

Encounters With the Modernist Food-Object

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Abstract

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This interdisciplinary dissertation seeks to remedy scholarly neglect of the topic of food within literature and art of the early twentieth century, particularly within transatlantic forms of modernism. I argue that the topic of food—or, as I will call it, the food-object—has been additionally neglected within recent scholarly work on objects and material encounters, including “thing theory” and other object-oriented ontologies. I examine the treatment of food—particularly in terms of the food-object—within Rebecca West’s “Indissoluble Matrimony” and *The Judge*, arguing that these works provide rich examples of a new centrality of food within modernist literature, particularly in terms of objecthood and the everyday, as they variously portray the act of food consumption as one of play, sensory encounter, pleasure, overintimacy, abjection, violence, and coercion,

notably with regards to gender and the limits of the human body. After arguing for a reassessment of art historical narratives that treat the artistic category of the readymade as one of dematerialization, I then suggest that the readymade instead actually emphasizes the specific materiality of objects, as well as embodied encounters with these objects, which leads to discussion of small-scale “readymade” sculptures across modernist avant-garde artistic movements such as Dada and Surrealism, mid-century artistic movements such as Pop Art, and beyond. Focusing particularly upon Marcel Duchamp’s *Why Not Sneeze, Rose Sélavy?*, Méret Oppenheim’s *Object* and *My Nurse (Ma Gouvernante)*, and Claes Oldenburg’s *Pastry Case I*, I examine the ways in which these sculptures interrogate both the concept of food as object and the act of food consumption, particularly as these things relate to forms of bodily encounter that expose the lack of distance between the human (or animal) body and the food-object, and that also emphasize human-food interactions that are not necessarily about edibility. The vulnerabilities and possibilities of the modernist scene of eating within public settings such as restaurants, cafés, and automats are considered through painter Edward Hopper’s *The Automat*, *Chop Suey*, and *Nighthawks*, as well as through Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *The Waves*. My discussion of these works foregrounds such acts of food consumption as spectacle, particularly as they take place within eating establishments that emphasize visibility. Also explored, within a brief coda, are the ways in which “modernist cuisine” has become a category of food within the high-end restaurants of the early twenty-first century, one which emphasizes—much as do twentieth-century modernist works of literature and art, and scenes of eating which are

culturally modernist—forms of body-object play, spectacle, and, ultimately, both the objecthood of food and the complexity of the human encounter with food.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1. Introduction: Food-Object Matter(s)	1
Chapter 2. Pleasure and Control: Encounters with the Food-Object in Rebecca West's "Indissoluble Matrimony" and <i>The Judge</i>	23
Chapter 3. Ready(made) to Eat? In/edible Encounters with Marcel Duchamp, Méret Oppenheim, and Claes Oldenburg	88
Chapter 4. Spectacular Vulnerability: Negotiating the Modernist Scene of Eating with Edward Hopper and Virginia Woolf	159
Coda. Consuming "Modernist" Food in the Twenty-First Century	252
Bibliography	264

CHAPTER 1

Introduction:

Food-Object Matter(s)

I would like to begin with the problem of Cézanne's apples. After all, scratch the surface of nearly any discussion of modern visual art—and of literary modernism, for that matter—and one is liable to find mention of Paul Cézanne, the French Post-Impressionist and proto-Cubist painter to whom art critic Peter Schjeldahl has recently referred (perhaps glibly, though not inaccurately) as “the godhead of modernism” (“Game Change”). Cézanne began painting apples whilst in the middle stages of his career, in the 1870s, and frequently returned to this subject matter throughout the final decades of his career.¹ Cézanne's apples may tumble forth into the picture plane, scattering themselves amongst almost-sculptural folds of fabric (as in *The Basket of Apples* [1895]). They may share compositional space with other fruit or vegetables, and/or dishes and other food-adjacent objects (as in *Still Life with a Ginger Jar and Eggplants* [1893-94]). They may be alone, varying numbers of brush-stroked globes in close-up upon a wooden table (as in *Four Apples* [c. 1881]). They present themselves repeatedly to the viewer of Cézanne's body of work, piled up, turned upon their sides, smooth or mottled, green and red and yellow and brown. But how are we to apprehend these apples? After brief consideration of two of the most influential and enduring answers to this question, I will discuss the ways in which these apples might be generatively read in relation to recent object-oriented theories—that is, as

objects—and, more than this, as part of the undertheorized but particularly rich and complex category of food-objects that I will address throughout this dissertation.

Is it enough, for example, to mark the place of Cézanne's apples within the long history of the "still life" within the visual arts, a category of painting dating back to Roman times which reached its apotheosis in the Dutch and Flemish styles of the seventeenth century?² After all, one might note, drawing from modernist critic and painter Roger Fry's work on Cézanne, the ways in which these apples mark a tremendous stylistic departure from earlier still life paintings by other artists, even those painted within a nearly contemporary time period, particularly in terms of 'unrealistic' perspective and Cézanne's handling of paint upon the surface of the canvas, and it is likely such stylistic departures that led the artist to supposedly remark that he wished to "astonish Paris with an apple" (Lanchner 5).³ According to Fry, whose 1927 volume on Cézanne remains remarkably influential, Cézanne's choice to portray "robust and long-enduring fruits" such as apples was a practical one; instead of needing to attend to the rapidly-fading freshness of "ephemeral flowers" as subject matter, filling his studio table with apples simply allowed Cézanne to "pursue till it was exhausted his probing analysis of the chromatic whole," such as the ways in which "changes of colour corresponded to movements of planes" and the "idea of colour as revealing plasticity" (38). Fry's analysis of *Still Life with Comptoir* (1879-80) focuses purely upon the formalist elements of Cézanne's apples: the "small touches of a full brush" which layer pigment into "an extreme richness and density," the "rectilinear lines of the napkin and knife" that create the "horizontal extension" of the composition that "supports the spherical volumes" of these apples, the repetition of spheres and oblong shapes that contribute to the "formal harmony" of the piece, and the oft-"exceptional clearness" of the brush-hatched contour that lends each spherical volume (apple) "impressive solidity and weight" (43; 47; 48-9; 50; 51).

Fry continues his discussion of several of Cézanne's other apple-involving paintings in the same vein, and then notes, "how constantly spherical forms absorb [Cézanne's] attention" marking the very few Cézanne still life paintings involving skulls as evidence that "a skull was merely a complicated variation upon the sphere" (53). On Fry's model, then, the differences in artistic subject matter between an apple and a skull are negligible at best—these objects are important only for the opportunities they provide an artist such as Cézanne to experiment with different "variations" of spherical shapes. And, indeed, Fry has indicated that "In still-life the ideas and emotions associated with the objects represented are, for the most part, so utterly commonplace and insignificant that neither artist nor spectator need consider them" at all (41); or, rather, that we must therefore 'look away' from content in order to exalt form. And yet, one might query, if apples and skulls are virtually interchangeable, and if Cézanne were capable of utilizing the 'spherical variation' of the skull in order to experiment with painterly form in much the same way as he might with an apple, why did Cézanne not paint more skulls? After all, if nothing else, a skull is even less "ephemeral" than the most "robust" apple. It is also worth questioning Fry's assertion that "the ideas and emotions associated" with objects represented within still life paintings are "utterly commonplace and insignificant," a notion which implies that such "ideas and emotions" inspired by these painted representations are both in some way predictable and objective.

Although Fry briefly notes that there might be "exceptions to this purely plastic significance of still-life," such as those provided by symbolists who might arrange objects in such a manner as to "force" these objects to reveal some entirely non-plastic emotion" beyond the significance of their shape, color, contour, ultimately, Fry argues for attendance to form as some method of critical biography, suggesting that it is the "fact" that the specific nature of

objects (apples, skulls, and so forth) within still life paintings is so utterly insignificant that “makes the still-life so valuable to the critic as a gauge of the artist’s personality” (41). Fry’s insistence upon the centrality of form to still life works such as Cézanne’s paintings of apples has endured far longer than his suggestion that such form have something to do with the “artist’s personality,” with Lionello Venturi, Italian art critic and author of the first *catalogue raisonné* of Cézanne’s works, in 1941 indicating that the “prevailing interest” in the study of form “may be symbolized by the pictures of apples,” and concluding “Why have so many apples been painted in modern times?—Because the simplified motif gave the painter an opportunity for concentrating on problems of form” (47). In 1990, Norman Bryson, author of one of the very few contemporary studies on the artistic genre of the still life, briefly argued for a sort of anti-realism via such formalist focus, suggesting that, within Cézanne’s *Still Life With Apples* (1895-98), “there is less interest in the actual colours of fruit than in the clashes which pigment can produce between acid green and ochre; less curiosity about the actual shape of lemons [note: if there are indeed lemons within this painting, which is debatable given that (at least some of) the yellow objects may also be read as additional apples] than about volumetric rhymes they can be persuaded to yield if they are treated as variations on a sphere” (86). Bryson continues by arguing that here, the “goal,” which is to create a “great” painting, “enormously exceeds the depicted subject” (86); that is, that the apples themselves matter little, except as painterly repositories of formal characteristics on the way to artistic “greatness.”

Critic and art historian Meyer Schapiro, on the other hand, would like for us to read the still life painting as something other than this wholehearted “negation of interest in subject matter,” and Cézanne’s apples as something more than brushstrokes upon a canvas; that is, as evidence of Cézanne’s “displaced erotic interest” (15; 5). Schapiro grounds his analysis of

Cézanne's apple paintings in psychoanalytic theory and the traditional association within Western culture of apples with eroticism and "ripe human beauty," suggesting that the objects within still life paintings, "as free choices of the painter in an intimate sphere, could...readily provide latent personal symbols and envelop" erotic feelings (5-6; 13). More specifically, Schapiro draws from Cézanne's other work and interests, citing his youthful enjoyment of classicism and Renaissance poetic tropes, as well as Cézanne's artistic interest in the eroticism and sexuality of the human body within several of his other paintings (such as his version of *Leda and the Swan* [1886]), and, particularly, within his *Still Life with Plaster Cast of Amor* (c. 1895), a composition in which the ever-present apples (as well as what appear to be large radishes) share space upon the table with the rounded plaster contours of a statue of Cupid. Of this painting, Schapiro indicates that, "The central place given to the apples in a theme of love invites a question about the emotional ground of his frequent painting of apples," ultimately suggesting that the "association of fruit and nudity" here, as well as the repeated prominence of the apple within his other still life paintings, might allow us to read Cézanne's paintings of apples—what Schapiro refers to as his "habitual choice of still-life"—as a theme with a "latent erotic sense, an unconscious symbolizing of a repressed desire" (5; 5; 12). According to Schapiro, "It was because [Cézanne] painted both still-life and nudes that he was able in the idyllic and the pure still-life paintings to symbolize his desires through the apples as elements with a vague analogy to sexual themes" (14), implying that it was perhaps this 'purity' of the still life form that allowed Cézanne to imbue these apples with a sensuousness, and perhaps a sensuality, beyond that of his more openly sexual paintings; the apples are often, Schapiro suggests, particularly within Cézanne's later paintings, "objects of a caressing vision," through which Cézanne demonstrates his 'love' of "their finely asymmetrical roundness and the delicacy

of their rich local color which he sometimes evokes through an exquisite rendering rarely found in his painting of nude flesh” (28).

And yet, Schapiro also admits that such analysis is incomplete and cannot be readily applied to all still life paintings, indicating that, for example, Cézanne’s choice to repeatedly paint apples might be attributable to a less sexual, though still psychological, purpose—that is, as “deliberately chosen means of emotional detachment and self-control” (13). He notes that, “to rest [only] with the explanation of the still-life as a displaced sexual interest” is to ignore the potentially “important meanings of the objects on the manifest plane,” as well as their, and the artist’s, roots in other forms of influence, such as “social experience” (13). Schapiro’s psychoanalytic reading of Cézanne’s apples, as well as his admission of the potential complexity of the portrayal of these apples, within such still life paintings thus gestures beyond Fry’s formalist reading in order to begin to take the apples themselves into account. And Schapiro does also begin to consider the ways in which still life as a genre is bound to the portrayal of actual matter (rather than considering only the ways in which such matter is portrayed), and its “impersonal universe,” and the ways in which objects may evoke sensory experience beyond that of the purely visual, remarking that objects such as apples within still life paintings may also “appeal to all the senses and especially to touch and taste” (20; 19). In this way, Schapiro begins to read Cézanne’s apples as actual material objects and not simply brushstrokes upon a canvas or evocations of latent urges and desires, though his brief discussion of this topic depends entirely upon the connection of such objects to an “implied human presence,” by which these objects are fully “subordinate to man as elements of use, manipulation and enjoyment,” and “owe their presence and place to a human action, a purpose,” ultimately ‘conveying’ “man’s sense of power over things” (23; 19). Schapiro ultimately places his approach to the apples themselves in an

aesthetic, or perhaps intellectual, realm somewhere between that which would fully recognize the materiality of such apples, and that which exists for portrayal within some version of the picture plane, musing: “The fruit, I have observed, while no longer in nature, is not yet fully a part of human life. Suspended between nature and use, it exists as if for contemplation alone” (25).

If we carry Schapiro’s brief gesture toward the potential materiality of Cézanne’s apples further, we may begin to apprehend these apples as specific objects. After all, whatever else it may also be—a marker of aesthetic taste, class or culture, a momentary sensory delectation, a means of nourishment or survival, a mere prop for social engagement—an item of food is also necessarily an object. Recent studies of objects within the humanities have opened and extended a number of discussions about the place of objects within literature, art, and culture throughout modernity and postmodernity, with a number of these discussions focusing upon the functional and aesthetic aspects of the object or engaging the ways in which humans interact with objects via Heideggerian and/or Marxist theories of the category of the object and the subject-object dialectic. For example, Douglas Mao has written of “modernism’s extraordinarily generative fascination” with objects as such, suggesting that, for modernists such as Virginia Woolf and Ezra Pound, “the object world” encompassed both disillusionment and hope, gathering into itself the terrors and pleasures of confrontation with the category of the mass-produced commodity object within the early twentieth century, as well as the meaningful—and often auratic, in the Benjaminian sense—purposiveness of the creation of individualized works of art (*Solid Objects* 4; 9). An object-focused reading such as Mao’s then, might encourage us to begin by considering Cézanne’s apples in terms of their place within commodity culture; apples, at least at the turn of the last century, existed outside of the realm of industrialized production, but were not, of course,

valueless within the capitalist system of this production, nor was their form of production necessarily one without potential human implication, given centuries of cultivation. We might then explore the ways in which Cézanne's interest in these apples, and his methods of seeing or portraying these apples through, for example, curious shifts in picture-plane perspective, both re-figured traditional notions of the still life painting—and, one might even argue, restored it to some version of prominence within the art world of the time—and pre-figured early-twentieth-century modes of the still life painting such as those by the Cubists and Matisse.

Bill Brown, on the other hand, purveyor of a theoretical approach that he calls “thing theory,” draws from Heidegger and Marx (and, eventually, Henri Bergson) to suggest a fundamental division between different *kinds* of objects: those that remain objects and those that instead become “things.”⁴ This division is one largely based upon concepts of use/disuse and the relationship between—or what he refers to as “the imbrication of”—human subject and inanimate object; as he explains, “We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy” (*Other Things* 31; “Thing Theory” 4). A “thing” for Brown, then, is a concrete object that will not cooperate in some way, that refuses to do what it is supposed to do, that exhibits a subversion of its own usefulness, and perhaps, of its own use-*value* within a commodity system. This “thing” has in some way lost its prior functionality within the subject-object relationship, thereby calling attention to its own materiality and forcing the human subject to confront it *as* “thing” rather than continuing to simply put this object to use. According to Brown, this shift from object to thing is inextricably linked to individual human subjectivity: “The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation” (“Thing Theory”

4). Therefore, consideration of Cézanne's apples within this "thing theory" model would likely begin by querying the uses, and perhaps the use-values, of the apples themselves. Would their function, for example, be something involved in human consumption—the gustatory pleasures of their sweetness, the bodily nourishment of their caloric content—or does their position upon a table before the painter's easel reinscribe their function as something purely aesthetic (and how, one might also wonder, might Cézanne's particular methods of depicting these apples change that)?

Beyond subject-object relations, Brown's account of these "things that stop working for us" does suggest objects that are in some way willful and/or agentic, stubborn in their own materiality, and it is this suggestion that both leads Brown to begin to talk of rich objects (such as Homer's Shield of Achilles) in terms of their potential "vitality" within his more recent work on thing theory, and also brings his form of object-centered theory into closer conversation with the approaches to object apprehension set forth within recent theories of "new materialism." Such theories, which are often referred to as object-oriented ontologies, focus upon the independence of the object and are based upon a posthumanistic desire to reinscribe the traditional hierarchy of human (or, that which is traditionally "subject") and object in a manner that does not privilege humanity. These non-anthropocentric approaches to object apprehension, as set forth by theorists such as Bruno Latour and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, materialist feminist theorists such as Karen Barad, and material-ecological theorists such as Jane Bennett, treat both humans and nonhuman objects as actants upon one another within various complex relational models that are not "about" subject-object relations, but which instead emphasize the ethical and, often, the political, possibilities of forms of co-created interaction. For example, Bennett argues for recognition of a "vitality of matter" that inheres within, and across, all objects and bodies,

suggesting that such recognition of “a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies” will encourage us to subscribe to “more materially sustainable modes of production and consumption” within our capitalist system (ix). Bennett’s argument here draws from one of the basic tenets of Latour’s philosophy; that is, that (nonhuman) objects are fundamental “co-producers” of our human world and our experience of reality, and that these objects (or actants, in new materialist phrasing) fully participate in our actions and relationships rather than being purely acted upon (54).

Although theoretical discussions within the new materialist field often tend toward such levels of abstraction that all objects may appear to be part of a vague and nonspecific conglomerate and therefore potentially not worth theorizing individually (of those mentioned above, Bennett and Cohen are exceptions to this tendency, as they often focus upon applicability of the theories to specific objects and/or phenomena), such new materialist readings encourage a certain centrality of the object (or, actant) that potentially begins to compensate for its previous neglect within humanities-focused theoretical realms, demand deeper consideration of the many and varied types of interactions that take place between humans and objects on a daily basis, and present the object as agentic, independent, filled with its own material properties and possibilities. These points of focus allow us to return to Cézanne’s apples with the insistence that, despite any enduring pervasiveness of formalism as preferred analytical approach, these objects, these apples, do (quite literally) matter.

However, these apples are not simply objects, they are *food*-objects, part of a particularly complex category of objects which heavily implicates the presence, actions, and experiences of the human body in a variety of ways both related, and not related, to food consumption.⁵ And, despite the vast range of materialist object-centered theories, encompassing as they do issues of

subject-object relations and hierarchies, commodification and production, and the properties and potentialities of objects both as distinct entities and as they interact with the human body, such object-centered theories have almost entirely neglected the specific material concerns of food-objects and food-adjacent objects (such as dishes, silverware, and so forth). Such neglect may be due to an unwillingness to engage with the specific complexities of the food-object and ways in which it implicates—or may be contingent upon—the body, to the tendency of those within humanities departments to consider the study of food-objects to be primarily (or exclusively) the province of those within “food studies” departments in the social sciences, and/or to what Denise Gigante has noted as an historical intellectual bias against the sense of taste, “bound up” as this sense is with “the unruly flesh” of the body, pleasure, and animalistic appetite, or what Mikhail Bakhtin has called the “grotesque” elements of the body that are bound up with “the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly” (3; 21). Regardless of the reasons for this neglect, these recent object-centered theories remain useful for consideration of the food-object, though they do not begin to cover its specific intricacies and concerns.

It is indeed useful for consideration of the food-object to attend to its specific objecthood and materiality (and material properties), as well as the ways in which it may inevitably enter, or originate within, the economic system that marks it as commodity. Further, the food-object may be said to demonstrate its own forms of complicated agency within the world, as it simultaneously acts upon and is acted upon by forces outside itself. As Deborah Lupton reminds us, “Food is unclean, a highly unstable substance; it is messy and dirty in its preparation, its disposal and its by-products; it inevitably decays, it has odour. Delicious food is only hours or days away from rotting matter, or excreta. As a result, disgust is never far from the pleasures of food and eating. Food continually threatens to become dirt” (3). I might also here point out the

ways in which the food-object not only threatens to become a form of dirt both outside of, and within, the human body, and not only threatens to disappear from viability as an edible/nourishing object altogether through its decay (an important matter, after all, when one is hungry), but also actually threatens—whether through its inherent properties and their reactions with the biological makeup of a particular ingesting body, or through its “unsafe” handling or spoilage—to become not only that which will not nourish or act as beneficent within the human body, but that which will harm, poison, or make ill.

The food-object also acts upon the ingesting human body by inducing a range of sensations that link to emotions or urges, such as pleasure, disgust, and satiation. It crosses the external boundary of the body, and therefore, it—or, rather, the version of the food-object that exists in various stages of transformation and processing by the consuming body—may be felt on the inside of the body, in the mouth, as it moves down the esophagus, as a “full” feeling in the stomach, and so forth. It may then affect both the sense of the body itself through appetite satisfaction, blood sugar and mood, and beyond, as well as, of course, the ultimate nourishment of the body in terms of health and actual physical survival. Each food-object changes in some small fashion, whether temporarily or permanently, the individual biology of the body which consumes it, as well as the appearance of that body, and such changes inevitably affect the negotiations of the “self” with the body (food preferences, food choices, acceptable health, and so forth) and may alter the terms of the body within the world, shifting proprioceptive possibilities via weight and health, and sociocultural possibilities via issues such as appearance and embodied action/movement and the ties of such issues to concerns of class, gender, and race.

Further, each food-object may interact with other food-objects or food-adjacent objects (or simply with non-food objects), their materiality bound up with one another and then

experienced by the human body in terms of visual-intellectual aesthetic appreciation, other sensory experience and/or “lived experience” of the body, and tactile physical manipulation that may be “about” food preparation (such as creating a “dish” or putting together a meal) or food consumption, or may be about other forms of interacting with these food-objects (such as refusal). Such combined forms of interaction involving multiple food-objects, or food-objects and “other” objects, are, as with interactions involving individual food-objects, regulated through sociocultural practices, but are ultimately experienced materially, intellectually, sensorily, emotionally, by an individual human body in ways that cannot be replicated by, or within, another body. Any act of food consumption may prompt the recall of memories, emotions, beliefs associated with that particular food-object or combination of food-objects (as well as those associated with the act of eating itself), challenging, contributing to, or strengthening these associations, whilst potentially reinscribing such a food-object (or, again, the act of eating itself) with a host of social and cultural meanings.

At the same time, the food-object itself is transformed, destroyed, assimilated, by the body through the act of its consumption, as it becomes a contributor to the body’s materiality (or, perhaps, contributes to the fundamental material hybridity of the body), and its categorization as food-object is reaffirmed both by the ingesting individual and, in some measure, within a social context. Such categorization is, of course, both deeply ingrained within the “gustatory code” of all societies and draws from thousands of years of cultural practices surrounding food-objects and food consumption, and a ‘moving target’ of sorts, a site of “continual production and reproduction of sociocultural meanings” within more recent structures of social hierarchy, value, and survival (Lévi-Strauss 164; Lupton 15). The human encounter with the food-object, then, is not only one of material interchange, individual lived experience and the proliferation of

personal meanings inherent within this encounter, it also a site of interpersonality and sociality, vulnerability and influence, social communication, and, as Roland Barthes has noted, “a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior” from which we cannot escape (“Toward a Psychosociality” 21).

But how do we decide what constitutes a food-object? Is such a categorization simply due to edibility? After all, there are a number of technically edible—and even potentially nourishing—objects within the world that we do not consider to be food-objects (unless we are very, very hungry). And, if we are unlucky enough to encounter an animal predator more powerful than ourselves, we ourselves qualify as food-objects. Further, as Pasi Falk has pointed out, the boundary between an object that is inedible—that is, an object which is technically incapable of being incorporated into the body—and the cultural system of edible/inedible objects is a particularly “fuzzy” one, and he reminds us of the ways in which “substances objectively defined as non-foods or even poisons are actually incorporated [into the human body]—from coca-leaves to tobacco” (69-70). Therefore, one might query, at what point does a technically edible object become a food-object? And must a food-object always implicate the body via a current, or impending, act of consumption, thereby automatically setting up a certain kind of hierarchical subject-object dialectic? Such questions provide us with productive interrogative directions for the consideration and theorization of food-objects, whilst demonstrating what I would simultaneously consider to be one of the advantages and one of the disadvantages of the tendency by object-oriented ontologists to consider all objects, bodies, phenomena as “equal” actants within a potential relational interaction; such consideration allows for more neutral analysis of forms of material interaction, though the relative abstraction of this neutrality may potentially sidestep (or even ignore) some of the forces, systems, and experiences that may also

be useful in consideration of an object—particularly a food-object.

Thus, within this dissertation, I would like to situate the food-object somewhere between such object-oriented ontologies and the more “conservative” object-centered theories discussed above, in a theoretical space that firmly emphasizes its objecthood and materiality, but also within a space which includes sociocultural constructs of the food-object. This theoretical space is also one which will foreground the food-object’s place within the complex bodily act (and sensory, intellectual, psychological experience) of consumption and some of the concerns surrounding that act of consumption. Or, rather, to put this another way, I locate the theoretical aspects of this project between cultural studies that treat food in primarily a socio-historical and/or anthropological sense and cultural studies that treat food and its related issues such as taste and sensation in ways primarily metaphorical and conceptual, and I do this by focusing largely upon matter, the food-object’s interaction with the human on the level of the physical body, and the experience of bodily consumption.

More importantly, I would like to situate this project, and the food-object itself, within the early twentieth-century literary, artistic, and cultural modernisms of Europe and the United States. Categories of “modernism” obviously remain much debated, whether framed as a mode of resistant “interruption” of dominant realisms, a non-cohesive “heterogeneous episode in the history of culture,” a literary (or artistic) response to “crisis of representation,” or a diverse category of experimental “tendencies” (Eysteinson; Levenson 8; Lewis xviii; Nicholls viii). It is beyond the purview of this project to even begin to define modernism(s), but, ultimately, the version of modernism(s) approached within this project are broadly conceived, taking into account awareness of “modernism” as a (collection of) movement(s) specific to the historical period of the early twentieth century, and encompassing a vast range of literary and artistic

styles, forms, and structures—including those associated with avant-garde movements such as Surrealism and Dada.

I would suggest that, within the early twentieth century, cultural treatment of food and other ingestible objects tended to foreground objecthood, given the ways in which food production, processing, and packaging began to emphasize notions of individual, standardized portions and convenience (such as through pre-sliced bread), and the ways in which notions of “appropriate” meals began to include, for example, the consumption of discrete food-objects such as sandwiches at lunch counters. Further, consumers had (necessarily) begun to question the nature of the food-objects they purchased, resulting in the passage of the 1906 Pure Food and Drugs Act in the United States by what eventually became known as the FDA. Food-objects, then, became subject to governmental policing and regulation of their specificities, prompting exploration of just how much adulteration would be acceptable, what might constitute a “pure” particular food-object, and so forth. Additionally, Harvey Levenstein has discussed the ‘rise’ of popular discourses surrounding the caloric and vitaminic content of food-objects within this period (discourses which attempted to further quantify the food-object), as well as the paradoxical popularity of the act of dieting for weight reduction in the United States during the Great Depression, a period of enormous food deprivation for those in the lower classes. According to Levenstein, this popularity of dieting was largely attributable to the “tidal change that had swept middle-class American attitudes toward food in the previous decades: the conviction that you should eat what is good for you, not what you like” (*Paradox* 12). And, of course, the two major wars within the first half of the twentieth century served to further quantify the food-object through forms of war rationing throughout Europe and the United States. Such cultural shifts encouraged modernist literary and artistic (and commercial—given the rise of food

advertising) representations of food to become a particularly rich space for the investigation of the nature and significance of material objects within the culture of this period, and for anxieties regarding the potential effects of food-objects upon the body itself to become widely discussed.

And yet, despite this rich space of food-related investigation, as Allison Carruth noted in her 2009 article on war rationing and late modernism, “no critical account” had yet “attend[ed] to the preoccupation with food in literary modernism” (768), and little has changed since that time; the topic of food within modernist literature remains deeply undertheorized and underdiscussed, as does the topic of food within the early twentieth century visual and plastic arts. This oversight is both unfortunate and puzzling, given the ways in which food-objects and acts of food consumption appear with relative regularity within a wide range of works across these modernist disciplines, as well as the ways in which both the food-object and the act of food consumption are particularly relevant to other interests and discourses prevalent within these modernisms, such as “everyday” practices, animality, tensions between interiority and exteriority, and the sensate experiences of the body within the world—all of which will be discussed within this dissertation. This project will also consider the ways in which the act of food consumption within this period became dissociated from some of the traditional familial bonds and constraints, such as through notions of “appropriate” mealtimes and environments for food consumption, as well as from—to some extent—the category of the domestic. Additionally, although the site of food consumption may act as social and interpersonal easement or opportunity, communal and/or ritual celebration, and confirmation of “belonging” and kinship practice, I would suggest that modernist literature and art also frames this site of food consumption as one of interpersonal and social threat (or, at the very least, vulnerability)—whether through the agency and/or

unpredictability of the food-object itself as it might interact with the ingesting body, through the conflation of food-objects with the ingesting body itself and/or with animality, or through methods of control, dominance, or judgment within both kinship groups and larger social structures.

The next chapter, entitled “Pleasure and Control: Encounters with the Food-Object in Rebecca West’s ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’ and *The Judge*” begins to consider the possibilities of the complex human encounter with food-objects as this encounter relates both to forms of food consumption and non-consumption within two modernist literary works by Rebecca West: the short story “Indissoluble Matrimony,” and the novel *The Judge*. I suggest that these works provide rich examples of a new centrality of the food-object within modernist literature, particularly as this food-object relates to modernist notions of objecthood and the everyday. These works also portray the category of the food-object and the act of food consumption itself as complex sites for physical, emotional, and intellectual play, sensory stimulation, and forms of pleasure ranging from the aesthetic to the gustatory, whilst also proffering examples of the food-object as potentially undesirable and the act of food consumption as one of difficulty, abjection, violence, and control/coercion. Such difficulties relate both to notions of kinship and to gendered power structures within these literary works, as well as to the potential limits of the body itself. This chapter also briefly discusses the portrayal of embodied processes, such as breathing and speaking, within these two works—processes that are not “about,” but are related to, food consumption via bodily proximity and sensory overlap.

In Chapter Three, “Ready(made) to Eat? In/edible Encounters with Marcel Duchamp, Méret Oppenheim, and Claes Oldenburg,” I argue for a reassessment of the fundamental art historical narrative that treats the category of the early-twentieth-century Duchampian

“readymade” as one of dematerialization and disembodiment, suggesting that the readymade instead emphasizes the materiality, specificity, and objecthood of objects both artistic and “everyday,” as well as to firmly embodied encounters with these objects. Focusing upon food-objects in particular, I use this category of the readymade as a throughline to discuss small-scale sculptural food-objects and food-adjacent objects by Marcel Duchamp, Méret Oppenheim, and Claes Oldenburg across modernist avant-garde artistic movements such as Dada and Surrealism, mid-century artistic movements such as Pop Art, and beyond. I discuss the ways in which these sculptural food-objects interrogate both the concept of the food-object itself and the act of food consumption, exposing notable anxieties about the agency of the food-object, as well as the manner in which the food-object is both similar to, and unlike, the human body, whilst also suggesting forms of bodily encounter with the food-object that are not “about” food consumption or edibility. These sculptural food-objects may both attract and repel in an assortment of ways, but, ultimately, due to their status and display as art-objects, they remain unavailable to us, unassimilable into the body, and potentially afunctional.

The fourth and final chapter, “Spectacular Vulnerability: Negotiating the Modernist Scene of Eating with Edward Hopper and Virginia Woolf,” explores the ways in which, influenced by increased urbanization and its concomitant cultural shifts, the Anglo-American urban “scene” of food-object consumption within the early twentieth century shifted to one of (or, at least, one which included) convenience and public spectacle within the new spate of brightly-lit, glass-and-metal-covered casual dining establishments. This new scene of eating allowed for possibilities, particularly within the social and interpersonal realm, as those within different classes and those of different (and traditionally marginalized) genders, sexualities, and races were able to “mix” within these environments, but it also added further layers of

complexity to the already-complex act of eating—both via addition of the potential proximal threat of “the other” to this act, and by this scene’s visual foregrounding of the boundary-crossing, and therefore vulnerable, physical act of food-object consumption. These issues will first be considered through a brief discussion of several of American artist Edward Hopper’s “scene of eating” paintings, focusing particularly upon the ways in which these works have been read by critics, and will then be examined in further depth—with particular emphasis upon the embodied and “lived” experience of food consumption within such public settings—through substantial discussion of significant semi-public and public scenes of eating within three of Virginia Woolf’s novels.

Within the brief coda to this dissertation, “Consuming ‘Modernist’ Food in the Twenty-First Century,” I will bring my exploration of food and food-objects within modernism into the present-day period, using the recent cultural popularity of “modernist” cuisine, its association with molecular gastronomy, and the publication of Nathan Myhrvold’s recent *Modernist Cuisine* cookbook series to question how we have come to define the presence and purpose of a “modernist” food-object within the contemporary culinary and gustatory sphere. I will ultimately suggest that “modernist” food emphasizes process and experimentation during stages of food preparation and consumption, whilst foregrounding the complexity of the cooking/eating experience and forms of multisensory, aesthetic, and intellectual “play” with food-objects within the food-consuming encounter.

Ultimately, this dissertation insists that the food-object matters—both within, and without, its encounters with our bodies. The food-object matters in its materiality, its specificity, its potential agency. It matters in the ways in which it brushes up against—altering and being altered by—issues of sociality and culture, gender, class, sexuality, kinship, aesthetics, and so

forth. It matters in its similarities and dissimilarities to our own bodies, and in the ways in which our material, biological, and psychological interactions with it are those of desire and pleasure, disgust and refusal, tactile play and multisensory engagement, control and uncontrol, sustenance and (fundamentally) survival. And it matters in the ways in which it helps to constitute our lived experiences, affecting our physical bodies, our emotional lives, our relationships, and perhaps even our identities. More than this, however, this dissertation insists that the food-object matters in the above ways within transatlantic forms of modernist literature, visual/plastic art, and culture—that is, that the level of engagement with food-objects within many modernist works is significant; that consideration of the food-object substantially contributes to, and is informed by, modernist discourses about objecthood, the everyday, lived experience, and more; and that it is worth considering methods of attending to the food-object and our encounters with this food-object that may themselves be distinctly modernist in nature. Focusing upon the food-object, then, extends object/thing studies in a necessary (but long overlooked) direction, whilst simultaneously offering an approach to the corpus of modernism which no longer neglects food-objects such as Cézanne’s apples and the rich scenes of food-object encounter and consumption within modernist literature and art, as well an approach which takes into account the intricacies and specificities of modernist approaches to modes of embodied interaction with objects.

Notes

¹ As Schapiro notes, most of Cézanne's still life paintings before this period were not of fruit. (14)

² See Bryson. (particularly 17-59)

³ A tremendous stylistic departure from earlier still life paintings by other artists such as those by French Realist painter Gustave Courbet (Note: Fry remarks upon Courbet's influence upon Cézanne in particular [9]). Maurice Merleau-Ponty has theorized this 'unrealistic' perspective as an offshoot of sorts of "lived experience," suggesting that, "By remaining faithful to the phenomena in his investigations of perspective, Cezanne discovered what recent psychologists have come to formulate: the lived perspective, that which we actually perceive, is not a geometric or photographic one" ("Cezanne's Doubt" 73).

⁴ Brown begins to draw from Bergson particularly within *Other Things*, in which Brown's vocabulary of "thingness" shifts to include the "vitalization" of such matter.

⁵ This might apply to the animal body, obviously, but for the sake of clarity here, I am limiting this discussion to the food-consuming acts of the human body.

CHAPTER 2

Pleasure and Control: Encounters with the Food-Object in Rebecca West's "Indissoluble Matrimony" and *The Judge*

Within the previous (introductory) chapter of this dissertation, I established the theoretical concerns of this project as a whole: the category of food as composed of a collection of edible objects that retain some form of agency as they encounter the materiality of the human body within acts of tactile play, sensuous enjoyment, and actual consumption and absorption into the body, and the ways in which any act of food consumption is a tremendously complicated one, negotiating as it must between the material aspects of the food-object and of the body, the intellectual, emotional, and "lived" experiences of food consumption, the sociocultural implications of the act of eating, and so forth. I discussed my desire to explore such concerns within the space of literary, artistic, and cultural modernism(s), and the ways in which the food-object and acts of food consumption were given new forms of prominence within literary and visual art works of the period. Within the chapter below, I will examine these concerns about the food-object and food consumption in modernism as they appear within two fictional works by underconsidered modernist writer Rebecca West: the short story "Indissoluble Matrimony," first published in 1914 in Vorticist journal *Blast*, and her 1922 novel *The Judge*.

The emphasis placed upon food, and the specific treatment of food-objects and processes of food consumption within these two literary works will allow us to consider some of the ways in which the food-object shifts into a more centralized position within modernism; this shift is part of the greater centralization of the more general category of objects within the literature and art of the early twentieth century (as noted by Bill Brown and Douglas Mao) and is related to an

interest in the materiality of the food-object independent of the human body, as well as its material similarities, and dissimilarities, to the human body. I will suggest that the interaction of the food-object with the human body is foregrounded within these two literary works by West both in terms of acts and processes related to food consumption as well as those related to forms of non-consumption of the food-object. My discussion of these acts and processes of food consumption will take into account the ways in which such consumption may be inextricably linked to matters such as pleasure, desire, eroticism, memory, ritual, and social propriety, and will also address the complex and overlapping motivations for food consumption (apart from simple hunger), particularly with regards to issues of control and consent. This discussion will also include mention of the ways in which the act of food consumption is often biologically associated with, or fundamentally “bound up” with other embodied processes—specifically, here, breathing and speaking—in ways that both emphasize the liminal blur of physiological “multitasking” that marks such areas of the body and that call attention to the ways in which these embodied processes are often some combination of voluntary and involuntary, just as acts of food consumption may be. My discussion of these acts and processes of food non-consumption will include consideration of the types of pleasure/desire or disgust/repulsion that may be gained from “play” and kinesthetic manipulation of food-objects, sensory engagement with aesthetic and tactile aspects of food-objects that are not linked to the edibility of these food-objects (that is, the ways in which these food-objects are framed both as food and as objects in a more general sense), as well as the refusal or denial of the food-object as consumable object, and the ways in which this refusal/denial relates to control of one’s own body, and the bodies of others. Ultimately, I would suggest that exploration of the myriad embodied interactions with food-objects offered up by West within these two works encourages further consideration of the

place of the food-object within modernist literature and within modernism as a whole, as well as (re)consideration of the complexities of our own encounters with food-objects.

British novelist, essayist, and journalist Dame Rebecca West (1892-1983) “attained in her lifetime a public stature that could be claimed by few twentieth-century women writers” (Mackay 125); praised in her thirties as “the most brilliant literary critic of her sex now before the public” and by the middle of her career—by *Time* magazine, with her image upon the cover—as “indisputably the world’s Number One woman writer,” she enjoyed the “life of a literary celebrity” in England and the United States until her death (Collini 44). Known particularly within her lifetime for her “penetrating journalism” (Schweizer, “Meaning of Exile” 389) on political and social issues (such as her mid-century pieces on the Nuremberg trials and lynchings in the American South for *The New Yorker*), West began her career by writing for socialist and feminist journals (such as *The Clarion* and *The Freewoman*) in the early twentieth century, and moved on to penning pieces both fictional and nonfictional for newspapers and general interest magazines (such *The Saturday Evening Post*) on both sides of the Atlantic. West also wrote nonfiction book-length studies on socio-historical topics (such as 1947’s *The Meaning of Treason*), biographies (1933’s *St. Augustine*), numerous novels which may variously be classified as experimental modernist fiction (1929’s *Harriet Hume*), World War I fiction (1918’s *The Return of the Soldier*), espionage “thriller” (1966’s *The Birds Fall Down*), semi-autobiographical tale (1956’s *The Fountain Overflows*), as well as multi-generic works exhibiting a “pioneering hybridization of [literary] form” such as her 1941 *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, a two-volume “travel memoir and sprawling history” of Yugoslavia during the interwar

period, a work for which West is perhaps most often remembered today (Cohen “Sheepish” 143; Pulsifer 53).¹

And yet, despite West’s accolades and tremendous literary output during her lifetime, much of her residual fame remains centered around her personal life, particularly, as Vesna Goldsworthy notes, in “her role in the sexual soap opera of Britain’s literati” via her romantic relationships with H.G. Wells and newspaper magnate Lord Beaverbrook, with numerous contemporary biographies of West published over the past thirty years, but far fewer scholarly volumes published regarding her literary work (2).² Such oversight is perhaps partially due to the potentially distracting ‘rabbit hole’ of West’s curiously shifting political views throughout her lifetime: her early socialist activism that evolved into staunch anti-Communism at mid-century, and her complicated approach to feminism and gender equality within both her life and her work, an approach which has captured a significant portion of the critical attention given to West in recent decades.³ As Marina Mackay has indicated, West’s definition of, and engagement with, feminism varied throughout her lifetime, from her early involvement—and subsequent disillusionment—with the suffragettes, to her more conservative stance on gender relations during her later life, which “located her feminism, as she argued women must, within a broader network of political engagement” (127). Such (relative) conservatism, in conjunction with her treatment of gender relations within her novels, has led some feminist critics to, as Bernard Schweizer has remarked, decry West’s “perceived gender essentialism, her celebration of heterosexuality, and her admiration of virility” (“Introduction” 28).⁴ However, as Schweizer notes, other critics, such as Ann V. Norton in her scholarly volume on West’s “paradoxical” feminism, have chosen to emphasize West’s ‘willingness’ to explore “all of the contradictions of being a human being and a woman” within her work (*Paradoxical Feminism* 147).

The relative critical inattention to West's work is likely also due, at least in part, to what Debra Rae Cohen has aptly termed West's "extended, contradictory, and extraordinarily varied oeuvre" ("Sheepish" 143). Stefan Collini has suggested that this "unclassifiable, all-rounderish literary identity" was partially what "sustained" her prominence throughout her lifetime, but has also hinted at the continued problematics of classifying (and studying) a writer whose works may "fall between" categories of history, politics, literature, and philosophy (57, 46, 52). And, indeed, the combination of elements, styles, and genres present within many of West's works has frequently led scholars to focus their attentions upon debates regarding genre, rather than spending much time analyzing the frequently rich contents of West's works. For example, literary critics have variously made the case for reading *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* as a "modern epic," a pastoral prose proem of sorts, deeply subjective "collection of assorted ethical and historical essays," and "irretrievably hybrid" mix of "political history, travel, autobiography, meditation, art history, and even fiction" (Schweizer, *Heroism* 84 and Wolfe 146; Rollyson *Literary Legacy* 149; Fussell 206; Montefiore 179). Such difficult classification has also led critics to variously describe West and her work as "Vorticist, socialist, feminist, modernist, Manichean, sentimentalist, essentialist, anti-communist," and even "proto-postmodernist," labels which are, as Faye Hammill points out, "only appropriate to certain of her works, or certain passages within them," and which therefore tend to detract, or perhaps distract, from critical analysis that might focus upon other aspects of West's work (Cohen "Palimpsestic" 150; 354).

Bernard Schweizer argues in the introduction to his 2006 collection of contemporary criticism on West that she remains a especially liminal figure within modernism in particular, and that scholars have often simply not known what to do with her, given that she was "prolific

in different arenas of high *and* popular cultural production both during and after the modernist period,” a feat which locates her body of work outside of traditional critical tropes that define modernist literature as a “high art” response to, or denial of, mass “low” culture (“Introduction” 23, italics in original). More than this, as Schweizer also notes, West’s work does not fit smoothly into the gendered version of such a distinction through which, as Andreas Huyssen argued in *After the Great Divide*, modernist high art is cast as masculine and mass “popular” culture is cast as feminine. Schweizer also suggests that the ways in which West’s works engage with ideas of domesticity and personal identity have little to do with the treatment of domesticity in “women’s fiction” of the early twentieth century, nor its purported inheritance from modes of sentimental fiction of the eighteenth century, and he remarks upon West’s personal confidence, range of output (including that within modes of mass literary culture that were traditionally specifically identified as masculine, such as journalism), and her unwillingness to accept any suggestion of the intellectual inferiority of women (24). That said, he continues, “although her work transgresses normative typologies associated with gendered models of modernism, she was not without proper moorings in the typical modernist repertoire of styles and ideas” such as stylistic experimentation and innovation (particularly regarding literary elements such as non-linearity of narration), an interest both in interiority and in “the micro-detail of everyday experience,” engagement with psychoanalytic concepts, and a fondness for writing subversive essays and public critiques of her contemporaries (Schweizer 24; Mackay 126).⁵ Both Schweizer and Bonnie Kime Scott have asserted that a number of West’s works, particularly those written within the 1920s, are very easily related to canonical modernism, “even though,” as Scott notes, “they have not yet been canonized” (*Gender* 562).

And, indeed, West has rarely been mentioned in discussions of literary modernism until quite recently, and those mentions have remained surprisingly infrequent. Nearly all of the scholarly articles and book chapters about West and modernism published within the past few decades focus upon either *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, which is most often discussed with regards to genre (as indicated above), or *The Return of the Soldier*—which is generally considered with regards to war trauma, masculinity, and psychoanalysis, with more recent discussions of the novel taking into account women’s experiences of the war and the text’s complex relationship with mental illness and sanism.⁶ Other literary scholars have recently attempted to frame West’s place within the modernist scene; Hammill has read West in conjunction with Noël Coward in the context of the social scene of literary modernism, and Douglas Mao has gone so far as to suggest a particular ‘indebtedness’ of Virginia Woolf’s seminal *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) to West’s lengthy essay “The Strange Necessity” (which was published with several of her other essays and reviews within the 1928 collection of the same title), though he is quick to note that such influence was otherwise bidirectional throughout the respective careers of Woolf and West, given their “mutual respect” for one another’s work (“Origins” 189).

Such studies begin to perform the work of locating West within modernism, though much of her work remains little considered, an unfortunate state of affairs given the plenitude of compelling stylistic and thematic figurations within her early twentieth-century fictional works in particular, as well as the likelihood that consideration of West’s modernism (and of West *as* modernist) might allow us to explore the limits of the ways in which we currently categorize modernist works/writers. After all, as Schweizer indicates, many of West’s “canonized contemporaries”—such as Woolf, James Joyce, and D.H. Lawrence—did not live beyond the

period commonly historicized as “modernist,” and certainly not beyond mid-century, suggesting that literary scholars have therefore not been sufficiently stretched to evaluate and categorize those modernists (such as the long-lived West) whose work “transitioned into different aesthetic, ideological, and thematic territories” as they aged, particularly in response to cultural shifts throughout the century (“Introduction” 26). As Schweizer suggests, whether such evaluation and consideration takes into account the ways in which West’s works may “fit” into modernism, postmodernism, and/or (and here he follows Kristin Bluemel) “intermodernism,” we might ultimately look to “develop a more inclusive modernist cultural theory that can accommodate figures like West,” figures whose vast output, multi-generic experimentation, and shifting points of focus throughout lengthy careers do not encourage critical neglect (“Philosophy of History” 240; “Introduction” 25). Further, although West’s works may indeed appear undeniably hybrid in terms of genre, one might also query the ways in which more focus upon generic hybridity within the works of other modernist writers might (have) shift(ed) our scholarly discussion of their work in similar directions, though serious consideration of claims to, and classification of, genre within the works of West (or of other modernists) is not relevant to this dissertation.

The issues raised by feminist critics (which will be discussed in more detail throughout this chapter), however, are strongly relevant to this dissertation. Given the ways in which West’s novels and fictional stories frequently focus upon the lives and identities of women in the first half of the twentieth century, particularly with regards to independence within romantic and familial relationships, as well as the ways in which her politics and concerns about gender-centered issues featured prominently in her nonfiction writing throughout her lifetime, it is understandable that so much of the relatively minimal critical work thus far performed on West’s

writings focuses so strongly upon concerns of gender. And, as will become apparent throughout this chapter, gender issues are certainly significant within discussion of West's literary treatment of food-objects and food consumption. After all, a fundamental part of West's early feminist call for women to establish "a militant movement for more riotous living" that does not deny "the animal in women, with its desires for food and freedom and comfort" (as published in *The Clarion* in 1912, qtd. in Marcus, *The Young Rebecca* 134), proposes a "de-repression of women's appetites and desires," according to Laura Winkiel, that "is clearly connected to her support for women's participation in the pleasures and dangers of modernity" (*Modernism* 59). However, to treat gender issues as the only matters worth analysis in West's work, or to sidestep the ways in which gender issues intersect with many other considerations within this work would be shortsighted. In the works discussed below, gender is consistently implicated alongside issues such as animality, but both are implicated within a larger set of issues regarding appetite and control within modernity.

These issues regarding appetite and control within West's work have much to do with control of the liminal bodily boundary of the mouth and the lived experience of one's own body within acts of food consumption, as well as with control of the food-object itself. As Maggie Kilgour has suggested, following Mikhail Bakhtin, food consumption is:

an act that involves both desire and aggression, as it creates a total identity between eater and eaten while insisting on the total control—the literal consumption—of the latter by the former. Like all acts of incorporation, it assumes an absolute distinction between inside and outside, eater and eaten, which, however, breaks down, as the law "you are what you eat" obscures identity and makes it impossible to say for certain who's who. (7)

Of course, as discussed within the previous chapter of this dissertation, not only does the distinction between food-object and consuming body remain murky given the ways in which food merges with the body through the act of eating, as well as the ways in which the human body is itself edible to other animals (or through, as Kilgour later reminds us, cannibalism), the food-object never actually falls under the desired “total control” of the food consumer at any stage of its consumption or digestion; after all, the food-object possesses its own material properties and its effects upon the human body itself are to some degree uncertain. Further, the issues regarding appetite and control within West’s work also have much to do with degrees of (often gendered) interpersonal and social power and dominance that frame the food-object and cannot be “disappeared” from the act of food consumption, though these notions may indeed appear to be invisible or may be unspoken. These notions speak to reasons for food consumption that reach beyond hunger, personal desire, and autonomous action to levels and methods of control enacted upon one body by another body, such as through forced feeding and forms of what I will refer to throughout this chapter as “coerced feeding.”

The specifics of forced feeding are here worth considering for a moment, given West’s explicit (if brief) engagement with the forced feeding of suffragettes within *The Judge*, her more extensive engagement with this topic within some of her earlier writing (which will be noted below), and the ways in which such engagement invites consideration of acts of food consumption that are decidedly not pleasurable, and that may, instead, take the form of embodied experiences of violence and suffering. Such acts strongly contrast with West’s frequent portrayal of food consumption as an act of great multisensory pleasure, but, more importantly, they encourage us to more thoroughly consider the acts of food consumption within West’s works that

enact subtler methods of bodily control, as well as the ways in which food consumption may be (or, perhaps, always is) layered with modes of consent.

Forced feeding (or “force-feeding,” if one wishes to emphasize the violence and force of the act itself, rather than the actions of one body upon another), or forcible feeding (as it was often referred to in the early twentieth century), was common practice during the imprisonment cycles of suffragette activists in early twentieth century Britain. “Hunger striking” became an “official strategy” of the suffragette movement in 1909, with these activists refusing to consume food out of protest for their imprisonment, which “forced” another kind of consumption—that of the body consuming itself in lieu of food, and the governmentally mandated concern about these forms of food consumption/non-consumption translated into the act of forced feeding (Green, “Advertising Feminism” 197). This act was ostensibly performed to keep these hunger-striking suffragettes alive, though it was typically performed with both violence and an element of semi-public humiliation. Various memoirs of famed suffragette Sylvia Pankhurst, for example, describe in vivid detail the participation of “six women officers” of the prison as numerous (male) doctors forced her jaw apart with steel instruments and roughly inserted a rubber tube down her throat (“Forcibly Fed”). Her memories of this act (and the accounts of many others) usually conclude with her vomiting, thus obviously defeating the purpose of the “feeding” aspect of forced feeding, as well as having sustained minor injuries to her gums, jaw, and esophagus, injuries which grew less minor through repetition of this act. This act was also, obviously, fundamentally traumatic; as suffragette Lady Constance Lytton recalled in a speech in 1910, “The doctor put the steel gag in somewhere on my gums and forced open my mouth until it was yawning wide. As he proceeded to force into my mouth and down the throat a large rubber tube,

I felt as if I were being killed—absolute suffocation is the feeling. You feel as though it would never stop” (292).

As Barbara Green notes, hundreds of women were force-fed (often repeatedly) between 1909 and 1914, as “physicians, government officials, suffragists, and concerned citizens debated the ethics” of such feeding, often within “the pages of the daily newspapers” (“Advertising Feminism” 197).⁷ The British press regularly printed detailed descriptions of the acts (both those written by suffragettes and more general descriptions) as well as photographs and realistic illustrations of the process of forced feeding. The forced feeding of the suffragettes also captured the interest of a number of modernist writers, among them Djuna Barnes, who allowed herself to be force fed (and to be photographed being force fed) as part of a piece for *New York World Magazine* in 1914, writing that it was “utterly impossible to describe the anguish” of the experience, and describing the “torture and outrage” of knowing that hundreds of women would suffer this act (17). Suffragettes regularly spoke at meetings of their experiences with forced feeding, which, as Green points out, could be considered particularly empowering. (195) Elaine Scarry has written extensively about the ways in which such torture of the body is “language-destroying,” and has argued that this destruction of language then thoroughly destroys the “self” and one’s sense of identity by causing an inability to “express” and “project” this self into the world beyond the body (*Body in Pain* 35). Thus, in speaking publicly about something that happened privately (or semi-privately, in the case of the forced feeding of the suffragettes), one regains agency and subjecthood. According to Green, such public speech, which acted as “representation and reduplication of the event” of forced feeding, must also be read as a “vital reworking of spectacle and of performative activism” within suffragette circles, ‘organizing’ the “event” of forced feeding whilst “scripting the oppressor and giving a plot to the oppressed,”

allowing the experience to be staged and re-staged within suffragette pageants, as well as within plays and novels written by those more peripheral to the feminist cause (“Advertising Feminism” 194; 199). Conversely, these public recollections of episodes of forced feeding, as well as—particularly—the visual images of such acts as imagined/depicted by the press, increased visibility of such acts, thus adding to the spectacle of these acts as demonstrations of “sovereign and disciplinary power,” which, after all, “are meant to be visible” in order to create and maintain forms of disciplinary governmental and/or institutional control through fear (Wilcox 106).

Following a Foucauldian model, Lauren Wilcox has pointed out that such forced feeding of prisoners acts as demonstration of both sovereign disciplinary power and of biopower, enacting sanctions upon the subject on the level of her body, as well as sending the message that state power dictates both life and death. This causes bodies to become dependent (or an extreme version of Foucault’s “docile bodies”), symbolically—and literally—removing the agency of the individual and stressing that the humans in possession of these bodies “are not autonomous agents but recipients of care that must be efficiently managed” (102). Speaking of the forced feeding of the suffragettes more specifically, Green has argued that, through hunger striking and the “rejection of consumption,” “the consuming feminine body...denies its conventional status as reproductive,” and that the act of forced feeding through which this female body “is both violated and nourished by a ‘long red tube’ brings technology to the scene of female embodiment and destabilizes the category of ‘femininity’; that is, the maternal body, which presumably exists only to feed others, erases itself and is sustained by mechanical (and masculine) science” (“Advertising Feminism” 198). This combination of ‘violation and nourishment,’ then, at least according to Green, subverts acts of feeding and “care” by gendering these acts as masculine,

thereby symbolically (at least, within the act of forced feeding) eliminating the final vestiges of maternity in—or, perhaps, at the site of—a female body that has denied both its purposive self-feeding as a “feminine” act of caring and its accepted “purpose” of survival and reproduction, and replacing that previously-maternal body with a space to enact technological operations of modernity. This is a compelling argument, though I might here suggest additional consideration of the act of forced feeding as part of larger discourses and enactments of the medicalization and regulation of the body, discourses and enactments that are less (or are not *only*) “about” gender, but which instead (or also) echo the medicalization and regulation of food-objects within early twentieth century culture (with, for example, the creation of the Food and Drug Administration and the rise of food standardization) and the medicalization and regulation of acts of food-consumption (with, for example, the rise of dieting for health purposes).

The literal and symbolic possibilities of the forced feeding experiences of suffragettes were of great interest to West, and (as will be discussed later within this chapter) the text of *The Judge* does specifically raise the issue of this type of forced feeding—albeit briefly—though the novel is much invested in other forms of potentially involuntary food consumption. And it bears consideration that, within West’s previous iterations of what developed into *The Judge*, the act of forced feeding was given greater prominence. West’s first—and unfinished novel—*The Sentinel* has been very convincingly read by Kathryn Laing as the earliest iteration of a Westian palimpsestic text chain consisting of *The Sentinel*, the more fragmentary *Adela*, and the fully completed *The Judge*.⁸ *The Sentinel* is particularly notable, according to Laing, for “its representation of scenes of violence against women, prison conditions, and forcible feeding,” which, she argues, “are among the most gruesome and grueling in suffrage literature” (“Introduction to *The Sentinel*” xxxii). In order to capture the details of such imprisonment,

hunger striking, and forced feeding, Laing notes, West borrowed liberally from the published and publicly recited narratives of suffragettes who had experienced such acts, with the novel's suffragette protagonist, Adela, being held down by wardresses and doctors as she chokes on the feeding-tube and believes herself to be dying ("She felt as if he were killing her"), and "with her set and glassy eyes" watches her own body "begin to writhe and resist: of itself begin to twist from side to side about the transfixing tube and try to expel it" (236). Such an account, which has clearly been only lightly fictionalized, figures the force-fed body as object-like, with doll-like (or perhaps even taxidermic) "set and glassy eyes," and as a site of both suffering and of various forms of material resistance that echo, and contrast with, the forms of bodily resistance used by suffragette demonstrators in public spaces for political purposes. Adela's control of her body via hunger striking is here violently erased, and although "she" herself resists the insertion of the feeding tube and its forced nourishment, her body also resists this act "of itself" and on its own, creating a tableau that not only serves as visual spectacle to those observing/participating in this act of forced feeding, but also as very personal visual spectacle that serves to underline (to herself) her loss of control over her body to the wardresses/doctors (and, as discussed above, to forms of sovereign and disciplinary power) but also to suggest the ways in which the materiality of one's own physical body and its actions may exceed, or even resist, the control of the "self" who inhabits that body. After all, Adela has here not only lost control of her body to those who use their (collective) physical advantages to violate that body, she has additionally lost control of her body to her body itself as it writhes and tosses of its own volition. Literary portrayal of such bodily excess might be fruitfully tied to the sorts of discourses about the modern body as machine that Tim Armstrong engages in his *Modernism, Technology, and The Body*, or, as I will discuss below, to notions of bodily and interpersonal control.

I will suggest throughout this chapter that West's interest in, and specific mention within *The Judge* of the forced feeding of the suffragettes in the early twentieth century relates closely to her broader interest in notions of control and bodily consent, as well as to her interest in consumption. More than this, I would argue both that consumption is unavoidably "bound up with" issues of control and consent in complex and resonant ways, in terms of the actions and abilities of the body itself to consume and the biological abilities of the body to process and take nourishment from food, the preferences and choices of the individual (and the ways in which those choices are often about things like availability, seasonality, price, etc., which are dictated by elements of external control), and the myriad reasons *for* consumption, many of which may focus less upon hunger or pleasure and more upon degrees of control enacted upon the body by the bodies of others—specifically within close relationships in "everyday" settings. Foucauldian models of bodily discipline and biopower (as mentioned above) are certainly not undertheorized (and are certainly tremendously valuable) but I would suggest that our overdependence upon these models of bodily consent in the realm of political subjecthood has—at least in thinking about topics like food consumption—encouraged underexploration of the consumptive dimension that involves systems of control enacted upon food-objects by bodies, and upon bodies by food-objects, as well as—and perhaps more importantly—systems of control enacted by bodies upon other bodies in ways more "everyday," more private, more personal, and more interpersonal, specifically in terms of issues like kinship relations. The act of the consumption of food, after all, may be used to demonstrate cooperation and/or submission (and perhaps even domination), as well as to show—or to perform—forms of love and/or respect. Food consumption may be used to create or (re)affirm kinship and/or social structures and to strengthen interpersonal ties, as well as to demonstrate more explicit forms of control (state,

patriarchal, matriarchal, and so forth), both within family units and within larger societal groupings. And it is these forms of domination and (re)affirmation that West begins to engage within “Indissoluble Matrimony,” and then address in more depth within *The Judge*.

West’s “Indissoluble Matrimony”

After beginning her career as a political essayist for feminist and/or socialist journals such as *The Freewoman*, *The New Freewoman*, and *The Clarion*, Rebecca West’s published her first work of fiction, a short story entitled “Indissoluble Matrimony,” in the first issue of *Blast* in 1914. The short-lived *Blast* was under the direction of English writer and artist Wyndham Lewis, and was used a platform to advance the political and aesthetic ideals of Vorticism, an avant-garde movement which synthesized elements of both Futurism and Cubism into an artistic movement which emphasized “geometric forms” that were, “on the one hand, sharply delineated, and on the other, constructed and arranged so as to suggest driving, rushing, forceful motion,” whilst advancing values of dynamism, conflict, and machine-centered modernity (Hickman 5). Although West’s association with the “Vorticist juggernaut” that was *Blast* has led some popular contemporary outlets to refer to her as “the forgotten Vorticist,” she was not a signatory of the movement’s manifesto, and was not considered to be a part of the group, neither by herself nor by others (Cowan 286).⁹ One might be tempted to attribute this to a conflict between her support of suffragism and women’s rights and *Blast*’s very public disavowal and mockery of suffragette activism, but as Paul Edwards explains, “There was never any question of West becoming a vorticist or of associating herself with the movement, and she even claimed in 1930 that Lewis published the story without her knowledge” (201). This does not, of course, mean that

“Indissoluble Matrimony” is out of place within *Blast*, though the story has been infrequently considered within the context of these surroundings, at least not at any length. Bonnie Kime Scott dismisses the story’s initial placement within *Blast* by suggesting that West simply “had a feminine vision that went beyond the violent, surface articulations of Blast editor, Wyndham Lewis, and the aestheticized violence of vorticism” (“Refiguring the Binary” 185). Miranda Hickman has briefly noted the “turbulent events” and “violence” of the story, and Edwards remarks that it “seems to share a spirit of violence and defiance with the polemical side of *Blast*—or at least it *depicts* defiance and violence” (68; 201, italics in original). Winkiel has suggested that the “exclusion” of West’s “Indissoluble Matrimony” from debates about Vorticism may be due to the formal concerns of its (relatively) realist idiom, but argues that the text engages amended Vorticist ideals through its mixing of avant-garde and popular elements (which echo the mix of styles and media within *Blast* itself). (“Cabaret” 214) And Kathryn Laing, in tracing the feminist sources of the story, has indicated that these feminist elements and influences form a “paradoxical combination” with “male” Vorticist aesthetics that was “characteristic of the often incongruous and unlikely” links between and across radical political and intellectual circles just before the First World War (“Am I a Vorticist?” 54). Ultimately, categorization of West’s relationship with Vorticism is beyond the scope of this project, though one might here note the potential fruitfulness of more thorough consideration of this (dis)association in conjunction with West’s complicated feminism and/or her treatment of bodies within her other texts of the period.

“Indissoluble Matrimony,” the story of the quietly acrimonious “bourgeois British marriage” marriage between George and Evadne Silverton, has often been anthologized in the years since its publication in *Blast*, but it rarely seems to be considered in any depth, and is

sometimes dismissed as melodramatic and “rather overwrought” (Morrison; Winegarten 227). Considered “worthy of a place” in *The Norton Anthology of Women Writers* “because the editors of this anthology “admired its depiction of a socialist, activist woman winning at sex war,” the text is most often read simply in conjunction with West’s own feminism, as a parable of gender relations within the early twentieth century (Scott “Refiguring the Binary” 169). As Ann Norton suggests, following Gilbert and Gubar’s assertions in the first volume of *No Man’s Land*, George Silverton is cast within this story as a classic “no-man” who “cannot in reality dominate a woman” and who must instead “imagine a violent conquering” (23). Winkiel reminds us that (ostensibly, since the text of “Indissoluble Matrimony” makes no specific mention of household cleanliness) “Evadne is more interested in workers’ struggles than in cleaning the house and caring for her husband,” and that this conflict regarding gendered expectations is ultimately “resolved in favor of Evadne’s stronger role within the marriage and George’s continued dependency” (“Cabaret” 215, 214). And Scott has discussed the ways in which Evadne serves as a “combative female” who is “fighting partially for her own identity” and place within a gendered system (“Refiguring the Binary” 185).

Most recently, “Indissoluble Matrimony” has been read in terms of raciality and postcolonial concerns, with Winkiel commenting upon the ways in which the text both “parodies the racial dangers believed to arise from colonial mixing” through this mixed-race marriage, re-writing Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* as a “suburban encounter with otherness,” and reaffirms a “problematically primitivist” view of the racialized other in which Evadne is denied full subjecthood within the narrative through portrayal of her body as both exotically attractive and repulsive, her behaviors as contradictory, and her thought processes as fragmented and generally unknown to the reader, particularly given that most of the story is told from the—likely

unsympathetic—perspective of George (“Cabaret” 215-17). And Carrie Rohman, one of the very few critics to read the story’s scene of food consumption as significant, has argued that the text uses both race and gender to address oft-theorized modernist anxieties regarding animality; in the end, George’s “mastery” of race and gender—through his identity as white, European, male, and the ‘head of household’—cannot allow him to “transcend” his own human animality (“On Marrying” 27). I would like to begin my own analysis of “Indissoluble Matrimony” by briefly discussing the text’s interest in the body—animal or otherwise—particularly in terms of processes of control and bodily (in)capability, and will then move on to a more in-depth examination of the scene at the supper table to suggest the ways in which this scene simultaneously figures the act of food consumption as one of aestheticized and sensuous “play” between human body, food-objects, and food-adjacent objects, and one of conflict and abjection. The text fundamentally links this act of food consumption to concerns of sociality and interpersonality, as well as cultural and personal expectations, and—through consideration of the specificities of the food-objects being encountered and consumed at this table—I will also suggest that this scene explores the oft-blurry boundary between the consumed food-object and the consuming human body and the manner in which the instability of such a boundary relates to the issues of consent/control and (potentially gendered) dominance/violence and to the prominence of such thematics within this story as a whole.

The text of "Indissoluble Matrimony" frequently worries the notion of the control and capabilities of the human body, whether one’s own body or the bodies of others. The narrative begins with George returning home from work, where "the spitting noise of the striking of damp matches and the mild, growling exclamations of annoyance told him that his wife was trying to light the dining-room gas" (98). Evadne’s difficulty in lighting the gas lamp(s) connote

uncertainty, or perhaps incapability, within the domestic sphere, a connotation strengthened by George's later (unvoiced) accusation that the evening meal is an inappropriate one (which will be discussed in detail later in this section). Following the meal, George and Evadne argue over her socialist activism, she storms into the darkness to have a swim, and he follows, thinking to catch her in a romantic clinch of some sort. As George follows the vanishing Evadne to the lake, he becomes increasingly uncomfortable within his body as he encounters the landscape, and less and less able to bend his body to his will. Shod only in "carpet slippers," he promptly loses this indoor footwear to an expanse of mud, his dampened socks immediately send him "snuffling in anticipating [sic] of a cold," and he accidentally strikes his arm against the "great stone wall of the county asylum," a place in which bodies are contained and controlled by the state (105, 106). This inspires "more pain than he had thought his body could hold," and he sobs and writhes and "squeal[s]" in pain, catching his ankle between rocks and experiencing "agony" at this "final physical humiliation," though this will certainly not be the ultimate failure of his physical body within this text (106, 107). He quickly grows exhausted ("Drowsiness lay upon him like lead" [108]), and when he at last comes upon the solitary Evadne at the lake, he can barely manage to call out to Evadne; we are told that "She did not hear him," but after further attempts, "at last he achieved a chest note," "committing a horrid tenor squeak" (108).

The curious incapability of, and lack of control George possesses over, his body contrasts here with the robust capability of the body of Evadne. Energized, "whirling her arms above her head," she jumps into the water and, we are told, "struck out strongly. Her movements were full of brisk delight and she swam quickly" (108). After a wrestling match in which both fall into the water, George battles a "hostile current" with his "limp" and "flaccid body," nearly drowning in the process, and then manages to evade Evadne's "strong arms" to hold her face beneath the

water until she "dropped like a stone" (108, 109). As he retreats to dry land, believing he has ended her life, overcome with "weakness," he repeats to himself reassuringly, "'I must be a very strong man'" (118). The language in this section clearly evokes notions of masculine sexual impotence, which, in combination with the text's strong interest in gender relations and the potential defeminization/masculinization of Evadne, a "New Woman" figure who speaks publicly on socialism and women's suffrage, rides about in motor cars when she 'should' be preparing a 'proper' meal, swims alone at night, and is cast (though only by her husband) as highly sexualized, might tempt one to cast George as in some way feminized, potentially successful and in physical control only in the traditionally feminine sphere of the domestic. After all, he is the partner with a sense of proper mealtime ritual and content (which will be discussed in a moment), and his body proves remarkably incompetent when he encounters the world outside the home. And yet, after limping home to end his own life in order to avoid being punished for his wife's murder, his inability to use his body to control the trappings of the domestic sphere, and his own body's consumption of the things found within in the domestic sphere, lead to the ultimate failure of his physical body.

Upon finding Evadne peacefully asleep in bed, George realizes: "Probably he had never even put her into danger, for she was a great lusty creature and the weir was a little place...He sneezed exhaustingly, and from his physical distress realised hiw [sic] absurd it was to have thought that he had killed her. Bodies like his do not kill bodies like hers" (117). But bodies "like his" do not, apparently, kill bodies like his *own*, either, as, in the end, George's body is incapable of ending even his own life; as he moves to turn on the gas, he discovers that Evadne, demonstrating a thriftiness and control of her domestic environment worthy of one of Mrs. Beeton's Victorian housewives, has turned off the gas "at the main" in order to economize

during the sleeping-hours (117). The text that began with George helping a struggling Evadne to light the gas-lamps of the dining room for consumption of their meal, then, ends with Evadne's inadvertent veto upon George's decision to inhale—or perhaps to consume—the natural fuel that is both provided to consumers via system of industrial production and processing, and that is, quite literally, itself consumed by the flame which it makes possible. Further, George's unrealized attempt to replace the air which will pass between his lips (his breath) with gaseous particles (in this case, non-breath) echoes the text's further interest in things that pass (or do not pass) between the lips and are in some way consumed by the physical body—George's frequent inability to speak and Evadne's apparent ease with words, his attention to the rhythm of her breaths as she quietly rehearses fragments of the public speech she plans to give (104), the water he believes has replaced her breath during the scene of attempted drowning, and the food that Evadne easily consumes and George struggles to consume within the first scene of the story.

The text of also places great emphasis on the relationship between the interior and the exterior of the human body, particularly in terms of race and the erotics of beauty. Evadne is of mixed race (we are told immediately that “she had black blood in her” [98]), and George constantly wavers between desire for the—often orientalized— “riot of excited loveliness” that is her “beautiful joyful body” and disgust for that same body, “coarse in grain and pattern,” her skin likened to the surface of a slug (98, 111, 116). During the meal with which the story begins, George muses upon the specter of an elderly woman whose voluminous accounts had been handled by his law firm many years previously, a woman who he describes as “the loathsome spectacle of an ignorant mind, contorted by the artificial idiocy of coquetry” (100). He concludes this thought with the reflection that “One feared to think how many women were really like [her]

under their armour of physical perfection or social grace” (100). The text also exhibits a strong interest in the material specifics of the relationship between the inside and the outside of the body, in terms of both appearance and sensation; Evadne is described as having blood “coursing violently under her luminous yellow skin,” and when the couple finally vent their shared rancor by the lake, we are told that “they felt tall and full of blood” (98, 110), points of focus that not only draw attention to the material body and its boundaries but that have encouraged Laing to propose a potential vitalist reading of the story (“Am I a Vorticist?” 50-51). And, perhaps inevitably, given its interest in the body and notions of interiority and exteriority, the text foregrounds things that pass between the inside and the outside of the body—breath, voices, words, and the consumption of material food-objects. I will next discuss the latter, because, after all, “Indissoluble Matrimony” begins with a memorable meal, and will then briefly explore the overlapping resonances between these material food-objects and the immaterial things that also pass through the lips of these two characters, particularly as these processes relate to control of the body.

When the story begins, Evadne has also very recently returned home, though from a social call, and, as the dining room is lit by George, she smiles “abstractedly, at some digested pleasure” (98). As mentioned above, George later suggests that Evadne may be having an affair, thereby associating the process of consumption—this “digested pleasure”—with eroticism, in a way that will continue throughout the story. The lighting of the room is both part of the ritual of preparing for the evening meal, and something that makes “proper” dining and consumption possible. Indeed, when the room is lit, George notices that Evadne had set out the “supper” meal before her errand, and that she had done so improperly—which echoes her fumbling mismanagement of the gas lighting— and he internally remarks: “As usual she had been in an

improvident hurry: it was carelessly done” (98). George exclaims that he “can’t” eat before washing his hands, further calling attention to his sense of propriety as it relates to the meal, and suggesting the (avoidance of) the threat of contamination (98).¹⁰ Evadne, on the other hand, continues to exhibit “othered” behavior by sitting down and beginning to eat by herself, as George washes his hands in the next room. “It annoyed him,” we are told, as “There was no ritual about it” (99). As Pasi Falk points out, “a common meal” is a “ritual communion creating a bond and identity between those sharing the same food and (imagined) experience” (85), and the gulf between George and Evadne is perhaps most apparent during this supper; they do not prepare for the meal in the same way, they do not begin the meal at the same time, and, ultimately, they will not eat the same foods during the meal. Nor, it is evident, will they have the same experience of the meal, as both are lost in private thought throughout.

Furthermore, the meal itself, the meal that Evadne has prepared, is considered by George to be wholly inappropriate and in obvious violation of the standards of propriety; “What an absurd supper to set before a hungry solicitor’s clerk!,” he broods (99). This meal consists primarily of uncooked natural foods, such as fruit and honey (further specifics of this meal will be considered more closely in a moment), and, as George indicates, “The only sensible food to be seen was a plate of tongue laid at his place” (99). His disdain for (most of) the food-objects that have been included in this meal calls to mind the cultural distinctions Claude Lévi-Strauss has made between “raw” and “cooked” categories of food, and we might also presume that an element of the meal’s impropriety is its serving temperature; as Mary Douglas suggests in “Deciphering a Meal,” a meal that is composed of “entirely cold” elements “omits a major contrast within a meal”—that of the distance between “hot” and “cold”—and thus “modifies” the intimacy of the meal, leaving “another threshold of intimacy to cross” (66).¹¹ Such lack of

intimacy within this meal seems appropriate, given the difficult relationship between these two characters, and it is significant that the primary “cooked” (to use Levi-Strauss’s terms) item upon the table—that is, the tongue—is, due to its placement upon the table before Evadne’s afternoon errands, served at the same “room temperature” as all of the other components of the meal. The resonances of the “sensible” tongue itself will be considered more closely later in this section, though I might here point out George’s use of the word “sensible” as it relates to this food, rather than to the others on the table. Clearly, each of the foods included within this meal are “sensible” in that they are perceptible by the senses, and most will be enjoyed in a particularly *sensuous* manner by what Green has termed “the consuming feminist body” of Evadne, but not all of the food-objects seem to be available to (all of) George’s senses (“New Woman’s Appetite” 233). The text’s use of “sensible” here also brings to mind the ways in which “having good sense” has come to mean “logical,” and thus able to perceive and understand things intellectually, a process which in some ways parallels the process by which the use of the word “taste” has evolved to connote aesthetic taste and its attendant interactions with morality—as traced by Denise Gigante in *Taste: A Literary History*—rather than simply the biological/emotional/cultural processes inherent in the mouth’s interaction with a material food-object.

In visual terms, the supper with which “Indissoluble Matrimony” begins may be considered as a sort of visual tableau. As Evadne has set out and arranged the meal in the manner she ostensibly deems aesthetically appropriate before each party arrives home, the sudden lighting of the gas lamps in the dining room allows for the previously-arranged meal to appear all at once, and encourages the diners (and, through them, the reader) to view this meal in aesthetic terms. The scene is also described in remarkably painterly fashion: “In the centre, obviously

intended as the principal dish, was a bowl of plums, softly red, soaked with the sun, glowing like jewels in the downward stream of the incandescent light. Besides [sic] them was a great yellow melon, its sleek sides fluted with rich growth, and a honeycomb glistening on a willow-pattern dish" (99). The description concludes, almost as an afterthought, with the mention of the "sensible" tongue set out at George's "place" (99). The specifics of this meal, with its "preposterous centrality of fruit" (Rohman 33), are closely associated with Evadne, as she has prepared the repast and is the only one to enjoy it; which she does, in a very sensuous manner, as the meal continues. George notes that "she would be crushing honey on new bread, or stripping a plum of its purple skin and holding the golden globe up to the gas to see the light filter through" (99). Here, the phrasing "she would be" instead of "she was" suggests that these things are common occurrences, thus underscoring the "everydayness" of this curious meal, an "everydayness" earlier suggested by his mental comment about the arrangement of the meal ("*as usual*, she was in an improvident hurry" [98, italics mine]). Evadne, she of the "unruly feminine appetite," appears to thoroughly participate in the consumption of these food-objects, appreciating tastes, textures, and the sight of the light filtering through the skinned plum as she holds it before the gas-lamp, arranging it visually to her liking prior to tasting it (Green, "New Woman's Appetite" 233). The words "crushing" and "stripping" suggest not simply sensuousness, but sensuality and passion, control, and perhaps even violence. Her intimately familiar actions with the about-to be-consumed fruit emphasize her own association with a conflation of fruit-like qualities and (exotic) eroticism found elsewhere within the text; George recalls the younger Evadne as being "of tropical fruit," and "ripe for adult things" (100, 101). The present-day Evadne eats this honey-covered bread, this fruit, we are told by George, with "an appalling catholicity of taste" (99), and this liberality of her sense of taste further echoes

what George casts throughout the story as her overt sexuality and potential promiscuity—both, after all, are examples of “unruly feminine appetites” (Green, “New Woman’s Appetite” 233).

Evadne clearly considers this meal to be both perfectly appropriate and pleasurable; she is, we are told, possessed of a “child’s love of sweet foods” (99). Such dominant sweetness is, we might assume, another reason that George finds this supper “absurd” and inappropriate. According to Pasi Falk, the universal preference for sweet-tasting ingestibles provides a link between humans and (other) animals (73), and such an association might here call additional attention to the ways in which George associates Evadne with animality elsewhere within the narrative, largely through her sexuality and her race.¹² The *ways* in which humans eat, after all, are meant to be illustrative of civilization, of distance from—or, at least, control of—“base” animal instincts such as hunger and the desire for pleasure.

Few of the trappings of this meal are described, and those food-adjacent objects that are present serve only to emphasize the visual appearance of the food-scene, and of the food-objects themselves. We are told of the quality of “the downward stream of the incandescent light,” and the “willow-pattern dish” upon which the “glistening” honeycomb rests (99). We might here briefly note the inclusion of this willow-patterned plate, something that would have been, during the early twentieth century, simultaneously common and old-fashioned, thereby suggesting that something about this “absurd” meal—or perhaps something about this unhappy marital relationship—is unexceptional indeed. The presence of such a dish also engages the thematic of a clash between “old” and “new” that is so prevalent within literature of the modernist period, something that was, necessarily, of particular interest to the “forward-thinking” Vorticists and their ilk.

Further, this willow-patterned plate implies a certain kind of exoticism, one that has been appropriated from non-western culture (as has the process by which this “china” is created), then imbricated within the cultural practices of English society both via the ritual of the meal and more generally, and one that is inextricably linked to the matter—in both senses of the word—of food itself. We might also note that such dishes themselves are, after all, “triumphs” of culture over nature—clay refined and made “civilized.” The presence of this type of plate, then, at the supper table of Evadne and George, serves as a reminder of George’s exoticization/orientalization and objectification of Evadne’s physical body, and of the ways in which she is associated with (the pleasures and presentation of) food. It may also serve to underline the ways in which Evadne, despite her “exotic” coloring, features, and ancestry, is actually English. And finally, the willow pattern of the dish necessarily associates the food which it is made to bear, and which provides it with its ostensible primary purpose, with the category of art and aesthetics—not simply by its decorative, and hand- (or, later, machine-)decorated nature, but by the content and style of its depiction. The willow pattern consists of a stylized landscape scene heavily framed by decorative patterns, and this decorative frame for the landscape scene within the willow pattern calls attention to the scene *as* an artistic landscape, both by providing boundaries for the scene and by echoing the often-ornate framing practices that have historically lent importance to works of art, thus proposing that the dish itself is a type of art-object. The framing border of this type of dish, then, acts as a sort of dual frame by highlighting the visual and artistic nature of the scene painted upon it whilst emphasizing the visual and artistic nature of the food that will be placed within, or arranged upon, the dish—within the frame—thereby replacing the landscape with another type of artistic “scene”—a miniature “still life” of food-objects that is three-dimensional, ephemeral, material, and ultimately consumable.

The framing border of the willow-patterned plate also calls to our attention one of the general features of dishes, and of place settings—in which the bordering silverware, glasses, etc. encircle and call attention the plate, and, thus, the food—that of the creation and continued policing of boundaries. The food “belongs” on the plate. As Georg Simmel has indicated in “The Sociology of the Meal,” plates and place settings create order, creating personal space and reinforce boundaries between one diner and another, as well as between any communal serving dishes—which may be controlled or “passed” between boundaries/spaces/territory by the actants/individuals via a set protocol—and the individual servings claimed by the individual (132-33). The “plate of tongue laid” at George’s “place” at this dinner, then, is clearly intended only for George’s consumption, and, indeed, Evadne’s focus will be on other elements of the meal whilst George is eating the tongue—they do not share this food, thus further emphasizing the space between them (99).

The material and symbolic elements of this plate of tongue are particularly rich. First, the tongue is an organ found both within, and in some ways, *without*, the body of both humans and other animals. It is a liminal mass, always testing the border of the body, continually breaching the boundary between internal, personal, experience, and the exterior, or social, world, by turns encaged behind teeth and lips and partially exposed. The tongue’s purpose is to test things that come from outside the body, and then, if these things pass the test of taste/texture, to help control these things so that they may become incorporated into the body, or, to put it in Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin’s terms of the tongue’s purpose within the mechanism of the mouth: “the tongue mashes and churns” the food-object, and then “lifts up to make it slide and slip” (54). The tongue assists with the edibility of material, and is, during George and Evadne’s supper, itself edible, an “object” that has been sourced from the (non)boundary of an animal (presumably a cow) and

itself taken into the (non)boundary of a human animal. The presence of the tongue at this supper table, then, plays with ideas of controlled consumption and the tension between bounded and non-bounded place and space, both within the socially-mandated place setting at the supper table and physically, within the material body of George himself.

George's consumption of the tongue provides us with a complex echo on the level of materiality, an interaction that encompasses pleasure and dominance, subjectivity and similarity, and the perceptive apprehension of lived experience. The sensation of the food-processing tongue which belongs to one's body against the inanimate food-object tongue might easily be read as sensual or erotic, and the act of using one's own tongue to derive pleasure from the taste and texture of this consumable tongue is an act of tasting something that is itself meant *to* taste rather than *to be* tasted. In that moment, one might wonder precisely whom is doing the tasting? The act of consuming a tongue-as-food-object brings one curiously close to the act of consumption itself, to what Pasi Falk, here drawing from Bataille, calls the "locus of transgression which...is concretized in relation to the bodily boundaries separating the outside from the inside" and which relates to all pleasures involving orality of the body (87). In psychoanalytic terms, it also encompasses the fear/pleasure of the "eat or be eaten" "situation" (Falk 86). According to Otto Fenichel:

The ideas of eating an object or being eaten by an object remain the ways with which any reunion with objects is thought of unconsciously. The magical communion of 'becoming the same substance,' either by eating the same food or by mixing the respective bloods, and the magical belief that a person become similar to the object he has eaten are based on this fact. (63)

Part of the pleasure, then, of consuming any animal may be the pleasure of temporarily achieving the dominant role in this “eat or be eaten” dichotomy, and the consumption of a part of that animal’s alimentary system—such as the tongue—is likely to inspire even greater pleasure. Rohman, drawing from both Bataille and Derrida, has argued that “eating meat defines the animal as always-having-been-a-thing, and conversely, it defines man as never-having-been-a-thing” (33). Her use of “man” here is important, as she argues that George’s consumption of meat in this scene reaffirms his masculinity and dominance over the animal, whilst confirming his subjecthood (rather than his objecthood).

On a phenomenological level, we might consider George’s consumption of the tongue in terms of Edmund Husserl’s related concepts of “double apprehension” and “the touching finger.” According to Husserl, double apprehension occurs when:

the same touch-sensation is apprehended as a feature of the ‘external’ Object and is apprehended as a sensation of the Body as Object. And in the case in which a part of the body becomes equally an external Object of another part, we have the double sensation (each part has its own sensations) and the double apprehension as feature of one or of the other Bodily part as a physical object. (177)

The “touching finger,” then, is a both synecdochic stand-in for the body itself as it encounters this “external object” and, by extension, its own self, through the sense of touch and a philosophical “shorthand” for this concept. Husserl is particularly interested in the symmetrical experience of fingers touching fingers, as well as in using the hand itself as illustrative medium, and this might inspire us to follow Derrida for a moment in his questioning of what he views as Husserl’s “privileging” of the finger/hand; why not other “external” parts of the body, he asks, such as “the tongue on the lips...and the tongue on the palate” (*On Touching* 164). And indeed, we might

consider the ways in which the tongue is always located not simply adjacent to, but actually *against* another part of the body—several, simultaneously, if we consider the various “parts” of the mouth—and it is always touching, always sensing, and always tasting those parts, as well as feeling itself (and tasting itself) against those parts. Thus, we might extend this to consider the experience of George’s supper, during which George’s tongue is itself being sensed and tasted by itself, as it senses and tastes the beef tongue during the act of its consumption. Just after this meal, during their argument about Evadne’s socialist speeches, we are told that George’s “tongue licked his lips in fear,” not, as Rohman points out, that he licked his own lips (104). Instead, as she indicates, “George is momentarily elided by his licking tongue, a tongue that appropriates his agency at this instant,” and this gesture reminds us of the potential agency of the tongue-just-consumed, as well as his own speech, as well as that of Evadne, both of which he seems unable to control (38).

The tongue-as-organ is inextricably linked to utterance (and to the metaphorical “tongue” that is language), as well as to consumption. As Maud Ellmann has observed, “the fact that language issues from the same orifice in which nutrition is imbibed means that words and food are locked in an eternal rivalry.... Since language must compete with food to gain the sole possession of the mouth, we must either speak and go hungry, or shut up and eat” (46). The tongue-to-be-eaten has been rendered mute by its removal from the animal’s body and its preparation as food. This muteness echoes the muteness of the meal during which George eats the tongue; we are told that “The meal would pass in silence,” as, presumably, do the rest of George and Evadne’s meals, as the text suggests repeatedly that the circumstances of this meal are not unusual (99). Rohman has theorized that, “George may eat animal tongue in order to over-mark his mastery of the vocalizing animal and thus recite his own exclusionary claim to

‘language’” (34). I would add to this that, not only has Evadne prepared this tongue for his consumption, any hypothetical attempt to emphasize his own linguistic “mastery” is well-undermined by his relationship with language throughout the rest of West’s story, thus, this “mastery” carries more than a hint of irony, as well as connotation of his impotence and lack of mastery, or control, over his own body.

For this mute (beef) tongue with which George fills his own mouth—thus temporarily removing his ability to speak—also echoes George’s general lack of speech within this text; the reader is often granted George’s thoughts, which rarely match his utterances, and it is suggested that the words with which he might express himself are almost material in nature, and that they interact with a mouth that cannot in some way function as it should. For example we are told of his silence with Evadne, “He would find the weight of words choked on his lips by the weight of dullness that always oppressed him in her presence” (99). Here, two immaterial aspects—words, and dullness—are granted an almost-bodily materiality as they encounter his body, and a connection is drawn between the lips (which are involved in the control of bodily processes of speech, breath, and consumption) and the throat (which controls ingestion of food and inhalation/exhalation of breath) through the text’s use of the word “choked.” We are told later, during another of George’s attempts to speak, that “His lips stuck together like blotting-paper,” providing the reader with an image of language made as material as possible—as inked words affixing two pages together (103). These difficulties, and George’s consumption of the tongue, also potentially touch upon ritual—Fenichel’s discussion (mentioned above) of the “magical” belief seen in some communities that a person in some way “takes on” the qualities of that which he/she consumes—and may also remind us of Ludwig Feuerbach’s maxim “Der Mensch ist was er isst” (“Man is what he eats”) (qtd. in Chernov 401).¹³ But while it is true that George becomes

more confrontational than seems to be usual following consumption of this meal, his own tongue does not appear to be much, nor permanently, loosened.

The presence of the tongue at this silent meal, and as it is consumed by the uncommunicative George, also emphasizes Evadne's marked lack of muteness. Although he notes that she would "forbear to babble" throughout this meal, the implication is that she often "babbles," and we are told that she often sings to herself, sometimes during meals, with a voice "which welled up from the thick golden throat and clung to her lips" (99, 100). After dinner, Evadne receives word of a speaking engagement at a socialist meeting, and this news is met with the pleased exclamation "They want me to speak," and after dinner, when George 'catches' her rehearsing her potential speech under her breath after dinner, he responds, "You shan't speak!" (100, 104), thus attempting to control her identity on the level of her body, and, as James Longenbach points out, attempting to deny her "any claim to subjectivity" (99). It is then noted that she has been "speaking successfully" at such meetings for some time (100). Notably, she does not consume, nor share, the tongue that has been set so deliberately at "his" place at the table. It seems she does not need to. Her control of her own tongue allows her to speak "successfully," in contrast to George's difficulties with verbal expression.

Such resonances are fundamentally interwoven with the acts of food consumption within West's "Indissoluble Matrimony," as are the story's dual anxieties about the survival of the material body in ways both dramatic (querying who will survive the violent interlude in the lake, as well as its aftermath) and quotidian (querying what might be a "good enough" meal in order for one to go about the daily business of living), anxieties which echo the narrative's more figurative—but no less substantive—anxieties about the survival of the "self" (or of *a* "self") within a relationship. Ultimately, within "Indissoluble Matrimony," West puts forth versions of

the food-object and of the act of food consumption that are fundamentally complex, figuring a range of rich food-objects that are worth considering in terms of their individual material specificities and potential meanings, and suggesting the act of food consumption as a modernist site of negotiation between nature and culture, identity and subjectivity, self and other. More than this, West's version of food here casts the act of food consumption as inextricably linked to discourses of power, dominance, and control—over the appetites and materiality of the body of the self and/or others, over the food-object and its similarities to the human/animal body, and over the social, cultural, and interpersonal meanings and expectations which inevitably surround acts of food consumption—all of which are concerns and discourses that West will develop further within her subsequent fictional works, particularly—as we shall see— within *The Judge*.

West's *The Judge*

West's second novel, *The Judge*, published eight years after the first issue of *Blast* and four years after *The Return of the Soldier*, garnered a fair amount of criticism from her contemporaries for what were viewed as both thematic and stylistic excesses within the novel. Virginia Woolf famously referred to *The Judge* as “an over stuffed sausage,” into which West “pours it all in,” with “irreticence,” leaving the reader “covered with flying particles” (qtd. in Hertog 79). H.G. Wells, who was West's lover at the time, described the novel as an “ill-conceived sprawl” in which West had “splashed her colours about” (qtd. in G. Ray 123; qtd. in Glendinning 80). As Scott has pointed out, Wells' “objections” here likely had a good deal to do with the ways in which West was, with *The Judge*, “departing from her Edwardian male

mentors” (*Refiguring Modernism* 130)—that is, by straying from narrative he expected from West: “a simple, linear plot inspired by the life story of a real-life male judge they had met which on one of their vacations” (131). Conversely, I would suggest that Woolf’s criticisms of *The Judge* have much to do with the ways in which the novel remains influenced by the Edwardian, and even the Victorian, novelistic styles—particularly in scope and realist description—given Woolf’s strong distaste for these styles (as seen in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” and elsewhere). After all, *The Judge* certainly displays a number of elements—both thematic, such as an interest in psychology and memory; and stylistic, such as shifts in temporality, focus, and even tone—common in other weighty modernist novels, such as Woolf’s own *To the Lighthouse*, Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Elizabeth Bowen’s *The House in Paris*, and Willa Cather’s *The Professor’s House*, among others.

Although *The Judge* has been the subject of some recent interest, much to do with the novel remains understudied and undertheorized. Most of this recent interest in *The Judge* has centered upon explicit or implicit debate regarding the novel’s genre. The novel has been variously categorized as a sentimental novel; as a gothic romance; as a hybrid of the “female” (rather than male) gothic genre and the “New Woman” novel; as a potential “feminist allegory” by way of (Freudian) psychological novel; as a roman à these about the dangers of men; as “an unusual version of the family romance, part gothic romance, part psychological drama, and part feminist polemic”; as a Greek drama; and as “a new type of philosophical fiction—a female novel of existential pessimism.”¹⁴

In addition to advancing—or confounding—generic debates, much contemporary criticism of the novel concentrates upon grand themes such as Jungian archetypes; cosmology and morality; beauty and evil; and the narrative’s purported “rejection of divine benevolence”

(Schweizer, *Heroism* 19).¹⁵ More than this, scholarly work upon *The Judge* has also focused strongly upon feminist readings of the novel, with Elaine Showalter arguing in 1977 that the novel thoroughly “punishes” women who “gave in and despised themselves for giving in” when it came to patriarchal expectations (*Literature* 119). Nancy L. Paxton has claimed that the novel demonstrates West’s “effort to imagine a model of female citizenship that encompasses not only the political and economic but also the emotional and psychological [particularly Oedipal] dimensions of women’s sexual identity” (196). “Perhaps more than any other novel of the period,” Shirley Peterson has indicated, *The Judge* illustrates “a commonly overlooked dimension of early twentieth-century women’s history: the anxieties of female liberation” (105). According to Bonnie Kime Scott, the text focuses less upon binaries of masculinity and femininity and more upon the contrasts and similarities between older and younger generations of women, ultimately “encourag[ing] a more expansive definition of modernist experimentation and feminist modernism” (“Refiguring the Binary” 107). And Laura Cowan has most recently made the case for reading the novel’s treatment of women through the lens of genre theory by arguing that interpretation of the novel as female gothic/New Woman hybridity allows for attention to be given to problems of class, gender equality, and politics of the time, such as “workplace harassment in early twentieth-century England” (57).

Such critical discussions are undeniably important; however, these discussions have tended to quite thoroughly supplant discussion of the novel’s realist aspects, its interest in the thematics of memory, kinship, class, and social condition, and its pervasive and substantial investment in the everyday lived experience of the body, particularly as that lived experience relates to interactions with food-objects, interactions which may involve actual food consumption or forms of tactile and sensuous “play” that foreground the materiality, objecthood,

and potential agency of these food-objects. As within “Indissoluble Matrimony,” the text of *The Judge* proffers finely detailed scenes that explore the pleasures of specific food-objects, whether these pleasures be about taste, aesthetic enjoyment, tactility or other forms of sensory engagement, food-prompted intellectual and emotional engagement with forms of memory, and/or interpersonal or social pleasures that are centered around the consumption of food. And yet, I will also suggest that acts of food consumption within this novel are additionally associated with forms of threat, and, conversely, that forms of threat within this novel frequently take the—figurative or literal—shape of acts of food consumption. The distance between the human body and the food-object is repeatedly queried within this novel, calling attention both to the potential objecthood of the body and its own edibility and/or ability to be manipulated and in some way used or consumed. Sexuality is treated as somehow adjacent to acts of food consumption, but this treatment focuses upon physical threat, disgust, and repulsion, rather than the pleasurable forms of eroticism that are so frequently associated with acts of food consumption within our culture. Food-objects, and their consumption, are also here repeatedly linked to acts of violence, whether these acts be sexual or otherwise. And it follows, then, that West frequently portrays the act of food consumption throughout this novel as a coercive act (as alluded to within the introductory sections of this chapter), figuring degrees of coerced feeding that are strongly inflected with concerns of gender, class, and/or kinship relations and suggesting that methods of coercion, as well as opposing methods of control that—for similar reasons—may restrict the consumption of food rather than urging it, are a part of our everyday encounters with, and through, food. This section of this dissertation chapter will begin by commenting upon the overall prominence of food within the novel, and will then move to discuss scenes of food consumption within *The Judge* that involve coercion and dominance, those that involve pleasure

and play, and those that involve control and violence, ultimately demonstrating the ways in which, after “blasting” the traditional sentimentality of a literary scene involving a husband and wife sharing a quiet supper within “Indissoluble Matrimony” by introducing incursions of violence, abjection, and threat, in *The Judge*, West follows through on the promise of such a scene by thoroughly exploring the microaggressions and intimacies of daily life alongside grander acts of violence and survival.

The Judge follows young Scottish suffragette and typist Ellen Melville through her courtship and engagement to Richard Yaverland, an English chemist and explosives manufacturer. Each of the novel’s two books ends with the death of a mother--the first, Ellen's mother; the second, Richard's mother, Marion, upon whom a substantial portion of Book Two is focused—and the novel concludes by very strongly suggesting that the rest of Ellen's own life will follow a similar trajectory to the lives of these two mothers; she will, ostensibly, be abandoned by her lover, be cast out by society, and will raise a child on her own. The narrative demonstrates substantial interest in bodies, particularly the bodies of women, and the ways in which bodies interact with objects, particularly food-objects. The text also offers frequent metaphorical play between bodies and objects, often utilizing food-related metaphors to describe the undefinable, indeterminate, or even the unspeakable. Ellen and her mother pass near an opium den at night, and are followed by the dark shape of a “tall Chinaman,” his “flat face creased with a grin” as he “savour[s] the women's terror under his tongue, sucking unimaginable sweetness and refreshment from it” (12). A naive Ellen watches Richard interact with her boss, and, we are told that, “In the warm, interesting atmosphere she detected an intimation of enmity between the two men; and it was like catching a caraway seed under a tooth while one was eating a good cake” (34-35). As Richard and Ellen chat together during a walk, he notes the “queer

flavour of her that in its sharpness and its freshness reminded him of the taste of fresh celery” (82). Consideration of her superior's sexual interest in Ellen’s creates “a swallowed sob...as sharp in her throat as a fishbone” (137). When Ellen ponders the prospect of future physical contact with Richard, she recalls an unappealing couple she once glimpsed in the street who “had put their mouths to each other's faces so munchingly that it had looked as if they must turn aside some time and spit out the cores of their kisses” (420). Upon meeting Richard's hapless half-brother, Roger, Ellen muses that he is “sickening like something fried in insufficient fat,” and, after Richard has stabbed Roger, she decides that she is not afraid of the dead body because, ““If his spirit was in the room it was sickly and innocuous, like the smell of a peardrop” (435, 489). Such food-related figurative language suggests that this invocation of the interaction of the human body with food-objects, whether in terms of touch, taste, appearance, or scent, will allow particular insight within this novel, and this suggestion is borne out in more concrete terms throughout the events of the narrative. Such food-related figurative language also often connotes strange and almost cannibalistic notions of edible bodies, and of the revolting “appeal” of consuming another body in some fashion, notions that recall the consumption of the tongue within “Indissoluble Matrimony.”

The Judge offers numerous scenes of the consumption of food, and each of these scenes takes place at a pivotal moment within the narrative, thus framing many of the events of the novel in both food-objects and acts of consumption. Mr. Philip, son of Ellen’s boss, attempts to seduce Ellen during his dinner, moments before she meets Richard. On Ellen’s first “date” with Richard, he accompanies her to the butcher, the baker, and the grocer as she purchases food for herself and her mother. Ellen’s boss softens all of his difficult discussions with her by gifting her boxes of candy, the size of which is apparently in direct proportion to the potential difficulty of

the conversation. A confused and momentarily suicidal Ellen returns home for a final, solitary meal, immediately after which she and Richard exchange vows of marital intent. Ellen's first discussion with Marion takes place over dinner in an Essex restaurant, and her first moments at the Yaverland estate occur over lunch in the grand dining room of the house; a meal during which "the bright silver and delicate wineglasses, and the little dishes of coloured glass piled with wet green olives, stood among their images on a gleaming table," thus emphasizing both issues of class and the themes of replication and doubling that appear throughout the novel (269). When Marion recalls the dark events of her past, these events are tied to food, as well: the great "contentment" following her solitary feast just before she is attacked by the townspeople; her realization that her prized child Richard has deceived her, which takes place during tea with her less-favored son; her realization of her murderous loathing for this less-favored son, which is occasioned by her enjoyment of his corporal punishment for sneaking jam from the larder. When the adult Roger returns to the Yaverland home with his intended, they immediately have a(n awkward) tea. After the discovery that Marion has drowned herself, and that her final words to anyone were part of an in-depth discussion with the cook about purchasing new saucepans, Ellen attempts to serve tea to the distraught brothers, and this meal ends in Richard's stabbing of Roger with the breadknife from the table. Of these moments, I would like to more closely consider the candy given to Ellen by her boss, Ellen's "pre-suicide" meal, the ways in which Marion's memories link time and space through the presence of a particular food-object, and the final tea after Marion's death, in order to examine some of the ways in which the novel portrays intersections of class, gender, edibility, and the experiences of the body.

The early twentieth century battle for women's suffrage is always on the periphery of this novel. When Richard meets Ellen, she is an active—though low-level—suffragette who spends

her spare time handing out tracts in the streets and attempting to convince him to attend meetings and speeches. This is unsurprising, given West's own vocal feminism (and initial socialism), and the partial enfranchisement of female voters in the United Kingdom in 1918, shortly before she began work on *The Judge*. Given what we now know of the hunger strikes and forced feedings of British suffragette activists of the early twentieth century (as discussed earlier within this chapter) it is difficult to fully avoid linking female suffragism in some way with issues of food consumption—whether in terms of elective starvation and bodily self-control, or in terms of state-sanctioned demonstrations of control and national sovereignty via the violent, and violating, act of forced consumption. And indeed, Ellen attends a voting rights meeting early in the narrative in which she listens to the stories of those who “waited to be carried up to the cell where the doctor and the wardresses waited to bind and gag them and ram the long feeding-tube down into their bodies” (58). Such framing clearly connotes rape (as do the nonfictional accounts from which West draws this description, as discussed above), and evokes the ways in which consumption, and food, may not be controlled by the individual and, more than this, may become a threat to the autonomy and wholeness of the body. Further, I would suggest that this explicit mention of forced feeding throws into relief the subtler forms of coercion and consent violation with regards to the consumption of food that are present throughout the novel (and discussed below). Notably, this is the same suffrage meeting Ellen has convinced Richard to attend, and their eyes will later meet across the room, and when Ellen's mind begins to wander during these speeches made by the suffragettes, she thinks of Mr. Philip (whose interactions with Ellen will be discussed in a moment) and then wonders “Oh, why had she thought of him?” (63). Her mind also wanders to her (lack of) knowledge about sexual acts, and, we are told, “she fell to wondering what this thing was that men did to women,” and, in this way, the text creates an

association between sexual threat and consumption that will continue throughout (64).

Further, in keeping with the text's interest in female autonomy in terms of voting rights, employment, and social/political independence, the events of the novel continually return us to such themes on the level of the material body. Mrs. Melville loses her beauty and emotional and physical health to poverty and disease and eventually dies from diphtheria, and Marion Yaverland loses control of her body in her youth when she is physically attacked by the townspeople over her status as unwed mother, and again when she is raped and impregnated, and her eventual suicide may be considered a sort of reclamation, though a tragic one, of her control over the actions of her own body.

This equation of forced—or at least coerced—food/drink consumption and sexual violence is echoed elsewhere within *The Judge*, as when Mr. Philip, in the first moments of a seduction attempt, presses Ellen to try wine for the first time at the end of a workday. After she initially refuses the Burgundy wine, he responds by cajoling, “But it’s so pretty!”, appealing to the aesthetic sense often attached to (pre-)consumption, and she grows “absorbed by the red beauty in his glass” (28). He continues “coaxing” her to try it, growing more and more insistent:

“You’ll have a glass?”

“No, thank you”

“You’ll surely have a taste”

“Ah, no—“

“Just a drop...” (28)

Mr. Philip’s insistence (and, perhaps, his amendment from “glass” to “taste” to “drop”) finally causes Ellen to accept his offer, though not with pleasure: “She muttered, ‘Well, just a drop!’ and found herself laughing unhappily” (28). He orders her to “Drink it up! Drink it up!” and she

relents, then comparing this consumption to the experience of being attacked physically:

“She had never thought wine was like this. It was not so much a drink as a blow in the mouth”

(28). Ellen’s literal distaste for the experience serves as a strange encouragement for the

predatory Mr. Philip, and we are told that: “The crisis of his pleasure in persuading her to do the thing which she hadn't wanted to do was his joy that she hadn't liked it when she had done it”

(29). Here, her lack of consent in the act of consumption excites him in a way that conflates cruelty with eroticism, and he approaches her with apparently (sexually) violent intent: “At last he knew what he wanted to do...she was still wringing her hands...he moved towards her, walking masterfully. Oh, it was going to be ecstasy....” (29). It is at this point that (fortunately) they are interrupted by Richard’s arrival.

It might be tempting for a reader to think of Richard, given both this entrance of his character into the narrative and his portrayal throughout as someone who is capable of love, empathy, and affection, as a somewhat heroic figure. After all, as Scott points out, “Richard Yaverland is certainly a more attractive suitor than Philip James,” one who “is aware of both Ellen’s strength and her vulnerability” whilst demonstrating some “sympathy” to the aims of the suffragettes (*Refiguring Modernism* 135). However, the text again links the consumption of food with both sexuality and masculine cruelty (or at least lack of concern) through Richard, who soon finds himself bemused at his consideration of Ellen as more than a sexual object. “It was his desire,” we are told, “to look on women with a magpie thievish eye and no concern for their souls.” After all, he muses, “the dinner that one eats does not presume to have a soul” (52). Here, Richard shifts from describing women in terms which connote general objecthood—he is a magpie of European folklore, collecting shiny objects—and his (presumably sexual or pre-sexual) interactions with these women as a sort of theft, to the suggestion that women are not

simply objects, but food-objects able to be used by his own body. The absence of “soul” in one’s dinner, he suggests, comes not from the food consumer’s distaste of imagining something unappetizing, such as any qualities that might render a meal, or a food, in some way human-like in this consumer’s mind, nor from the actual absence of such a characteristic as “soul” in food itself, but from the lack of “presumption” on the part of the food itself. This food, the about-to-be-consumed “it,” which obviously lacks control of the situation, apparently dares not be so audacious as to “presume.” Such phrasing figures women not simply as objects controlled both by men and by their own inability to “presume” subjectivity and agency, but as food-objects to be consumed by men, in a manner that suggests traditional associations of food consumption with eroticism whilst allowing a peculiar space for the food-object to possess, but never to act upon, potential agency and/or subjectivity—it is not that this “meal” *lacks* a “soul,” simply that it does currently not *presume* to possess one, nor to speak this possession.

West’s narrative proffers a slightly less sinister variation of Ellen’s food-consumptive coercion at the hands of Mr. Philip in a similar scene with his elderly father—Mr. Mactavish James, Ellen’s actual boss—which, we are told, takes place several days later. The kindly Mr. James, who “always gave her sweeties when Mr. Philip,” her would-be seducer, “had been talking against her,” brings Ellen a particularly large box of hard candy (158). Ellen wonders, shrewdly, if she is “to deduce from the unusual size” of this package that Mr. Philip “had been saying something unusually cruel,” and their respective interactions with this box of candy frame their discussion of Ellen’s budding relationship with Richard, who is one of the firm’s clients (158). Mr. James begins by ordering, “Take out a stick and give me one,” then, noticing that she does not eat hers, queries about her health and apparent lack of hunger (158). In response, so as not to hurt his feelings, she bites the candy-stick “joylessly; and laid it down again,” and upon

further coaxing, we are told that “She smiled, palely, and gnawed the ginger stick, her jaw being so impeded by her desire to cry that she could not bite it” (158). Here, her lack of desire to eat is evident, and her body itself, via her “impeded jaw,” interferes with—and resists—her attempts to consume the candy: “she could not bite it.” After further cajoling, Ellen begins to consume a piece of ginger candy before changing her mind, exclaiming that she hates the “nasty, hot thing” and that she will, instead, “have one of the pink ones. They’ve no great flavour, but I like the colour” (161). Her desire for, and then for something other—or “blander”—than, the ginger stick echoes her ambivalence regarding sexual contact throughout the novel, particularly given the undertones of sexual desire in these scenes of food/drink consumption with Mr. Philip and Mr. James.

Ellen's rationale for her choice of the pink candy here also reminds us of just how much the aesthetic appearance of a food might matter to an act of consumption--that one food-object might be preferred over another based solely upon its visual qualities, even when those appealing visual qualities accompany an absence of flavor, or taste, which is usually thought to be a/the primary impetus for choosing one food over another (when one has a choice, that is). Here, Ellen's personal version of "good" aesthetic taste trumps the actual, literal, sense of taste that is the interaction between her mouth/tongue and the food itself. She again pauses in the act of consumption, and Mr. James insists, pushing the candy-box closer to her and remarking “in a tender and offended voice,” ““You're not eating your sweets...I hoped to give you pleasure when I bought them [...] I wish I could give you more pleasure”” (166). This desire to provide Ellen with pleasure speaks not only to the pleasures of consumption, but implies both his general fondness for Ellen (we are told elsewhere that “he loved her” [16]) and the suggestion of a sexual attraction. “Age permitted him,” we are told, to “delight” in her beauty without impropriety (15),

and, indeed, as he will later tell her whilst sharing this candy: "You'd look plain beside no one but Venus" (168). And, indeed, we learn that a bit of Ellen's initial appeal for Mr. James was her physical resemblance to his own, long ago, love (146-48). His appeal regarding the candy finally takes root, for, "One would always get her that way. Someone was being hurt. Immediately she had the soft breast of the dove" (166). Given a choice of *which* candy to eat, but little choice whether or not *to* eat, Ellen relents, and, ostensibly, consumes.

After her meeting with Mr. James, Ellen decides that she shall kill herself, but will do so after taking tea. She imagines her leap from a local bridge as she sets out butter, milk and sugar, and has "the luck to find in the breadpan a loaf far newer than it was their thrifty habit to eat, and carried it back to the table, finding just such delicious pleasure in digging her fingers into its sides as she found in standing on her heels on new asphalt" (172-3). Here, Ellen compares object to object—or, rather, aggregate object/thing to aggregate object/thing, given that both the bread and the asphalt are material mixtures and she equates the interaction of her body with an edible food-object (her fingers in the fresher-than-usual bread) to the interaction of her body with a fully non-edible object/thing (her heels sinking into the asphalt). This comparison, particularly given that it is made between a food-object traditionally considered to be a form of basic human sustenance—bread is the "staff of life," after all—and an object/thing that had come to signify urbanization and the "paving over" of the natural world, calls attention to the materiality and objecthood of the bread via a form of figurative estrangement. The loaf of bread exists independently of the human body (at least between the stages of baking and consuming), and is here something with which the non-consuming parts of the body interact in ways that seem not to relate to consumption at all. The relationship between the bread and the body is instead, it seems, one that emphasizes the play between the human body and the food-object, a form of play that

may leave a mark upon the food-object (one presumes that both fingers digging into bread and heels sinking into asphalt will leave physical impressions) which may be associated with tactile enjoyment and the weight/intention of the human body, rather than a relationship that emphasizes (or even necessarily includes) the incorporation of a food-object into the body via consumption. The “pleasure” of these two physical interactions of the body with objects is, as Ellen tells us, “just” the same, though this equation is complicated by her qualification of the similarity of these two interactions in terms related to consumption—the pleasurable feelings invoked by both actions, it seems, are “delicious,” indeed.

As Ellen visually scans the larder for jam to accompany the bread, her fingers continue their quest for tactile adventure: “her hand happened on a bowl full of eggs” (173). She muses that there is “nothing...nicer to touch than an egg,” so this tactile pleasure is apparently even more “delicious” than the previous pleasure of the bread, and, as she handles the egg, suggests:

It was cool without being chill, and took the warmth of one's hand flatteringly soon, as if it liked to do so, yet kept its freshness; it was smooth without being glossy, mat as a pearl, and as delightful to roll in the hand; and of an exquisite, alarming frangibility that gave it, in its small way, that flavour which belongs to pleasures that are dogged by the danger of a violent end. (173)

In this brief passage, the text brings our attention to a number of considerations. The egg itself is here cast as both sentient and agentic, as a food-object (and, as with the bread, simply an object) which participates in, and even enjoys, its interaction with the human body, taking “the warmth of one’s hand...as if it liked to do so.” It retains its “self,” however, allowing the temperature shift whilst maintaining “its freshness” and remaining—quite literally—unspoiled by its interactions with Ellen’s hand. The preciousity of this everyday food-object (and, indeed, she later

remarks that she “believed it was possible that things can be common and precious too” [174]) is here compared to that of a pearl, a visual and material rhyme that de-centers the edibility of the egg in favor of objecthood, much as in the bread-asphalt comparison discussed above, and connects the natural world to the cultural world (pearls are worn in societal settings, after all) in a way which emphasizes regular interaction with the human body (the continual play of a pearl necklace against the throat). This play, and Ellen’s pleasure in this play, is addressed in her description of the tactile properties of the egg, and the “delightfulness” of not simply touching the egg, but feeling its weight and pressure in her palm by “roll[ing] it in the hand.”

The “frangibility” of this egg can only be known to Ellen through past experience, and it is this very frangibility, this potential ephemerality, this susceptibility to the “violence” which will ready it for consumption, she suggests, that allows this “pleasure” of encountering the egg its “flavour.” This type of flavor, it seems, arrives before the physical properties of a food’s actual flavor can be detected by the taste-organs of the consumer. That flavor is, of course, dependent upon a myriad of factors—the biological make-up of the egg (and the body of the chicken in which it was created), the biological make-up of the consumer—for, after all, eggs do not taste “good” to everyone, what happens to the egg after its creation, notions of availability and desire, and the social and cultural constructs that allow an edible object to be considered “food.” These factors are also contingent upon temporal concerns, as the biology of bodies is ever-shifting, as are the social traditions and belief systems surrounding human treatment of food-objects, and a particular desire at any moment may become subordinate to another (for something other than an egg, for example). Beyond all of this, the text of *The Judge* here seems to suggest that knowledge, at least in part, creates flavor—or, more specifically, that knowledge

of the properties of the food-object itself and of its dual identity as general object and food-object (and perhaps of its process of transformation from one into the other).

Continuing the interaction between her body and this food-object, Ellen then holds “an egg against the vibrating place in her throat” (173), a gesture which brings the containing and protective surface of her body—that is, her skin—and the signifier of that which keeps her body alive—her heartbeat, here figured as a vibration at a vulnerable spot in her throat—together with the containing surface that was once intended by nature to protect another life: that of the now-nonexistent chick, the intended nourishment for the body of which will now act as nourishment and pleasure for Ellen’s own body and continued existence, though she assures herself that this is her last meal. This gesture places concurrent emphasis upon the fundamental fragility of the egg and that of Ellen’s body, which may not survive the night, and it also marks an act of curious (over)intimacy, blurring boundaries between food and non-food, edible object and human body. This gesture also completes Ellen’s previous figuration of the egg as pearl, as the egg now, albeit temporarily, rests in the location of a necklace, drawing further attention to the objecthood of the egg.

Ellen’s pre-consumption interactions with these food-objects conclude with Ellen weeping as she considers: “how full of delights for the sight and the touch was this world she was going to leave” (173). She then enjoys her meal thoroughly, though such enjoyment is described in simple, objective terms: “The egg was good... The bread was good too” (173). She cuts her bread into strips, generally known as “soldiers,” and dips them into the egg, “though she knew grown-up people never did it” (173). This “play” with her food is ultimately not her final act in life, though it is her final childish act, as moments later, she will exit her home into Richard’s waiting arms. Her enjoyment of this meal transforms her lament regarding her

impending loss of sensuous and aesthetic appreciation for objects into a reconsideration of her planned suicide based upon the pleasures of food. As she finishes her meal, she reiterates: “It was only because of all the things there are to eat this was a dreadful world to leave” (173-4), rhapsodizing about:

the different delicate textures of the nuts of meat that, lying in such snug unity within the crisp brown skin, make up a saddle of mutton; yellow country cream, whipped no more than makes it bland as forgiveness; little strawberries, red and moist as a pretty mouth; Scotch bun, dark and rich and romantic like the plays of Victor Hugo; all sorts of things nice to eat, and points of departure for the fancy. Even a potato roasted in its skin, if it was the right floury sort, had an entrancing, ethereal substance; one could imagine that thus a cirrus cloud might taste in the mouth. (174)

It is difficult to deny Ellen’s passion for food in this passage, nor what she sees as the extensive interplay between foods-as-objects (the “snug unity” of the “nuts of meat”), between foods and bodies (the strawberries like the “pretty” mouths which will consume them), between foods and ideas (“bland as forgiveness”), and between foods and other objects/things (the rich and romantic Hugo-esque pastry, and the ways in which certain properties and conditions of the roasting of a potato allow it to be elevated, quite literally). Food, here, is everything, and the pleasures of the various properties of food-objects as they interact with the human body echo, but are far in excess of, the life-sustaining nourishment of food on a biological level. Food is cast not simply as a part of life, or as allowing for life, but as a (or, perhaps, *the*) reason to live.

Ellen’s musings in this passage upon the merits of a well-roasted potato inspire the mental assertion “Potato plants were lovely, too,” followed by the vivid recollection of a day-trip she had once taken with her mother: “there sprung up before her on the bare plastered wall a

potato-field she and her mother had seen one day. Thousands and thousands of white flowers running up to a skyline in ruler-drawn lines” (174). She goes on to recall their walk near the river adjacent to these plants, and the observation of wedding festivities taking place nearby. These imagined images, directly prompted by her rumination on potatoes and projected upon the wall before her, allow her to escape the worries of her present, and for “her mind’s eye” to stare “wildly on the past rather than look on this present, which, with all the honesty of youth, she meant she should have no future,” thus linking present and past, and—through the matrimonial content of the memory—future, given that she will become engaged to Richard moments later (174).

Shortly after Ellen’s arrival at Richard’s family home, Marion Yaverland, who, we are told, often spends her evening “in the grip of one of her recurrent madneses of memory,” recalls, with great pleasure, a special meal she enjoyed whilst pregnant with Richard: “In the larder she found the cold roast beef, magnificently marbled with veins of fat, and the cherry pie, with its globes of imperial purple and its dark juice streaked on the surface with richness exuded from the broken vault of the pastry” (298, 300). Here, the “imperial” “richness” of the pie filling echoes her later sentiments that, during her first pregnancy, “She felt her womb as an inexhaustible treasure,” and the “broken vault of the pastry” evokes the eventual separation of the infant Richard—a child Marion values above all else and treats royally—from her body (303, 300). This “broken vault,” however, also simultaneously suggests the recent “loss” of her virginity to Richard’s father, and her future rape by Roger’s father—a man into whose arms she will be driven just following this meal, as her postprandial walk leads to her harassment at the hands of the villagers. This equation of Marion’s body with the consumable “vault” of the piecrust draws attention to the text’s connection between the human body and the food-object,

particularly with regards to the bodies of Ellen, Marion, and Roger. Additionally, the apparent fragility of the “broken” crust parallels the “frangibility” of the egg at Ellen’s “final” tea; Ellen’s piecrust-body acts as container for the “richness” of her children much as the eggshell functions as a offspring-containing displacement of the hen’s body. In this scene, which, as it takes place in the midst of her pregnancy with Richard and is thus temporally located between her sexual encounter with Richard’s father and her rape by Roger’s father, Marion, too, is poised between physical pleasure and suffering, “dogged by the danger of a violent end” (171)—both through the rape of her body (which appears to terminate any recently-awakened interest in the sexuality of her body), and through her eventual destruction of her body via suicide.

The association of her children with the cherries—the psalmic “fruit of her womb,” one supposes—in this scene reoccurs in more concrete fashion within Marion’s memories of her children, creating a sort of through-line within the narrative of this family and illustrating some of the complexities of their familial relationships through the complexities of relationships between bodies and food-objects. During another of Marion’s bouts of “memory madness,” the text describes the scene of Marion’s impetus for sending the young Roger away to live with his aunt. At this point, Marion, we are told, had, in spite of herself, been “growing distantly fond of Roger,” a child with both with a tremendous “hunger for love” and “so full of love itself” that he is able to “return” the affection she does not provide (340). Here, love—in terms emotional and demonstrative—is framed in terms of physical hunger (for food) and “fullness” or satiety—though, perhaps notably, young Roger’s “fullness” is paradoxical, in that it somehow coexists *with* hunger because his needs for sustenance remain unmet by his mother. Marion does, however, manage to provide young Roger with material food-objects for consumption, and when

young Richard returns home from a prohibited circus jaunt, she and Roger are in the midst of a “mid-day meal” which involves Roger begging for more cherry jam and Marion restricting his consumption of the favored treat in (surprisingly) motherly fashion: ““No, dear, it’s too rich. If you have any more you’ll be ill,”” thus emphasizing the traditional maternal role in the regulation of a child’s consumptions—that is (through “love” and/or duty), control of what to eat, when to eat, how much to eat, and, often, to eat anything at all (342). Her response also speaks to the ways in which food, even “good” food, that which is both unspoiled and desired by the consumer, can be of harm to the body; the (often difficult-to-quantify range of the) “right” amount keeps the body healthy and alive, too little or too much may lead to illness or death, to say nothing of the precarity of methods of food preparation, quality of food supplies, and so forth. The consumption of food-objects, it seems, may interfere with the workings of the body in myriad material ways, both on the level of minute biological processes, and in the more readily visible ways which will be discussed later in this section.

The “richness” of the desirable cherry jam that Marion replaces in the larder inevitably echoes the “richness” of the cherry pie filling that the pregnant Marion discovered in a different larder years before, and these sweet cherries will be rediscovered in this larder later that evening, after Marion returns from reluctantly punishing her favored Richard for his disobedience and finds Roger, referred to here as “the other child,” “standing on a chair and spooning cherry jam out of the jar into his mouth” (345). He drops the jar, “so that gobs of jam fell on its pinafore, the paper-covered shelf, the chair, the floor,” and reaches out with “jammy arms” to his mother, who proceeds to punish the child physically and then marvel at “how delicious it had been to beat it” (345). The consumption of the jam here simultaneously speaks to the desire (often) inherent in consumption, the control (and lack of control) of food consumption by an authority figure, the

potential pleasure of the forbidden (which may also be inherent in food consumption). The visual image of the uncontainable red jam, as it spreads from the mouth and hands of the boy, to the arms and torso of the boy, to the shelves and floor, connotes blood, particularly given Marion's pleasure in beating the child—a pleasure also compared to the pleasurable consumption of food, given her qualification of this pleasure as “delicious”—and her later realization that she might eventually kill “it,” thus continuing the boundary-blur between categories of human and food-object within this novel (345).

In contrast to this encounter in which Roger is denied cherry jam and his secretive feasting upon this jam leads to Marion's admission that she cannot love nor care for him, we are told that Marion's motherly encounters with Richard throughout his lifetime regularly involve a ice cream dessert, “one with crystallised cherries,” at a particular restaurant, a “glittering room behind the plate glass walls,” in which, as Ellen puts it when Marion takes her there, “men and women ate and drank under strong lights with a divine shamelessness” (239, 234, 231).¹⁶ Upon ordering the same dessert for Ellen, thus controlling her food consumption as she controlled that of her own children, Marion remarks:

This is like old times...I've so often watched Richard eat it. He went through various stages with this pudding. When he was quite small he used to leave the crystallised cherries to the very last, because they were nicest, arranged in a row along the rim of his plate, openly and shamelessly. When he went to school he began to be afraid that people would think that babyish if they noticed it, and he used to leave them among the ice, though somehow they always did get left to the last. Then later on he began to side with public opinion himself, and think that perhaps there was something soft and unmanly about caring so much for anything to eat, so he used to gobble them first of all, trying not

to taste them very much. Then there came an awful holiday when he wouldn't have any at all. That was just before he insisted on going to sea. But then he came back—and ever since he's had it every time we come here, and now he always leaves the cherries to the last. (243-4)

The cherries that Marion would not grant Roger are here an indulgence regularly proffered to Richard, one he literally “singles out” from the rest of the dessert, and his consumption of this particular dessert—and Marion’s attention upon this consumption—in the privileged setting of the restaurant is here described as a constant throughout his life. In this particular scene, Ellen acts as surrogate for the absent Richard as she consumes “Richard’s” dessert, though she apparently does so with little enjoyment, eating “her iced pudding as if it was a duty,” a lack of enjoyment particularly notable given Ellen’s deep appreciation for the consumption of food, as discussed elsewhere in this chapter (243). The substitution of Ellen’s cherry-consuming body for Richard’s here lends support to Rollyson’s rather romantic notion that “Richard and Ellen are twins or lover-shadows...both inordinately attached to their mothers” (*Literary Legacy* 37), whilst continuing the themes of substitution and duplication (or perhaps cyclical replication) found elsewhere within the novel.

Richard’s bodily interactions with these crystallized cherries provide a succinct summary of a child’s growth and developing identity through this character’s repeated interaction with the same food-object. But more than this, they compose a remarkable narrative about the presence, and purpose, of food in a human life. Through this narrative, we see Richard struggling with the distinction between public and private enjoyment, a distinction which emphasizes the distance between the larder in which Roger gobbled cherry jam using only his hands and this scene of cherry consumption, in an upscale public space which separates rich from poor, a space in which,

as Ellen imagines her neighbors back home remarking of the restaurant, “every Tom, Dick, and Harry in the street” watches “every mouthful you take” (234). In this narrative of Richard and the cherry ice cream, we are able to see his “open” and “shameless” designation of the cherries as the most valuable part of the dessert evolving—via his fear of social disapproval—into a complex (one imagines) set of actions designed to “leave them among the ice” whilst still saving them for last, thus secreting his pleasure in the process of consuming the cherries. He later associates the pleasures of food consumption (or perhaps simply the pleasures of consuming sweet food-objects) with femininity, and attempts to affirm a socially acceptable version of his masculinity through an act of consumption that denies the feminine—and thus apparently shameful—pleasure, “gobbling” them quickly, “trying not to taste them very much.” This denial of his greatest pleasure develops into full refusal of the experience of consumption of the favored food itself, during that time period when, we are told, “he wouldn’t have any at all.” And finally, as a more emotionally secure adult, he is able to, once again, control his desires enough to save the cherries “to the last.” Through his interactions with the cherries in this dessert, we see Richard “playing with his food,” separating out and “arranging” the cherries in a row at the side of his plate, and this play speaks to the pleasurable material aspects of, and encounters with, food-objects that pre-figure (or perhaps that are not truly about) an act of consumption, much as we have seen with Ellen’s interactions with food earlier in the novel. This “play” here becomes one of a range of complex actions involved in bodily interactions—whether consumptions or non-consumptions—with food-objects: enjoyment (public, private, or both, deferred, partial), denial, control and refusal. It also relates closely to the range of emotions here associated with the consumption (or non-consumption) of food-objects—that is, pleasure, shame, desire. Throughout this mini-narrative, we glimpse a range of acts that depict the same food-

object as shifting from something that is both edible and pleasurable, to simply edible, to inedible, and back to edible and pleasurable.

The cherries from the cherry jam of the long-ago “midday meal” attended by the very young Roger, Marion, and the young and disobedient Richard are not the only objects from that tea table to make an appearance later in the narrative of *The Judge*. During that meal, Richard arrives home, bragging about his forbidden trip to the circus, and Marion’s initial response is framed with regards to her paused action: “She had left the bread-knife sticking in midloaf and sat looking at him in silence” (342). Here, the bread-knife upon the table is given an oddly central role in what turns out to be a pivotal moment in the lives of this family, and the position of this knife at this moment, “stuck midloaf” in the body of the food-object, seems potentially violent—or perhaps violating—particularly given the violence Marion wishes to do her least-favored son later that afternoon. The bread-knife plays a similar role in the breakfast-table scene at the end of the novel. In this scene, Marion has gone missing (and has, presumably, committed suicide), and Ellen, the grown Richard, and the just-returned Roger—who has returned not from the circus, but from a lengthy tour in the Salvation Army—attempt, over tea, to deal with their grief. We are told that Ellen’s “flesh was weeping for Marion” as she cuts slices of ham with the bread-knife, “unbroken all the way from the bone to the outer rim of bread-crumb-freckled fat” (479). This description of the ham is curiously bodily, fleshly, particularly in conjunction with her own “weeping flesh.” Ellen directs the brothers to “sit forward” and eat, then has the “tremendously exultant” thought that she “shall always look after” Richard’s food, “Now that Marion is gone,” here effectively stepping into the maternal and food-controlling role (just) vacated by Marion, and providing another element of replication within this scene (479). As Roger attempts to eat, we are told that “Tears and the ham collided noisily in his throat” (480),

thus creating a new form of “weeping flesh” and suggesting the ways in which the body and the food-object may remain at a disjunct, even when brought together, and also suggesting the ways in which food can work in opposition to the body itself, resisting the food-consumer’s (voluntary) attempt to “force” their own body to consume food.

Ellen’s slicing of the ham-flesh is soon echoed in another way, when, after an argument, Richard takes up the bread-knife from the table and stabs through the human flesh of his brother, “driving” this blade “into Roger’s heart” (487). Thus, in this “melodramatic denouement” (Peterson 113), the long-ago scene with the bread-knife sticking out of the bread is brought to a new conclusion, and one in which, through this chain of signification, Roger’s body is equated with food-objects both through the knife’s actions in previously carving the bread and the ham, and through the knife’s very designation—as “bread-knife,” rather than simply a knife. This suggests a new dimension to the text’s interest in the relationships between bodies and food-objects—that of material similarity, and that of the threat of the human body as potential food-object. Roger ends his life with a knife in his chest and “his head lying untidily among the tea-cups,” thus destroying any illusion of peaceful domesticity and completing the suppressed acts of violence surrounding the “mid-day meal” decades before (487). Further, in this moment, as Roger’s body loses its animation and becomes object-like, it also literally becomes a part of the tea itself, with his head lying on the table “among the tea-cups,” the ham, and the other tea-things, the scene both a version of what Norman Bryson has called “the still life of ‘disorder’” and a suggestion of a particularly horrifying *vanitas* painting.¹⁷ The food-table is here no provider of reasons to live, as with Ellen’s “pre-suicide” tea, but is instead where life ends, and the food-objects surround Roger’s body as it is reduced to fleshly objecthood.

In the end, West’s *The Judge* may indeed, as its critics have suggested, be a novel with a

great deal of content but perhaps less thematic continuity than one might expect, but its investment in the pleasures and perils of daily life is distinct, and distinctly modernist in nature, especially in its bid for the centrality of such everyday events within a novel.¹⁸ West's version of "the everyday" is a category in many ways anchored within the experiences of the body, and, within *The Judge*, she demonstrates both this dailiness and the larger, often melodramatic, moments within the narrative through—or at least in proximity to—acts of food consumption and other interactions between the human body and the food-object. The narrative of *The Judge* consistently features these scenes of food consumption and interaction, whilst itself exhibiting significant textual and linguistic "play" with food-objects and food consumption via elements of figurative language and thematics which repeatedly call into question the distance between human bodies and food-objects, and consider the novel's interest in issues of class and gender through acts of food consumption, acts which are often tinged (or more than tinged) with the threat of violence. West also continuously explores issues of control and consent through food-objects and food consumption within this novel, whether these issues of control and consent stem from actual bodily (in)capabilities, such as when the body itself interferes with food consumption; from state-sanctioned forms of biopower, such as in the "forced feeding" of suffragettes; or—and I would suggest, most compellingly—from a range of much "softer" forms of forced feeding, acts of food consumption that are marked by varying forms of coercion that encourage further inquiry into—and more substantial theorization of—the social and interpersonal pressures that may inflect individual acts of food consumption on a daily basis, and the degrees to which such pressures may be harmful, beneficial, and so forth.

Ultimately, West's work within both "Indissoluble Matrimony" and *The Judge* figures a notion of food consumption that is inseparable from modes of control, not simply in terms of

controlling the food-object by consuming it and “using” it for biological survival, but also in terms of control over one’s own consuming body, as well as in terms of multivariate forms of social and interpersonal control—which may range from overt to covert, public to private, institutional to kinship-level personal—over the act of food consumption. Such a notion speaks to the permissions we give ourselves over our own bodies, the permissions we give objects (in this case, food-objects) over our bodies, and the permissions we give others over our bodies, as well as the permissions we do not grant, all upon a daily basis. These permissions are particularly relevant to discussions of modernist culture, given the ways in which food-objects and bodies were subject to increasing governmental and societal regulation and categorization within the early twentieth century in the United States and Great Britain (through, as discussed elsewhere within this project, increasingly industrialized food production, regulation of adulteration and nutrition, the rise of dieting and vitamins, and so forth), and the ways in which such regulation and categorization was (and is) inevitably bound up with issues of class and gender.

Throughout “Indissoluble Matrimony” and *The Judge*, Rebecca West grants food a prominent place, exploring the pleasures and problems of eating, portraying the complexities of human engagement with food-objects within the boundary-crossing acts of food consumption and “play” with these food-objects; the intimacies—and disintimacies—of bodies across, and within, scenes of food consumption; the associations, and intertwinings, of acts of food consumption with forms of desire and pleasure, abjection and repulsion; and the ways in which acts of food consumption concurrently operate across registers both grand and minute, simultaneously acting as sites of momentary sensory enjoyment and actual physical survival of the body (and of the “self”). Such portrayals are invested in, and might be fruitfully examined more closely in relation to, dialogues about the “everyday” and the intersections of nature and

culture that have become associated with modernist literary and artistic output, but these portrayals also place West firmly within a substantial strain of transatlantic modernism that treats the food-object, and human interactions with the food-object—especially in the ways that these interactions figure the act of food consumption as a fully embodied process with resonances well beyond traditional considerations of taste and appetite—as worthy of significant attention (and here we might think of Woolf, Joyce, Proust). West’s treatment of food-objects within the works discussed above, particularly in terms of emphasis placed upon the material properties and objecthood of these food-objects, as well as the similarities between these food-objects and the human body, additionally engages the sorts of questions raised by early twentieth-century artists working within the visual and plastic arts, a subset of this food-interested strain of transatlantic modernism that will be discussed within the next chapter of this project.

Notes

¹ For a reading of *Harriet Hume* as high modernist, see Schweizer (“Rebecca West and the Meaning of Exile”), amongst others. For its classification as West’s “most overtly experimental novel, see Cohen (“Sheepish” 143). West is most often remembered for *Black Lamb*, at least according to both Schweizer (*Heroism* 1) and Richard Robinson (11). A recent article in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, however, has made a strong case for *Black Lamb* having (unjustly) fallen out of favor within the past five years (Snyder).

² As critical (and popular) biographies go, see Deakin; Gibb; Glendinning; Hertog; Rollyson’s *Rebecca West: A Life* (which was in 2008 revised into a second edition and retitled as *Rebecca West: Modern Sibyl*); Weldon. See also Rollyson’s *Literary Legacy of Rebecca West*, which does indeed discuss her literary works in more detail than many others, but which remains more biographical than critical. For scholarly volumes, see Cowan; Norton (*Paradoxical*); Schweizer (*Heroism, Rebecca West Today*).

³ West’s shift from socialism to anti-communism is detailed in Rollyson’s *A Life* (284-94) and elsewhere. For discussions of West’s approach to feminism and gender relations, see Norton’s *Paradoxical Feminism* and Scott’s *Refiguring Modernism*. Critical treatment of West’s feminism is discussed at length throughout Schweizer’s *Heroism*. For more on West’s early feminism and feminist activism, see Marcus’s *The Young Rebecca*. And for a particularly strong discussion of transatlantic feminism within the early twentieth century and how West’s views fit into such a complex movement, see Delap’s *Feminist Avant-Garde*.

⁴ See Ferguson; Fromm.

⁵ In a review of his *Selected Essays*, West wrote of T.S. Eliot, “Mr. Eliot’s influence on English letters has been pernicious” (typescript dated Sept. 30, 1932. qtd. in Schweizer, “The Meaning of Exile,” p. 395, footnote 4). Of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, West wrote that it was “full of mincing sentimentalities, it is frequently incompetent, it is narcissistic” (*The Strange Necessity* 178).

⁶ For consideration of the novel with regards to war trauma and masculinity, see Kavka’s “Men in (Shell-)Shock,” and Showalter’s brief discussion of the book within *The Female Malady* (191), amongst others. For critical readings centered even more firmly on the potential psychoanalytic aspects of the text, see Bonikowski; Pinkerton. For a reading that considers women’s experiences of the war, see Pulsifer. For a reading focused upon mental illness/sanism, see Linett.

⁷ Between 1909 and 1914 given that, as Purvis indicates, all imprisoned suffragettes were released by order of the government at the start of World War I. (123)

⁸ See Laing’s “Versions and Palimpsests,” as well as the introductory materials to the published version of West’s *The Sentinel*, which was edited by Laing.

⁹ For West as “forgotten Vorticist,” see Mills.

¹⁰ As Lupton notes, “The development of standards of ‘civilized’ behavior around eating and table manners represents a desire to avoid the animalistic nature of humanity, to emphasize and assert the importance of culture over nature” (22).

¹¹ On Lévi-Strauss’s model, with cooking food as marking the “transition from nature to culture” in “native thought” (164).

¹² For an excellent discussion of this, see Rohman.

¹³ Or, within its surrounding passage, which provides an interesting figuration of the consuming body: “Food becomes blood; blood becomes heart and brain, food for thoughts and feelings. Human food is the foundation of human development and feeling. If you want to improve the people, given them better food instead of declamations against sin. Man is what he eats. A man who enjoys only a vegetable diet is only a vegetating being, is incapable of action” (qtd. in Chernov 401).

¹⁴ For its categorization as a sentimental novel, see Norton’s “Rebecca West’s Ironic Heroine.” For categorization as “Gothic romance,” see Philip Ray. For categorization as hybrid of “female” gothic and New Woman novel, see Cowan. Laing also discusses the novel as a form of “New Woman” novel in “Versions and Palimpsests,” though she is far less interested in its potential generic hybridization with the gothic. For categorization as psychological ‘feminist allegory,’ see Paxton (190). For categorization as roman à these, see Winegarten. For categorization as “unusual version of the family romance, part gothic romance, part psychological drama, and part feminist polemic,” see Peterson (107). For categorization as Greek drama, see Jane Marcus’s Introduction to the 1980 re-printing of *The Judge* (London: Virago). For categorization as “a new type of philosophical fiction—a female novel of existential pessimism,” see Schweizer’s *Heroism* (19).

¹⁵ For discussion of the novel with regards to Jungian archetypes, see C.G. and A.C. Hoffmann. For discussion of the novel’s cosmology and morality, see Ferguson. For discussion of beauty and evil within the novel, see Scott’s “Refiguring the Binary.”

¹⁶ See my discussion of public food consumption as spectacle in Chapter 4 of this dissertation project.

¹⁷ The “still life of disorder” is, according to Bryson, a subcategory of Netherlandish still life painting that “dwells on the wreckage of the meal” (140).

¹⁸ For discussions of modernism and dailiness/everyday life, see (amongst others) Randall; Davis.

CHAPTER 3

Ready(made) to Eat? In/edible Encounters with Marcel Duchamp,

Méret Oppenheim, and Claes Oldenburg

Within the first chapter of this dissertation, I noted the rather substantial node of recent scholarship regarding materiality and objecthood that has simultaneously led to, and been informed by, an emergence of interest in the place of objects within modernist and/or early twentieth-century European and American literature, culture, and the visual and plastic arts. And yet, as I suggested, this scholarly interest in objects has rarely extended to investigation of the place of food-objects within such media and milieu, despite the ways in which modernist literature often engages food-objects and acts of food consumption, the rich sociocultural (re)negotiations of food-objects and food consumption that took place within the modernist period, and the renewed early-twentieth-century interest in the portrayal of food-objects within artistic categories such as still life painting. Such scholarly neglect, at least within the realm of the visual arts, is likely influenced by the prominence of strongly formalist dialogues within early twentieth century art criticism that emphasize concerns such as composition and color, often to the exclusion of any analysis of materiality beyond the thickness of paint upon a canvas. Within the second chapter of this dissertation, I focused upon two works by Rebecca West in order to discuss some of the ways in which modernist literature engages food-objects and complex acts of food consumption and/or interaction, emphasizing both material objecthood and embodied experience within the human encounter with food and addressing issues of sensory and intellectual play, edibility and inedibility, control and consent, and disgust and pleasure.

Within this chapter I will build upon these discussions in order to reassess a fundamental narrative in the study of modernist and avant-garde art: that of the “readymade,” as well as to more thoroughly consider the place of the food-object within the twentieth-century visual and plastic arts, specifically with regards to a notable strain of small-scale sculptural works associated with avant-garde art movements of early-to-mid-century. As I have noted previously, the category of the object became a substantial node of inquiry within the European and American art worlds of the early twentieth century. This new node of inquiry emerged through a new prominence of, and respect for, the portrayal of objects within artworks, and as the primary subject of artworks; we might here consider Cubism, and the ways in which Cézanne’s paintings helped to shift the category of the still life painting from the—long subordinated and critically neglected—artistic space of “genre painting” into the realm of “high” art. This strong interest in objects within art also extended to engagement with the objecthood (and materiality) of artworks themselves; remaining with Cubist works for the moment, we might here consider the rise of multimedia collage through paintings that incorporate objects such as newspaper (as in Pablo Picasso’s *Composition with Violin* of 1912), rope, and cloth (as in Picasso’s *Still-Life with Chair-Caning* of 1912—which integrated oil-cloth printed to look like chair caning into the central composition of the work). Such incorporations allowed viewers to simultaneously recognize the objects *as* objects (newspaper, rope, cloth/chair caning), and as part of a representational system (with the newspaper providing the outline of a violin), thus calling attention to objects in new and complex ways. Further, this new interest in artistic objects inaugurated questions about the aesthetics of objects within art (and the aesthetics of art as a whole) that remained relevant throughout much of the century, with influential critics such as

Michael Fried providing narratives of twentieth-century art that actually center upon notions of the object (as in “Art and Objecthood”).

Much of the artistic focus upon objects within the twentieth century is due in no small part to the emergence of the “readymade,” a category of sculpture that consisted partially or entirely of objects manufactured (and often mass-produced) by someone other than the artist. The readymade is inevitably associated both with Marcel Duchamp and with the avant-garde movement of Dada, which combined the influence of other artistic movements involving elements of abstraction (such as Cubism) with a pervasive interest in “anti-art,” or the desire to move beyond conventional forms and methods of creating art and to challenge traditional notions of artistic value (Puchner 226). Duchamp’s “invention” of the readymade was remarkably influential. In general and Dada-inflected terms, it contributed substantially to the object-centered interests of the Surrealists, which, of course, were heavily influenced by Duchamp—both directly/personally, in that Duchamp participated in Surrealist activities and social circles—and peripherally, in that the Surrealist movement largely (at least, as the accepted story goes) subsumed much of Dada, particularly in terms of the employment of techniques of randomness, rearrangement, free association, and so forth. Further, both the international influence of Duchamp and his readymades, and the international influence of Surrealism—especially with regard to objects juxtaposed with one another and/or environmentally decontextualized (we might here think of Dalí’s clocks in the desert in his 1931 *The Persistence of Memory*)—returned at mid-century via their inherited contributions to the largely American Pop Art movement, within which artists also exhibited a particular interest in objects and placed them in curiously central positions. This influence also extends into the later decades of the century; John Brough has commented that “one must at least admit that almost all of the major art movements of the

sixties, seventies, and even eighties show the unmistakable mark of Duchamp, and specifically of his readymades” (119).

Such artistic inheritances are largely due to the ways in which the readymade challenged—and moved beyond—traditional approaches to, and notions of, art. According to Duchamp himself, “Dada was an extreme protest against the physical side of painting...It was a way to get out of a state of mind—to avoid being influenced by one’s immediate environment, or by the past: to get away from clichés—to get free. The ‘blank’ force of Dada was very salutary...as a purgative” (qtd. in Sweeney 141). This “purgation,” and the resulting—or perhaps concurrent—“creation” of the readymade did not actually cause, according to Thierry de Duve, the “death of painting,” though this creation did constitute “the act by which the abandonment of painting was recorded and without which this abandonment would have been no more than a cessation of activity that history would never have bothered to register” (*Pictorial* 17). That is, as de Duve here implies, the readymade may be considered a marker of the historical moment at which painting—in terms of traditional painterly techniques, non-abstract subject matter, (human) figural representation, and so forth—became largely obsolete. As such, via its new approach to what might constitute an artwork and its emphasis upon ideas rather than upon the aesthetics of the final “product” of artistic creation, the readymade also helped to usher in twentieth-century movements of Conceptual art, and according to Thomas McEvilley, “it was unquestionably the Readymade that has dominated the work of Conceptual Art sculptors from the early sixties until” the present day (*Sculpture* 64).

The emphasis upon the “anti-aesthetic” nature of the Duchamp’s readymade—that is, as an artwork that is not necessarily, or not solely, intended to be pleasing to the eye—and its sense of conceptuality have led to narratives of the readymade-as-category that (over)emphasize

dematerialization, as well as to critical neglect of important aspects of the readymade sculptures themselves. As Janine Mileaf has indicated, “The designation of everyday objects as works of art by the interwar avant-garde was arguably one of the most significant interventions in the history of modern art during the twentieth century” (2), and yet relatively little actual theorization of the readymades has occurred—beyond, I would here add, theorization regarding the importance of the readymades to questions of grand aesthetics, which has been plentiful. More than this, despite the ways in which we must inevitably encounter all works of art (and objects in general) via the sensory experiences of the body, and through the lived somatic experiences that are in many ways inextricable from embodiment, it is particularly surprising that minimal attention has been paid to the bids for sensory engagement—or, rather, for aspects of sensory engagement that move beyond visual appeal and aesthetic “taste”—made by these readymades and other object-centered sculptures of the twentieth century, especially given that these sculptural works often so closely resemble, or at least call upon, objects with which we interact physically, in myriad ways, on a daily basis. Mileaf herself has attempted to rectify this lack of attention provided to sensory engagement with these sculptural art-objects by exploring the ways in which tactility, and touch itself, emerged as a “historical concern for those engaged in the production of object art” during the early-to-mid-twentieth-century, thus creating “a form of [artistic and theoretical] interaction characterized by reciprocity, decentralization, contact, and multiplicity” (3). According to Mileaf, this emergence of concerns regarding tactility/touch is directly related to the “embodied, tactile” engagement desired by Duchamp during the creation of his readymades (25), as opposed to the traditionally “retinal” privileging of the visual when encountering an artwork. Mileaf argues that this emergence of tactile concerns both “points toward the coalescence of a newly valued intersubjectivity within the avant-garde” movements

of the early twentieth century, and which, for present-day theorists, may provide useful support for those “who have sought to re-envision modernism against a rigid formalist, and specifically optical, model” (3); that is, by including lived experiences of tactility within narratives of modernism.

I would follow Mileaf in her bid to place sensory experience in a position relatively central to the human encounter with the work of the readymade, and to human encounter with object-centered art more broadly, though I would broaden this sensory experience beyond tactility and touch to include further elements of the human sensorium, and will, within this chapter, center the discussion upon a subset of readymade and object-centered art that occupies another area of critical neglect: that of the food-object within art. As suggested within previous chapters of this dissertation, in addition to a new focus upon objects in general within the European and American art worlds of the early twentieth century, artists also exhibited new forms of interest in the portrayal of food within art, often placing food-objects in central positions and reestablishing genres that often featured food (such as the still life) as central to artistic movements such as Cubism. Interest in the depiction of food-objects within art is, of course, hardly new, nor is it unique to this time period; paintings of food, after all, may be easily traced back to ancient Greece, through Brueghelian peasant feasts, through the Dutch and Northern European still life movements which foreground both edible and inedible objects, and so forth. But what is unique about the (pre)occupation of artistic works with food-objects throughout the early twentieth century (and beyond) is not simply that these particular food-centered works reflect cross-movement shifts in the world of art and artistic production in the early twentieth century—various “moves” away from (narrow definitions of) realism, the blurring of categories between painting and sculpture, and the turn toward artistic representation

of an “everyday” that reflects the rise of industrialization, mass production, and advertisement within European and American culture—though these works certainly do reflect such shifts. I would suggest that, instead, what is particularly notable about many works of art within this “food-related” category during this period are the ways in which these works become sites of play, encounter, and exploration of the fraught and ever-changing space between (or lack of space between) the object and the human body.

This chapter will, therefore, argue that there exists within the early-to-mid-twentieth century European and American art worlds, and particularly within—and across—avant-garde movements such as Dada, Surrealism, and, later, Pop Art, a new engagement involving “everyday” objects which interrogates the very nature and purpose of the food-object itself. This is an engagement which, conveniently, aligns with both the modernist (and midcentury) artistic and literary interests in the categories of “the everyday” and surface materiality, as well as with the cultural progression of industrialized and sanitized foodstuff production within the twentieth century. This new engagement is, I would suggest, particularly resonant within modes of small-scale sculptural works that involve the overlapping categories of the manufactured object, the found object, and the readymade, and which simultaneously invite and disinvite possibilities of embodied interaction with these sculptural food-objects through structures of desire and forms of multisensory appeal, and then through disgust, inedibility and untouchability, by exposing and re-figuring deep anxieties about food-objects and the bodily vulnerabilities inherent in the act of consumption itself.¹

I will begin this chapter by discussing the Duchampian readymade, a category of art that, as noted above, has initiated a wealth of scholarship regarding aesthetics (particularly with regard to philosophy) and the value of artworks within the institutionalized, and inevitably

commercialized, structures of “the art world.” This is a wealth of scholarship that has for too long emphasized dematerialization and neglected the materiality and resonances of the readymade objects themselves, whilst largely ignoring the ways in which Duchamp’s readymades inaugurate—or at least bear a prominent place within—modernist and later-century artistic traditions that center upon forms of embodiment, and upon art objects as material things that we experience via our senses, and within our flesh. I will then discuss Duchamp’s *Why Not Sneeze, Rose Sélavy?* as both paradigmatic readymade and as sculptural food-object, followed by consideration of several works by Surrealism-associated artist Meret Oppenheim—particularly her small-scale sculptural food-objects *Object* and *My Nurse*—which may be qualified as forms of the readymade. I will conclude this chapter with a section on Pop-associated artist Claes Oldenburg’s sculptural food-object *Pastry Case I*, which may also be considered a form of readymade sculpture, and its place within Oldenburg’s larger object-centered installation *The Store*.

Marcel Duchamp: *Why Not Sneeze, Rose Sélavy?* and the Readymade

French-born artist Marcel Duchamp’s small sculptural assemblage *Why Not Sneeze, Rose Sélavy?* (1921) consists of a rectangular white-painted metal birdcage (approximately 5 x 9 x 6 inches in size) including four small rounded bird “perches,” which contains 152 cubes of white marble cut to resemble sugar cubes, a tiny white porcelain dish settled beneath several of these cubes, as well as a small mercury thermometer and the bone of a cuttlefish, both of which protrude from the top of the cage casually, like a garnish. The title and date of the piece are inscribed in black block letters on the underside of the cage, though the letters are reversed (for this reason, versions of this piece are generally displayed propped above a small mirror so that

this inscription may be read by the viewer). The piece was one of the Duchampian readymades reproduced in 1964 by the Schwarz Gallery, though it had originally been “commissioned” in 1921 (if one is able to fully “commission” an artwork without dictating anything but price) by Dorothea Dreier, sister of the artist Katherine Dreier, who wanted Duchamp to create a small piece for her. Duchamp later explained that, “Since I didn’t want to do a painting, in the usual sense of the word, I told her ‘Fine, but I’ll do whatever comes into my head.’...I sold it to her for three hundred dollars. I made some money there!” (qtd. in Naumann 65). Dorothea Dreier hated the piece, and eventually sold it to Katherine Dreier, who also disliked the piece and who eventually sold it to art collector Walter Arensberg. (Naumann 65)

As suggested above, it is difficult, it seems, to overstate the importance of Duchamp and readymades such as *Why Not Sneeze?* to modern and contemporary art, particularly—as Martha Buskirk notes—in the period since the 1950s. (191)² Although Duchamp began as a painter and worked within various modes of painting, sculpture, and “happenings” throughout his life, and although much of his work within each category was influential, particularly in terms of the ways in which Duchamp expressed his interest in the interactions—and often the similarities—between bodies and objects, even Duchamp himself has remarked that, “I’m not at all sure that the concept of the readymade isn’t the most important single idea to come out of my work” (qtd. in Kuh 92).

The artistic category of “the readymade,” or “ready-made,” is typically used at least somewhat synonymously with the artistic category of the “found object” or *objet trouvé* (though there remain questions about the relative levels of visible artistic intervention involved in each, as well as about the inclusion of new vs. used commodities therein³), and may also involve overlap with other twentieth-century artistic categories such as collage, the Rauschenbergian

“combine” of mid-century, and the more general categories of assemblage and conceptual art. The term “readymade” as an artistic category was first defined in 1938, in André Breton and Paul Éluard’s *The Abridged Dictionary of Surrealism*, as “an ordinary object elevated to the dignity of a work of art by the mere choice of an artist,” a definition attributed to Duchamp himself, but which was actually written by Breton (Obalk). In his own interviews and writings, Duchamp remained far more circumspect, and abstract, in describing the readymade, suggesting the necessity that the readymade-object be “anti-retinal,” or chosen without the concern for aesthetic pleasure that had marked the choice of artistic subject matter and/or display in the past, and, instead, should be of a more intellectual and conceptual nature.⁴ “Ultimately,” as Duchamp has explained, the readymade “should not be looked at... It’s not the visual aspect of the Readymade that matters, it’s simply the fact that it exists... Visuality is no longer a question: the Readymade is no longer visible, so to speak. It is completely gray matter. It is no longer retinal” (qtd. in Girst).

Duchamp has further suggested that his choice of readymades “was based on a reaction of visual indifference with at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste...in fact, a complete anaesthesia” (“Apropos” 47). This desirable “indifference” did not necessarily extend to Duchamp’s own physical encounter with the object, as the readymades do involve varying stages of artistic intervention—apart from being, for example, turned on their sides (as with *Fountain* [1917]), these objects are typically signed (with Duchamp’s name or a pseudonym, depending), given elaborate titles (which are often painted upon the object itself), and some involve substantial assemblage/juxtaposition of an assortment of objects—with some elements handmade, some purchased new in a store, some discovered upon the street as trash, and so forth. These variations, and the shortcomings of Breton’s above-noted simple definition of the

readymade in terms of including these variations, have led to a number of attempts to further classify these variations on the readymade; the most accepted of these would be to separate the readymades into “aided or assisted,” which “imply a manipulation [on the part of the artist] modifying the object” and which, for most critics, suggest a combination of two or more readymades, and unassisted (de Duve “Echoes” 99).

Other theorists have, throughout the years, attempted to further qualify these categories by creating more minor divisions such as “imitated readymades” (in which the main element of the readymade is a copy of an already existing object), “rectified readymades” (in which the main element of the readymade is already a known work of art and is then in some way altered by the readymade artist), and so forth, though such further—and increasingly minute and confusing, one might suggest—categorizations seem unnecessarily overclassificatory, particularly given that such ever-narrowing taxonomic focus tends to take place in lieu of any actual consideration of the materials and content of these readymades, both of which, as Helen Molesworth notes, remain largely ignored within artistic criticism. (“Work Avoidance” 52) Further, for many critics, only the entirely unaltered readymades may be qualified as actual, “pure” readymades, and the others would instead fall into more general categories of appropriative art such as those discussed above.⁵ Continuation of the debate regarding precisely what is, and what isn’t, a readymade is beyond the scope of the project of this chapter, and I will simply suggest that each of the twentieth-century artworks discussed at length within this chapter may easily be considered to be some version of an assisted readymade, if one wishes to consider them so.

As suggested above, much of the importance of the readymade to twentieth-century art, and within the modern art world itself, lies in the ways in which the existence of the readymade

marks a “challenge” to aesthetic theory. As John Brough points out, this challenge requires artists, critics, viewers, to “explain how an everyday manufactured object, not made by the artist and possessing no aesthetic value, is nonetheless a work of art” (120). As such, the critical debates on this topic have been, and to some extent remain, legion, prompting Steven Goldsmith to remark that the readymades “have become the central hurdle over which any attempt to define art must leap” (197). To summarize these debates very briefly, let us follow Gerard Genette in considering Duchamp’s “pure”/“unassisted” readymade *Bottlerack* (1914). For theorists such as Arthur Danto and Ted Cohen, the bottle rack is itself the work of art worthy of consideration, but for Genette, the gesture of proposing that this bottle rack is a work of art is what is most notable (and this is what takes the readymade into the realm of the conceptual), and, because of this proposal, the readymade itself becomes, if not precisely a work of art, a “museum piece” worthy of consideration (8). Thus, as Genette suggests, in terms of aesthetic theory, for those who would subscribe to a view of the readymade similar to that of Danto or Cohen, the readymade illustrates the potential division between, and separation of, the artistic and the aesthetic, whilst for those (like Genette) who believe the work of art consists in its proposal, or “baptism” by the artist, the potential aesthetic character of the piece is not necessarily foreclosed upon (de Duve 162; 137-8). Further, theorists such as Danto and George Dickie subscribe to the “institutional theory of art”—that is, that an artwork can only become an artwork in the context of the existence of an “art world,” and, thus, the display of this work within a museum or gallery. Therefore, according to Danto, for artists such as Duchamp, the placement of an unaltered “everyday” object such as a bottle rack within a museum allows for that bottle rack to begin to share the properties of other works of art. (*Transfiguration* 20).

Ultimately, these debates about what constitutes the inclusion of an artwork within the category of “a work of art” are beyond the scope of this chapter, but what is most notable regarding this matter, at least for our purposes, are the ways in which these debates illustrate, and generate questions about, fissures within the very foundation of “art” (or, perhaps, “Art”) within the early twentieth century, many of which are directly related to the place of the object within art, and to the place of the object within our everyday lives. Such questions inevitably involve the tension between aesthetic (dis)pleasure and (a)functionality, particularly when one considers the ways in which the placement of readymades within an art world setting (and, potentially, the incongruent encounters of different parts of an assisted readymade with one another) may eliminate the original, or intended, function of these objects, but without necessarily courting the beauty and aesthetic pleasure generally considered to be the “function” of objects within a museum or gallery. For example, as Danto notes, “For me, Duchamp’s philosophical discovery was that art could exist, and that its importance was that it had no aesthetic distinction to speak of, at a time when it was widely believed that aesthetic delectation was what art was all about” (*What Art Is* 144). Such questions also involve querying the ways in which an object, functional or not, may be provided with a different meaning—or perhaps even a multiplicity of meanings—depending upon its context, both in terms of environment/surroundings and its encounter with the human body, or what Umberto Eco, following Claude Lévi-Strauss, has called “semantic fission”: “An object exists: this object, in its normal context, has a meaning. I take it into another context and it changes its meaning” (225).

Further, such questions generated by the “creation” of the readymade additionally, and necessarily, implicate the (human) body, and its encounters (potential, imagined, actual) with the object and the art-object. Not only are the objects Duchamp turned into readymades almost

always those associated with everyday phenomenological practices involving the body and its domestic life, these objects are also, as Molesworth argues, very often those associated with bodily maintenance: “They are objects for cleaning, hanging, storing, drying, preening, and peeing: objects whose purpose is to aid in self-presentation, objects that allow homes and offices to function” (“Work Avoidance” 51). Thus, these objects, she notes elsewhere, allow the body to become “legible” via encounter: “Bodies become legible in their encounters with readymades because they are either called into humorous action (go ahead, hang up your hat) or stymied by their inability to use a previously functioning thing (the problem of an inverted urinal)” (*Part Object* 193). Further, in addition to these (potential, imagined, actual) encounters between bodies and recognizable objects, the readymades also prompt an additional set of encounters with that same recognizable object as *art* object, within a museum/gallery setting. Lisa Siraganian reminds us that Duchamp often employed the word “rendezvous” when discussing the readymades, thus framing these works as “a performance at a given moment of time,” a installation made “complete only when the spectator walked in” and was able to physically interact with them (88; 131).

The readymades and, more broadly, the new questions about the place of the object within the visual and plastic arts are inevitably bound up with the spread of mass-produced commodities within the early twentieth century, as well as with (as discussed within the introductory chapter of this dissertation) modernist tensions between objects associated with “high” culture and art and objects associated with mass culture and consumerism.⁶ However, one of the ways in which the readymades differ from other forms of object-centered sculpture is via medium; instead of being formed fully by the artist (through intention, accident, and so forth), they are from—or, in the case of the assisted readymades, at least partially from—“elsewhere,”

whether that be an industrialized assembly line, some other form of commerce-centered manufacture, an animal, etc. Critics such as Peter Bürger have argued that such origins demonstrate a “radical negation of the category of individual creation” that runs counter to traditional notions of artistic production that locate value within these individualistic acts of creation, suggesting that Duchamp’s technique of painting his signature upon mass-produced objects destined for art galleries/collectors was one of the key “provocations” of the Duchampian avant-garde, a subversion both of notions of individual creativity within art and the value placed upon signature and artistic reputation over “quality of work” within the early-twentieth-century art world (51-52). The readymades, and object-centered art in general, additionally echo a number of concerns that are also notable within literature of the period; that is, the simultaneous (and strongly related) question of what constitutes and work of art/literature and/or what a work of art/literature should look like, a new interest in depicting the “everyday,” shifts in style/methods/materials and a sense of “play” or exploration with regards to these, and, as it follows from the last, an interest in liminality and “in-betweenness” of style, genre, etc.

The “invention” of the category of the readymade began with Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917), the urinal turned upon its side and scrawled with the “signature” of “R. Mutt,” a name Duchamp drew from “Richard Mutt,” who was the masculine alter ego of his friend Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, a woman often considered to be the “mother” of the Dada movement, remains an immediately-recognizable touchstone within twentieth-century art.⁷ Although *Fountain* remains the best-known of Duchamp’s readymades—likely due to its scatological “shock value,” as Buskirk points out, “art historians generally date the inception of the readymade to 1913, when Duchamp first attached a bicycle wheel to a stool” in order to create *Bicycle Wheel* (196). Duchamp himself commented that this “happy idea” was, as he explains,

“my first Ready-made, so much so that at first it wasn’t even called a Ready-made...I liked the idea of having a bicycle wheel in my studio. I enjoyed looking at it, just as I enjoy looking at the flames dancing in a fireplace” (qtd. in Elderfield 135; qtd. in Schwartz 442). Curiously, Duchamp’s description of his pleasure in “looking at” the object strongly suggests an aesthetic dimension was at play, or perhaps simply inherent, within the work, despite his refusal of “retinal art” and his uneasy relationship with the (mired and complicated) category of the aesthetically pleasing.⁸

Duchamp’s first true unassisted readymade, *Bottle Rack* (also sometimes called *Bottle Dryer* or, in a zoomorphic re-naming that appears to contradict the object-centrality of the readymades, *Hedgehog*), was “created” several years earlier when Duchamp purchased the iron rack in 1914 with the intention of displaying it as an “already made” sculpture (Duchamp qtd. in Naumann 44). The piece, however, was not displayed in a museum/gallery setting, as it remained in Duchamp’s Parisian studio and had, by the time Duchamp realized that it was his first “readymade,” been accidentally disposed of by his sister, who was minding the Parisian studio whilst Duchamp was in New York (though it was eventually replaced) (Duchamp qtd. in Cabanne 47). Thus, Duchamp’s first “official” unassisted readymade was *In Advance of a Broken Arm* (sometimes called *Prelude to a Broken Arm*), the snow shovel that Duchamp purchased whilst in New York in 1915, then painted with its title and the inscription “from Marcel Duchamp 1915.” Duchamp continued to “create” readymades, both unassisted and assisted throughout the 1910s and early 1920s, albeit in very limited fashion. As Thomas Girst reminds us, “Duchamp once spoke of thirty to thirty-five [readymades], though today only about a third of them are known” (Girst drawing upon Dieter Daniels). A number of these readymades, at least according to Duchamp’s notes from the time, as well as to accounts by artists and writers

of the period such as Charles Sheeler and William Carlos Williams, have apparently been lost, though some may never have come to fruition in the first place. (Girst)

Duchamp felt strongly that his output of “readymades” must be limited in order to “avoid redundancy,” a concern that continued throughout his career, as well as in order to restrict the availability of each work, thereby avoiding what he believed to be the “uselessness” of multiple iterations/reproductions of works of art, which he felt made “vulgar” “things that could be interesting if they were seen by fewer people” (Girst; qtd. in Collin 39).⁹ “There are,” Duchamp continued, “too many people in this world looking. We have to reduce the number of people looking!” (qtd. in Collin 40), an assertion which is particularly compelling with regards to his readymades, given that these objects—particularly those which would fall into the “unassisted” category—are elsewhere (outside the museum), and often commonly, available to the eye—though, admittedly, not *as* “art objects” in a museum. Despite his apparent disdain for “multiples,” thirteen of Duchamp’s original readymades (several of which had been lost) were “reembodied” as “remade readymades,” in editions of eight, by the Schwarz Gallery in Milan in 1964, a project borne of Duchamp’s sudden increase in popularity at midcentury which—not coincidentally—coincided with Pop artists’ engagement with objects, manufacturing processes, and questions involving reproductions of multiples as works of art (Buskirk 199-200).

Duchamp’s *Why Not Sneeze?* is an assemblage work which, if one accepts the existence of the category of the “assisted readymade,” falls near the end of the period during which Duchamp “created” his readymades (at least those of which current scholars are aware). In many ways, though this is hardly a perfect “fit” given that Duchamp’s artistic interests throughout his lifetime are not exactly linear, nor easily separated in periods, the readymades fall between Duchamp’s paint-on-canvas explorations of Cubism (and, to some extent, Futurism), as in *Nude*

Descending a Staircase, No. 2 (1912), and his interest in kinetic sculptures (Duchamp's execution of the complex *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even [The Large Glass]* [1915-1923] led to a series of "mobile" *Rotoreliefs* throughout the 1920s), at a time during which Duchamp worked primarily within New York City.¹⁰

Let us now consider some of the potential resonances of the elements of the piece itself, particularly with regards to bodies both human and animal and food-objecthood; after all, even Duchamp himself has admitted that the readymades, randomly chosen though they may be, can hardly escape meaning.¹¹ The title of this artwork, which has prompted Edward Powers to describe the piece as a "gender-bent object" (359), refers to the name of Duchamp's female persona, R(r)ose Selavy, a pseudonym with which Duchamp signed several pieces throughout the 1920s (sometimes through a mash-up of his own name as well as hers, as in "MarSelavy"), as well as an alter ego in the role of whom Duchamp dressed and was repeatedly photographed by Man Ray.¹² Duchamp has explained that he initially wanted to develop a Jewish alter ego, but then decided to instead change gender, as it "was much simpler," and the name itself is widely accepted to be a linguistic play on "eros, c'est la vie" ("(love/sex), that's life" (qtd. in Tashjian 41). The presence of this wordplay/reference has encouraged critical comparisons between the "sneeze" of the title and sexual release. Jerrod Siegel has suggested that: "The implied answer to the question is that R[r]ose prefers the state of permanent anticipation that is not sneezing to the release of tension the small explosion would bring: because eros is desire, delay is the only state in which it survives undiminished" (171). Duchamp has remarked that the title is about a sort of play with disconnection:

of course the title seems weird...since there's really no connection between the sugar cubes and a sneeze...First of all there's the dissociational gap between the idea of

sneezing and the idea of [this piece] because after all, you don't sneeze at will; you usually sneeze in spite of your will. So, the answer to the question is simply that you can't sneeze at will! (qtd. in Schwartz 487)

Additionally, I would suggest that this title, in its bid for the bodily control of the fictional(ish) R(r)ose, provides an echo with the bid for avian control provided by the cage, and may also be considered to refer to a bodily process that involves expulsion from the oral cavity (that is, the act of the sneeze) which may, given the undesirability of the location of what would normally be considered a highly desirable foodstuff (that is, the sugar), also echoes similar acts of expulsion inspired by disgust whilst eating (that is, the "spitting out" of distasteful food, and so forth).

The marble/sugar cubes within this piece exist between several planes of ingestive (un)desirability. I have within the previous chapter of this dissertation discussed the universal animalic preference for sweet foods, and might here point out the "everydayness" of sugar as a "staple" food. Sugar, once a "preciosity" given its relative scarcity, was transformed into a "daily commodity" via the rise of mass production and the concomitant shift in eating habits within Europe and the United States (Mintz 147-8). Its purity of color and its cubed form are both refinements performed by machine in the early twentieth century, both intended to make sugar even more desirable. As April Merleux has discussed, in the early twentieth century industrially processed sugar was associated with cleanliness, with the "point of" such processing being "to remove the last remnants of sweat and soil from the sugar so that its consumers are unaware of the product's natural and human history" (46; 24). Such refinement provided sugar consumers with comforting psychological distance both from its "natural" material forms (raw sugarcane, brown sugar crystals) and from the forms of labor and the laborers associated with its harvest. This marked, according to Merleux, a "racial hierarchy encoded through the contrast between

civilized and uncivilized, technology and nature, refined and raw, white and brown,” in which “People of color produced raw cane sugar in the tropics, closer to nature,” and “White men refined sugar on the mainland where they could expunge the hidden risks of the tropics” (57). Further, sugar cubes are composed of refined and/or whitened sugar molded into uniform cubes—a concept and process which initially became popular in England in the late 1800s, likely due in part to the appeal of the neat cleanliness of the cube shape to Victorians, and certainly due to the convenience of regulating a “serving size” of the commodity (Kennedy).

However, in *Why Not Sneeze?*, although these “sugar” cubes mimic an edible—and desirable—substance that has been expressly readied for human consumption via refinements, these cubes are not placed alongside additional markers of cultural desirability—not atop a tea tray with tiny gleaming sugar tongs, nor anywhere near a teacup, nor even anywhere that remotely connotes edibility. Instead, these cubes litter the bottom of a birdcage like refuse, unavoidably associating this “sugar” with animality, excrement, and abjection. The “sugar” commodity has here lost its use-value, but, more than this, the food-object itself, and its interactions with the potentially consuming body, are called into question; food-objects, it seems, even those carefully machine-processed and controlled, are ever at risk of becoming unclean.¹³ Additionally, these “sugar” cubes are here presented in a manner that deemphasizes their aesthetically pleasurable potentiality; piled up randomly, with the haphazardness of their arrangement held in check only by the confining bars of the cage, the neatly geometric stackability of each individual cube is here subverted, becoming a collection of carefully purified and formed food-objects made chaotic. The desirable (to eat) is thus made wholly undesirable.

Further, even if one could overcome the disgust likely inspired by their location, Duchamp’s “act” of “replacing” the sugar cubes with the marble cubes also (obviously) subverts

their potential edibility, whilst citing an additional fungible material: the stone itself. It might seem that the material “replacement” of the sugar with marble, another raw commodity that is here divided into cubes through human-machine intervention, though one that remains far more expensive/valuable than sugar and which was once of even greater value within classical and “high” art and religious circles, would allow for these cubes to be doubly precious in nature. And yet, the value, and desirability, of the marble was weakened within the art world of the twentieth century—apart from their eschewal of traditional artistic materials such as marble, sculptors of the early twentieth century had begun to move away from sculpting the human figure in realistic fashion, and thus had attenuated need for the marble that could be made to mimic the smoothness of human skin. Instead of being carefully sourced from traditionally prestigious Carraran quarries and then sculpted and polished into a grand work of art by a careful hand, the marmoreal cubes of *Why Not Sneeze?*, their locational origin unknown, have been cut into tiny, even, squares—indistinguishable from one another, and, indistinguishable even from a less valuable substance (that is, sugar). These are not desirable tiny marble “sculptures,” nor, given their blandness and perfect machine-cut uniformity, are they likely to even be considered individual/miniature sculptures by any stretch of the word.

Duchamp’s replacement of an ephemeral material with a permanent one inevitably implicates (the actions of) the body. Sugar cubes, of course, retain their shape when dry, but the sugar itself dissolves and disperses quickly in liquid, much as all food-objects break down in the human body during the process of consumption and digestion. The presence of the thermometer within the cage connotes both the process of food-cooking and the transformation of edible substances—“normal” (that is, non-marble) sugar, after all, is melted by keeping a careful eye on temperature, as well as referencing the human body through this object that is also used to police

a body's "normal" temperature. It also suggests sensation—the feeling against the body of something that is cold or hot—in this case, both the thermometer and the body in its imagined interaction with the piece. The cuttlebone, on the other hand, is a non-edible object that is not precisely inedible—cuttlebones are traditionally given to birds as ingestible calcium supplements, so this element of the piece may actually "belong" in the cage. The cuttlebone, as an internal shell for the cuttlefish, provides containment and protective covering for the mollusk, a protection here echoed by the containing birdcage in which it rests. This bone is both white and porous, and shares those properties with porcelain, sugar cubes, and marble. The birdcage has been painted white, and thus echoes the appearance of the cuttlebone and the marble/sugar.

The shared properties of cubed marble and sugar cubes privilege the visual in this piece, but the differences (and the "joke" of the substitution of one material for the other, the inedible for its edible visual twin) require a different kind of sensuous body intervention—that of touch. Through touch, one might experience both "the marble with its coldness," and the weight that belies the true materiality of the cubes (Duchamp qtd. in Schwartz 487). Although both sugar and marble are crystalline substances, however, marble is obviously a stronger substance, as well as a much heavier one; as Duchamp has indicated, "It weighs a ton...and that was one of the elements that interested me when I made it" (qtd. in Sanouillet 135). Duchamp saw this material substitution as indicative of an implied process of transmutation, explaining that, in this piece, "sugar is changed to marble. It is a sort of mythological effect" (qtd. in Sanouillet 135). One might here consider what Danto has suggested regarding Andy Warhol's 1964 series of Brillo boxes, in which Warhol faithfully reproduced the exterior of a large cardboard box of Brillo cleansing pads upon empty wooden containers of the same size. Warhol was obviously in artistic debt to Duchamp's readymades and perhaps to *Why Not Sneeze?* in particular, and, according to

Danto, Warhol's Brillo boxes were about "the question of distinguishing art from reality. I mean: distinguish them not epistemologically but rather ontologically—sooner or later one would discover that one was made of plywood, the other not. The question was whether the difference between art and reality could consist in such distances" (*What Art Is* 145). These "discoverable distances" are at the heart of *Why Not Sneeze?*, particularly given the glee with which Duchamp had his friends lift the cage in order to enjoy their surprise at its unexpected weight and the pleasures of "play," of this materially-contrasting "replication" of the sugar (Breton *Lost Steps* 116), whilst remaining teasingly *undiscoverable* for anyone who encounters the piece in a museum setting. This undiscoverability places the piece at some remove from the lived bodily experiences of the museumgoer, allowing *Why Not Sneeze?* to retain its modes of visual "play," but eliding other forms of sensory experience associated with tactile manipulation and touch. Such limitation of encounter with this piece may seem inevitable, given its artistic value and the traditions of museum display—the museumgoer does not typically expect to be allowed to touch works of art, after all. And yet, we might also keep in mind the ways in which such display might discourage intellectual emphasis upon, or even consideration of, the full material significance(s) of this piece and others like it, potentially confirming or contributing to art historical narratives of dematerialization and/or disembodiment.

Ultimately, Marcel Duchamp's *Why Not Sneeze, Rose Sélavy?* is a paradigmatic readymade of the "assisted" variety, a sculpture that queries the distance (or lack thereof) between artistic commodities and man- or machine-made commodities "meant" for daily use, as well as the nature and value of sculpture, and of art, itself. These commodities do not, however, exist only within the realm of ideas; the piece as a collection of objects (or, taken as a whole, as a combined sculptural object) may strongly court intellectual/conceptual engagement with regards

to play and substitution, auratic notions of artistic and commercial production, and so forth, but they are also—unavoidably—objects. And, more than this, the material elements of this artwork are objects that bear associations with, and to, bodies both human and animal, and which suggest (or even invite) interactions with those bodies. As such, *Why Not Sneeze?* (and much of its readymade ilk) may send us not in the direction of purely conceptual art and artistic narratives of disembodiment—as traditional narratives of the readymade often suggest—but in a new, more materially-focused direction. Additionally, the particularities of *Why Not Sneeze?* engage not only objecthood and the interactions/associations of objects with bodies, but *food-objects* and their especial, complex, and often contingent, properties and interactions with bodies. This line of engagement with the food-object within the early-twentieth-century plastic arts, particularly within categories of assisted readymades and small-scale combinatory sculptures, is worth tracing further, and will next be considered in conjunction with several food-centered assemblage sculptures by Méret Oppenheim.

Méret Oppenheim: *Object, My Nurse*, and Beyond

Méret Oppenheim's best known work, *Object* (1936) (alternately known as *Le Déjeuner en fourrure*, a moniker which will be discussed in a moment) is a teacup, saucer, and spoon set that she purchased at the French department store Monoprix and covered in the pale tan pelt of a Chinese gazelle. The surface of the china set is covered entirely, if not perhaps uniformly—despite Heike Eipeldauer's enthusiastic qualification of the “virtually seamless masking” of the covering by the fur; that is, the thin pelt clearly just rests atop the saucer, and one may just glimpse porcelain along the edges of the saucer and the handle of the cup (17). *Object* was exhibited, as mentioned above, in the first *Surrealist Exhibition of Objects*, which took place at

the Charles Ratton Gallery in Paris for one week in May 1936, after which the exhibition traveled to London and New York. Oppenheim's piece immediately captured the attention of curator Alfred H. Barr, Jr., who purchased *Object* in 1936 and added it to the *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York later that year. Like Duchamp's *Why Not Sneeze?*, *Object* figures the encounter between the human and the food-object as one of complexity, comprising both multisensory desire and anxieties about abjection, animality, and objecthood as these concerns relate to acts of consumption and the body. However, as we shall see, *Object*, as with Oppenheim's other works that will be discussed below, extends the concerns of Duchamp's *Why Not Sneeze?* into further dimensions of gender, eroticism, and class.

The work of Oppenheim, a German-born Swiss artist, is today most often considered in terms of gender and sexuality, largely, it seems, because of her strong ties—particularly early in her career—to the male-dominated Surrealist movement. Oppenheim eventually began to exhibit substantial discomfort with the “female artist” label, as well as with her enduring association with Surrealism.¹⁴ In fact, in 1984, Oppenheim refused to grant permission for her inclusion, or even discussion of any of her works, within art historian Whitney Chadwick's *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, though it was unclear if Oppenheim's refusal was prompted by being recognized within this critical text as a “woman artist” or as a Surrealist.¹⁵ The place of women within the Surrealist movement of the 1920s and 30s (and, one might argue, beyond) was certainly complicated; and although the female body was central to a great deal of male-created Surrealist works (particularly those by Dalí, Breton, and peripheral Surrealist Man Ray), and although “no other [artistic] movement has had such a large number of active women participants,” female artists such as Oppenheim and Leonor Fini were generally framed within

this artistic and social environment as little more than muses for the male artists as these women “moved through the Surrealist orbit” (Chadwick *Women Artists* 7).¹⁶ In fact, Oppenheim herself generally framed the female artists involved in the Surrealist movement of the period as a “listeners,” rather than as full artistic participants within the group. It is unclear whether such framing was due to potential issues of “surrealist misogyny,” to simply feeling unwelcome, or whether Oppenheim may have “distanced herself from Surrealism because she didn’t want to restrict herself to any one artistic movement” (Chadwick “Infinite” 5; Dama).¹⁷ Regardless, Oppenheim was introduced into the female margins of the Surrealist group by Alberto Giacometti around 1933 and immediately began working as a model for Man Ray, most famously appearing nude in his photographic series *Erotique Voilée*, before beginning work on the creation of her own artistic objects shortly thereafter (Belton 67; Hubert *Magnifying* 38).

Oppenheim is primarily known for her sculptural work, much of which is in the form of small-object assemblage, a genre popular with the Surrealists (we might here think of Dali’s *Lobster Telephone* [1936], arguably one of the most famous artworks of the surrealist movement), and a genre which strongly demonstrates the early- to mid-twentieth century fascination with pre-existing objects discussed earlier in this chapter. Many of Oppenheim’s works also exhibit a tremendous interest in the interaction of objects with bodies both human and animal: a brass table with bird-like feet (*Table With Bird Legs* [1939]), suede gloves silkscreened and embroidered with the finely-wrought branching capillaries of a human hand (*Glove* [1985]), a photographic self-portrait in the form of an X-ray in which Oppenheim’s jewelry items—multiple rings and hoop earrings—stand out prominently against the lines of her skeleton as the ghostly shadow of her flesh recedes into nothingness (*X-ray of My Skull*, [1964; printed 1981]). Such works suggest Oppenheim’s concern for exploring the object-like qualities of the body, the

ways in which non-living objects might mimic aspects of human bodies—particularly in terms of the visual—as well as the ways in which objects might in some ways actually become a part of the body. Gloves and jewelry, for example, are often considered to be particularly intimate articles of dress, as the purpose of gloves is to effectively become a “second skin” for their wearer, and items of jewelry alter the shape and appearance of the body parts that they adorn. Such gloves and jewelry, as well as certain articles of clothing and shoes, are, as Elizabeth Grosz points out (drawing from Paul Schilder's version of the bodily schema), a part of each individual's "body image": “Anything that comes into contact with the surface of the [actual] body and remains there long enough will be incorporated into the body image—clothing, jewelry, other bodies, objects” (80). According to such an inclusive model of the body's interactions with objects, then, objects are brought into the web of subjective bodily awareness and lived experience—often by being considered in some way useful, whether this use be functional or decorative— as the body itself extends to include them; simultaneously, such objects are also brought into the realm of bodily presentation and performance of the body/embodiment. We cannot, it seems, escape the complex interplay between objects and bodies, even as this interplay regards the constitution of the body itself.

The works involving gloves, jewelry, and the fusion of body parts and objects also bespeak an abiding interest in the tension between the interior and exterior of the body (again, of bodies both human and animal), an interest that is further enunciated both by Oppenheim's repeated use of fur as a sculptural element, and by her artistic encounters with food objects and the act of food consumption (sometimes at the same time, as with *Object*, which will be discussed at length in a moment). Oppenheim's “fur” works began with her design of a fur-covered bangle bracelet (*Fur Bracelet*, 1935) for designer Elsa Schiaparelli.¹⁸ As Kathleen

Bühler notes, with this bracelet, Oppenheim “is playing on the contradiction between the untamed wild and its exploitation for the decorative staging of femininity” (206). Oppenheim wore this “cuddly” bracelet, as the story goes, to a meal at the Café de Flore with Pablo Picasso and his partner Dora Maar, where the bracelet was much admired and the trio discussed the potential covering of numerous objects with fur, including Oppenheim’s suggestion of the teacup upon the table, an idea which would directly lead to her creation of *Object* in the following year, and, by extension, to her early-1970s “multiples” series of kitschy mixed-media/collage “souvenirs” based upon *Object*, which featured faux-fur cutouts in the approximate shape of a teacup/spoon pasted next to fake flowers atop glittery cardboard ovals (Eipeldauer et. al 18).¹⁹

In 1936, Oppenheim also created a pair of roughly sewn fur gloves from which the tips of realistic wooden fingers emerge, their nails painted brightly (*Fur Gloves With Wooden Fingers*, 1936), a work which clearly engages the tension between what is covered and what is uncovered—or, rather, concealed and unconcealed—and which toys both with the similarities between human skin and animal fur, and, given the way in which the clumsy shapelessness of each fur “glove” evokes the shape of a paw more than that of a human hand—thus allowing the red-tipped fingers to emerge like blood-tipped claws—the more general similarities between human and animal actions/activities/“nature.” Bühler has suggested that, within Oppenheim’s *Fur Gloves*, “the linking of woman and predator attests to a reconciliation of the bestial with the human,” what might perhaps be considered “a more holistic human condition,” an association that will be discussed in more depth below, and one which would inevitably fit smoothly into discourses of animality, atavism, and/or primitivism within modernist literature and the visual arts (206).²⁰

Oppenheim's fur-covered *Object* garnered a great deal of attention during its inclusion in the traveling first Surrealist exhibition, creating enough of a stir amongst the public to warrant the following "Critical Note" in the December 26, 1936 issue of *The New Yorker*. "A woman fainted last week at the Exhibition of Fantastic Art, Dada, and Surrealism, right in front of the fur-bearing cup and saucer. She left no name or address with the attendants who revived her—only a vague feeling of apprehension" (9). Apart from the apparently visceral—and shocking—response garnered by *Object* in this setting (the potential reasons for which will be discussed in a moment), this blurb is notable both for its implication that "the fur-bearing cup and saucer" is a publicly recognizable locational fixture within this story, and for the unidentified writer's mystique-baiting attempt to capture the sense that this work transgresses—and in sinister fashion—normality and/or propriety (the possibilities of which will also be discussed in a moment). Likely contributing further to the fame of the piece were Man Ray's photographs of *Object* taken late in 1936, which were angled so as to emphasize the shadows of the cup and what Mileaf would term the work's "shadowy sexuality" (147). Ray's photographs of *Object* also clearly mark Oppenheim's shifting place within Surrealist (and Surrealist/Dadaist) circles—that is, from Oppenheim as surrealist "muse" or peripheral "listener," her nude body the subject of Ray's photos, to newly-emerged central figure and creator of what some termed "the quintessential surrealist object" (Belton 64). In 1946, Barr sold the piece to the MoMA (where it has since remained); *Object* was the first work by a female artist to be added to the permanent collection of this museum (Gotthardt).

What is perhaps most notable about Oppenheim's *Object* is that, for both critics and casual viewers, it almost immediately became, and has since remained, the center of a substantial and seemingly ever-shifting constellation of potential meanings and interpretations (or, perhaps,

a non-linguistic chain of signifiers). I would suggest that the art world's focus upon, and the longevity of public interest in, this piece are both largely the result of such potentialities—or, perhaps, the very rich number of such potentialities; after all, *Object* seems to both speak too much, and to remain frustratingly mute. The title of the piece even remains up for debate, as, during the 1936 exhibition at the Ratton Gallery, Breton renamed the piece *Le déjeuner en fourrure*, or *Breakfast in Fur*, a titular play upon both Édouard Manet's 1862-3 painting *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (*Luncheon on the Grass*), and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's 1870 novella *Vénus à la fourrure* (*Venus in Furs*). Breton's re-naming of *Object* capitalizes upon the erotic interpretations of the sculpture whilst simultaneously associating the piece with the category of the “shocking” and slyly attempting to claim a place for it within the history of groundbreaking, and thus memorable and influential, art. These erotic connotations, and interpretations, of *Object* are useful, but have, to some extent, overshadowed more thorough discussion of the piece; such interpretations tend to limit other, more subtle and materially centered, discussions of the piece. Oppenheim herself dismissed Breton's re-naming of *Object* by suggesting that the title mattered little: “The wordgames of critics, the power struggles of men!” (qtd. in Belton 68).

Oppenheim's *Object* largely locates itself at a juncture at which human, animal, and inanimate object meet, and it does so both by pointing to, and by querying, the similarities and the overlap between these three categories, as well as by begging, and then denying, the possibility of the viewer's “expected” bodily interactions with each of these elements (both through the object's exhibition in a museum, originally behind glass and for the additional reasons discussed below). The teacup, after all, is meant to be held by the human, lifted to the lips, and to act as conveyance for an ingestible food- (or in this case, drink-) object that will nourish the human body. The fur incites sensuous (and, yes, *sensual*) interest, and “appeals to the

sense of touch, wants to be stroked and petted” by the human, as one interacts with an animal (Eipeldauer 17). However, the fur no longer “belongs” to an animal, the lumped concavity of the teacup would provide space for only the most delicate of stroking, and the cup’s possible status as some sort of bizarre object-animal hybrid might inspire further reluctance to touch (even if the object were not exhibited in a museum and, thus, “off-limits” for tactile exploration). The animal fur is unavoidably associable with human hair (more on that in a moment), thereby conflating mammal with mammal and, thus, humans with animality (more on that in a moment, as well). Although Oppenheim has remarked that she was “thinking only of the contrast of material textures” in creating the piece, these textures not only contrast with one another, but echo one another in small ways (Belton 68). The gently waving whorls of the fur may register as rough or smooth to the touch, depending upon one’s directional interaction with the “grain” of the hair pattern, and the fur—or, more specifically, the fur-pelt—serves to protect, contain, and warm the animal (that is, when it is attached to an animal). The inherently cool porcelain material of the teacup and saucer is also born of the natural (clay, in this case), glazed and fired into a presentation of pure surface “skin,” and it acts as container, as well as conductor, for the warmth of the tea, and as protection for the human hand from the temperature of the tea. One might even read *Object* as doubly-surfaced, or as a sort of “stack” of surfaces, a reading which would resonate both with the anxiety over bodily boundaries exhibited in other ways by this work, as well as with the modernist/early-twentieth century interest in surfaces evident throughout art and architecture of the period.²¹

Further, one might suggest that the foregrounded visibility of the natural within this piece, which may obscure (some of) the potential cultural/social meanings of the tea set itself, speaks to the early twentieth century interest in the primitive and atavistic whilst cleverly

inverting the common modernist trope of societal propriety as providing only a thin veneer atop a base, animal nature that is present within every human (one might here consider the literary works of D.H. Lawrence, amongst numerous others).²² Thomas McEvelley notes that this foregrounding of the natural/animal over the cultural/social in Oppenheim's *Object* may imply a "hopeful assertion to the effect that nature will ultimately somehow redeem the problems of culture" ("Basic Dichotomies" 47). These "problems of culture," one imagines, might primarily include the place of women in early twentieth century society. Although I would not go so far as to suggest, as has Valerie Fletcher, that, "Oppenheim proclaimed her identity as female in *Object*," it is worth noting that *Object*'s "assemblage of domestic items evokes associations with meals, which are usually prepared and served by wives and maids" (97). Fletcher continues this line of reasoning to suggest that "the thought of drinking from a hair-covered cup is repugnant, so we may interpret it as an oblique protest against the domestic role women were expected to fulfill (97, 99). But such "problems of culture" might also include the intersection of social class and commodity, given that fur, although growing more and more popular with those of the middle classes at the beginning of the century, retained a level of preciousness, and thus, the furred component of *Object* might connote, as Renée Riese Hubert remarks, "an expensively decked-out women" (*Magnifying* 64). The porcelain component of *Object* also speaks to class, given that porcelain within European countries was once available only to the very wealthy, though, by this point in the 1930s, was mass-produced, sold at department stores such as the one at which this set was purchased, and available to many. One might also here point out the ways in which *Object* sets up echoes of provenance in terms of commodity/trade; fur, after all, originates in the natural world, but is made into global commodity through trade (and this is "Chinese" gazelle fur, after all), whilst porcelain also originates in China, and is created through cultural

transformation (and commodification) of natural materials. Additionally, the tea that would be poured into the porcelain cup, but which here is either replaced or made undrinkable by the fur of the Chinese gazelle (depending upon one's reading of the piece), would also originate in nature via tea leaves, from Asia, and which would itself have become an international commodity via (colonial) trade. Thus, the very materials of Oppenheim's sculptural amalgamation encompass both the predation and control of natural elements by man—both in terms of the killing of the prey animal and the use of its pelt, and in terms of the mixing, firing, and alteration of natural clay—and the structures of commerce that allow food-/food-adjacent objects to be appropriated, altered or created, valued, and traded for use amongst bodies.

Although *Object* possesses more general connotations of bodiliness, largely due to the ways in which we automatically presume fur to either be a part of the body of an animal or to provide a covering for the human body, we must also here discuss the ways in which the piece has been read as specifically sexual, particularly given that these associations are likely a large part of the reason this piece became so central to discussions of Surrealism and women. A substantial number of critics have read *Object* as a piece that conflates human and animal(istic) desires in a sort of “saucy joke” (Gompertz 258); as Hubert explains, “the cup, hollow yet round, can evoke female genitalia; the spoon with its phallic shape further eroticizes the hairy object” (*Magnifying* 64). Thus, as Philip Nel has suggested, *Object* “invites the viewer to a breakfast in which a phallic spoon will enter the furry vessel of a cup” (22). This “invitation,” via the presentation of a fur-covered, and thus highly tactile, surface goes beyond an offer of observation, to an offer to touch, and to, perhaps, actually participate in the assumed sexual act via touch—and then, by dint of the work's presentation within a “hands off” museum setting, the

work forecloses upon that opportunity, creating a teasing interaction that might be read as sexual or, at the very least, as particularly sensual.

Janine Mileaf, however, argues that the spoon should be read as something other than phallic—that is, as oral, and as a substitute for the mouth of the viewer who might (but cannot) drink from this “cup”: “The spoon’s practical shape invites comparison to a tongue or the molded interior of a mouth” (147). Mileaf’s reading of the spoon remains sexualized, but ties an erotic reading of the piece’s components more directly to the act of consumption—or rather, perhaps, to the erotics of consumption. Further, Jack J. Spector remarks that the notion of drinking tea from this cup evokes the notion of an oral sexual act, or, as he terms it, “an association with a perverse performance with the mouth,” an association made all the more “perverse,” some critics have suggested, by its potential implication of female sexual pleasure (187). In such a way, suggests Mileaf, “the physicality and pleasure of the female body [within *Object*] is emphasized rather than denied” (147). Bühler also rather coyly points out that the idea of drinking from this cup “makes tangible not just tasting the tea but the feeling of hair on the tongue—and is a reminder that hairs of this sort normally only end up in the mouth under certain circumstances. This thought alone is capable of bringing a blush of shame to the viewer’s face” (206).

However, the erotic register of *Object* extends beyond its potential resemblance to human body parts, and beyond its evocation of a possible sexual act, into the realm of desire and the suggestively hidden, or what Gilles Deleuze has described when referring to Sacher-Masoch’s *Venus in Furs*, as the anticipatory appeal of “the fur that never discloses the flesh” (70). On this reading, as Ursula Sinnreich notes, the fur acts as “garment...denying [the spectator] the view of its naked surface” (qtd. in, and translated by, Gardner 12), and, according to Eipeldauer, it is

“precisely [*Object’s*] hairy clothing that blocks the view of the “naked” surface and sparks a desire to unveil what lies concealed beneath the fur” (18). Further, Julia Kelly has posed the object as itself being the product of a transgressive sexual union, describing the piece as “the unlikely offspring of the physical union of crockery set (The hollow forms of female sex organs) and wild beast, a hybrid creation of illicit intercourse, like the monstrous Minotaur” (80). In these readings, the porcelain cup and spoon act as stand-in for the human body, and their interactions with one another and/or with the viewer replace, or combine, acts of consumption with acts of eroticism (an association, of course, that is not uncommon within our culture).

The erotics of *Object* may easily be said to include the sensual, given the ways in which touch is bound up with sexuality, but, as mentioned above, they also include the *sensuous* aspects of a more general sort of tactile pleasure—that of stroking something soft. But the sensory appeal of fur is not necessarily limited to the tactile experience of the human who strokes an(other) animal. Instead of enclosing space (and liquid, when filled), as would a “normal” teacup, *Object* extends out *into* space, though in a very small way; it is everted rather than inverted, with hundreds of tiny individual hairs sticking their points into the air. If this fur were attached to an animal, of course, the fine roots of each hair would culminate in sense receptors beneath the skin, and would thus register the touch of the tea-drinker’s fingers and lips; thus, the teacup/saucer would then *feel* the drinker, rather than the drinker simply feeling it. This possibility, though ultimately foreclosed upon by the removal of the fur/skin from the feeling animal, allows for some uncertainty regarding the agency of the object itself. The relationship between human beings and this bodiliness of hair—or in this case, fur—may be both complex and uneasy, as it exists at a liminal threshold of the body, simultaneously both inside and outside the body itself,

and has thus been subject to a rich history of cultural restriction and regulation. Terence

Turner explains that:

Hair, like skin, is a “natural” part of the surface of the body, but unlike skin it continually grows outwards, erupting from the body into the social space beyond it. Inside the body, beneath the skin, it is alive and growing; outside, beyond the skin, it is dead and without sensation, although its growth manifests the unsocialized biological forces within. (85)

Part of the fascination with Oppenheim’s *Object*, then, is that the hair follicles of the pelted teacup appear to be growing from the object, away from its body, but also seem to be growing *toward* the human body, threatening to reverse this “eruption from the body” and to insert themselves *back into* a body (in this case, the human body), via the consuming mouth. Further, this piece suggests that biology in some way has overtaken the non-biological (or, yes, that nature has in some way reclaimed culture), and that the ‘safe’ has become uncontrollable: that perhaps the rather skin-like porosity of the natural cup that has been smoothed into a porcelain sheen has somehow returned, and that teacup’s hair/fur extended into a particularly social space regulated by propriety—that is, the space of the social “tea” event, or perhaps simply that the tips of this fur might invade the body itself. Such concern about bodily invasion, of course, has its place in any act of food ingestion. Anything we consume breaches the boundaries of the body, and even if we find ourselves fortunate enough to control what we consume, we ultimately lack control regarding the effects that these ingestibles will have upon our bodies; there always remains the threat of the potential consumption of the “wrong” thing due to carelessness, ignorance, or overwhelming hunger, the consumption of something that will not nourish, but which will poison or otherwise detract from bodily health.²³

The tea cup-and-saucer set of *Object* does not include serving pieces, such as a teapot or tray, an exclusion which allows much of the focus of the piece to fall neatly upon a potential act of consumption/ingestion, rather than including the more general trappings of tea, the social niceties of a tea-related gathering, the making or pouring of tea, and so forth. The first critic to write about the piece, Marcel Jean, excitedly exclaimed that “The visitors [to the Ratton Gallery] immediately imagine themselves drinking their chocolate from this vessel,” and Oppenheim herself is later portrayed in a 1967 self-portrait photograph lifting the cup to her lips, in profile, apparently drinking (or, rather, “drinking”) from it (qtd. in Helfenstein 27). This imagined (or partially enacted, in the case of Oppenheim’s photo) act of consumption marks the crux of the work; not only would it be impossible for visitors to actually complete the common everyday activity of drinking from the cup (since it is on display in a museum), they could not drink “normally” from the cup regardless, at least not without ingesting tea “contaminated” (or, at least, “flavored”) by the fur pelt (rather than from, as Spector indicates, “hard, clean porcelain” [187]), or without simply receiving a potentially unappealing mouthful of the fur itself, sans tea. As Alex Potts has noted: *Object* “provokes a curious mixture of fascination and disgust by prompting one to think of drinking out of the fur-covered cup, and of the sensation of furry hair coming into contact with one’s tongue and lips, perhaps sodden with warm liquid, all the while thinking of the origins of the actual fur as the hair and skin covering a once living body” (119). This “once-living body” is of the animal and is edible by human standards, though the fur is not, of course, one of the parts of the animal’s body that is considered edible (the skin to which it is attached, however, is another story). This pelt’s inclusion here, particularly in absence of any other part of the animal, crosses both the boundary between edibility and inedibility, and that between hunger and disgust, both of which are often present in our

encounters with food-objects; there are, as is detailed elsewhere in this dissertation, parts of things we do and do not eat, parts we discard, and things from which we must psychologically distance ourselves in order to complete the act of consumption/ingestion. Thus, the viewer's encounter with *Object* marks, as Mileaf indicates, an "instance in which intake is merged with repulsion" (146-147), and one in which tea, "one of the mainstays of civilization" (Orwell 34) and civilized human behavior, is replaced—or perhaps overwritten—by the animality of the pelt, thus querying the distance between human and animal.²⁴

Breton famously remarked that a purpose of the Surrealist movement was "to hound the mad beast of function," and, indeed, the addition of fur to this cup renders it in some way dysfunctional, or perhaps afunctional, as the "the liquid held by the original object may no longer be contained" (Breton originally qtd. in *Cahiers d'Art*, Noted by Helfenstein 29; Mileaf 147). I would here disagree with Mileaf's assertion that liquid "may no longer be contained" within the cup, as this simply is not the case—after all, the fur pelt might partially absorb the liquid, and it would undeniably make it less appealing, but it does not entirely interfere with the functioning of the cup as cup.²⁵ However, a teacup's intended purpose is quite clear (it is called a teacup, after all, not simply a cup), and as a vessel intended to convey, and to make more easily edible, a food/drink-object. *Object* does indeed render any contents of this teacup inedible (or non-drinkable, as the case may be), whilst making a strange appeal to one's other senses, or, perhaps, to the lived experience of consumption and the pleasures of touch as an essential part of any act of consumption. In this way, the work subverts expectation, defamiliarizing the everyday and bringing the rote processes of the daily into question, as well as allowing the viewer to reconsider the process of consumption itself. Further, if this teacup cannot fulfill its purpose as a vessel from which to (desirably) drink, the object is then removed in some fundamental way

from the realm of human focus in which it might exist only *for* this use, and thus from the traditional human-centered subject-object dichotomy in which objects are traditionally framed as non-agentic and materially unimportant save for their dependence upon human needs/uses.

Ultimately, *Object* operates upon a level of, or perhaps makes a bid for, sensory conflation. “Viewers,” as Mileaf notes, “are drawn to its smooth texture but realize that they are meant to use an unexpected organ for its reception. Rather than at the hands, this...work is aimed at the mouth—or perhaps the opposite. A cup that should be for the mouth has been rendered tactile through its enclosure in fur” (147). Such an (imagined) interaction likely inspires confusion—is the action here required of us to drink or to touch?—but it also represents an exaggerated version of any common act of consumption, thoroughly ensnared as such an act will inevitably be within the web of the human sensorium. However, by virtue of *Object*'s placement in a museum/gallery as “art-object,” rather than simply as “object,” both our expectations for experiencing, and our actual sensory experience of, the object is foreclosed upon. Nevertheless, even if it were possible to use the item according to its assumed function as a serving vessel for a drink, our attempts to ingest a drink (or at least a pleasant or desirable drink) would be thwarted.

During the same year in which she created, and gained such attention for, *Object*, Oppenheim also created another assemblage piece that thoroughly engaged the relationship between the body, food, and food-related objects, though with much less public notice: *Ma Gouvernante*, which is sometimes translated as *My Governess* but is most commonly referred to as *My Nurse*. This piece, which was also originally included in the Ratton Gallery exhibition of 1936, consists of a pair of worn high-heeled shoes trussed like roasted poultry upon a shining silver platter, the tips of the heels topped with the frilled paper caps that are sometimes used to decorate the exposed bone-tips of a cooked bird or cut of meat.²⁶ The inclusion of these frilled

caps provides a neat echo with the heels themselves—both white (as would be the exposed bone the caps are meant to cover), both mean to "decorate" the end of a leg, both a denial of potential animality and an unnatural imposition of cultural propriety upon the body. This cultural imposition upon the body is, in each case, meant to trick the eye. High heels replace the shape of existing parts of the human body with more culturally "desirable" shapes, altering not only the lines of the feet they may conceal, but, as one walks in these shoes, shifting musculature and postural form throughout the body. The paper caps conceal the absence of body parts of the animal that no longer exist, replacing this absence with ornamentation that softens the consumer's initial encounter with a part of an animal "meant" to remain inside the body; a part of the animal which may be, therefore, distasteful. An exposed bone suggests abjection, as it crosses a boundary that is not meant to be crossed, thus calling attention to physiologic similarities between the consumer and the food-object—both are, after all, an interplay of flesh and bone as they interact upon the dinner table. Unlike *Object*, which may or may not actually replace the ingestible food/drink-object with its fur pelt, *My Nurse* represents both the trappings of the food-object—via the presentation of the shoes upon the silver tray, the twine with which the shoes are bound, and the paper frills—and the food-object itself, or, rather, the replacement of the food-object itself.

The presentation of the roast/shoes upon, and their visual framing within, a silver platter, as well as the garnish of these decorative paper caps suggest an upscale version of domesticity, a meal meant to impress, and a version of conspicuous consumption that simultaneously surrounds actual consumption/ingestion and the human body itself. The shoes themselves have been purchased (and, ostensibly, at this point in human history, produced in a factory), and are thus, as Edward Powers remarks, inevitably "constituted of use-values" (362). However, their use-value

is also subverted both by their bondage—these “shoes hobble rather than ambulate”—and their placement upon a tray (and, ostensibly, then upon a dining table), as the center of an assemblage which causes them to be “not so much useless as against usefulness altogether” (Powers 364). The shoes, then, become in some fundamental way something “other than” shoes (though they also do not, of course, approach becoming roasted meat or fowl), the functionally-resistant “thing” of Bill Brown’s thing-object divide, or perhaps, through a “process of defunctionalization,” what Hubert simply categorizes as “a work of art” (*Magnifying* 64).²⁷

My Nurse has been most commonly read with an emphasis upon gender and sexuality, a reading likely influenced by fellow Surrealist Salvador Dalí’s unmistakable interest in portraying shoes as sexual, and sexualized, objects, and more generally influenced by the cultural “eroticization of the high heel” throughout the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century and the “contested fetish” status of shoes-as-object within mid-century modernist and postmodernist critical theory (Martin Heidegger on Vincent Van Gogh’s painterly workboots, Fredric Jameson on Warhol’s shimmering image of high heels, and so forth) (Semmelhack 35; Novero 187).²⁸ But such readings are also supported by Oppenheim herself, who, in 1982, commented of the piece, “It evokes for me the association of thighs squeezed together in pleasure. In fact, almost a ‘proposition.’ When I was a little girl, four or five, we had a young nursemaid. She was dressed in white (Sunday best?). Maybe she was in love, maybe that’s why she exuded a sensual atmosphere of which I was unconsciously aware” (qtd. in Ammann 116). Janine Catalano has commented upon the composition of this shoe-sculpture as suggesting a “prostrate, headless, woman, her legs suggestively akimbo,” a reading in which the sexualized high-heeled shoes become a synecdochic stand-in for the female body (72). This body has become further objectified, and object-like, by its absence of a “head” (and thus, one presumes, an identity), just

as the body of the roasted fowl is made more acceptable—and thus more appealingly consumable— by losing its head, and its specificity. In this way, as Hubert points out, the piece “problematizes the feminine without referring directly to a body and even less to a face” (39). The trussed immobility of the shoes implies sexual control through connotations of erotic bondage, while potentially equating the visual re-shaping of the absent foot via the high-heeled shoes with culturally patriarchal practices of femininity such as foot binding, and raising potential concerns about societal expectations of feminine containment.²⁹ Hubert notes that, “The shoes, tied together, have lost their independence... Through the strings they are turned into a mutual and common imprisonment,” resulting in what Thomas McEvilley sees as the work’s “suggestion that women are not supposed to move” (39; “Basic Dichotomies” 51). This body has also been made ready for consumption specifically through bondage and control, and the trussing of this body-turned-object suggests the ways in which the preparation and consumption of food is *about* control—control of the food-object and the objects which might surround it, and control of one’s own body in moments of hunger and of ingestion.

But *My Nurse* also potentially connotes, or implicates, the presence of women within the periphery of the piece. As Alyce Mahon points out, this piece, and much of Oppenheim's work, “merges the domestic and the erotic, and their compatibility in women” (137). Here, the “womanly object” (Catalano 74) is a food-object—the implied roast(ed fowl)—and has perhaps been made overtly erotic through its associations with female sexuality, but the formal custom of the silver platter and the paper caps suggest that this (non)food-object has been prepared in a traditionally domestic manner—that is, by a female cook, whether this be a servant or the “lady of the house.” The title of the piece further connotes domestic nurturance and feminine care of

the body, and, as Catalano has remarked, allows for the piece to be associated with “the most basic link between women and consumption—the act of breast-feeding” (72).

The shoes at the heart of *My Nurse* are noticeably not new; as Catalano indicates, the positioning of the shoes—their soles turned toward the viewer—calls attention to these soles, which are dirty and scuffed, in contrast to the “virginal white of the shoe leather” (74). This “worn” quality of the shoes associates them, and thus this piece, with their absent owner—having been used and incorporated into the body image of someone, these shoes inevitably become closely associated with the physical body of their (unknown) wearer. They carry the index of the wearer’s body, as well as the body’s interactions within the world—that body’s motions, its weight as it is affected by gravity, its negotiations with the properties of the surfaces upon which it has trodden—rough pavement, contaminating dirt, and so forth.³⁰ Not only are shoes a particularly bodily object in terms of their near-constant intimacy with the skin and their mediation between the body and the outside world, the parts of the shoe are (at least in English) actually named after the foot which they contain: heel, toe, sole. The “used” shoes of *My Nurse* are contaminated not only by the dirty scuff marks on the soles, but by their association with the feet, a part of the human body that (though often eroticized) is often considered to be less than “clean.” As Catalano indicates, the dirtiness of these shoes “underscores the object's inedibility even further” (75).

The edibility of this piece is “further undermin[ed],” Catalano continues, given that “Oppenheim uses an object made of leather--itself a product of a cow, situated within the realm of western consumption--but rendered utterly unpalatable” (74). This piece, then, “plays” with the different types of consumption (and the processes by which objects are readied for human consumption, both in terms of the preparation of food and the processes of curing, tanning,

dyeing), the different uses for an edible object, and the different elements of that edible object. The cow-skin's purpose as cover and container for the cow's interior body is subverted, and, as leather, it becomes a secondary cover and container for the body of the human who dons this additional "skin" in the form of a shoe. The foot-empty shoes upon the platter possess a structural framework, or "bones" of a sort, then, beneath their leather skin, and thus are somewhat like the roast they represent, though the "meat" of the food-object—or what would make a food-object truly edible—is absent (the absent feet of the shoe-wearer would, of course, constitute a form of "meat," though an unappetizingly cannibalistic one). The replacement of the expected edible food-object on this platter with the inedible (or at least "unpalatable") shoe-object(s) underscores the interplay between edible and inedible present in *any* food-object. Edibility, after all, is often dependent upon food-preparation technique and the methods by which a consumer interacts with a potential food-object (and, perhaps also, by hungry determination), and the very edibility of even "natural" food-objects is, almost always, inextricably bound up with inedibility—bones, skin, fur, teeth, seeds (some of which are not simply inedible, but actually poisonous, when ingested), rinds, shells, scales, packaging. As discussed in a previous chapter of this dissertation, the culturally constructed scene of food consumption is itself often further entangled in the tensions between edibility and inedibility, as dishes (or in the case of *My Nurse*, silver platters) surround and contain, utensils convey, aesthetically-concerned presentation incorporates elements of "garnish" (the knots of the trussing twine, the paper caps topping the bones), and the consumer is often forced to negotiate between the edible and the inedible (or, yes, unpalatable) with each bite.

Ultimately, Oppenheim's *My Nurse* operates within a space that touches upon the food-object as it exists independently, and interdependently with, the human body in terms of sight,

touch, and eventual (implied) taste and consumption (or, as the case may be, non-consumption), and a space that thus also covers not only the sense organs and ingesting mouth of the consumer, but the feet of the consumer, as well as non-food objects located within the bodily image, and the interactions of the human body with the world outside as mediated by these objects (and as represented by the dirt and scuff marks on the soles of the shoes). The piece links those cultural practices which adjust the natural state of things in order to “please” human society by distancing us—visually or otherwise—from the visceral rawness of the natural, both in terms of food-objects and our bodies themselves. However, more than this, *My Nurse* acts as a series of echoes and replacements, with the reflective platter providing specular doubling of the roast/paired shoes, as well as suggesting that it might provide reflected glimpses of the food server and/or consumer and the other “food” at the table whilst what it actually provides are reflected glimpses of the art viewer and its own surroundings within the gallery or museum in which it is exhibited. The (nonexistent) chopped-off feet of the roasted fowl, topped as they are with decorative white “shoes,” echo the absent feet that once helped these shoes to become dirty, and the decorative white high-heeled shoes themselves.

Although *My Nurse* did not garner particularly strong attention upon its display in 1936, the almost-immediate success of *Object* that same year, which arrived when Oppenheim was only twenty-three years old, was followed for the artist by a decades-long bout with depression, which resulted in lengthy periods in which she had difficulty working, and which thus accounts neatly for the relative sparseness of her artistic output during the 1940s and 50s (see Glueck, et. al). During this depressive period, Oppenheim returned to Bern and attended art school, intending to become a conservationist, apparently believing that her career as an artist was at an end after “experienc[ing] the fur cup as confining her to some particular category” (Wenger qtd.

in *Dama*).³¹ And indeed, it is difficult to argue with Eipeldauer when she remarks that *Object's* “extraordinary power as an icon would long distort the public’s conception of [Oppenheim’s] remaining oeuvre,” by becoming the piece by which she was—and still is—primarily recognized; by becoming what Gwen Raaberg refers to as the “tiresomely repeated exception” to the dearth of works by female artists included in exhibitions, books, and articles about Surrealism until the attempted—and, one might argue, relatively unsuccessful—revival of Surrealist works by women in the late twentieth century; and by becoming, through its very popularity, a well-known symbol of the Surrealist movement to which Oppenheim felt she did not belong (14; 1).

However, despite Oppenheim’s limited artistic output at midcentury, it is worthwhile to consider the ways in which her interest in the body (particularly the female body) and in the objecthood and consumption of food continued to dominate within the pieces she did create. We might here note her 1959 work *Spring Banquet*, also known as *Cannibal Feast*. This work, a performative piece well in-line with the “happenings” within the international art world of the late 1950s/early 1960s, originated in a “fertility feast” held by Oppenheim in Switzerland earlier that year, a meal in which the food was served upon the body of a naked woman. André Breton asked Oppenheim to repeat this activity by exhibiting a version of this meal (the live woman was later replaced by a female mannequin of *papier mâché*) at the 1959 *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme (EROS)* in Paris, where the work caused a stir, particularly after Breton (who clearly enjoyed retitling Oppenheim’s works, particularly in ways that might none-too-subtly direct the viewer to particular interpretations of the work) re-named the work *Cannibal Feast*.³² Oppenheim was displeased with this re-naming, later remarking that “instead of a simple spring festival,” as she had originally intended the work to be taken, it became “yet another woman

taken for male pleasure” (qtd. in Belton 70). Although one might certainly, and fruitfully, consider this work within the context of the “male gaze” and consumption—visual, erotic, societal, and so forth—of the female body, and although one might also question Oppenheim’s apparent surprise that the work would encourage interaction and analysis focused largely upon gender-based issues, it is also important to note here that Oppenheim’s original pleasure in a “simple spring festival” seems also to move beyond issues of gender (at least, as much as such a thing is possible in this case), and to instead, or perhaps also, celebrate and/or query the distance, or lack of distance, between the human body and the object (after all, as Novero remarks, the body here is “functioning as tray” [196])—more specifically, the food-object, via the form of display, the consumptive acts of the spectators and, even more simply, the placement of the food.

According to Hubert, the female figure at the center of *Spring Banquet*, “cannot escape cannibalization. Her body has become the domain of both order and disorder, invaded as it is by food, which occupies and almost eclipses her genitals” (“Chronicle of Surrealism” 40). While Hubert here brings up compelling points regarding possible associations between consumable food-objects, sexuality, and potential human predation (here coded as male) inspired by the piece, she also implies the potential threat of the food-objects themselves, which “invade” and “occupy” this image of the human body. These food-objects themselves thus both become a part of the bodily image/schema and threaten to consume the body at the center of this piece, whilst simultaneously inviting spectators both to consume them and to consume the body, but these food-objects also draw attention to the surface of the body and the tensions of the interplay between the body and the food-object as an exterior object which is meant to be taken into the body. The placement of the food-objects upon the skin (or “skin” in the case of the mannequin) of the body itself calls attention to the often minute, but crucial, difference between interior and

exterior; thus separated only from the organs of digestion by the skin, and from actually being ingested by the re-location of the food-objects from near the mouth to the arms, torso, etc., the food cannot fulfill its purpose (at least for the figure at the center of this piece). Therefore, for the spectator/participant, the human (or humanoid representation of the) body becomes food (or food-related), and, for the body at the center of *Spring Banquet*, the food is experienced only through touch—or, rather, through a version of its pressure and texture upon the body, instead of through exploratory touch with the fingers and mouth, followed by taste, ingestion, absorption in the agentic, experiential, and biological loop of eating.

This piece demonstrates Oppenheim's continued, and maturing, interest in the relationship between objects and bodies, between interior and exterior of the body (particularly in terms of surfaces), and between acts of consumption and non-consumption. It also prefigures later artistic works that combine a strong interest in food-/food-adjacent objects and the female body, such as Judy Chicago's 1974-79 feminist masterwork *The Dinner Party*.³³ More specifically, however, *Spring Banquet* figures a food-centered nexus within Oppenheim's work that is fundamentally erotic, multisensory, and uncanny, a place where the body acts as both food-adjacent object (a tray for food presentation) and food-object consumer, and a scene of consumption and material interplay that is simultaneously estranging and overintimate.

The sculptural food-objects of Méret Oppenheim—particularly *Object* and *My Nurse*—continue the legacy of the Duchampian readymade by creating materially and thematically rich (and unsettling) hybrid commodities from mass-produced objects. Like all forms of readymade sculptural objects, these new commodities court questions regarding their place within the art world (is this an art-object or simply an object?) and their forms of value: the juxtaposition of inexpensive and/or factory-produced items with “natural” objects—such as fur—that are of

notable enough economic value to become markers of social class, but which once existed outside the structures of capitalism on a very different scale of value (that is, as part of an animal). Further, these are objects of everyday life that are put to use by the body, and, within these encounters, they are objects in close contact with the fleshliness of the body—shoes upon feet, teacups against lips, and so forth—and these everyday objects have here been altered in order to additionally evoke everyday acts of food consumption. And yet, these objects are here made strange to us; they have become art-objects, certainly (whatever that might “mean”), but they have also been placed in a (figurative) space that encourages our awareness of the complexity of our daily embodied negotiations with such objects (and particularly with food-objects), and the ways in which concerns such as gender, eroticism, and value inform our daily encounters with the objects that these art-objects resemble. These questions of value and bodily encounter will remain particularly significant within the next section of this chapter, as we discuss consider a form of assisted readymade by Claes Oldenburg.

Claes Oldenburg: *Pastry Case I*

Claes Oldenburg’s sculptural object *Pastry Case I* (1961-62), is often considered to be a “key document in the history of Pop Art,” largely due to its eventual inclusion (via its 1962 purchase by art collector Sidney Janus) in the major Pop Art exhibition “New Realists” in November 1962, an exhibition which “is generally considered to have marked the international breakthrough of Pop” (Honnef 56). The work occupies a physical space of approximately 21x30x15 inches, consists of a glass-and-metal case such as one would find in a diner filled with nine food-objects—a piece of blueberry pie, a banana split, a piece of what appears to be strawberry shortcake, a plate of cookies, two sundaes, a nearly-complete cake with a wide stripe

of filling running through its center, what has been identified as a “flat long pastry,” and a toffee apple that is missing several bites—all sculpted of burlap and muslin soaked in plaster, and each painted with bright enamel paints (*Store Days* 34). The food-objects of *Pastry Case I* are not necessarily immediately recognizable; they are instead of uneven and globular shape, not simply material but *overly* material in nature, objects in which the underlying materials have often become undistinguishable from the finish. As Achim Hochdörfer notes, “Sometimes the strips of muslin resemble broad brushstrokes, so that it is often all but impossible to decide whether the vibrating movement of the surface results from the unsteady surface or from the gestures of the painting” (38). The paint itself is often a jumble of “Pollockian dripping,” the colors unmixed with one another, taken straight from cans of intense enamel colors “with names like ‘school bus yellow,’” and Oldenburg allowed “each layer of paint to dry before applying another. Thus he avoided the undesired effects of paints running into one another, which would have deprived their colors of radiance” (J. Robinson 61; Oldenburg qtd. in McKenna; Hochdörfer 38). The sculptural piece of blueberry pie within *Pastry Case I*, then, is an object with a greyish-brown “crust,” with swipes of bright blue along its sides, and quick dots of red and white and green atop the blue. The sculptural sundaes and “cream”-covered shortcake already appear half-melted (though they exist within a case meant to keep them fresh and cool), a jumble of colors and materials sinking slowly into one another within their silvered sundae cups. Streaked with shades of tan and dark brown, the sculptural cookies are nubby and stiff, a jumble of irregular edges upon a ceramic plate. The “flat long pastry,” a brown slab with scribbled etchings of bright red and blue atop it, could also easily represent a rack of ribs, a leg of mutton, or an entirely non-food object. The cake is the least “expressionistically pitted” (Lippard 108), and expressionistically *painted*, of these food-objects, and though its frosting retains a strongly

textural element beneath a coat of white paint, its visible interior is curiously flat and precise in comparison to the other pieces within the pastry case, the filling reminiscent of a racing stripe.³⁴ With *Pastry Case I*, Oldenburg continues Duchamp's inquiry into the food-object and the scene of food consumption (or non-consumption), and, as with both Duchamp's *Why Not Sneeze?* and the Oppenheim works discussed above, *Pastry Case I* operates within a space of replacement and "play" that includes considerations of (un)desirability, (in)edibility, and multisensory engagement. But Oldenburg's sculptural food-object (or collection of sculptural food-objects) focuses more strongly upon, and queries more deeply, issues of commodification, the handmade and the mass-produced, and the problem of value within artistic and commercial economies.

Swedish-American artist Oldenburg is nearly always associated with the American Pop Art movement of the 1950s and 60s, though this association is not so straightforward as one might initially assume. The parameters of the category of Pop Art remain contested, and the stylistic and thematic variations within the work of artists typically included within the category are vast.³⁵ However, Pop Art is most commonly considered to be stylistically marked by repetition, flat and "impersonal" surfaces that mimic commercial techniques of art (Rosenblum 54), and the use of bright colors, and it has often inspired critical charges of "depthlessness," superficiality, and homogeneity.³⁶ In terms of subject matter, the genre is most commonly associated with the everyday and the banal, often in terms of mass consumer/commercial culture and the commodity—areas that are certainly not new, but that often "previously appeared marginal to the fine arts" (Russell 12).³⁷ It is worth noting the ways in which the "immediately recognizable" images and objects "from the realms of advertising, grocery shelves, and movie and television screens" appeared within Pop Art, implying that "the commonplace, reassuring,

mass-produced things of ordinary life were not to be despised” and that mass or “low” cultural objects were worthy of “high” artistic/cultural engagement (Mamiya 4; Danto *Beyond* 3).³⁸ The methodology of Pop Art commonly involves techniques of “visual quotation” by which an image or object is “cut off from [its typical] source and surroundings,” potentially re-scaled or juxtaposed with other images or objects, and re-figured within an artistic space, thereby calling attention to its features, specificities, materialities (Mamiya 19; Barthes, *Responsibility* 202).³⁹ Given this engagement with everyday objects, it is unsurprising that Pop Art has been associated with Dada (generally by way of Duchamp), with midcentury critics such as Barbara Rose arguing that Pop Art is, like Dada (or, rather, as traditional narratives of Dada would suggest), “primarily idea art” and advocating for an artistic genre known as Neo-Dada, which would overlap with Pop Art (“Pop in Perspective” 201).⁴⁰ However, the substantial resurgence of interest in Dada—and, particularly, in Duchamp—at midcentury notwithstanding, Neo-Dada remained an underdefined generic category and never gained much popularity as an artistic classification.⁴¹

Curiously, Claes Oldenburg’s work has very rarely been mentioned within critical attempts to define Neo-Dada, despite his pervasive interest in objects and the way in which his sculptures (particularly at midcentury) engage with categories of assisted readymades and found objects. But a number of Oldenburg’s works during the 1960s (and beyond) may, at least upon first glance, be said to fall relatively neatly into the general category of Pop Art as discussed above. After all, Oldenburg’s body of work is often especially invested in objects associated in some way with domesticity and/or the everyday—many of which are food-objects—and many of these sculptural objects might be said to invoke the techniques of “visual quotation” mentioned above, given that these works often involve decontextualization of common objects through

placement (say, by placing sculptural food-objects on the floor of a museum, as in the *Floor Cake*, *Floor Burger*, *Floor Cone* series of 1962). Such placement, or displacement, of objects is part of Oldenburg's larger artistic project of play between the familiar and the unfamiliar in terms of these objects, whether this play involves decontextualization via surroundings/environment, size (as in *Floor Cake*, etc.), material (food-objects made of papier-mache, wood, burlap, vinyl—or, later in his career, steel—and/or structure.⁴² It is also the case that a number of Oldenburg's sculptural works exhibit an interest in smoothed surfaces, either through the use of materials that are smooth to the touch and reflectively shining to the eye (as in the vinyl-over-wood *Giant BLT [Bacon, Lettuce, and Tomato Sandwich]* of 1963), and/or through a visual simplification of texture, color, and/or pattern (the “bacon” poking out from within *Giant BLT* is entirely flat and slick, paper-thin, and uniformly striped).

However, a great number of Oldenburg's sculpted objects are not so smoothly-surfaced, particularly those that would fall mostly easily within the historical period associated with Pop Art (that is, the 1950s and 60s). In fact, Oldenburg's surfaces have only more recently become uniformly colored and smooth-surfaced, particularly within his series of large-scale outdoor collaborative public sculptural projects with (his wife) Coosje Van Bruggen, a series that did not begin until the late 1970s and which features massive, spray-painted steel (often food-)objects such as *Dropped Cone* (2001). Although Oldenburg's use of color may very often be associable with the “garish” and “un-nuanced” labels generally attached to Pop Art (as discussed above), his use of such colors is rarely uniform (at least until the late-century series with Van Bruggen), and instead tend toward textural variegation (as in *Floor Burger*, etc.) and/or the lumped drappiness associated with Abstract Expressionism, rather than Pop Art. Further, many of Oldenburg's midcentury sculptural objects, rather than being fully removed from their “natural”

environments, are in some way fully immersed in a version of an environment, whether through Oldenburg's creation of a surrounding installation within a gallery or other space (as in *The Street*, and *The Store*, both of which will be discussed below), and/or through the performative interactions of himself and others with these objects (as with *The Store*).

Oldenburg's interest in portraying the sorts of packaged and brand-named objects that have become synonymous with Pop Art (such as Warhol's Brillo boxes and Campbell's soup cans) is minimal.⁴³ Oldenburg's sculptures throughout the 1950s, 60s, and 70s may often be versions of commodities, but they are generally noticeably handmade, and, when they are locatable within a particular time period in America, this is due to their depiction of (for example) foodstuffs popular within the period (such as those sold at lunch counters—burgers, fries, sandwiches, slices of cream-filled cake). Although Oldenburg's extensive collection of sculptures within *The Store* (which will be discussed below) includes two sculptures specifically associated with brand names—*Pepsi-Cola Sign* (1961) and *7-Up* (1961), his primary interest lies with forms of consumables/commodities and structures of commercial production that do not (or do not *only*) emphasize mass-production.

I would suggest that Oldenburg's frequent classification as Pop artist—and the oft-reductionist (and, at times, classist) designation of Pop Art as a category of uncomplicated surfaces, simulacric brand-name objects, unchallenging artistic/intellectual statements, and mass/"low" cultural products—have encouraged a certain amount of critical neglect of Oldenburg's midcentury sculptural objects, especially with regards to materiality and the thematic resonances of specific objects.⁴⁴ His sculptural food-objects of the period, particularly those exhibited/sold within *The Store*, are worthy of greater consideration with regards to their frequently dense material structures, varied surfaces, and Oldenburg's sense of play within these

materialities, as well as the place of such sculptures within discourses of desire and disgust, edibility and inedibility, play and multisensory engagement with food-objects, and the distance (or lack thereof) between art and commerce as it might relate to the purchase, preparation, and consumption of food-objects.⁴⁵ Oldenburg's *Store* sculptural food-objects, as typified here by *Pastry Case I*, operate within the complex space of these discourses and concepts whilst also making compelling bids for actual bodily interactions with these works, especially as they originate, are displayed, and shift within an installation environment that (at least initially) is associated less with art and more with the lived experience of object creation and consumer encounters.

After moving to New York in 1956, Oldenburg realized, as he has explained, "I realized that art had to mean more than just producing objects for galleries and museums and that I wanted to locate art in the experience of life" (McKenna). In the late 1950s, this location of art in "the experience of life" involved the creation of small sculptural objects from scraps of refuse and "low" materials such as papier mâché. These objects resembled, albeit generally only in passing, objects already in existence; for example, "*Empire*" ("*Papa*") *Ray Gun* of 1959, with its primitive and only vaguely weapon-like shape. Many of these objects (including "*Empire*") made their way into Oldenburg's 1960 installation *The Street*, which took place in the basement of the Judson Memorial Church in Manhattan. *The Street* consisted of a collection of objects made of cardboard, newspaper, and burlap, many elements of which Oldenburg had found on the streets and garbage piles of New York City—some three-dimensional sculptures, some reliefs, some flat, some collage, with many depicting elements of city life such as taxis and street signs, and human figures depicted as "torn silhouettes" (Bois and Krauss 173).

Most of these works were minimally, and roughly, painted, browned by dirt and soot (and by virtue of the material of many being cardboard), only vaguely defined as faces, figures, etc. by thick, black, irregular lines. Sans the bright colors and clear forms of Pop Art, and featuring a clear appreciation for “junk,” Oldenburg’s *The Street* seems to bear more in common with the works of the subculturally-inclined Independent Group (IG) in England (which eventually became the relatively unpopular and currently tremendously understudied British Pop Art movement), or with Robert Rauschenberg’s combine paintings of the 1950s. *The Street* allowed Oldenburg to engage with “everyday life” within the city, and to bring it “inside” and into an art world setting (though, admittedly, a somewhat unusual one, given that this was not a typical gallery), as well as to bring together his interest in creating mixed-media art objects with his interest in placing these objects within an environment in which his own body, and those of others, could encounter and interact with them; Oldenburg performed “happenings,” or theatrical performances, within this space a number of times during the exhibition, and during one of these events, he provided audience members with one million dollars of “Ray Gun” currency (a play upon *Empire*, and his eventually extended collection of “ray gun” sculptures) that could be used to purchase sculptures within the installation.⁴⁶

Oldenburg’s next major installation, and his first financially successful artistic endeavor, *The Store* (1961-62), marked a natural continuation of many of the artistic, theoretical, and performative threads running throughout *The Street*.⁴⁷ *The Store* was, quite literally, a commercial “nongallery space” within the Lower East Side of Manhattan rented by Oldenburg, which Oldenburg filled with handmade objects meant to suggest, or to replicate (more on that debate later), the sorts of objects found in the windows of actual shops in his neighborhood: clothing, food, furniture, advertisements; shoes and scarves and dresses, a hanging sign

promoting soda, a mannequin wearing a bridal gown, old-fashioned chairs, a stove bearing a roast, a loaf of bread on a cutting board (Mamiya 46). These objects are not, however, faithful replicas of the actual store-displayed items which inspired them. They are, instead, “polymorphously lumpen,” “misshapen, obviously handmade” creations with “restless contours rising and falling from fluttering, unstable edges,” each crafted of muslin, burlap, plaster and papier mâché, each consistently “ambiguous as to their status as painting, sculpture, or the intermediate form of relief” (J. Robinson 49; Rose, *Claes* 64; Rose, *Claes* 9; Höchdorfer 44).⁴⁸ As literary critic Sonya Rudikoff queried of the objects of *The Store*, upon visiting their display during the 1962 Green Gallery period of the installation work: “who ever saw such hideously green salad, such orange-y and brown-y bread?” (62). And, indeed, nearly all of these objects drip with bright blotches and “garishly colored” irregular runs of tempera and enamel paint “splashed on straight out of the can... blotched, splattered, and overpainted” (Bois and Krauss 173; Rose, *Claes* 65). This combination of material roughness, formal ambiguity, and painting techniques associated with Expressionist and/or Action painting creates objects that often appear to “melt” into the environment surrounding them (see, for example *White Gym Shoes* of 1962).

Many of the sculptural objects within *The Store* are approximately the size of their “real-life” counterparts, but others play with scale; for example, as poet Frank O’Hara described in a brief review of Oldenburg’s installation, the “seven-foot pistachio ice cream cone (painted cloth) lay on the floor, flanked by a monstrous wedge of chocolate and vanilla layer cake of the same materials and scale and [the] hamburger... which, if used as an ottoman, could sit at least twenty fairly large persons” (141). These larger, “soft” sculptural food-objects are smoother, made from cloth, and, as Rosalind Krauss points out, themselves bodily in a way that the smaller, more numerous, and more-to-scale papier mâché objects/food-objects within the installation are not;

they are “pliant and soft, like flesh” (*Passages* 229), as opposed to stiff, clumpy, and variously contoured. And yet, all of the objects in *The Store*, by virtue of their engagement with recognizable objects, encourage the viewer to apprehend them via the “admission” that ““they are my things—the objects I use everyday”” (Krauss *Passages* 229).

The objects of *The Store* were all not only for sale, they were created—or “produced”—by Oldenburg himself at the back of the store, during and after “business hours”; according to Oldenburg, “I worked there more or less in view of the people who looked in. Even at night I would be visible” (qtd. in Buchloh 104). Germano Celant has commented that, “For the entire period that *The Store* occupied its Lower East Side quarter, Oldenburg was present among his products, presenting himself as manufacturer and shopkeeper, a body attesting to the continuity between desire and commodity” (24). The objects were produced, then sold, “thus presenting,” as Lawrence Alloway notes, “a situation in which the means of production and distribution are in one man’s hands, without the intervention of a[n art] dealer” (101). Fittingly, the store was advertised as being owned by the fictional “Ray Gun Manufacturing Company,” and Oldenburg himself was identified on the company stationery as “president” of this company (Rose, *Claes* 64). This *Store*, then, “would thus function like any other, each piece sold being immediately replaced on the shelves by another, often made on the spot (but this is not to say that the prices, even though modest, would be those of the corner grocery)”; instead, according to Oldenburg, “people came down and bought things at absurd prices. They bought a loaf of bread for ninety-nine dollars... Instead of paying a normal price for a loaf of bread, they would pay ninety-nine dollars for it” (Bois and Krauss 32-33; qtd. in Buchloh 104).

The equation of commerce with art within *The Store*, then, is incomplete, unequal, a matter of play rather than one of replacement, just as the art-objects for sale within the store

never precisely mimicked those upon which they were based. This lack of mimicry is both the location of these items' afunctionality—as Cecile Whiting has noted, these items disregard the “imperative” of the bargain stores which surrounded *The Store*, in which “all objects had to have a functional use”—and, as Christin J. Mamiya has suggested (following Barbara Rose), their own status as “art,” thus calling attention to questions regarding the purpose and value of art within sociocultural structures of capitalism (111; 46). Further, Oldenburg's interactions with the objects and with the “customers,” the interactions of those customers with the objects, and the interactions of Oldenburg and his friends with the objects within the installation space during their theatrical performances (which were referred to as “Ray Gun Theatre” during the run of *The Store*), call attention to the ways in which bodies are understood and made to carry meaning within commercial spaces and artistic spaces, whilst interacting with commodities. However, despite Oldenburg's location of art “within the experience of life” here—or, rather, within an experience of life that is inextricable from commerce and consumption—this *Store* is, of course, not an actual store, and its discrete economy is fundamentally based upon art and notions of artistic value (and here we might return to that ninety-nine-dollar bread). Further, many of the pieces from *The Store* would be re-exhibited or re-created within The Green Gallery in 1962, in what is often described as “the second version of *The Store*,” which allowed, as Höchdorfer has suggested, Oldenburg to “present his concept in all its facets, first in an experimentally oriented exhibition situation and then in an institutionalized framework” (52). Many of the new or re-created “soft” sculptural objects (such as *Floor Burger*) exhibited within this “art gallery” version of *The Store* were sewn on-site by Oldenburg and (his then wife) Pat Muschinski, once again “making their production part of the spectacle of the exhibition” (Oehler 213).

The sculptural food-objects that comprise the interior of *Pastry Case I*— a version of which was included within the original installation of *The Store*, and then within the later version of *The Store* at The Green Gallery—are simultaneously both patently artificial in nature (and immediately visibly so), and almost-Impressionistically engaged with a certain kind of realism (or, perhaps, *reality*) that is contingent upon the human body, its senses, and its phenomenological encounters within everyday life. As Oldenburg himself wrote in his 1961 statement “I Am For An Art,” “I am for an art that takes its form from the lines of life itself, that twists and extends and accumulates and spits and drips, and is heavy and coarse and blunt and sweet and stupid as life itself” (qtd. in Stitch 208). According to Nadja Rottner (speaking of the objects in *The Store* in general terms), “Oldenburg sought to incorporate into his handmade plaster reliefs of food and clothing items both the commodity object and his experience of seeing it,” thus representing objects “as he perceived them, incorporating perspectival distortions” (181-82). This representation of objects, as she points out, marks “a major departure from the Duchampian conception of the readymade,” though, within *Pastry Case I* (as well as within other sculptures within *The Store*), the “already made” case and the dishes beneath the sculptural food-objects therein place the piece squarely within discussion of the (assisted) readymade (or, at least, within discussion of mid-century artistic inheritance of such a concept) (Rottner 181).

Despite the curious sculptural modeling, overmateriality, and artificiality of the food-objects within *Pastry Case I*, these objects also speak very clearly to the ways in which they are “about” consumption and edibility; the toffee apple is missing several bites, gnawing tooth marks clearly visible in the white “flesh” of its red-brown-blue globe, and the interior of the cake with its yellow stripe of filling is only visible because one piece has apparently been eaten (and another piece cut and offset on the glass shelf, emerging slightly from the center of the cake).

And, indeed, despite the ways in which these objects may be unappealing visually (more on that in a moment), the viewer may desire to eat them; or, rather, to eat the actual food-objects which these sculptural food-objects represent. As Lippard has remarked, these “bright pastries...are even appetizing at times,” though the implied incredulity in her equivocation of “even appetizing” also reminds us that these food-objects are largely *unappetizing* (108). And, indeed, we might also wonder why this display case contains an toffee apple that is missing bites—after all, if this dessert were delicious, would the consumer have left it unfinished? Would it still even be located within the case? Perhaps, then, this apple is precisely as tempting as it looks—that is, not very? This tension between “appetizing” and “unappetizing” slots neatly into Oldenburg’s subversion of functionality in *Pastry Case I*—these are, in the end, inedible, food-objects that cannot be eaten. Further, this simultaneous bid for edibility and inedibility calls attention to the ways in which actual food-objects themselves may be both appetizing and unappetizing, depending upon mood, the moment, expectations frustrated or pleasantly surprised by taste or texture within the mouth. Food itself, then, may be functional or afunctional within various moments of the overlapping processes of hunger, desire, and/or nourishment.

Oldenburg himself has suggested that his sculptural food-objects here “are as apt to be depictions of the real thing as the real things (even real pie these days does not taste like pie)” (*Store Days* 49). This appears to be a comment upon the modes of food production that privilege factory-made, mass-produced, standardized food-objects, in contrast to the uniquely “flawed” handmade nature of food-objects in the past, and the resultant loss of a food-object’s former identity and the consumer’s enjoyment in ingesting it (the “real” pie that does not taste like *real* pie). His implication here is that these sculptural food-objects are closer to actual food-objects than we might at first realize, thus calling attention to the objecthood of food and the shifting

interplay between edibility and inedibility within personal (and cultural) encounters with the food-object. This implication also returns us to the tension between appetizing/unappetizing, as discussed above, and the ways in which the experience of food consumption may court a kind of visual temptation, and a resulting hunger, that is not based upon traditional “high” modes of aesthetics (such as clear form and clean lines), and one that may instead be based upon notions of plenty (here suggested by the collective variety and individual overmateriality of these sculptural forms). These dessert-objects, then, as Sidra Stich tells us, “all oozing with sauces and frostings,” depict “the surfeit of sucrose splendor, the sheer quantity and variety of candy-coated confections denote abundance. These are the in-between-meal and after-dinner bonuses of a prosperous society that enjoys the luxury of eating well, often, plentifully, and extravagantly” (87).

In addition to this “play” between (in)edible and (un)appetizing provided by the sculptural food-objects within *Pastry Case I*, the piece also evokes the tension between visual appeal and aesthetic displeasure (or, at least, indifference), particularly with regards to food consumption. Although the food-objects themselves, as discussed above, are lumpy in form and colored in largely unappetizing fashion, each (save for the striped cake) is presented carefully upon a porcelain dish or, in the case of each of the sundaes, within a shining silver pedestaled bowl, all of which, like the pastry case itself, were purchased, rather than made by Oldenburg. The reflectivity of these shining bowls echoes the metal edges of the case, as well as the glass itself, suggesting both this display’s inheritance from traditional “high class” methods of food display (upon silver platters, amidst twinkling crystal)—and here we might recall Oppenheim’s *My Nurse*—as well as its firm engagement with the “scene” of American food consumption within the early-to-mid-twentieth century; that is, within a diner or lunch counter at which all is

on display: the items of food, the eaters, the acts of consumption themselves (this will be addressed in more depth within the next chapter of this dissertation). And, indeed, as Lippard has remarked, Oldenburg's *Store* food "comes from small diners rather than from decorated restaurants" (110).⁴⁹ The case itself, which is ironically meant to "keep fresh" this food that will never "go bad," presents and thus contributes to desirability of the food-objects within, providing a "seductive display" that locates the piece within a diner or restaurant (or, apparently, a *Store*) rather than a home kitchen, and, according to Stitch, engages "the bonds between prosperity, mass marketing, and consumerism" (87).

But this glass-and-metal case also allows *Pastry Case I*, in addition to its engagement with the (in)edible, (un)appetizing, and the visually (un)appealing, to address the implication of touch within acts of food desire and food consumption (and within art itself). The roughly variegated textures of the sculptural food-objects, and the ways in which they have clearly been created through rather extensive handling on the part of the artist, the ways in which these food-objects would have been handled within the larger setting of *The Store*—during their creation, arrangement, display, and sale, by customers and by Oldenburg himself; all of these things suggest tactility, and, beyond that, a curious touchability. Oldenburg has explained that, "the thing that has made" him create "cakes and pastries and all those other things" within *The Store*, is, for each object, "instead of painting it, to make it touchable, to translate the eye into the fingers" (qtd. in Glaser 144). One of the particular resonances of Oldenburg's food-objects, then, are the ways in which his purported desire to "translate the eye into the fingers" is imbricated within actual experiences of food consumption. And yet, Oldenburg's sculptural invitation to touch is foreclosed upon within *Pastry Case I*, the glass case encloses, remains closed, denies

permission, and, effectively, provides a visual frame for the three-dimensional food-objects as though they existed within a two-dimensional painting.

Thus, Claes Oldenburg's *Pastry Case I*, as a version of a mini-installation that mimics the installation of *The Store* as a whole, allows us to consider some of the specifics of the objects within *The Store*, the nature and resonances of which have largely been underdiscussed and undertheorized (likely due in large part to the abundance and variety of these objects within the installation), and the ways in which, through such objects, "Oldenburg thickens life for our delectation" (J. Robinson 62). But *Pastry Case I*, in particular, allows us to consider the potential place of the readymade at mid-century. It is an art-object that exhibits material and sensory "play" similar to the works by Duchamp and Oppenheim that were discussed earlier within this chapter, and an art-object that calls into question the respective value of art- and non-art-objects. However, *Pastry Case I* more overtly straddles the line between these categories of art and non-art whilst also further complicating them. *Pastry Case I* actually originates within a setting in which this already-made case is filled with handmade "desserts" meant to resemble those for sale within a diner, and this process of artistic production—in its sculptural, and then painterly, manipulation of materials—is visible, and even spectacularized, within a purported "store," with Oldenburg himself fulfilling the overlapping roles of item creator, displayer and shelf-stocker, and "salesman." And yet, this store is, of course, not a typical store; rather, it is clearly an art installation *Store*, in which the items therein may be for sale, but not for the same prices for which they would be sold within a "regular" store. The items within this *Store* may be visually appealing, evocative, desirable to own, but they are not "useful" in the ways in which their "real" counterparts would be—the clothing bought at *The Store* cannot be worn, the desserts within *Pastry Case I* cannot be consumed. And then (a version of) this *Store* shifts into the

institutionalized space of an actual art gallery, and, in this new environment, the items remain for sale, and are still created on-site, but do they retain the “same” value as before?⁵⁰ Does this qualify as a fully artistic economy (whatever that might mean, given the remarkably disparate ways in which works of art are valued), whilst the previous incarnation of *The Store* was an artistic-commercial economy? These are questions that encourage further inquiry into the parameters of these specific economies with respect to these works (and perhaps in general), as well as consideration of the ways in which humans determine conditions of artistic and commercial value for such objects, and—particularly—consideration of the ways in which our bodies experience value within our interactions with objects (and food-objects) through modes of appeal and dis appeal, and through the forms of sensory and intellectual/emotional object-encounter that have been discussed throughout this chapter.

The sculptural works discussed within this chapter—Marcel Duchamp’s *Why Not Sneeze, Rose Sélavy?*, Méret Oppenheim’s *Object and My Nurse*, and Claes Oldenburg’s *Pastry Case I*—present food-objects that are immediately legible as being “ready” for human consumption—“sugar” refined and cubed for appeal and convenience, a teacup, saucer, and spoon laid out as if at afternoon tea, a “roast” neatly bound, decorated, and presented upon a platter, a display case filled with pre-sliced and plated “desserts”; these sculptural works posit a potential encounter with a consuming human body, rather than simply a museum-going spectatorial body. And yet, not only do their modes of display as art-objects prevent any possibility of actual consumption, the material substitutions at the heart of each of these works make them unavailable for our gustation, and unassimilable into the body itself. These sculptural food-/food-adjacent objects, then, figure a version of the food-object that is not—that *cannot* be only about desirability and edibility. Further, these works highlight the potential associations of the food-object with

abjection and animality, but they figure versions of the food-object that are also not only about disgust and disappal; despite these associations, they retain modes of significant tactile and aesthetic appeal. As such, these sculptural food-objects complicate and re-figure our embodied interactions with them, forcing us to encounter them in ways that are not about taste or nutriment and to question the loci of their functionality (or afunctionality), their value, and their processes of commodification.

These sculptural food-objects also make a collective bid for further consideration of the artistic category of the readymade as one not of dematerialization and disembodiment, but as one which emphasizes the fundamental materiality of objects (in this case, food-objects), their specific resonances, and their myriad interactions with human bodies. Although I have within this chapter provided context for the artists discussed by locating them within (or, rather, somewhat within) avant-garde artistic movements of the twentieth century (Dada, Surrealism, Pop Art), the ultimate narrative of this chapter is one askew to traditional art historical narratives that tend to emphasize distinct movements. By focusing upon food-objects as a through-line across artistic movements of the twentieth century, we are able to decenter these traditional narratives and to consider together three artists who are working on versions of the same project, however these artists might be positioned within movements or time periods. This “readymade and after” arc remains a fundamentally “modernist” one in many ways, as I do locate the readymade within modernism, but it also extends this strain of modernism into mid-century and beyond. And it is worth noting that this “readymade and after arc” might very fruitfully continue into contemporary art, with discussions of, for example, Félix González-Torres’s “candy pour” installations (such as *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* of 1991), in which museumgoers are invited to take a cellophane-wrapped hard candy from an endlessly-restocked pile in the corner

of a room, or works by Damien Hirst—such as *11 Sausages* (1993), in which a curved rope of uncooked sausages is suspended in formaldehyde solution within an acrylic case (see Figs. 20-21). Such works continue the “work” of the readymade and other forms of object-centered art of the early twentieth century, whilst contributing to discussions of food-objects and their scene of encounter with the body.

Works such as *Why Not Sneeze*, *Rose Sélavy?*, *Object*, *My Nurse*, and *Pastry Case I* ultimately implicate the complex ways in which an experience of modernist food, or at least the version of “modernist” food as figured within avant-garde movements of the modernist period (and beyond), may operate across historical periods by attending to the experience of food consumption as a complicated pleasure which may blur lines between human, animal, and object; whilst simultaneously proffering bodily interactions with food that are not about actual consumption, gustation, or alimentation, but which instead gesture to the food-object’s potential purpose beyond these things—as object, and as matter. These sculptural food-objects allow us to explore the centrality of the food-object itself within modernism and its unfolding inheritances, and to (re)consider categories of domesticity, class, sexuality, gender, the commodity, the body, and so forth, all within a highly charged scene of encounter between bodies and “food”-objects. Within the next chapter of this dissertation, I will attend much more closely to this scene of encounter by examining the modernist “scene of eating” within art, literature, and culture of the early twentieth century.

Notes

¹ I refer to “untouchability” here largely via their status and display as art-objects, which will be discussed later within this chapter.

² As a very brief sampling... Duchamp, as Jasper Johns wrote in his obituary for the artist, “has changed the condition of being here” (6). Curator Anne D’Harnoncourt has called him “a modern legend” (34). Richard Hamilton suggested in 1966 that “No living artist commands a higher regard among the younger generation than Marcel Duchamp” (qtd. in Kramer 248). And Michel Sanouillet suggested that, at the end of the twentieth century, “The world we are now [sic] entering bears an odd resemblance to the one Marcel Duchamp has been shaping for almost half a century” (4).

³ Iversen has argued quite convincingly for the fundamental differences between the readymade and the found object, in “Readymade, Found Object, Photograph.”

⁴ And, indeed, Duchamp eventually mused during an interview: “The strange thing about readymades is that I’ve never been able to come up with a definition or an explanation that fully satisfies me” (qtd. in Kuh 91).

⁵ Obalk, for example, argues in “The Unfindable Readymade” that, “If a so-called readymade consists in the putting together of several objects, even very few, this assemblage would require after all solving a problem of composition, and thus, it is no longer a readymade. At least, it is no longer a readymade which revolutionizes the concept of art. Therefore, these readymades are to be rejected from our interest.”

⁶ This is, as Mao (11, 18, et al.) and others have pointed out, a traditional narrative within modernist criticism.

⁷ For more on Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, see Gammel.

⁸ For further consideration of this contradiction, see Camfield, Lebel.

⁹ For example, in the 1930s, Duchamp was asked by the director of the Knoedler Gallery in New York to continue creating versions of his best-known works (such as *Nude Descending a Staircase*) in return for a “substantial” amount of money (Girst), Duchamp refused, later explaining that such an act “would force me to repeat myself. I will not even envisage this possibility. I value my independence too much” (qtd. in Schwarz 68).

¹⁰ As Tomkins explains, it was Duchamp who suggested the name “mobiles” to Alexander Calder as description of his work in 1931, and that Duchamp technically moved to New York in 1915, but split his time between New York and Paris throughout much of his lifetime. (294)

¹¹ In speaking of *In Advance of a Broken Arm*, as his first “official” readymade: “Obviously, I was hoping it was without sense, but deep down everything ends up by having some” (qtd. in Cabanne 54).

¹² For an excellent discussion of Duchamp’s interplay with Rose Sélavy, please see Tashjian.

¹³ Such loss of use-value, at least according to “thing theory,” potentially allows this “sugar” commodity to become more thing than object (see the works of Bill Brown).

¹⁴ Which is perhaps particularly interesting, as Francesco Dama points out, given Oppenheim’s “status as feminist icon of the 1970s” and her apparent irritation about the emphasis placed upon her gender when discussing her artistic output; her niece recalls Oppenheim stating that “There’s no such thing as male art or female art. Art is androgynous” (Dama).

¹⁵ This is mentioned within Chadwick's introduction to her book (7), and also referred to within Dama's *Hyperallergic* interview with Oppenheim's niece.

¹⁶ For a more thorough discussion of these concerns, please see the excellent anthologies *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation* (ed. Chadwick) and *Surrealism and Women* (eds. Caws, Kuenzli, and Raaberg), as well as Conley's *Automatic Woman*.

¹⁷ In terms of "surrealist misogyny"—Breton, after all, famously (and condescendingly) described women as "the most marvelous and disturbing problem in all the world" (qtd. in Lusty 24).

¹⁸ Schiaparelli was popular with the surrealists—Dalí and Leonor Fini also collaborated with her (see R. Martin). Oppenheim called this idea "winter jewelry" and was originally put into contact with Schiaparelli via Man Ray (See Baldwin 201-2). Also worth noting, this design was repeated by Oppenheim in other bracelets, as well as rings, some covered and some lined with fur, for a number of years—albeit not always via Schiaparelli.

¹⁹ As for the teacup upon the table at this encounter with Picasso and Maar, when her tea became cold, Oppenheim called out to the waiter, jestingly, "un peu plus de fourrure"/"a little more fur" (See Withers).

²⁰ See, amongst others, Rohman's *Stalking the Subject*, Seitler's *Atavistic Tendencies*, and Goldwater's classic study *Primitivism in Modern Art*.

²¹ As discussed by Cheng in *Second Skin*.

²² See also the scholarly work of Seitler, amongst others.

²³ Concerns particularly relevant within the early twentieth century, given concerns about food safety and adulteration. For example, in the United States, the Pure Food and Drink Law of 1906 was passed in response to studies which showed that food adulteration had "reached disastrous proportions," with samples of flour alone being found to contain "ground rice, plaster of Paris, grit, and sand" (Goodwin 42).

²⁴ And, it follows, the place of each within the traditional "animacy hierarchy" discussed by Mel Y. Chen in *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*.

²⁵ One might also here query whether the fur "belongs" to the cup or to the tea; that is, does the fur upon the teacup make the cup dysfunctional, or does the fur actually replace the tea? It is also worth noting here Dalí's "fur-lined bathtub" department store window homage to Oppenheim (at Bonwit Teller in New York, in 1939, meant to coincide with the "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism" exhibition at the MoMa), and the ways in which this piece is also a subversion of functionality—fur is both absorbent and water-repellent, after all—but also a good deal less threatening than Oppenheim's fur teacup, associated "purely" with sensuousness as it is, rather than involving consumption/edibility.

²⁶ The original pair of shoes had been furnished to Oppenheim by Max Ernst, whose wife-at-the-time, Marie-Berthe, had stopped wearing them. Ernst and Oppenheim had had an affair in 1934 (an event not uncommon within Surrealist circles). As the story goes, however, Marie-Berthe, upon coming upon this object in the Ratton exhibit, went into a jealous rage and destroyed the original work (Mundy 45).

²⁷ Hubert's categorization of art here as something somehow inherently defunctioned, or perhaps afunctional, is a compelling one, though unpacking this notion is sadly beyond the scope of this chapter.

²⁸ In terms of Dalí's interest in shoes, see, in particular, *Surrealist Object Functioning Symbolically* (1931/73) and his *Shoe Hat* collaboration with Schiaparelli (1937-8).

²⁹ Connotations of erotic bondage are particularly appropriate, given the association of high-heeled shoes with fetish acts in the early twentieth century (and more recently), a phenomenon discussed at length in Steele.

³⁰ I here refer to the "index of the wearer's body" in the sense of Charles Peirce's work on indices.

³¹ Oppenheim apparently began to feel better about the career-defining element of this work many years later, hence the kitschy "multiple" souvenirs of the piece in the 1970s.

³² Note: there is some uncertainty as to whether this *papier mâché* replacement was simply enacted for press photographs (Denson).

³³ It is also worth noting here that Oppenheim's *Spring Banquet* itself has been repeated and adapted within more contemporary art circles (see Denson for a discussion of this).

³⁴ This relative precision prefigures the more specific and more "Pop"-py outlines of Oldenburg's slightly later food-objects, such as *Giant BLT* of 1963.

³⁵ From Andy Warhol's screen prints and Roy Lichtenstein's comics, to Jasper Johns' painted target/plaster cast mixtures, to Robert Rauschenberg's multimedia "combines"—a swath of works, and artists, that have been argued to be "thoughtlessly bracketed together" in ways that make it difficult to "postulate a stylistic unity" (Rosenblum 53; Russell 11).

³⁶ According to Barthes, "Pop art...repeats—spectacularly" and "pop color is openly chemical" in "opposition to Nature" (*Responsibility* 99; 204); See Fredric Jameson's discussion of the depthlessness of Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes* (8-10); Clement Greenberg's suggestion that "as diverting as pop art is, I happen not to find it really fresh. Nor does it really challenge taste on more than a superficial level" (*Collected, Volume 2* 197); and Jean Baudrillard's discussion of Pop Art's homogeneity in *The Consumer Society* (115-16).

³⁷ Areas that are certainly not new given the substantial, steady, and lengthy history of the still life (which dates back to ancient times), as well as the everyday moments and settings portrayed in, for example, seventeenth-century Dutch interiors by artists such as Vermeer, late-nineteenth-century Impressionist works, as well as the readymade and Surrealist-associated objects discussed earlier within this chapter.

³⁸ An engagement which, according to many critics, was both fundamental to the popular success of the Pop Art movement whilst simultaneously rendering anodyne any potential critique of consumer culture implied within the subject matter of the movement (See Mamiya 4), evading the social responsibility it, at first glance, seems to demonstrate, thus ultimately putting a "stamp of approval" on the American status quo (See Kuspit).

³⁹ According to Atkinson, "pop artists have found objects which have previously been "'invisible' because they are so much a part of our surroundings that we don't see them" (163).

⁴⁰ Neo-Dada was, as Craft remarks, a term primarily defined in opposition to the "serious painterly concerns" of Abstract Expressionism (10). It was largely, it seems, a category in which to place artworks that engaged with objects (particularly "found" objects) and demonstrated anti-(traditional)aesthetic tendencies, as well as an artistic niche into which to shift artists such as Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg—artists who often were (and typically still are) associated with Pop Art but whose styles and techniques did not fit so comfortably beneath that generic umbrella.

⁴¹ A resurgence of interest, as Craft indicates, largely due to the influence of New York School painter Robert Motherwell and his publications on Dada (3, 12); An underdefined category of which, as Craft notes, “critics and historians have tried various strategies to make sense” (10); An unpopularity despite a few attempts of later art critics to bring it in from the periphery; see Hapgood.

⁴² This interest in (in this case, the removal of) structure is most evident in his “soft” series of 1965-6, which was made in collaboration with his then-wife, Pat Muschinski: *Soft Toilet* (1966), *Soft Washstand* (1965), *Soft Bathtub* (1966).

⁴³ This is perhaps particularly unexpected given the surfeit of brand names listed within a central section of Oldenburg’s 1961 artistic statement/manifesto (or, as Alloway has called it, Oldenburg’s “Whitman-esque series of affirmations” [101]), “I Am For An Art”: “I am for Kool art, 7UP art, Pepsi art, Sunshine art, 39 cents art, 15 cents art, Vatronol art, Dro-bomb art, Vam art, Menthol art, L&M art, Ex-lax art, Venida art, Heaven Hill art, Pamryl art, San-o-med art, Rx art, 9.99 art, Now art, New art, How art, Fire Sale art, Last Chance art, Only art, Diamond art, Tomorrow art, Franks art, Ducks art, Meat-o-rama art.”

⁴⁴ From art historian Peter Selz’s 1963 criticism of Pop Art: “The striking abundance of food offered us by this art is suggestive. Pies, ice cream sodas, Coke, hamburgers, roast beef, canned soups—often triple life size—would seem to cater to infantile personalities capable only of ingesting, not of digesting nor of interpreting” (316).

⁴⁵ As well as discourses about “American” cuisine, hunger, “low” food and “high” art, though discussion of those concerns is largely beyond the scope of this project.

⁴⁶ As Alloway explains, Oldenburg “rejects” the term “happenings” and “prefers to call his performances ‘theater of the real’ or ‘theater of objects’” (103). “Ray Gun” currency could be used for purchases according to the MoMA webpage for Oldenburg’s “*Empire*” (“*Papa*”) *Ray Gun*: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/81871>.

⁴⁷ According to McKenna, Oldenburg “marks ‘The Store’ as the point at which he began making a living with his art.”

⁴⁸ According to Oldenburg: “I don’t think I took the word sculpture very seriously, because I don’t think the issue was whether or not it as sculpture or painting. It was just construction of some kind, and I think that’s the important thing because that gave you a sense of freedom” (qtd. in Buchloh 102).

⁴⁹ Though I might add to this that some of Oldenburg’s *Store* food appears to come from a fully domestic setting, rather than a commercial one—the roast upon the stove, for example, or—in the Green Gallery incarnation of the piece—the set breakfast table.

⁵⁰ The items may remain for sale, though perhaps for even higher prices than within the previous version of *The Store*, this is unclear, as there appears to be (as of yet) no useful research on this.

CHAPTER 4

Spectacular Vulnerability: Negotiating the Modernist Scene of Eating

with Edward Hopper and Virginia Woolf

Within the previous chapters of this dissertation, I have focused much upon the food-object itself within modernist literature and art, as well as the experiences of consuming this food-object, or of being confronted with a version of this food-object that one cannot consume. In this chapter, I would like to move away slightly from some of the material specifics of the food-object itself in order to consider some of the material and bodily specifics of the experience of consuming the food-object within particular spaces—that is, public spaces. Scenes of public food consumption are not uncommon within the British and American literary and artistic modernisms of the early twentieth century. For example, the “Lestrygonians” section of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) centers around the exit of the hungry protagonist from his chosen Dublin restaurant after finding himself fully disgusted by the animalistic spectacle of the other restaurant patrons hungrily consuming their food; he instead partakes of a light vegetarian snack at a less-crowded nearby pub. In Nella Larsen’s *Passing* (1929), two mixed-race childhood acquaintances reconnect by locking eyes over their respective refreshments in an elegant Chicago hotel’s rooftop tearoom, both aware that their biraciality—if the other diners were able to realize it—would be cause for expulsion from such a place. And Edward Hopper’s painting *Nighthawks* (1942), which will be discussed in a bit more detail later in this chapter, proffers a vision of a well-lit diner late at night, with the food-consuming acts of its sundry denizens displayed neatly within the frame of an enormous plate-glass window in a surround of dark city street.

The presence of such scenes within Anglo-American literature and visual art of the period is not surprising, given the tremendous cultural shifts of the period with regard to food consumption and the scene of eating. These shifts will be discussed in more detail below, but it is first worth considering some of the significances of the act of food consumption within such public spaces. During acts of food consumption that take place within public spaces, the food-consuming body remains vulnerable to the literal and material elements of the potentially agentic food-object itself in ways previously discussed within this project, as well as to several different levels of the sociocultural implications of these acts of food consumption (and the effects of those sociocultural implications upon the food consumer's psychological and embodied experience of eating).¹ The sociocultural implications of food consumption as vulnerable act have been variously theorized in ways that focus upon the act of food consumption as a necessary (if potentially threatening) act of acceptance and incorporation—as in, when Deborah Lupton (following Bakhtin) comments that, “By taking food into the body, we take in the world”—as well as in ways that focus upon the bodily site of food consumption itself, as when Mary Douglas speaks of the mutability of bodily margins as they relate to features such as the mouth: “all margins are dangerous. If they are pulled this way or that the shape of fundamental experience is altered,” which is why “We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolize its specially vulnerable points” (281; 121).

The act of food consumption itself, then, may be framed as a vulnerable act through which one “takes in” a potentially threatening object from the outside world via a liminal “gateway” into the body, and it therefore stands to reason that this act of food consumption might constitute a doubly vulnerable act when it takes in the presence of others.² After all, such an act requires others to witness the vulnerability of the consuming body and to be reminded of

the vulnerability of their own bodies within an act of food consumption, but it also layers forms of social vulnerability atop this act of consumption, both because food consumption is an embodied physical act that is strongly influenced within its particularities (such as one's sense of the "appropriate" way to convey food to the mouth, for example) by the food consumer's upbringing and cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, and because, as Judith Butler has pointed out, "The body is constitutively social and interdependent" and such interdependence makes one vulnerable in other ways that gesture well beyond food within a public scene of food consumption (31). For example, Mackenzie, Rogers, and Dodds have together noted the ways in which this "embodied vulnerability to others" may make "human life precarious," given that "vulnerability and dependency are...intertwined" (4). And yet, it is perhaps useful to recall that such forms of vulnerability are also forms of possibility, and any public scene of food consumption may also hold the potential for bodily and social pleasures and opportunities.

Ultimately, the increased urbanization and cultural shifts in the United States and Britain during the early twentieth century led to aesthetic, material, and socio-cultural shifts in scenes of food consumption, and made these public scenes of food consumption far more common than they had been previously, thereby adding additional dimensions to the act of eating via the foregrounded visibility of the food-object and the food-consumer within this new environment—both in terms of public spectacle and private consumptive encounter with food-object. As I have suggested throughout this dissertation, any act of food consumption is remarkably complex in nature, negotiating as it must between the material aspects of both the food-object and the body themselves, the boundary-crossing vulnerabilities of the act of taking a food-object from the outside world into the body itself via the liminal boundary of the mouth, the cultural practices of eating and its associated acts (such as methods of food conveyance), and so forth. Any scene of

public food consumption, then—especially when this scene of public food consumption is spectacularized within a highly populated urban environment that privileges the visual, inevitably becomes even more complex than any private act of food consumption.

Although these early twentieth-century scenes of eating are scenes of possibility, encompassing the potential pleasures of anonymity, spectacle, extensive sensory stimulation, temporary feelings of communality, and social performance and/or interaction across boundaries of class, race, and gender, it is clear from modernist artistic and literary figurations of such scenes of eating that such scenes are also inseparable from notions of vulnerability; whether vulnerability of the actual physical body in terms of issues such as urban safety and food safety; vulnerability of the “self” and one’s form of public embodiment and social interaction to the gaze and approval/disapproval of the other—particularly whilst one is engaged in a such a bodily vulnerable act as food consumption, vulnerability to feelings of loneliness and social disconnection in the midst of others, vulnerability to overstimulation of the senses within a bright, crowded, noisy environment, and even the vulnerability of one’s appetite for food to the sights and sounds of such dining establishments (we might here recall Leopold Bloom’s disgust upon witnessing the food consumption practices of others). This chapter will consider the ways in which this complexity of public food consumption, with its attendant pleasures and especial vulnerabilities, is figured within three works of artistic modernism by Edward Hopper—*The Automat* (1927), *Chop Suey* (1929), and *Nighthawks* (1942)—and three works of literary modernism by Virginia Woolf—*To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), and *The Waves* (1931), with special focus upon the ways in which the act of consumption is cast within these works (and, in some cases, within the critical responses to these works) as an event simultaneously public and solitary, and as (potentially) communal spectacle and private moment.

In the end, through a brief discussion of Hopper's visual scenes of eating and a more thorough close reading of Woolf's literary ones, I will argue that these works call attention to the complexity of any scene of eating by making this complexity—particularly with regard to the vulnerability of the food consumer within this scene—quite literally *visible*, whilst also exploring the ways in which new spaces for public food consumption in the early twentieth century add to this complexity, gathering in cultural concerns and, in the end, acting as sites of encounter between self, other, and urban environment.

Edward Hopper and the Scene of Eating

Before discussing Edward Hopper's painterly scenes of public food consumption in terms of their engagement with urban-social environments of the early twentieth century, it is worth briefly attending to several Anglo-American sociocultural shifts that took place within the early decades of the twentieth century—shifts that made such scenes of food consumption possible, and which encompass issues of urbanization, class, and gender. Technological advances of the period—such as the machine-slicing of bread and more widespread practices of refrigeration—contributed to shifts in the physical scene of eating by popularizing more casual dining establishments such as lunch counters whilst allowing for shifts in meals themselves—such as by popularizing the sandwich—ultimately foregrounding convenience—both temporal and geographic—as one of the main features of a meal, and thus, of the act of food consumption itself.³ These shifts both responded to, and encouraged, cultural shifts regarding food consumption and mealtimes. Erika Dian Rappaport has discussed the ways in which, during the mid-to-late 1800s, “reorganization of the rhythms of daily life among the middle and upper

classes,” largely influenced by longer workdays and commutes, and the growth of urban public consumer activities such as shopping, led to shifts in the traditional timing and duration of meals, and such shifts ultimately contributed, as Diane McGee has noted, to a decline of the notion of the “family meal” in the early twentieth century, as eating alone became more common and increased urbanization led to greater numbers of people unbound by marital and nearby familial connections, people who needed to eat at widely varying hours in accordance with the specifics of their individual workdays (80; 25).

Given such shifts, the increase in dining establishments able to cater to “less patterned” meals within this period was inevitable, particularly new inexpensive establishments that could also appeal financially to the cities’ influx of middle- and lower-class workers” (Finkelstein xiv). The rise of these teashops, automats, snack bars, lunch counters, and cafeterias met the alimentary and gustatory needs of those within cities whilst also providing, as George Chauncey points out, less wealthy patrons—particularly those within marginalized groups—with specific urban meeting places at desirably odd hours.⁴ But, ultimately, by their public nature and across-class affordability and convenience, these informal early twentieth-century dining establishments provided scenes of eating which fundamentally incorporated possibilities of sociality and, more than this, forms of sociality that created opportunities for mingling across boundaries of class. After all, at many of these tremendously popular venues, the poor might find themselves seated next to the wealthy, and the average person might find him/herself close witness to a celebrity’s everyday scene of eating, and who knew where such encounters might lead?⁵ In this way, such urban dining establishments allowed the scene of eating to become one of potential social opportunity, as well as one of opportunity for other forms of pleasure and excitement in line with what Iris Marion Young (drawing from Barthes) has described as the eroticism of the city itself,

suggesting that “City life...instantiates difference as the erotic, in the wide sense of an attraction to the other, the pleasure and excitement of being drawn out of one’s secure routine to encounter the novel, strange and surprising” (266).

One of the pleasures and excitements of the city is that of visibility, both in terms of, as Laura Mulvey has discussed, the pleasure one takes in looking—at ‘sights,’ at objects, at other people—and the pleasure one takes in being looked upon by others. (16-17) Such visibility is particularly foregrounded in urban dining establishments of the period, especially those of a casual nature and/or those popular enough to attract a wide range of people from varying backgrounds. The sociality of such places allowed them to become “social arenas” which “put the individual on display; people could linger and be entertained by observing others as well as being a source of amusement themselves” (Finkelstein xiii). But in addition to creating social environments in which one might enact a particular performance of self via food consumption and interaction with others, and one might also watch others do the same, the public dining establishments of the early twentieth century (particularly after the sleek Art Deco style began to come into fashion) often foregrounded visibility—and spectacle—through their architecture and décor: shining reflective surfaces of metal and glass, an abundance of incandescent, and later, fluorescent, lights, and large plate-glass windows which framed the lights and sights of the city outside for the patrons of these dining establishments whilst making the scenes of eating taking place inside fully visible to those on the street.⁶ I might also point out, adding to Mulvey’s reminder of the pleasures of looking and of being looking upon, that the reflective expanse of shining windows and other surfaces within these dining establishments also encouraged a third form of pleasure in visibility—that of enjoying the image of one’s own self reflected back to one within such specular surfaces. After all, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty has discussed, the

experiences of one's own body are necessarily based upon perceptions that do not, and cannot—at least, not without assistance from an observational tool of some sort—privilege the visual; “I observe external objects with my body, I handle them, examine them, walk round them, but my body itself is a thing which I do not observe” (104). The experience of glimpsing one's self engaged in the act of consuming food, then, is an act of witnessing, or perhaps constituting (if one wishes to draw a bit from Lacan's “Mirror Stage”), one's self as a food-consuming subject, and such witnessing/constitution of the self may in such an urban/public dining establishment be layered atop the witnessing/constitution of the self as socio-public subject, or urban subject, all through one's potential embodied experience and/or performance of these subjectivities within this very public sphere of the restaurant. Such forms of visibility-based pleasure, experience, and potential subjectivity are integral to the early twentieth century urban scene of eating in both Britain and the United States, both in terms of the individual's lived experience of pleasure and anxiety within these public moments of food consumption, and in terms of, as Scott McCracken has discussed in terms of turn-of-the-century British teashops, the rise of these new “urban subjectivities” that allowed a subject to locate him/herself—visually or otherwise—between their daily experiences and their place within the culture and economy of the city, perhaps particularly with regards to gender (95-104).

And, indeed, in addition to allowing for boundary crossing within a social space in terms of class, these urban dining establishments allowed for boundary crossing in terms of traditional gender roles. As a staff writer explained in *The New York Times* in 1905, “The economic necessity which has forced women out of the home and into the world of business has completely annihilated the old idea that a woman should eat only in the privacy of her own household or in the homes of her friends,” thereby producing an environment in which working

women within the city were more likely to eat—and to have social engagements—at public dining establishments than they were to do so at home (7). Such social progress for women did not spread to smaller cities and more rural areas until successive decades, and the same *New York Times* story puts forth an anecdote in which “a business man” “from up the State” found dining in a New York restaurant with a “sophisticated” city-dwelling friend cannot help but look sadly around the dining establishment at all of the women eating in public, assuming that they are prostitutes since they are “eating away from their homes” (7). These new dining establishments thus reflected—and also expanded—opportunities for women in ways linked to employment and economic independence, as well as those linked to social independence, gendered societal status, and personal freedoms and subjectivity. That said, many of the public lunchrooms, cafeterias, and restaurants coming into business closer to the turn of the century needed to offer separate areas for women (often marked with signs reading “Tables for Ladies”) in order to attract them to these establishments, given the ways in which eating in public could mean risking harassment or, at the very least, undesirably “rubbing shoulders with staring male strangers” (Lesy and Stoffer 110). In this manner, these dining spaces simultaneously allowed for pleasure and anxiety, freedom and restriction, opportunity and risk; all considerations that will be much in evidence throughout the following discussion of Edward Hopper’s *Automat*, *Chop Suey*, and *Nighthawks*.

Although his name might not be the first to come to mind when one thinks of specifically “modernist” art (that honor would likely go to a more overtly experimental artist, such as Picasso), the works of painter Edward Hopper are often included under the umbrella of a version of modernism, albeit the far less determinate version of such a category that is offered within the realm of the visual arts.⁷ However, perhaps partially due to its investment in portraying scenes of

“everyday” life, Hopper’s oeuvre has proven somewhat difficult to categorize in more specific art historical terms, and, as Sheena Wagstaff has pointed out, “his work never quite fitted into any one of the movements, schools, or artistic attitudes to which it has been attributed at various stages,” and this work has therefore been critically associated with—to varying degrees of success—a diverse grouping of movements including the Ash Can School of urban realism, American Scene painting and Regionalism, Surrealism, and Symbolism, amongst others, and strongly tied to film noir and cinema, as well as twentieth-century artistic movements centered around photography (13).⁸ He has, therefore, most often been cast simply as a producer of “American art,” a broad genre of visual art that is typically tied to some version of realism and involved in some level of engagement with landscape (whether this landscape be urban or “natural”) and/or the human figure. And yet, despite his self-categorization as a realist artist, the connection of Hopper’s work to realism is a complex one, and critics such as Winfried Fluck have noted the ways in which his work combines realism with forms of abstraction, leading to painted scenes which may appear in some way documentary, but which are, upon closer inspection, remarkably nonspecific and, as Wallace Jackson remarks, “emphatically underdetailed”; these scenes present everyday events, composite forms of locations, and human figures “reduced to a set of prototypical human characteristics” with “masklike, free of nuance” faces (139; Matt 97; Wells 13).⁹

Hopper’s potentially ‘realistic’ form of subject matter, whether within his paintings set in cities or those set in more rural areas, typically focuses upon buildings and the people who may interact with—or, particularly, within—these buildings. Hopper’s paintings of the city notably eschew wide-angle panoramic views of tall buildings and urban crowds in favor of the intimacies of partial architectural views and figures engaged in their daily activities—workers in a small

office (*Office at Night* [1940]), an apparent shopkeeper sitting upon the curb smoking a cigar (*Sunday* [1926]), a partially-dressed woman—as though glimpsed from the windows of an elevated train—in her second-story apartment (*Night Windows* [1928]).¹⁰ These urban or urban-social landscapes have, therefore, been read as expressing concern about the features of the American city in the early twentieth century, and/or nostalgia for a time before such cities existed, though more subtle critics have instead called attention to the more neutral implications of Hopper's framing of the city—that is, as Hopper's recognition of the vast visual and experiential opportunities provided by an urban environment.¹¹ What I would refer to as Hopper's "scene of eating" paintings are a subset of his urban-social landscapes; diners consuming (or, perhaps, not consuming) food/drink within a variety of interior scenes, many of which center around the types of dining establishments new to the city within the early decades of the twentieth century, with the viewer located either inside or outside this establishment, his/her gaze upon the diners from the potential "position of the voyeur" (Wollen 70).¹² This viewpoint is emphasized by compositional elements that act as framing devices—such as windows—and an abundance of electric (and sometimes a combination of electric and natural) light, thus literally highlighting the spectacular nature of the scene of eating.

Hopper's paintings as a whole, and particularly these "scene of eating" paintings, are somewhat notorious for what Lipinski has, in speaking specifically of *Nighthawks*, called "narrative gap," and what Doss has implied is a form of narrative illegibility, but which I would instead term a narrative reticence, in which the viewer of the painting is cast as voyeur and invited to enjoy the visual spectacle of this scene of eating, but is provided with minimal, ambiguous, and sometimes even contradictory, information within the scene (169; 7). Such narrative reticence appears to encourage certain kinds of narrativization, both within critical

readings of the paintings (which will be discussed below) and within literary projects such as *Edward Hopper and the American Imagination* (Lyons), a collection of poetry and short prose works by literary figures such as Paul Auster juxtaposed against prints of the Hopper paintings which inspired them. Given the ways in which Hopper's narrative reticence is strongly tied to the sense of figural anonymity within his paintings, it is unsurprising that—despite the wide variance within critical readings of Hopper's scene of eating paintings in particular, which will be discussed below—most critical readings of Hopper's urban works emphasize notions of loneliness and/or interpersonal and locational alienation, particularly as those notions relate to the place of the human figure(s) within this (or any) urban environment; the most common consensus amongst critics appears to be that these paintings tell “a story of an isolated individual dealing with the problems of advanced industrialization” (Hobbs 10). Such readings, however, less commonly take into account the potential pleasures and benefits of isolation, or, at least, of anonymity, within a crowded urban environment (and here we might think again of the characters within Larsen's *Passing*, for example, who are able to move freely within urban spaces in which their racial background is not noticed). Critical commentary regarding Hopper's urban scene of eating paintings, more specifically, seems particularly focused upon the negative aspects of urban anonymity, a focus which I would suggest is likely due to some form of critical recognition of the bodily vulnerability inherent in the act of actual food consumption, as well as of the more general vulnerability inherent in the act of actual *public* food consumption, particularly within an urban scene of eating which frames the food consumer as spectacle, whether through the sheer number of potential eyes upon that food consumer at any given time, or by highlighting the scene of food consumption via brightly-lit, reflective dining spaces.

Judith A. Barter has argued that there “is never anything to eat on Hopper’s tables,” linking this proposed dearth of food-objects themselves to what she qualifies as a disinterest in food on Hopper’s part, given that, within the Hopper household, responsibility for meals fell to Jo Hopper, who as Avis Berman explains, disliked cooking and composed meals of canned goods when the couple were not dining out in restaurants (“Food” 34; 71). One might argue that Barter’s point is not precisely true—in *Nighthawks*, at the very least, a plate of unidentifiable food sits just to the left of the man with his back to the viewer, and the contents of the dishes on the table of the couple in the background of *Chop Suey* are uncertain. Hopper may not paint detailed plates of food before his food consumers, but, one might point out, he also does not paint detailed faces. That said, the tables within his scene of eating paintings do remain relatively empty; he is, as Barter indicates, most interested in “the spaces where eating and drinking [take] place,” and the “activity of eating” itself, “usually a social situation” in order to “poignantly situate people together yet ultimately alone” (“Food” 34). Hopper’s scenes of eating thereby foreground the shifts in the scene of eating within in the early twentieth century without focusing on what food is being consumed, but instead focusing upon where and in what state it is being consumed—which, of course, are fundamental elements within any act of food consumption. These acts of consumption are particularly public in nature, taking place as they do within the sorts of casual urban dining establishments popular within the period, and they emphasize concepts of visibility and spectacle, as well as anonymity as it might intersect with isolation and opportunity, potential togetherness and individuality, ultimately suggesting the ways in which a public setting further complicates the already tremendously complex experience of food consumption by calling attention to the vulnerability of the consuming body itself as well as its inevitable encounter with the social expectations, tensions, and opportunities of the public sphere

as this body negotiates between self and other and individual and public—or perhaps even potentially communal—act of food consumption.

The sole figure that is compositionally double-framed within the dark window of Hopper's *Automat* (1927) is most frequently described as “pensive,” a woman alone with her cup of coffee, one glove removed so that she might enjoy the feeling of the smooth, warm cup against her skin (thus speaking to the tactile pleasures of food/drink consumption), her attention directed downward or, perhaps, inward (Doss 6, Oehler 199, Updike 188, Strand 50, Wells 37). She is cast against a backdrop of a particularly black night outside the large plate-glass window, and her figure is, curiously, not reflected back to the viewer within this “strangely opaque” window, though the reflections of the rows of bright lamps adorning the ceiling of the restaurant hover above her in the “impenetrably dark” window area, converging in a vanishing point just above her body, suggesting the substantial size of the room in which she sits, and ‘playing with’ the forms of reflective visuality and spectacle common to scenes of eating in early twentieth-century casual dining establishments (Wells 41; Junker 32). The atmosphere of this scene of eating is one of space and solitude, despite its urban setting, the all-hours popularity of this particular type of dining establishment during this time period, and the fact that the viewer simply cannot see how crowded the rest of the room might be—after all, the woman’s figure is not reflected in the glass, so those of others within this dining space might also remain unreflected, and it is clear that at least one other person is here “present,” given that the perspective of the painting casts the viewer within this room, gaze directed toward the window, toward the woman. Sarah Kelly Oehler has noted the “sense of ambiguity” of *Automat*, and it is certainly this ambiguity that leads to widely varying readings of the painting—with critics

describing it in terms ranging from “contemplative” to “harrowing” (199; Troyen, “Sacredness” 118; Bendiner 159).

Critics have tended to heavily narrativize this painting. As Carol Troyen has indicated, this figure at the center of *Automat* in many ways “epitomizes” the “new woman” figure of the 1920s, given her sense of style (shorter skirt, possibly-bobbed hair, wide-brimmed cloche), as well as her independent movement within the urban setting as she takes her coffee (or perhaps a meal previously finished) in the trendy—but “safe and proper” for a woman dining alone—automat (“Edward” 6; “Sacredness” 118). And yet, Troyen herself would concurrently like to read this figure as one whose outfit seems “a little tired and out of date,” one who “seems a bit out of place, her social position precarious,” as is (Troyen claims) suggested by Hopper’s placement of this figure “at the table nearest the door,” as well as the way in which the other chair at the table is “drawn in tightly” and the manner in which her hat is “pulled down unusually low on her forehead” (“Sacredness” 118; “Edward” 49; Sacredness 118). Troyen concludes that the figure’s “optimistic attire speaks of middle-class hopes for improvement; that she sits alone in a normally boisterous restaurant suggests those hopes have been undercut by unspecified circumstances” (“Sacredness” 118). Troyen’s point about the figure relating to the early twentieth-century “new woman” figure is a useful one, though her reading of the figure’s placement within the restaurant as indicative of social precarity is both somewhat confusing and demonstrates both the sorts of judgments to which one might be vulnerable when dining within a public restaurant and the critical tendency to strongly (over)narrativize Hopper’s paintings. Such (over)narrativization is well evident in other readings of the piece, as well, which range from reading the figure of the woman as “an illusion” who exists “in limbo”; a figure who is “pinned” behind the tabletop, “overwhelmed,” and “depicted as a victim”; and a “melancholic” figure

adrift on a dark background that suggests “the vertiginous lure of nothingness—the slide into malignant Melancholia and the depths of depression,” with “the threat of suicide loom[ing] large” (Strand 50; Beck qtd. in Iversen, “Hopper’s Melancholic” 57; Iversen, “Hopper’s Melancholic” 57). These readings of the work, though somewhat extreme and rather poorly supported by the visual information present within the painting itself, nevertheless speak strongly to the critical need to read this scene of eating as one of vulnerability.

Further, many of the critical readings of *Automat* strongly (over)sexualize the female figure at the center of the painting, with these readings often even tending toward the uncomfortably lascivious. Comment is repeatedly made upon the figure’s “shapely legs” (Troyen 6, Wells 37), which Robert Hobbs erroneously argues, “form the brightest spot on the canvas” and therefore mark an attempt by Hopper to force the viewer to focus upon these legs, thus “turning [the woman] into an object of desire” (72-73).¹³ The figure’s clothing is noted in sexualized terms, an outfit that is “green on the outside and red within,” which, for Wells, connotes “passion cloaked by an innocent exterior,” particularly given what he terms “the enticing cut” of the figure’s “neckline” and the “rise of her skirt beneath the table,” items of clothing which Patricia Junker has remarked leave “so much soft, white, youthful flesh...exposed” (37; 32). Walter Wells continues with his discussion of this figure by curiously rhapsodizing, “Not just pensive, this young woman is alluring, quite enough to make a man look twice” (37). Junker goes so far as to suggest that this figure is consciously courting the gaze of others, arguing that “she has positioned herself conspicuously in the front window” of the restaurant, an argument that might be more convincing if the figure had taken the seat at her table that actually faced the window, where she might be glimpsed by large numbers of passers-by on the street (32). And much is made of the possible erotic connection between the figure of the

woman and the bowl of fruit on the windowsill behind her, with Berman suggesting that the “bowl of luscious fruit rhymes seductively with the shape of the young woman’s head,” with Junker remarking that Hopper might be implying that the woman is actually a prostitute “by associating her with the sumptuous fruit bowl behind her,” with Hobbs asserting that “the girl becomes an object in this painting, as comparable to the fruit in the glass compote behind her,” and with Wells musing that this bowl of “apparently fresh” fruit is out of place in such an establishment during colder months (which is perhaps not the case) and must therefore both intentionally reference “the larger hemispheres of the female body” and definitively indicate that the woman’s “pensiveness” is of “a sexual cast,” somehow concluding that the figure’s thoughts take the form of a “dilemma” that is “certainly more about lust than shopping, or work” (71; 32; 72; 37).¹⁴ Whilst these critics here raise compelling points regarding the vulnerability of a women eating (and, perhaps, particularly eating *alone*) in public to a sexually predatory, assumptive, and/or judgmental gaze, they mostly do so by themselves here (apparently unconsciously) actually providing that gaze, thereby reconfirming the ways in which Hopper’s painting places its viewer in the position of voyeur and its central figure as someone in the midst of the vulnerable act of food/drink consumption.

In terms of the environment in which this central figure finds herself, although the décor of this scene of food (or, rather, drink) consumption is presented with faithful accuracy to that of a real automat in the early twentieth century—as Junker has noted, the large windows, bright lights, fruit in the window, “marble-topped” tables, and “polished walnut chairs” were all characteristic of various iterations of the famous Horn and Hardart automat chain—if Hopper had not titled the painting with regard to this specific type of dining establishment, the location of this scene of eating would be unclear (25). After all, Hopper here chooses not to depict the

features that make an automat both immediately recognizable and unique; there are no gleaming rows of glass-windowed metal compartments containing assorted hot dishes, sandwiches, desserts, no enormous automatically-dispensing coffee urns, no shining “glass-paneled booths” containing those who were often the only visible workers in the establishment—the “nickel throwers,” who would convert patrons’ other coins and bills into the nickels required by the food-containing machine slots (Diehl and Hardart 32). Instead, within *Automat*, whilst referencing the location of this scene of eating via its title, Hopper directs our visual attention *away* from the walls of shining machinery, the wide variety of comestibles, and any bustle of such a “busy, noisy, hospitable” place, to instead gaze upon what Erika Doss has described as this “unexceptional nighttime scene of an undistinguished young woman” quietly enjoying her coffee, with the “repeating globes of light reflected” above her acting as the only visual suggestion of that which makes this automat an automat—that is, the rows and rows of mechanized food compartments (Troyen 49; Doss 6; Barter “Food” 34).

Junker has argued that Hopper simply did not need to paint the immediately recognizable features of the automat, and that, “In giving the title *Automat* to his otherwise ambiguous restaurant picture, Hopper understood the emotional response it would elicit among viewers for whom the Automat was not just an eatery but the embodiment of what was good and evil in their modern urban world” (27). And, indeed, it is worth considering the ways in which the pleasures and anxieties of the automat as “modern urban phenomenon” might inform this particular Hopperian scene of eating, as well as the scene of eating in the twentieth century more generally (Berman 68). The automat was, after all, unique in the relationship it created between food, food preparer and/or server, and food consumer, disrupting the traditional interpersonal restaurant triad by which food moved throughout a dining space (preparer, server, consumer) by

eliminating the server and placing consumer-controlled mechanized glass windows between the food consumer and the food preparers, who loaded food items into these windows from a kitchen behind the wall of compartments. The food consumer was thus firmly separated—via modern mechanization and modern materials such as metal and glass—from the goings-on in the kitchen, and from any consideration of those who might prepare or serve their food, whilst being spared any social requirement of interacting, even minimally, with these other people (who may, after all, have occupied lower socioeconomic strata than the food consumers themselves). This separation, as well as the association of metal and glass surfaces, as well as mechanized industrial practices, with sanitariness and cleanliness, no doubt served to minimize the anxieties of food consumers regarding food safety and purity, and allowed them a further measure of control over the food-object itself—that is, by enclosing and separating the complex material “messiness” of a food-object from its consumer until the very moment that consumer decided to confront such messiness.¹⁵ The automat foregrounded—and embraced—notions of modernity, streamlining food preparation and service via machine intervention, providing a form of abundance that was carefully contained and divided up into standardized units, allowing for tremendous choice at any time of the day or night (one might easily, for example, purchase three desserts instead of a more traditional meal arrangement), and providing an enjoyable novelty interaction with a machine (Troyen has noted the apparent ‘magic’ by which one’s desired food item “instantly appeared from behind a glass door with the deposit of a nickel” [118]). The automat’s range of inexpensive food items and welcoming atmosphere proved a great equalizer in terms of class—and one might here point out the ways in which those “nickel throwers” converted everyone’s money into nickels, thus likely providing a further sense of equalization—and became particularly known for acting as “safe spaces” for women and gay men within the

city. Such pleasures captured the public imagination, inspiring amateur poems published in popular magazines—such as the one beginning “Oh, how I love the Automat,/ The place where all the food/ is at!,” which was published in *Life* magazine in 1928, inspiring celebrities to be photographed there, and encouraging thousands of urban diners to converge daily on each automat (Koehnline 6).¹⁶

And yet, for some, the automat “represented the dark side of the new machine age,” with its impersonality and efficient processing of the needs of thousands of human beings (Junker 25). And, indeed, although social anonymity could be counted amongst the pleasures of the city, it was also, inevitably, one of the anxieties of urban living, and, as Junker reminds us, “the popular mythology of the Automat often addressed its metaphorically dark aspects, making these restaurants synonymous with the pathos of the modern age, a symbol of the loneliness and despair” of those attempting to succeed within the city (26). For example, an amateur poem entitled “Lonesome,” published in *The New York Times* in 1926, described in tragic terms the isolation of a young woman in the city where “millions throng the mart/ Living like a thing apart” as this woman dares “not to speak to one,” always instead “Dining in an automat” (Johnson 22). The previous year, *The New York Times* had published another amateur poem, “At the Automat,” in which the narrator of the poem comments upon the “bewildering crowds” within the automat, asking of these “crowding forms” of people the (very modernist) rhetorical question, “What are they, really, but automata?” who “come here to be wound up for the day...then machine-like...go through their motions” (Van Cleve 24). Additionally, the notion of being fed via some form of machine was a modern notion that sat uneasily with many—as is evident from the presence of the “eating machine” scene in Charlie Chaplin’s film *Modern Times* a few years later, in 1936. “At its worst,” Junker continues, the automat was by some

considered to be “an affront to the very men and women it was dedicated to serve: these emporiums that catered [partially] to the working classes were feared as labor’s worst nightmare, an enterprise run largely by machines” (26). It certainly would have been possible to paint the central figure of *Automat* against a busy backdrop of mechanized food-compartments in this machine-driven enterprise, with other patrons milling about her—though it is difficult to imagine Hopper managing to do so whilst still retaining his sense of spare visuality—and such an image would undeniably have connoted bodily vulnerability and urban alienation as well as the excitements and anxieties of the city and the technologically-advanced automat, as Junker noted above, Hopper has here managed to (potentially) gesture toward those elements via the title of the painting. Hopper’s interest, it seems, lies elsewhere; that is, in isolating the scene of eating/drinking itself, an act that, as we have seen, invites a narrativizing and/or sexualizing gaze.

In figuring another new and popular type of urban dining establishment within the early twentieth century, Hopper’s *Chop Suey* (1929) depicts an angled interior corner of a Chinese restaurant with an abundance of windows providing the viewer (and the diners within the restaurant) with fragmented glimpses of the city outside, a partial view of the light-up sign of the restaurant itself, and an abundance of midday sunlight which, as Wells has remarked, combines “the restaurant’s artificial illumination with natural light” (41). Of the two visible tables, the table in the background features a man who appears to be smoking a cigarette after his meal and the profile of a woman in a red hat who leans just into the painting from outside the frame, and the table in the foreground features two women dining together, the edges of their bobbed hair peeking out from beneath their cloche hats—potential “new woman” figures, as in *Automat*. “Chop suey” restaurants, named for the Americanized dish supposedly created by a Chinese chef

in New York in the 1890s, had become enormously popular in New York in the early years of the century acting both as “lively late-night supperclubs” involving music and dancing (at least, in pre-Prohibition times) that “appealed to a widely diverse clientele,” and, by the 1920s, a “staple” casual lunchtime destination, particularly for women who worked within the city (Troyen 35; 37).¹⁷ The scene of food consumption in Hopper’s *Chop Suey* is a far more crowded one than that of *Automat*, and yet, critical readings of the painting tend not to emphasize forms of communality, instead suggesting theories that seem to emphasize disconnection, or, at least, the complex interplay between togetherness and aloneness that comes with any act of eating in public.

Though the establishment figured in *Chop Suey* is, no doubt, a busy restaurant, which one might assume given the popularity of such dining locales in the 1920s and the occupation of both visible tables within the scene, this urban scene of eating nevertheless retains some of Hopper’s trademark sparseness. John Updike has remarked that the painting “blends an overlapping crowdedness with the static calm of the sunlit tabletop and the two...young women, who both seem to be listening,” whilst Troyen has argued that much of the “pictorial energy” of the painting—in terms of bright color, pattern, and eye-catching geometric shapes—is located outside of the restaurant itself (and is visible only through the windows), lending the interior of the restaurant an ‘austerity’ in which “the tables contain nothing but a saucer and a teapot, and the room seems empty of lively chatter,” creating a “busy social space” that also reads as a “subdued, reflective environment” (188; 49). I would take issue both with Updike’s certainty in categorizing the women in the foreground as young and as “both listening,” given that one of the women faces fully away from the viewer, as well as with Troyen’s suggestion that the room is a particularly quiet one—after all, the viewer cannot see the goings-on in the rest of the dining

room, and although the red-lipsticked mouth of the woman in the green sweater is clearly not captured in the act of speaking, her attention does appear to be focused upon the face of her dining companion (which we cannot see), and the couple at the table in the background are clearly engaged in some form of communication, given the eager attentiveness with which the woman in the red hat leans into the frame of the painting, her eyes upon the downturned face of the man. I would suggest both Updike's and Troyen's readings here are emblematic of the critical tendency to read the human subjects of Hopper's paintings as fundamentally alienated from, and uncommunicative with, one another, though in a manner that appears to have less to do with potentially idle narrativization (as discussed above in the context of *Automat*) and more to do with some form of recognition of the complexity of interpersonal relations, particularly when those relations take place in conjunction with already-complex scenes of food consumption. Some critics have remarked upon the apparent similarities of the two women in the foreground; Wells has suggested that the woman in the green sweater who faces the viewer "has brought a friend who, from behind, seems very much like her," and Margaret Iversen has read the figure with her back to the viewer as the other woman's doppelgänger, a reading which, I would suggest, might productively be considered to be another way of reading Hopper's figures as in some way solitary, even when they are not actually pictured alone, as well as another way of taking into account the presence of the types of patron-doubling reflective surfaces common to the scene of urban eating in the early twentieth century (41; "In the Blind" 419).

When considering surfaces and visibility within the painting, is also worth noting, as Updike and Troyen have above, the ways in which the smooth, bright surfaces of the tables at which these diners sit are largely empty; as with Hopper's other paintings involving scenes of eating, the food itself has been curiously decentralized. It is difficult to make out precisely what

sort of dishes remain on the table in the background, but the table of the two women in the foreground bears at least one blue bowl (another might possibly be hidden by the hands and arm of the figure with her back to the viewer) and a small teapot. It is therefore unclear as to whether the viewer is watching these women as they are just beginning, or have just finished with, their shared meal (or, possibly, whether they are simply sharing a pot of tea). As Troyen remarks regarding the visibility of these women, within *Chop Suey*, Hopper “represents women dining without male escorts as a reflection of modern middle-class life,” and although this painting was created two decades after city-dwellers supposedly began to accept the notion that the act of women dining in public did not automatically mean that these women were prostitutes (see 1905 *New York Times* story, discussed above), a *Pittsburgh Press* reviewer for a 1937 Hopper solo show nevertheless referred to the women in this painting as “pick me up girls, waiting for companions of the evening” (“Edward” 49; qtd. in Troyen, “Hopper’s” 185). Even recent critics, such as Berman, have somewhat inexplicably read the painting as suggesting an “equation of a comely woman with food and eating, with the promise of a good meal standing in for sexual desirability or availability” (68). Whilst the erotic elements of food consumption are certainly worthy of general discussion (if largely beyond the scope of this chapter), Berman’s reading seems relatively unsupported here, though, as with the (over)sexualized readings of *Automat* discussed above, it certainly speaks to the moments of vulnerability to the gaze of the other that are inevitably present within a public scene of eating.

Perhaps Hopper’s most popular—and most appropriated—work, *Nighthawks* (1942), offers a scene of eating which is, in terms of critical theorization, particularly notable for its ability to inspire heavily narrativized, and often remarkably contradictory, readings of the piece.¹⁸ And, indeed, this painting is remarkable for its ambiguity. It depicts a city scene, though

one that is entirely free of cars, pedestrians (except for the viewer, who appears to be standing upon the sidewalk), and litter. It is a “wide horizontal sweep” of a canvas with an area of well-lit primary focus, connotative of cinema but obviously lacking the movement and sound of such a medium (Barter “Nighthawks” 200, 209). Compositionally, the perspective is impossible for a ‘real’ scene (as noted by Barter “Nighthawks” 200), the vanishing point of the work is apparently located somewhere outside of the painting itself (as noted by Barter “Nighthawks” 200; Strand 7), the enormous plate-glass window framing the central scene is “abnormal...incapable of reflection” given that the viewer cannot see him/herself in it, and Hopper’s choice to leave the scene empty of a door leading into the diner suggests an inability for the viewer to enter the scene, thus contributing to what Filip Lipinski has described as the frustrated “aesthetics of desire” that make the painting so compelling (Doss 31; 169).¹⁹ The diner itself is a curiously empty space, all smooth, spare surfaces that echo the smooth, spare surfaces of the street outside as well as those of the visible shop across the street. And the details of the four figures within the diner are vague at best, the slight muddiness of their brush-stroked surfaces—a characteristic of Hopper’s painting style that likely led Clement Greenberg to famously call Hopper “a bad painter”—making it difficult to ascertain expressions, features, and even the details of their activities.²⁰ I would suggest that this is a characteristic of Hopper’s narrative reticence—which, of course, is common in his other paintings, but may be especially pronounced here—and is largely responsible for the tendency of critical readings of *Nighthawks* to strongly overstate the narrative and symbolic possibilities of the painting (According to Theisen, for example: “In a single, cogent, concentrated image, *Nighthawks* manages to reflect our attitudes toward individuality, cities, technology, nature, freedom, sexuality, women, money,

experience, success, and religion” [13]), as well as for the tremendous variance between these critical readings, which is discussed below.

This painting is most often “cited as an icon of urban anomie,” and a number of critical readings attempt to interpret this scene of eating in terms of discomfort, alienation, and even urban threat. John Canaday has written of the overall “seediness of the scene,” suggesting that it is one in which the “four people at the counter...are specimens preserved in a jar flooded with an eerie greenish light” that “hides nothing” (102), with the absence of a visible door into the diner leading him to conclude that “the people inside [this diner] are trapped in a world that offers no outlet or escape” (Westheider and Ansenk 24; 108). On Canaday’s reading, even the food-related objects visible within the diner represent interpersonal alienation: “even the items...in the diner—the coffee mugs, the saltshakers, and the napkin holders—are poignant symbols of separation” (102). Gordon Thiesen has read the piece in similar, though far less carefully considered, fashion, arguing that the patrons of this diner “don’t look especially friendly, and they don’t look as if they are enjoying themselves...They don’t look as if they are headed anywhere in particular, that their lives are on an upward trajectory, that they harbor expectations,” concluding that, within *Nighthawks*, “a sense of disaster pervades everything: the diner, the customers, the server, the empty street outside, the buildings across the way” (8). And Hobbs has argued that the scene of eating itself within this painting is fundamentally unappealing, suggesting that “this building is an island that beckons and repels; and the fluorescent lighting is intimidating, alienating, and dehumanising. It creates an unreal and artificial feeling of warmth, an atmosphere that is clinical and more in tune with a laboratory than a restaurant” (129).

And yet, on the other hand, critical commentators such as poet Mark Strand, have remarked that “there is nothing menacing about” this painting, “nothing that suggests danger is waiting around the corner,” and he qualifies the light streaming from the diner as a potential “cleansing agent” in that “nowhere are there signs of urban filth” (6). Ultimately, Strand concludes (perhaps responding unconsciously to Hobbs’s comparison of the building to an island) that the diner within this painting is an appealing “island of light distracting whoever might be walking by—in this case, ourselves—from journey’s end” (7). Wells has provided us with a rather curious positive reading of the painting as anti-capitalist symbol of nostalgic humanity, arguing that the visibility of the cash register in the shop window across the street from the diner (or the “night café, as Wells terms this establishment) underlines the absence of a visible cash register within the diner: “Instead of inside the café (where one might expect it), the illuminated cash register is elsewhere, out there... Inside the night café, money has no visible place. Nor is there any sign of food: the café’s sustenance, apart from coffee, is simply its clean, well-lightedness” (214). Thus, he concludes, this diner “provides a contemplative respite from the night outside,” and further argues that such “clear and human prioritizing of values is at the heart of *Nighthawks*” and that this painting therefore marks “Hopper’s vision of what America needs, especially in so unsettled a time” (214). And although Peter Schjeldahl has remarked upon the ‘bleakness’ of the *Nighthawks* diner and the ways in which “it bespeaks impenetrable private ordeals,” he also argues that the “word routinely used to describe Hopper’s work, ‘loneliness,’ doesn’t apply to the depicted characters, who are doing fine in their iffy ways” (“Art All Over”). Schjeldahl does not go on to explain his phrasing here, though one might assume that he is arguing against critical readings that focus solely upon notions of alienation between the painting’s diners.

Not only do critical readings of *Nighthawks* substantially vary in terms of describing the narrative, tone, mood, and “meaning” of the piece, it has proven difficult for even careful critical readers to agree upon what the human figures within the painting are doing, and how they are interacting with one another. For example, the red-haired woman at the counter has been variously described by critics as either a figure who “stares at her fingernails” or “a pack of cigarettes? A book of matches? A compact?,” one who “concentrates on the piece of paper in her hand—perhaps the check, or money,” or one who is “holding what looks like a sandwich” (Doss 22-23; Barter, “Nighthawks” 196; Wollen 69).²¹ In similar fashion, Doss has called attention to the ways in which she believes the man and woman sitting next to one another at the counter are uncommunicative and lost in their own respective thoughts, though Wollen believes that these two figures are straightforwardly in the midst of a conversation with the man working behind the counter, and Barter takes a more middle-ground approach to the interactions of these figures, suggesting that their interactions demonstrate play between “togetherness and separation,” as they “do not look at each other, but their hands almost touch upon the counter,” and as they interact verbally with the man behind the counter whilst the woman also focuses in upon the object in her hand (23; 69; “Nighthawks” 196).

Ultimately, however, it is most common for critics to note the ‘loneliness’ of the scene, often citing a statement Hopper himself made—“Unconsciously, probably, I was painting the loneliness of a large city”—though this statement is typically removed from its context of Hopper being asked about loneliness in particular, as well as from the statement he made just before: “*Nighthawks* seems to be the way I think of a night street...I didn’t see it as particularly lonely” (qtd. in Kuh 134). For Doss, this potential loneliness, or, rather, the sense of emotional and physical ‘detachment’ that she reads within the painting, allows *Nighthawks* to “evoke and

embody” what she views as modernism’s “emotional regime of restraint and alienation,” though I might soften such a reading to instead suggest the existence of a substantial strain within modernism that focuses upon the complex interplay between self and other, (attempted) communality and individuality, a strain which will be much in evidence within my discussion of Woolf’s scenes of eating in the next sections of this chapter (23). In the end, however, Edward Hopper’s *Nighthawks* provides the viewer with a scene of eating that, as Barter points out, spatially “depicts both exterior and interior worlds” via its inclusion of the city street and its ‘sealing off’ of the figures visible within the restaurant, neatly echoing the ways in which an act of food consumption implicates both the exterior and the interior of the physical body, as well as the ways in which a social encounter involves negotiation between private, interior experience and forms of exterior communication (“Nighthawks” 195). *Nighthawks* might also be read (as might all of Hopper’s “scene of eating” paintings), as Oehler has remarked, as illustration of the “occasionally strained nature of urban dining, as consumers share a space without any sense of togetherness,” reminding us that, despite any anxieties about, or opportunities for, social encounter that might be provided by a public scene of eating, that scene of eating ultimately remains a site of one’s private consuming encounter with food (199).

Consideration of Hopperian scenes of eating such as *Automat*, *Chop Suey*, and *Nighthawks* allows us to broaden our previous discussions of food-object consumption within this dissertation by taking into account the ways in which these private encounters with food-objects often take place within very public settings, and the ways in which such settings alter, and are altered by, the human encounter with the food-object. Edward Hopper’s images of food/drink consumption within popular forms of early twentieth-century dining establishment remind us of some of the specifics of public acts of urban food consumption at the time, whilst

also allowing us to begin to conceptualize the concerns of a specifically modernist scene of public eating within the visual arts and/or literature. Now that we have established that Hopper's modernist scene of eating is one that explores the vulnerabilities (and opportunities) present within acts of food consumption that are embedded in forms of public sociality and spectacle, we will next revisit, expand, and add to these concerns via a more in-depth discussion of the finely detailed modernist scenes of eating found within several novels by Virginia Woolf.

Virginia Woolf and the Scene of Eating

“Famed for her painterliness,” as a novelist, as Harriet Blodgett remarks, Virginia Woolf's writing obviously works to “stimulate more than the sense of sight,” and, indeed, many of her novels are “replete with food” (“Food for Thought” 46; Angelella 173). Such repletion is unsurprising, given Woolf's strong interest in the categories of the everyday, objects, and, particularly, in the body; as Randi Koppen has indicated, “the ground of Woolf's writing is the experiencing, physical body in a spatiotemporal, kinetic field.²² The experience of “I” as a body in space, in relation to other bodies, objects, masses, is fundamental to Woolf's thinking on selfhood, self-representation, and art” (382). This interest in the sensing, feeling body prompted E.M. Forster to suggest that the “invariably good” scenes of food consumption within Woolf's novels act as “sharp reminder that here is a woman who is alert sensuously” (236). This ‘sensuous alertness’ marks one of the ways in which she demonstrates what Blodgett has accurately described as Woolf's increasing “phenomenological allegiance to the perceiving consciousness” throughout her career” (“Food for Thought” 48). Woolf, of course, is tremendously attuned to notions of lived experience, and the ways in which such lived experience draws from bodily sensation, material awareness of the world outside the body, and

psychological consciousness, and, as the act of food consumption is an integral part of such lived experience, Woolf's novels often feature significant, and vividly detailed, descriptions of this food consumption.

Woolf's interest in the social and cultural dimensions of food consumption is also worth noting; Alice Lowe has reminded us that Woolfian scenes of eating are remarkable for their "keen observations of human behavior and nuance," and both Allie Glenny and Lisa Angelella have argued that Woolf's attention to food—particularly to the act of actually consuming food—within her novels may be read as feminist, both in terms of "righting a skewed world which had purged the sensual and elevated the rational," particularly within the experiences of women, and by foregrounding acts of food preparation traditionally considered "women's work" whilst simultaneously relocating women as something more than "producers and servers of food"—that is, as consumers and enjoyers of food—contra to the "Victorian norms in which Woolf was raised" (Lowe 158; Glenny xii; Angelella 173). Further, Angelella has proposed that Woolf's scenes of eating often demonstrate the concept of alimentary subjectivity, by which the food consuming characters therein at least partially "manifest themselves as subjects" by interacting with the world through food (174). This notion of food-consuming subjectivity is a useful one to keep in mind when considering Woolf's scenes of semi-public and/or fully public eating, particularly given the focus in these scenes upon negotiation, and differentiation, between self and other, as well as upon forms of "appropriate" food-consuming embodiment. This chapter's discussion of Woolfian scenes of eating will begin by considering the social and interpersonal interactions of food consumers at the semi-public dinner party within *To the Lighthouse*, and will then discuss a range of scenes of eating—with an emphasis upon those fully public—within *Mrs.*

Dalloway and *The Waves*, specifically focusing upon issues of vulnerability, spectacle, and embodiment.

Virginia Woolf and the Scene of Eating: *To The Lighthouse*

Undoubtedly, one of the most famous scenes of food consumption within literary modernism is that of the Ramsay's dinner gathering in Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*, a meal at which family members and guests are served the culinary "triumph" of *boeuf en daube* (100, 105). Occurring within a novel that is itself tremendously concerned with the boundaries between interior and exterior, Woolf's interest in the possibilities of meaningful human interaction across the boundary between self and other is here on full view, and this extended dinner scene is most often read as a successful experience of communality, a harmonious bringing together of the dissimilar figures around the table, in which even the temperamental philosophy-distracted academic Mr. Ramsay, whose interest in the 'thingness' of tables apparently does not often extend to the actual food upon these tables, manages to be "in great spirits," albeit temporarily (110).²³ And yet, I would suggest that this scene of food consumption figures nothing so straightforward as a truly communal experience for the diners around this table. Although this Woolfian scene of eating takes place in a domestic space, and is a gathering in which all of the figures present are technically known to one another and have been invited to dine together (unlike the figures who occupy Edward Hopper's scene of eating paintings), the text ultimately makes clear that the dinner guests are known to one another to varying degrees and some appear to be acquaintances at best. Further, given the text's focus upon the complicated thoughts and feelings experienced by these dinner guests throughout this scene of eating, it is not unreasonable to question the degree to which *any* of these diners may "know"

one another, nor is it unreasonable to question the notion that these diners' respective experiences of consuming this meal are even particularly similar to those of one another.²⁴ As such, this dinner party occupies a liminal and constantly shifting space between formality and informality, familiarity and unfamiliarity, individual and—an attenuated form of—community, and, to some extent, between forms of public and private acts of food consumption, and, in the end, figuring the scene of eating as one of complexity and vulnerability.

This scene of eating may appear to approach an experience of communality via food consumption; as Mrs. Ramsay fills the diners' plates with stew, "peering into the depths of the earthenware pot," the very presence of the food at the table appears to create unity and sense of material (and perhaps spiritual) coherence, at least for Mrs. Ramsay herself, who notes a "profound stillness, which "seemed now for no special reason to stay there like a smoke, like a fume rising upwards, holding them safe together. Nothing need be said; nothing could be said. There it was, all round them" (105). As Vicki Tromanhauser has argued, however, this sense of unity is momentary at best, and, as she suggests, "despite Mrs. Ramsay's desire to feed the disparate diners into a unity, she remains aware that Tansley and Lily [remain] unassimilable into her social stew," and, throughout this meal, "Mrs. Ramsay combats dissent on all sides, and the murmur grows more audible in the silence between dishes" (16). On Tromanhauser's reading, then, the "profound stillness" is not necessarily, as Mrs. Ramsay believes, a demonstration of safety and togetherness, but a liminal state in which the tensions of togetherness during this meal are even more noticeable.²⁵

Extending Tromanhauser's reading, I would emphasize the ways in which this particular scene of eating figures *dis*unity, as well as the tremendous complexity of the individual act of food consumption as it is combined with negotiations of the social sphere, and the ways in which

this complexity increases exponentially with the number of food consumers/social negotiators located within a scene of eating. After all, those present at the Ramsay's dinner seem to be having very different, and constantly fluctuating, experiences of the gathering. William Bankes, who finds himself "annoyed" at the "interruptions" of Mrs. Ramsay instructing the maids to keep the food warm, begins by musing quite extensively upon how he would rather be alone or with his work, rather than irritated by these "boring" people, a line of thought which progresses into mutinous thoughts about both family life and this particular family, and guilt that he could suddenly "feel nothing" for Mrs. Ramsay, who is one of his oldest and dearest friends (88-89). By the end of the meal, however, William's internal arc has shifted substantially, apparently due to the pleasures of eating: "He had eaten attentively. It was rich; it was. It was perfectly cooked...She [Mrs. Ramsay] was a wonderful woman. All his love, all his reverence had returned" (100). Charles Tansley, who 'scowls' his way through the gathering in a fury of private bitterness, yet also simultaneously manages to make relatively polite conversation with those around him, "could," we are told "almost pity these mild cultivated people" whom he feels are incapable of fully appreciating him and would therefore, one day, "be blown sky high, like bales of wool and barrels of apples, by the gunpowder that was in him" (91, 92). Lily Briscoe reflects upon the fundamental 'insincerity' of human relations as she forces herself to speak politely to her neighbor, but spends the meal thoroughly focused upon the placement of the tree within the painting she imagines completing, even moving the salt cellar in relation to the tablecloth pattern in order to spatially map this future artistic effort (92, 86). Several of the Ramsay children spend the dinner sitting "in a row...almost silent, but with some joke of their own going on...It was something quite apart from everything else, something they were hoarding

up to laugh over in their own room,” thereby having an experience which sets them quite apart from the others at this dinner table (109).

Further, Mr. Ramsay, who as mentioned above, enjoys a moment of high spirits at the end of the meal, spends most of the gathering in misery and (semi) private outrage because he is unable to control the food consumption of others; when Augustus Carmichael dares request a second helping of soup, which is the first course, Mr. Ramsay responds by “screwing his face up...scowling and frowning and flushing with anger...It was unthinkable, it was detestable...that Augustus should be beginning his soup over again,” and brooding that “He hated people wallowing in food...He hated everything dragging on for hours” (95, 96). We are told that Mrs. Ramsay “saw his anger fly like a pack of hounds into his eyes, his brows, and she knew that in a moment something violent would explode” (95). This crisis is ultimately averted, largely through maritally communicative eye contact with Mrs. Ramsay, and it is entirely unclear whether anyone else at the table has observed the intensity of Mr. Ramsay’s response; Mrs. Ramsay “wondered if Augustus Carmichael had noticed. Perhaps he had; perhaps he had not” (96). Mrs. Ramsay begins the meal in a state of personal existential query tinged with despair (“But what have I done with my life? thought Mrs. Ramsay, taking her place at the head of the table” [82]), mentally flits to and fro between matchmaking endeavors long successful (Paul and Minta) and unlikely at best (William and Lily), monitoring her husband’s temper, momentarily uniting with Augustus in the aesthetic act of appreciating the cornucopic centerpiece of fruit and seashells, and processing her thoughts and feelings about everyone at the table, their work, and more, all whilst graciously serving the meal, facilitating all manner of social and linguistic interactions between her guests (the “merging and flowing and creating” that all “rested on her” [83]), and beginning to expound passionately upon such topics as “the iniquity of the English dairy system”

(a topic which neatly emphasizes her role as mother whilst invoking timely class struggles and issues of food hygiene) before her views are “laughed at” and dismissed by her family members (103).

Ultimately, these diners appear to spend a truly substantial portion of the meal with their minds located somewhere else entirely, according to their individual concerns, and most of these individual thought processes do not even (mentally) locate the diner within the same temporal time frame as the others; in some fundamental way, Lily, for example, is already sitting before her painting several days later, the children are already imagining their laughter together just after the dinner, Mr. Ramsay and Augustus are discussing their college years in detail, and so forth. (110) Such complicated phenomenological ephemerality is, of course, Woolf’s point (or, rather, one of her points) about human consciousness and mental experience and the narrativization of that consciousness/experience—which, in this case, is largely conveyed via Woolf’s oft-favored ‘baton passing’ narrative technique as textual focus shifts from character to character. And although the dinner guests at this table may indeed be, for a moment “conscious of making a party together in a hollow, on an island,” such brief consciousness does not here figure an unproblematic version of communality, nor something so straightforward as unity (97). Whilst these individuals are indeed brought together by the act of consuming food, this gathering (and, perhaps, any gathering) is a fundamentally unstable one. Further, in addition to the dissimilar and/or divergent thoughts, behaviors, and experiences exhibited by the guests at this dinner party, as discussed above, there exist other, more physical, disunities at this table. Not everyone who ‘should’ be present is so, it seems, as Paul and Minta, off on a search for a lost brooch, enter casually partway through the meal, and at least one of the Ramsay children is elsewhere, with the rest moving in and out of the room throughout the meal.²⁶

Such bodily movement throughout the meal emphasizes the existence of private physical spaces outside of the more public dining room, a spatial distinction that echoes the division between internal thoughts and external (social) interactions enacted by those around the dinner table during this scene of eating. The specifics of the meal itself, the preparation of which is repeatedly emphasized throughout this section of the novel, also makes in some way present others who are not as visible within the scene of eating as those seated around the dining table, but who are nevertheless necessary to such acts of food consumption.²⁷ The meal is, after all, prepared by a cook whose role within the scene is pivotal—given the “perfect triumph” of the dish upon which they can all agree—who not only remains in the kitchen throughout the scene, but whose presence is largely erased from the narrative of the meal by those who partake of it, with all credit for the dish going to Mrs. Ramsay at the dinner table (105).²⁸ Within this scene of eating, this cook is treated as an extension of Mrs. Ramsay herself (as members of household staff so often are, of course), and her own embodied labor of food preparation is transferred to Mrs. Ramsay and replaced, or perhaps written over, by the action of Mrs. Ramsay serving this food. This bodily replacement again calls attention to private spaces beyond the (more) public dining area—in this case, private spaces in which food is readied for public consumption, private spaces which allow a desirable distance between the bodies of those who prepare such food and those who consume it, thus emphasizing socially-mediated anxieties regarding the vulnerabilities inherent in the act of public (or, in this case, semi-public) consumption.²⁹

In addition to having widely differing experiences of dining together in general, those at the Ramsay’s dinner table also, the text suggests, are granted differing experiences of the act of food consumption itself. The *boeuf en daube* itself may be read as a dish in which disparate elements are brought together into a balanced “soft mass” via a lengthy cooking process, but the

narrative emphasizes the ways in which this dish/food-object is multivariate, allowing for variance in the servings according to the diner's desire or the server's whim, as when Mrs. Ramsay casts about within the pot in order to find a "specially tender" piece of meat for William Bankes (100). The diners consume the 'same' dish, though it is, of course, not the same (and, one might point out, could never be so, given how dependent one's experience of food consumption is upon individual emotional, intellectual, and physical factors), some of the diners consume fruit from the centerpiece and some do not (108-9), and, curiously, the text offers some ambiguity as to whether or not each person at this table consumes food-objects with any sort of pleasure and/or hunger, or even as to whether or not each person consumes food-objects at all. According to André Viola, the "feminine" characters within this scene exhibit "a lack of enthusiasm for food," which, for Viola, stands in sharp contrast to the "unproblematic, often pleasurable" food enjoyment of the male characters and, curiously, supports both his reading of Mrs. Ramsay as maenadically ambivalent mother-figure and his linkage of this scene—and the relationships between the women within this novel—to Woolf's own periodic, and possibly anorectic, food refusal (281).³⁰ Elizabeth Dodd goes so far as to cast Mrs. Ramsay as an anorectic based upon this dinner scene, suggesting that, here, "food is something that must be prepared and offered to others, to fulfill their nutritive and emotional needs, and the preparation and presentation of food will articulate a woman's care for her loved ones and manifest her importance in the household, but that very food is not to be consumed by the woman herself" (151). Dodd's argument that Mrs. Ramsay does not eat is based upon the general notion of such Victorian domestic ideals, and the fact that Mrs. Ramsay's food consumption is not actually described in any detail within this scene, as well as her refusal of a pear from the centerpiece when a piece of fruit is offered to her at the end of the meal (Dodd 152; *TTL* 108). Lisa Angelella's argument for Mrs. Ramsay's

potential non-consumption of food-objects at this dinner is more compelling, and she suggests—via a brief discussion of Bakhtinian bodily transgression—that the figure of Mrs. Ramsay here demonstrates a form of “servile subjectivity, in which the woman is alienated from her own bodily need and desires and does not incorporate her external world, but rather serves it,” thus engaging “with the world around her only as a machine ministering to others”; a situation in which a woman’s “laboring hands are engaged, but her senses are not,” and cannot be so, given the cultural expectations with which she has been raised (176).

However, as Blodgett notes, not all of the other figures within the dinner party scene in *To The Lighthouse* are explicitly stated to eat within the text, and this seems reasonable given the ways in which Woolf’s writing style so often “precluded her describing [all of] the tedious details of narration,” and, therefore, such omission does not mean that Mrs. Ramsay does not here consume food (“Food for Thought” 46). In fact, Blodgett argues that we may readily “infer that Mrs. Ramsay has finished eating when ‘she tucked her napkin under the edge of her plate,’ even if we have not seen her chewing” (*TTL* 11; Blodgett, “Food for Thought” 46). I would also suggest that the parenthetical phrase “(The *boeuf en daube* was a perfect triumph)” that is placed between Mrs. Ramsay’s words to Andrew as she serves him what is either a late or second helping of the stew is actually evidence of her own alimentary enjoyment of—or, at least, personally-experienced satisfaction with—the meal itself (105).³¹ Further, although it seems likely that the centerpiece is intended for consumption by the diners as part of a dessert course, as Blodgett rightly points out, that Mrs. Ramsay “explicitly refuses a pear...requires no anorexic ambitions. The fruit is part of an artistic arrangement” in which Mrs. Ramsay has been taking aesthetic pleasure throughout the meal, and which Woolf potentially uses to emphasize the place of art in life; that is, as a “heightening of the ordinary” (“Food for Thought” 46; “Mimesis” 289).

The “artistic arrangement” of this fruit as a collection of food-objects, then, locates it between edible and inedible, dinner and decoration, thus inviting both consumptive and non-consumptive acts during this meal experience, and underlining the potential variety of dining experiences at this table.

The scene of eating that is the Ramsay’s dinner party within *To The Lighthouse* is, in the end, deeply preoccupied with the difficulties and pleasures of consuming food within such a liminal semi-public space; the social, emotional, intellectual, material and bodily negotiations involved in consuming food in the presence of others, and the ways in which such acts further complicate the already tremendously complicated act of eating and its attendant concerns regarding the presence or absence of taste, desire, enjoyment, particularly via the uncontrollable “other” and one’s surroundings. Ultimately, despite any potential—and temporary—feelings of togetherness and the pleasures of the *boeuf en daube*, Mrs. Ramsay cannot keep “a hand” from dismantling the edible centerpiece upon which her visual feast focuses (109), Mr. Ramsay cannot keep Augustus Carmichael from “disgusting” him by continuing to eat soup (96), William Bankes cannot maintain the quiet order nor briefness of dining he prefers (88-89), Lily Briscoe cannot avoid “the trick” of feeling she must be “nice” to those she dislikes as she eats (91-93), and Charles Tansley cannot speak, nor act upon, his negative feelings regarding the company with whom he dines. (90-92) Eating alongside, or “with,” others, it seems, is an act fraught with vulnerabilities, whether those others are intentionally included within a scene of eating or are—as in Hopper’s paintings—simply consuming food at a nearby table, and although consideration of this semi-public scene of eating within *To The Lighthouse* allows us to establish Woolf’s investment in such vulnerabilities (and in the tensions between communality and individuality within acts of “shared” or public food consumption), these vulnerabilities are even more

pronounced in Woolf's figurations of truly public food consumption within other novels such as *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Virginia Woolf and The Scene of Eating: *Mrs. Dalloway*

The overarching narrative of Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* in many ways centers upon the large house party with which the novel ends; however, although this party does indeed include a dinner component, the reader is granted minimal access to this meal, and only after it has concluded. This minimal access occurs via a textual moment in the thoughts of Mrs. Walker, the cook, as she stands amongst the remnants and trappings of the meal in the kitchen, "the plates, saucepans, cullenders, frying-pans, chicken in aspic, ice-cream freezers, pared crusts of bread, lemons, soup tureens, and pudding basins which, however hard they washed up in the scullery seemed to be all on top of her, on the kitchen table, on chairs" (165). The next morning, we are told, she and Mrs. Dalloway would "go over the dishes--the soup, the salmon; the salmon, Mrs. Walker knew, as usual underdone, for she always got nervous about the pudding and left it to Jenny; so it happened, the salmon was always underdone" (165). These kitchen-located passages allow the reader to form only a vague impression of what food-objects may have been served to guests at the meal, and place the edible specifics of this particular meal firmly at the periphery of both the party and the novel itself, suggesting that this party, and Clarissa's role as hostess, are "about" sociality and the intersection of private and public spaces in ways that have little to do with actual public food consumption.³² Earlier in this novel, however, we are offered a particularly rich scene of eating in public: that of Doris Kilman's and Elizabeth Dalloway's afternoon tea at the Army and Navy Stores. This scene, which Blodgett has described as "uncomfortable," and which Lowe has suggested is satirical via its contrast with the "gentility"

of Clarissa's Dalloway's party ("Food for Thought" 51; 158), has most often garnered critical consideration centered upon its contribution to the novel's portrayal of Doris Kilman as being somehow either sympathetic or unsympathetic (typically the latter).³³ I would suggest that such curious critical focus upon sympathy has much to do with the specifics of this scene of eating, the complexities of which implicitly cast the reader (much as Hopper's paintings cast the viewer) as a member of a judgmental public watching a woman—one who exhibits othered, and potentially abject, embodiment, no less—daring to consume food, and to demonstrate her desires, food-based or otherwise, within a public setting. More than this, however, this particular Woolfian scene of eating is remarkable for its attention to the tremendous complexities of eating, and, more importantly for our purposes, of eating in public, chiefly as these complexities relate to the intersection of social class and commerce, and to the physical (female) body as "appropriate" consumer, embodied subject, and public spectacle.

It is important to note that Kilman and Elizabeth do not simply have tea in a public tearoom within an urban environment, but they have tea in a public tearoom that is located within a store (within an urban environment). Further, they do not simply have tea at a tearoom that is located within a store, but their tea is bookended by actual encounters with nonperishable commodities within the store.³⁴ This scene of eating, it seems, is inextricably linked with capitalist commerce, and, as such, we might here fruitfully consider the scene of non-food commodity consumption that surrounds this scene of food consumption within this section of the novel. The link between these two forms of consumption is perhaps unsurprising, given that, as Jennifer Wicke notes, the novel as a whole has much to do with shopping: "Everybody knows by now that Clarissa goes shopping, indeed, starts the book with her shudder of pleasure poised at the foot of London's gleaming shopfronts" (13). According to Reginald Abbott, we might even

go so far as to consider shopping to be “the primary activity” in *Mrs. Dalloway*, given that, within the space of the novel, “the Dalloways, Rezia Warren Smith, Miss Kilman, and Hugh Whitbread all go shopping,” and the ways in which, via skywriter, “Advertising literally invades Bond Street and its airspace and invites (demands) everyone...to witness the spectacle” and power of the public commodity (198).³⁵ However, there are crucial differences in the ways in which these characters encounter such commodities, particularly in terms of Doris Kilman, whose poverty forces her to make her pre-tea purchase of a petticoat at a “mass market department store [which is] without any of the desire-driven excesses experienced in diverse London shops” such as those visited by others within the novel (Wicke 19). As Abbott explains, Doris Kilman's “need to buy a petticoat at the Army and Navy Stores instantly sets her apart from the ladies of the era who always ordered their lingerie custom-made” (204). She is, therefore, as Abbott goes on to remark, “the grotesque opposite” of “the girls buying white underlinen threaded with pure white ribbon for their weddings” at specialty shops upon whom Clarissa Dalloway's bright glance alights during her visit to Bond Street (Abbott 204; *Dalloway* 18).

Although the Army and Navy Stores are a venue which, in offering goods at a price point that she is able to afford, ostensibly “includes” Doris Kilman, her shopping experience is not necessarily a pleasant, nor perhaps even a truly successful, one. Kilman does leave the store with the needed petticoat (though not without considerable assistance from others in doing so), but her preoccupations distract her throughout the process of making this choice and she cannot, it seems, even take part in an effective socio-commercial encounter with the salesperson: “There were the petticoats, brown, decorous, striped, frivolous, solid, flimsy; and she chose, in her abstraction, portentously, and the girl serving thought her mad” (130). Following such a list of

petticoat options, the reader is not told which has been chosen, which confirms both that Kilman's choice was made without deliberation or meaning, and that this choice does not—and cannot—matter to her; we have previously witnessed her thoughts, after all, that “No clothes suited her. She might buy anything” (129). Such an assertion of ill-suitedness is, of course, largely contingent upon her poverty, which creates an “inability to fit into the ever-changing appearances of commodity spectacle,” as well as an inability to have clothing custom-made to flatter her potentially ‘nonstandard’ body type (Abbott 198).

Ultimately, Kilman appears to be flummoxed by the entire shopping experience, and must be led through it by others. Tormented by thoughts of her lonely life as she walks to the store with Elizabeth, Kilman misses the turn and must be steered by Elizabeth's hand in order to enter the store, and then again in order to find the correct department: “Elizabeth guided her this way and that; guided her in her abstraction as if she had been a great child, an unwieldy battleship” (129-30). Elizabeth is capable of guiding Doris Kilman through the store primarily because she is able to be comfortable with the excesses of the urban setting—and Elizabeth's affiliation with this urban setting will continue just after the tea, when she will “calmly and competently” ride around London on the top levels of omnibuses, even appearing to temporarily become a part of the buses themselves, “responding freely” to each movement of the bus “like a rider, like the figure-head of a ship” (139; 136). Although Doris Kilman is educated and independent, a “frightfully clever” woman with a “knowledge of modern history [that] was thorough in the extreme,” one who “had her degree” and “was a woman who had made her way in the world,” she is no jaunty New Woman figure moving about the city; her relative poverty and her appearance preclude such a possibility (131; 125; 132). It is, instead, Elizabeth who moves freely, who possesses options, not only because, as Kilman tells her, “every profession is

open to the women of your generation,” but because Elizabeth possesses the wealth and “beautiful body” that allow for such ease of movement within this urban environment (136). Further, as Abbott has suggested, “As a Dalloway, Elizabeth is heir to all of the aristocratic ‘style’ and ‘appearance’ of her parents and is thus able to navigate the Army and Navy Stores while maintaining a disinterested distance from the display of commodity spectacle” (206). Her socioeconomic privilege therefore allows Elizabeth to disengage from the realm of the consumers and commodities; she here does not *need* to consume. This privileged consumptive indifference is further borne out during the tea scene, during which Elizabeth appears to eat little, finishes rapidly, and exhibits thorough bafflement at the appetite(s) of Kilman.

Following the tea with Elizabeth, Kilman becomes disoriented without Elizabeth there to assist her and cannot find her way out of the store, nor can she even manage to retain her parcel, as we are told that she:

blundered off among the little tables, rocking slightly from side to side, and somebody came after her with her petticoat, and she lost her way, and was hemmed in by trunks specially prepared for taking to India; next got among the accouchement sets, and baby linen; through all the commodities of the world, perishable and permanent, hams, drugs, flowers, stationery, variously smelling, now sweet, now sour she lurched; saw herself thus lurching with her hat askew, very red in the face, full length in a looking-glass; and at last came out into the street. (133)

The jumble of goods which impede Kilman’s progress as she attempts to leave the store speak both to the cacophonous abundance of the department store in the early twentieth century—a place in which one might seemingly find “all the commodities of the world,” and to the blurring of needs, behaviors, and social encounters that result from such a heterogeneous space

(particularly one, I might note, that includes the feature of a tearoom). The travel trunks and baby goods are here particularly significant; as Jean E. Kennard indicates, Kilman here “appears to be trapped by the symbols of the imperial power and the traditional female role that have, in fact, proven her undoing” (159). She is, after all, an outsider, one who was forced to relinquish her ideal education due to her sympathy for “the Germans,” one who will never marry and will “never come first with anyone”—whether due to her appearance ensuring that she is “never meeting the opposite sex,” as she suggests, or, more likely, to the same-sex direction of her romantic longings—and, as such, she does not (cannot) purchase such globally and maternally oriented commodities and apparently does not know what to do when faced with them (124; 129; 129). Immediately following these encounters with the commodity objects that symbolize her outsidership within this consumer environment and this society as a whole, Kilman is faced with the “lurching” “full length” specular image of herself lost *within* this environment. According to Abbott, “The function of store mirrors is to reflect the consumer's image superimposed on countless other images of shining, dazzling commodities waiting to be purchased. For Miss Kilman, however, the mirror mocks her as her misshapen image is juxtaposed on commodities” that she cannot consume appropriately—or, rather, consume at all (207).

Kilman's inability to navigate within this consumer community results in “paranoia” and overwhelm; at tea, she notices “all those people passing—people with parcels who despised her” (Abbott 205; *Dalloway* 132). She cannot, as Abbott has remarked, “merge into the spectacle” of consumer behavior, just as she cannot consume goods as others are able to (205). She cannot even maintain control over her own parcel; she leaves it behind at tea and an identified “somebody” must chase her down to return it, then when she enters Westminster Cathedral

seeking post-tea solace, the parcel lies upon the floor, seemingly forgotten as Kilman prays (134). It is also worth noting, as Abbott points out, that this purchased petticoat is “a private garment imbued with sexuality but bought publicly amidst the spectacle of commodity culture, [and] its ambiguous status reflects Miss Kilman's ambiguous relationship with Elizabeth” (208). And, indeed, it is in the store that Elizabeth’s apparent fondness for Kilman begins to wane. Following Kilman’s awkward encounter with the salesgirl, the reader is told that “Elizabeth rather wondered, as they did up the parcel, what Miss Kilman was thinking” (130), and, during the tea, Elizabeth becomes frustrated by Kilman’s “odious righteousness” (Froula 144) and self-pitying attempts to keep her from attending her mother’s party that evening: ““I never go to parties,” said Miss Kilman, just to keep Elizabeth from going. ‘People don’t ask me to parties’” (132). Elizabeth therefore disengages, sitting politely “Like some dumb creature who has been brought up to a gate for an unknown purpose, and stands there longing to gallop away,” then collecting her gloves (which Abbott points out are “a symbol of her class and of Bond Street,” which is the site of both Clarissa Dalloway’s earlier shopping trip and the location of famous glovers [206]) and leaving Kilman at the table, instead of assisting her on her way out of the store as she did on the way in (132).

Just as Kilman has been unable to act as appropriate consumer of commodity goods during her visit to the store itself, she is also unable to consume appropriately during her tea with Elizabeth in the store’s tearoom; she appears to be “too” hungry. “Elizabeth rather wondered,” the reader is told, “whether Miss Kilman could be hungry. It was her way of eating, eating with intensity, then looking, again and again, at a plate of sugared cakes on the table next to them” (130). Here, Kilman’s appetite is framed as unruly, as being marked by an “intense” concentration upon the food she consumes that is somehow unbelievable to Elizabeth. This

framing primarily underlines the difference in class between these two figures—after all, why should Kilman *not* be hungry? If nothing else, she is (at least by Dalloway family standards) “degradingly poor,” a socioeconomic status of which Elizabeth is certainly aware, given her closeness to Kilman, but one of which she appears to have little real understanding, given the ways in which the Dalloways “lived with everything they wanted” (123; 131). As the hungry Kilman here eats with this “intensity,” covets the nearby cakes, gobbles a chocolate éclair in vividly described—and potentially salacious—terms (which will be discussed in a moment), and enjoys yet “another cup of tea,” the food consumption of Elizabeth, who has apparently never wanted for food in general and is either not hungry in this moment or is unwilling to display hunger, is covered only in the vaguest terms (131). The phrase “They had their tea” suggests that Elizabeth does consume something at this meal, as does her response to Kilman’s order of that additional cup of tea: “no, she did not want anything more” (130; 131). Additionally, Elizabeth’s questioning of Kilman’s ability to still be hungry, or perhaps even to be hungry at all, brings our attention to the possibility that Kilman may also consume food for reasons other than—or in addition to—the satisfaction of the (physical) hunger of the body. She certainly takes pleasure in the enjoyment of food; it is “almost the only pure pleasure left her,” and she notes that “Sometimes lately it had seemed to her that, except for Elizabeth, her food was all that she lived for; her comforts; her dinner, her tea” (130; 129). The novel’s focus upon the “pure pleasure” she takes in food suggests, to Dodd, that Woolf has here cast Kilman as a compulsive eater contra Mrs. Ramsay’s anorect, has prompted Angelella to remark that, for the “gluttonous” Kilman, food “constitutes self-medication, rather than self-fortification,” and has inspired Patricia Moran to argue that “since [Kilman] cannot fulfill her social and sexual needs, she becomes obsessed with food, the only bodily need she can sate herself” (46; 178; 79). I would here point out that

the experience of taking pleasure in the flavors and textures of food during consumption does frequently overlap with—and may indeed be in many ways inextricable from—actual (physical) hunger, that taking substantial pleasure in food does not necessarily constitute obsession, and that Kilman’s enjoyment of food may have a good deal to do with the ways in which her poverty limits her enjoyment of more expensive pleasures, though these critics do certainly raise important points about the complex reasons for food consumption that are potentially made visible within this scene.

In addition to apparently exhibiting ‘too much’ hunger, it is worth noting that, at least within this scene (which is the only time we actually witness Kilman consuming food), her ‘inappropriate’ level, duration, and/or “intensity” of hunger seems also to be marked by an inappropriate taste for the “wrong” food-objects. We witness her “disturbingly lubricious” consumption of an éclair, as well as her desire for the pink cake claimed by the child at the next table (Glenny 130). Her bitter response to the loss of the pink cake bewilders Elizabeth—“when a lady and a child sat down and the child took the cake, could Miss Kilman really mind it? Yes, Miss Kilman did mind it. She had wanted that cake — the pink one...to be baffled even in that!”—and not only aligns Kilman’s appetite and tastes with those of a child, but her anger at a hungry child demonstrates poor form, as does her tendency to “offer advice about moral restraint while devouring [the] éclair” at this tea (*Dalloway* 130; Angelella 178). Further, Kilman’s desire for, and hearty consumption of, these desserts potentially connotes behavior that is marked as both unladylike and potentially unhealthy, particularly given the rise of dieting and the ideal of the slender female body in the early twentieth century and the ways in which critics such as Vereen Bell read Kilman’s body as being “overweight” (102).³⁶ According to Angelella, the “sweet food [Kilman] eats is non-nutritious and insubstantial” (176), and notes that “Sweets were

often associated with women in the early twentieth century and thought appropriate to their delicate appetites” (176-77). And, indeed, as Blodgett reminds us, sweet food-objects are also associated with Rezia Smith in this novel, who “liked ices, chocolates, sweet things” and who is given “sweet stuff” to drink by Dr. Holmes following Septimus’s suicide (“Food for Thought” 87; *Dalloway* 150). Angelella also argues that, in Woolf’s work specifically, “sweets tend to be associated with female characters who are portrayed as superficial, or who submit to a wholly traditional feminine roles (178). Angelella is here attempting to support her point regarding the meat-eating New Woman figure at the heart of Woolf’s *Night and Day*, but this assertion sits rather poorly with regards to the women who consume sweet food-objects within *Mrs. Dalloway*, particularly with the figure of Kilman, whose intense inner turmoil and renunciation of her bodily appearance (which will be discussed in a moment) hardly qualify her as superficial, and whose role within the novel is, if anything, masculinized. That said, both the pink cake that Kilman cannot possess and the éclair that Kilman then consumes may also be read as a substitute for Elizabeth, the properly feminine and “beautiful” object of Kilman’s intense love and apparent desire, about whom she thinks with desperation: “If she could grasp her, if she could clasp her, if she could make her hers absolutely and forever and then die; that was all she wanted” (125, 131, 133; 132).³⁷ Blodgett has suggested that “Kilman is not only terribly unfulfilled in general; she specifically wants to devour the sweetness of Elizabeth,” and the éclair thus becomes her “substitute gratification,” thereby allowing her to “sublimat[e] her desire for Elizabeth” (“Food for Thought” 51; Moran 79). In this way, the apparent social inappropriateness of Kilman’s food-based desires in the tea scene echo the social inappropriateness of Kilman’s romantic desires—that is, for the sort of same-sex relationship that was earlier denied to Clarissa Dalloway and Sally Seton.

This echo of ‘appropriateness’ also calls attention to the sexual undertones of Kilman’s food consumption within this scene (and, one might suggest, with much food consumption in general), as the reader observes her “fingering the last two inches of a chocolate éclair” and watches, alongside Elizabeth, as Kilman “opened her mouth, slightly projected her chin, and swallowed down the last inches of the chocolate éclair” (131-32). Kilman’s undeniably sensuous, and potentially *sensual*, engagement with the food she consumes, and her indelicately mannered interaction with the food-objects within her grasp (including the inelegant way in which she “washed the tea round in her cup” [132] after finishing the éclair) is a “tell” of her class and of her (true) desires, whether these desires simply be for enjoyment of a “unbecoming” quantity of food, for the “wrong” food-objects, for the young woman sitting across from her, or for all of these things simultaneously—thus reminding the reader, Elizabeth, and any viewer within the public tearoom, of Kilman’s “improper consumer” status. Perhaps curiously, given Kilman’s apparent sexual preferences, her treatment of the éclair could easily be read as an interaction with a phallic object; or, alternately, as support for the novel’s potential association of Kilman herself with traditional tropes of masculinity, whether in terms of temperament (Phyllis Rose has suggested that Kilman’s image is one of a “masculine woman, aggressive, embittered by what she does not have” [30]) or in terms of her physical body, which is elsewhere framed as being large and somehow unwomanly.³⁸

In addition to the ways in which Kilman’s socioeconomically informed appetites and mannerisms interfere with her ability to act both as appropriate food consumer within this public scene of eating (which is, as discussed above, itself located within the larger context of the consumption of commercial goods), the appearance of Kilman’s body is also framed as inhibitor to appropriate consumer status. Her body is associated closely with food-objects

(physiognomically, she possesses “gooseberry-coloured eyes” [125] and a forehead which, “do her hair as she might,” “remained like an egg, bald, white” [129]), but, more than this, throughout the novel, Doris Kilman’s physical appearance and the movements of her material body are figured as aesthetically transgressive and socially unacceptable, even monstrous, exhibiting a version of what Rosemarie Garland Thomson refers to as “corporeal otherness” (16). In one of her less tormented musings, Kilman simply refers to herself as “plain,” but, as Moran points out, she is far more likely to ‘wallow’ “in her abject embodiment” and imply that she is somehow monstrous, via her primary “indignity,” which is “the infliction of her unlovable body which people could not bear to see” (*Dalloway* 132; Moran 79; *Dalloway* 129). Both Clarissa and Kilman herself refer to Kilman as being “ugly,” particularly by comparison to Clarissa’s contrasting “small pink face...delicate body” and “air of freshness and fashion” (125, twice on page 128; 125). Kilman’s clothing unavoidably contributes to her othered appearance. “Year in and year out,” we are told, she wears a “cheap” “green mackintosh coat” (123) that, as Celia Marshik explains, automatically “makes Kilman appear clumsy and awkward in its expression of practicality” and “encapsulates everything wrong with her social position: at one glance, it communicates her lack of style, impoverished state, and increasingly peripheral status” (“Modernist Mackintosh” 65; *At the Mercy* 2). According to Marshik, the mackintosh, continually present and unflattering as it is, encourages erasure of Kilman’s subjecthood, effectively helping to turn her into an (undesirable) object as it emphasizes the overwhelming abjection of Kilman’s substantial body (*At the Mercy* 8; “Modernist Mackintosh” 63). Kilman is described as being “large” and “heavy” with “large” hands and “thick fingers” (134; 125; 131; 132). She describes her own movement as “clumsy,” and the text appears to support this

categorization via the description of her “lurching” attempts to exit the store following her tea with Elizabeth (123, 128; 133).

Such descriptions of Kilman’s physicality, grounded as they are in generalized bulk rather than, say, association with curvaceous maternity, potentially connote masculinity (and a transgression of “appropriate” femininity), but, curiously—and perhaps *through* this connotation of masculinity—they also connote strength and a potential agency grounded in her embodiment that complicates Kilman’s characterization as victim, both within her own mind, and within the novel as a whole. After all, as he observes her praying at Westminster following her tea with Elizabeth, Mr. Fletcher cannot help but—rather admiringly—note Kilman’s “largeness, robustness, and power” (134). This description echoes Elizabeth’s remark, moments before, that “Miss Kilman made one feel so small,” a comment that refers primarily to Kilman’s insistence upon reminding the wealthy Elizabeth of her own diminished socioeconomic status, but which also neatly restates previous descriptions of Kilman’s physical size (131). Clarissa finds Miss Kilman’s overall corporeal embodiment not only threatening—associating her with both strength and monstrosity, as standing “with the power and taciturnity of some prehistoric monster armoured for primeval warfare”—but almost too much to bear, even when Kilman is not physically present, noting that “For now that the body of Miss Kilman was not before her, it overwhelmed her” (126).

Kilman’s ‘overwhelming’ body, her excess corporeality, her marked material otherness: these are things that prevent her from being able to consume food “appropriately” in public. Her competing/overlapping hungers, highly visible both in her (possibly over)consumption of desserts at tea and the grasping nature of her need for Elizabeth potentially invite the reader to feel disgust upon witnessing them.³⁹ Angelella, following Patricia Moran’s discussion of

Woolfian eating in *Word of Mouth*, suggests that, despite the feminist direction of much of Woolf's writing, her work also frequently provides evidence of "patriarchal revulsion over women's bodies and appetites" by which the female characters in her novels "often" "surrender themselves to crude sensuality, their bodies out of control" (176). I am not convinced that this happens "often" throughout Woolf's body of work, but such an assertion is certainly relevant to a discussion of Doris Kilman. As a "large," and possibly overweight, woman—or perhaps simply as an embodied woman who not only does not practice "appetite denial" but who takes what Angelella qualifies as "crude" bodily enjoyment in food whilst in public, Kilman runs the risk of being "thought to take up too much space, appropriate too many resources for herself, privilege her desires over her attractiveness and refuse the Western hierarchy of mind over body" (Angelella [following Bordo] 175). In this manner, Kilman's body and sensuous engagement with the food she consumes transgress social norms, and these transgressions connote moral and class-based insufficiencies in her very being.⁴⁰

Kilman is (mostly) conscious of these transgressions; not only is she deeply insecure about the size and appearance of her potentially "unlovable" body, she is uncomfortable with her bodily materiality as a whole and cannot seem to reconcile the experience—or perhaps even the existence—of this materiality with her emotions, thoughts, and desires (129). As a result, she becomes obsessed with the possibility of 'controlling' her body and containing her emotions, thoughts, and desires. She is assisted in this effort by her fairly recent involvement with "the church" (presumably the Church of England) which she "had turned in to...two years three months ago," an involvement which has periodically provided her with a sense of succor not unlike that of the pleasure of consuming food ("A sweet savour filled her veins" when she "thought of God" [124]), and a temporary escape from embodiment; she takes comfort in the

“bodiless” light of the church, as something that might allow her to “aspire above the vanities, the desires, the commodities, to rid herself both of hatred and of love” (124; 133). Kilman’s faith also provides her with an idiom that allows her to situate her struggles within the greater context of a Christian struggle for mastery of the body in service of the mind and spirit. Thus, when she feels insecure next to Clarissa or within the crowded city, or when she is faced with “turbulent and painful” feelings (128) she repeats to herself that “it is the flesh” (128 [four times], 129) that she must control. This idea of a nonspecific material “flesh” which may be reigned in with regard to desire or impulse presumably allows Kilman to distance herself somewhat from the specifics of her actual body and proprioception (which one might argue is why she is typically framed as clumsy and in some way lacking in appropriate control of her body), but even her adherence to the possibilities of bodily denial wavers briefly when faced with Clarissa: “But it was not the body; it was the soul and its mockery that she wished to subdue; make feel her mastery” (125). Kilman’s faith-based rejection of the flesh, then, stands in complex contrast to her indulgence in the fleshly pleasures of food consumption within the scene of eating in the Army and Navy Stores tearoom.⁴¹

At the conclusion of the tea scene, the reader is faced with a particularly visceral image that encompasses Kilman’s strong association with the body and with food consumption, as well as the vulnerability of her external body and her internal feelings within this public setting, and her overall vulnerability as public spectacle. Elizabeth has finished eating whatever little she has managed to consume, has grown weary of Kilman’s self-pitying and needful conversation, and decides to leave: “One had to pay at the desk, Elizabeth said, and went off, drawing out, so Miss Kilman felt, the very entrails in her body, stretching them as she crossed the room, and then, with a final twist, bowing her head very politely, she went” (132-33). This analogy of bodily

connection calls back to the aftermath of an earlier meal within *Mrs. Dalloway*—that of Lady Bruton’s upscale luncheon with the Dalloways and Hugh Whitbread, after which her guests leave and Bruton contemplates the encounter as she begins to nap:

And they went further and further from her, being attached to her by a thin thread (since they had lunched with her) which would stretch and stretch, get thinner and thinner as they walked across London; as if one’s friends were attached to one’s body, after lunching with them, by a thin thread, which (as she dozed there) became hazy with the sound of bells, striking the hour or ringing to service, as a single spider’s thread is blotted with rain-drops, and burdened, sags down. (112)

When Bruton falls fully asleep, this “burdened” and ‘sagging’ connection ceases entirely: “And Richard Dalloway and Hugh Whitbread hesitated at the corner of Conduit Street at the very moment that Millicent Bruton, lying on the sofa, let the thread snap” (112). This “thin thread” of attachment, a sort of intersubjective trace made visible, is here framed as being contingent upon recent physical contact and proximity, and figures a curious psychosomatic model of emotional connection as translating into actual material, or bodily, connection. The physical contact required for such a connection is here suggested to necessarily involve sharing a meal, as the “since” in the “(since they had lunched with her)” parenthetical potentially implies both “in the time since” and “because,” and the inclusion of the “after lunching with them” clause immediately following “as if one’s friends were attached to one’s body” is specifically focused upon the meal, rather than simply upon ‘seeing’ or ‘spending time with’ one’s friends, suggesting that food consumption as shared activity may somehow act as an activity especially bonding or connecting.⁴²

In addition to referring back to this earlier section within *Mrs. Dalloway*, The “stretching” of Kilman’s entrails across the growing distance between her body and that of Elizabeth is also noticeably similar to—albeit far grosser than—a romantic analogy made within Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. Such a similarity is not without irony—the scene in *Jane Eyre* will end in a longed-for proposal of marriage, and the novel itself will (eventually) end happily for the two characters involved. However, instead of ending in confessions of mutual love, this scene of imagined bodily connection in *Mrs. Dalloway* ends with Elizabeth leaving Kilman sitting alone amongst the éclairs, “stricken” with “shocks of suffering” (133). And, particularly as we do not see Kilman and Elizabeth together again (nor do we even see them separately much past this point in the novel), it is difficult to imagine the—either nascent or nonexistent—love story between Doris Kilman and Elizabeth as ending well. The scene within *Jane Eyre* takes place when Rochester begins to bid a painful goodbye to Jane, who plans to leave for Ireland in order to avoid what she believes to be his love for another woman, explaining:

I sometimes have a queer feeling with regard to you--especially when you are near me, as now: it is as if I had a string somewhere under my left ribs, tightly and inextricably knotted to a similar string situated in the corresponding quarter of your little frame. And if that boisterous Channel, and two hundred miles or so of land come broad between us, I am afraid that cord of communion will be snapt; and then I've a nervous notion I should take to bleeding inwardly. (283)

This is a remarkable image, and one which figures love as a(n organic? Inorganic?) string physically bound to the internality of the human physical body, but the analogy is also both politely vague about the specifics of the body itself (“somewhere under my left ribs”) and suggestive of the traditional association between love and the bodily heart-as-organ. In the scene

between Kilman and Elizabeth in *Mrs. Dalloway*, however, Kilman's unspooling bodily connection to Elizabeth does not seem to be located in the vicinity of the heart; after all, although the term "entrails" may include the body's internal organs in general, it most commonly refers specifically to the food-processing intestines, and Woolf may here be literalizing (or even satirizing) traditional/poetic notions of "the bowels" as the seat of passionate emotions. In addition to speaking to the intensity of Kilman's feelings for the vanishing Elizabeth via connotations of a medieval "intestinal crank" instrument of torture, Woolf's choice here further strengthens the associations made by this scene between Kilman and food consumption, and the ways in which her emotional and sexual appetites appear to overlap with food-based hunger. Further, the analogy is an imagined 'making visible' of all of her appetites, and a figurative 'making' public of the actual (imaginary) inside of her body. The image exaggerates, and thus calls attention to, the vulnerability inherent in consuming food in public—that of others witnessing a breach of the bodily boundaries (via the mouth). It also continues Kilman's association with the material body in general, and more specifically with impoliteness of food consumption and disgust-inspiring overmateriality of the body, whilst engaging in very Woolfian concerns about how one reconciles—or does not, or cannot—the intertwining of feelings and thoughts with physical bodiliness.

Consideration of this tea scene within *Mrs. Dalloway*, then, allows us to explore the ways in which Doris Kilman's personal embodied experience of food consumption, with all of its private pleasures and torments, is made spectacle—her "insides" on display, her status as "inappropriate" food consumer made public for all (including the reader) to potentially judge. This scene of eating is firmly embedded within scenes of encounter with commerce, which not only reflects the popularity of new forms of dining establishment (and new forms of eating

experience) located within stores within the early decades of the twentieth century, but which also reminds us that food-objects and our encounters with them are often unavoidably influenced by commercial concerns. After all, not only is the food-object itself a commodity within systems of commerce, commercial concerns shape and alter cultural mores, social expectations, and personal experiences, ultimately impacting questions of what and when we are able to eat, how much we might enjoy it (and how we might go about said enjoyment), and how (or perhaps even if) we are able to eat with, or in front of, others. Now that we have discussed a semi-public scene of eating within *To the Lighthouse*, and a fully public scene of eating within *Mrs. Dalloway* (and, of course, within Hopper's paintings, as discussed within the previous section of this chapter), we will move on to consider a range of both semi-public and fully public scenes of eating within *The Waves*, scenes which will offer us particularly complex embodied encounters with food-objects.

Virginia Woolf and the Scene of Eating: *The Waves*

Woolf's antepenultimate novel *The Waves* exhibits perhaps the strongest concern of all of her novels in the tension inherent in materially mediated (and experienced) interactions between self and other, whether that "other" be object or human. This rich text remains surprisingly undertheorized, with most critical attention focusing upon the potential implications of Woolf's experimental structural elements within this novel, such as the marking of time and the human life cycle within the brief descriptive interludes which bookend each of the nine chapters in sustained linguistic figuration of a seaside setting, and the unusual form of the chapters themselves, which are composed entirely of variable-length soliloquies made consecutively by the each of the six characters (Bernard, Ginny, Louis, Neville, Rhoda, and Susan) upon whom

the novel focuses.⁴³ These soliloquies raise questions regarding public and private, self and other, performance and performativity, and are littered with what Dorrit Cohn has called “self-conscious perception verbs” (such as “see,” “feel,” “hear”) which imply perceptual engagement or actual physical contact with the world (265). Although Cohn has implied that the foregrounding of such verbs contributes to an anti-realism of the novel, I would suggest that Woolf’s usage of these verbs signifies an attempt to frame a version of realism (or, perhaps, reality) that is very firmly grounded in sensory experience and interaction of the physical body with the outside world.⁴⁴

As such, it is perhaps unsurprising that the text of *The Waves* finds itself quite concerned with the material possibilities of food and embodied acts of food consumption. One of the central “set pieces” in most of the pre-chapter interludes is a table set for a meal, glimpsed as the rising or setting sun casts “sharp wedges” of light upon the room, causing food-adjacent objects such as dishes, cutlery, table and chairs to appear “as if they had been sunk underwater” (110), or to visually separate, to blend together, to begin to disappear into darkness and lack of form (75; 29; 166), to take on a “fanatical existence” in which a plate becomes “a white lake,” a knife turns into “a dagger of ice,” and drinking glasses are “upheld by streaks of light” (110).⁴⁵ These painterly scenes lack both human presence (as do nearly all of the interludes) and the presence of food itself, though such forms of presence, it seems, are not far away, given “the fumes and steams of the greasy kitchen vapour; the hot breath of mutton and beef; the richness of pastry and fruit” (109).⁴⁶ Several critics have noted that a number of the pre-chapter interludes contain images and themes that will be repeated within the soliloquizing chapters which will follow them, thus allowing these interludes to potentially act as a sort of introduction to the themes found within each chapter.⁴⁷ And, indeed, the importance of the food consumption that will take

place at such table settings will figure substantially within the “regular” chapters of the novel, throughout which the characters will take note of, ‘play’ with, and become associated with food-objects, as well as dine both individually and together within public dining establishments, ultimately demonstrating the ways in which the act of food consumption—particularly when such an act takes place within a public setting—is one of complexity, vulnerability, and possibility.

Within the chapters themselves, narration of the six characters’ experiences with food begins almost immediately, as the brief initial nature-observation-laden “speeches” of the characters (““I hear a sound,”” said Rhoda, ‘cheep, chirp”” ““A caterpillar is curled in a green ring,’ said Susan” [9]) in the first chapter turn very quickly to descriptions of food-objects and meal preparation:

‘Cold water begins to run from the scullery tap,’ said Rhoda, ‘over the mackerel in the bowl’ ... ‘Bubbles form on the floor of the saucepan,’ said Jinny. ‘Then they rise, quicker and quicker in a silver chain to the top’ ... ‘Now Biddy scrapes the fish-scales with a jagged knife onto a wooden board,’ said Neville... ‘The dining-room window is dark blue now,’ said Bernard... ‘Look at the table-cloth, flying white along the table,’ said Rhoda. ‘Now there are rounds of white china, and silver streaks beside each plate.’ (10-11)

The characters, who are cast as young children within this chapter, then apparently consume their meal, leaving Louis—who will, throughout the novel, often take on the role of relative outsider within their group—outside: ““Now they have all gone,’ said Louis. ‘I am alone. They have gone into the house for breakfast”” (11). Following vague descriptions of playtime and arguments and lessons in the schoolroom, we rejoin the characters at a tea-time meal, which Susan describes as

she reminisces about glimpsing the butler passionately kissing the maid in the midst of windblown laundry at some unidentified earlier point in time:

‘Now though they pass plates of bread and butter and cups of milk at tea-time I see a crack in the earth and hot steam hisses up; and the urn roars as Ernest roared, and I am blown out hard like the pyjamas, even while my teeth meet in the soft bread and butter, and I lap the sweet milk...Rhoda dreams, sucking a crust soaked in milk; Louis regards the wall opposite...Bernard moulds his bread into pellets and calls them “people.” Neville with his clean and decisive ways has finished. He has rolled his napkin and slipped it through the silver ring. Jinny spins her fingers on the table-cloth, as if they were dancing in the sunshine, pirouetting.’ (25-6)

In this semi-public scene of eating, Woolf intertwines food consumption and sexuality, though in a fashion different from *Mrs. Dalloway*'s portrayal of Doris Kilman's food consumption as an almost grotesquely sexual act; instead, this association is here cast as one of sensory appeal and potential eroticism. More than this, however, within this scene the reader is provided with a remarkable scene of the intersection of food consumption and physical, intellectual, and emotional play, and the interactions of each character with the food and trappings of the meal (napkins, tablecloths, etc.) strongly figure the act of eating, and/or the moments surrounding the act of eating, as those which connect the body with one's rich internal life; Jinny makes her fingers spin like dancers, Louis apparently daydreams, Bernard appears to be telling stories (likely to both himself and the others, given that he “calls” them people) using the bread-people he has molded, literally “playing with his food.” Neville, of the “clean and decisive ways,” is the only one who appears not to play in this scene. The description of Susan's food consumption—

which is the richest given that the scene is described in her “voice” and the reader is therefore located within some version of her narration at this moment—associates the memorable kiss she has witnessed with something elemental—such as a nature-driven geologic event—and the steam from such an event to the steam from the nearby tea kettle, as well as with the sensuous experience of the body interacting with food—the teeth “meeting” in the bread and butter, the animal-like “lapping” of the milk; and she is overwhelmed by it all, “blown out hard” like the clean pajamas whipping in the wind. The act of consuming food is here figured as a sensuous and complex experience involving mediation between self and other(s), body and objects, emotions and thoughts and sensations.

All of the characters within *The Waves* are, at some point, closely associated with elements of the natural world (“I hold the stalk in my hand. I am the stalk,” Louis tells us [11-12]), but none more so than Susan, who ‘hates’ London and what she views as the artificiality of the Swiss boarding school environment in which the six characters spend their formative years (61). Upon her graduation, Susan immediately escapes by train into an English countryside largely defined by its association with food production and distribution:

‘these are not school fields; these are not school hedges; the men in these fields are doing real things; they fill carts with real hay; and those are real cows, not school cows...I smell corn and turnips. I undo a paper packet tied with a piece of white cotton. The egg shells slide in to the cleft between my knees. Now we stop at station after station, rolling out milk cans...The air rushes down my nose and throat...with the smell of turnip fields in it.’ (61-62)

Here, the “reality” of livestock and growing crops cleanses Susan’s body of “the carbolic smell of corridors and the chalky smell of schoolrooms,” just as she unwraps what is ostensibly her

traveler's meal of hard-boiled eggs and the eggshells "slide into the cleft between" her knees, thereby prefiguring the notion of abundant fertility that will come to define her throughout the rest of the novel—as mother of numerous children, as country gardener, as cook for her family, as one for whom "Yet more will come, more children; more cradles, more baskets in the kitchen and hams ripening; and onions glistening and more beds of lettuce and potatoes" (61; 173). Susan's body will become further associated with food-objects as she ages into her domestic role, her flesh lying "like a field bearing crops in rotation," her hands "plunging...into the warm inwards" of bread dough, her "pear-shaped eyes" becoming strange to her old friends upon later meetings—as Neville mentally remarks, "But your eyes, Susan, full of turnips and cornfields, disturb me" (131; 99; 171, 212; 211).

Susan's bodily association with food exists in particularly marked contrast to the novel's figuration of Rhoda, who is typically described within the text in terms by turns inhuman and curiously *abodily* terms; she is sea-foam, a drifting scrap of paper, "a ribbon of weed," fluttering "unattached, without anchorage anywhere" (107, 130; 130; 122). She struggles to connect with her body ("I have no face. Other people have faces; Susan and Jinny have faces; they are here. Their world is the real world. The things they lift are heavy" [43]) and thus spends a number of her soliloquies explaining her compulsion to connect her body in some way to the material world, such as by touching doors, bed frames, and other solid objects in order to brace herself, to "call [herself] back into [her] body," lest she be "blown down the eternal corridors forever" (44; 27; 44; 159). Given Rhoda's difficulties with the lived experience of her physical body, it is perhaps unsurprising that, although she is technically present at a number of meals within the novel, her most vivid encounter with food within the novel is both imagined and impersonal. As she moves timidly through London, she passes a music hall and explains:

‘Here is a hall where one pays money and goes in, where one hears music among somnolent people who have come here after lunch on a hot afternoon. We have eaten beef and pudding enough to live for a week without tasting food. Therefore we cluster like maggots on the back of something that will carry us on...like walruses... We lie gorged with food, torpid in the heat.’ (162)

Within this passage, Rhoda both distances herself from the actual act of consumption and, curiously, includes herself in this imaginary act of consumption, shifting from “one” to “we,” though there is no evidence that she herself has eaten recently, nor that she actually enters the music hall. Further, the picture she paints of the postprandial bodily experience is one of disgust; the sated body is actually over-glutted, overly fleshly (particularly in its comparison to a flesh-feasting maggot), and powerlessly heavy, unable to move without simply ‘riding along’ on “something.” Food, as this passage would suggest, is not a material object qualified to lend Rhoda’s body her desired sense of solidity and physicality, likely because it is an object incorporated into—and thus able to alter—the body itself. According to Glenny, this passage—as well as Rhoda’s apparent unsubstantial materiality—casts Rhoda as anorexic figure who “experiences her full stomach as a weight upon her soul” and as a threat to her selfhood (155; 158).

Rhoda’s interactions with food are cast not only in opposition to Susan’s bodily associations with food, but also—as Glenny points out—to Neville’s lived experience of food consumption, which, within his narration of his dinnertime, is one of pleasure, physical security, and great interactive intimacy between the body itself and the food objects as they are consumed:

‘But I eat. I gradually lose all knowledge of particulars as I eat. I am becoming weighed down with food. These delicious mouthfuls of roast duck, fitly piled with vegetables,

following each other in exquisite rotation of warmth, weight, sweet and bitter, past my palate, down my gullet, into my stomach, have stabilised my body. I feel quiet, gravity, control. All is solid now. Instinctively my palate now requires and anticipates sweetness and lightness, something sugared and evanescent; and cool wine, fitting glove-like over those finer nerves that seem to tremble from the roof of my mouth and make it spread (as I drink) into a domed cavern, green with vine leaves, musk-scented, purple with grapes.’ (138)

According to Glenny, Neville here “derives a sense of security from the comfortingly familiar sequences of eating—both the harmonious succession of tastes and sensations... and the biological passage of the food through each chamber of his body” (160). I would additionally suggest that this passage particularly emphasizes the concomitant materiality of the food and of Neville’s body; the potential agency of the food-objects themselves as they act upon—and merge with—his body (the “glove-like” wine “fitting” itself over his oral nerves); the redistribution of the mass of these food objects from outside to inside his body, the stabilization and solidity of their now-combined weight as they encounter the world (in this case, in terms of gravitational pull); and the synaesthetic fusion of these food objects, Neville’s physical body, and his imagination and intellect, as his mouth momentarily transforms into a grape-covered cavern.

The Waves also includes an extended scene of food consumption from the perspective of Louis, albeit one far less concerned with the lived bodily experience of tasting, consuming, and processing food, and one far more concerned with the lived bodily experience of consuming food within a public, urban setting. Although he is one of the six characters within the novel’s circle of friendship and textual speech, Louis is cast as somewhat of an outsider throughout the novel; instead of being “fully” English as are the others, and instead of being the “sons of gentleman” as

are Bernard and Neville, Louis's father is a banker in Brisbane, and he speaks with an Australian accent which marks him as other. (20; 19 et al.) As such, from an early age, he feels that he must mimic others in order to maintain some version of social standing and to avoid the mocking laughter of his peers; in the schoolroom as a child, he explains that he "will not conjugate the verb...until Bernard has said it...I will wait and copy Bernard. He is English" (19). Although scholarly Louis is framed as the most intelligent of the group, one who always "know[s] the lesson by heart" and is well aware that he "could know everything in the world if [he] wished," he largely occupies himself by performing a version of Englishness ("I will now try to imitate Bernard softly lisping Latin" [20]) that never fully succeeds (20). Following the years spent at boarding school with the other five characters, Louis—who cannot afford to attend university as can the others—enters into the world of London commerce and eventually becomes "immensely respectable," though he cannot jettison his insecurities, reflecting: "I have known little natural happiness, though I chose my mistress in order that, with her cockney accent, she might make me feel at my ease" (200; 201). Louis's sense of separation from those around him is particularly visible within scenes of food consumption, from the childhood experience of being left behind when the others go inside for a meal ("Now they have all gone...I am alone. They have gone into the house for breakfast, and I am left standing by the wall among the flowers" [11]), to the teatime scene (discussed above) in which Louis simply "regards the wall opposite," lost in thought and disengaged from the others, to—most importantly, for our purposes—the scene of the Louis as a young professional in London, taking lunch in a café in the midst of "glass shelves set with plates of buns and ham sandwiches. All is somewhat obscured by steam from a tea-urn. A meaty, vapourish smell of beef and mutton, sausages and mash, hangs down like a damp net in the middle" (25; 92-93). This is a strongly sensuous scene, one

focused upon scent and sight, and the clear glass display shelves and the mist of steam that “somewhat” obscures the sights of the place echo the play with desirable and undesirable visibility that Louis himself experiences within this scene.

Louis is well aware that he is, within this café, part of a scene of public consumption. He acts as urban spectator throughout this meal, his eyes repeatedly drawn to the sights featured via the café windows; ““People go on passing...They pass the window of this eating-shop incessantly. Motor-cars, vans, motor-omnibuses; and again motor-omnibuses, vans, motor-cars—they pass the window”” (92). But he is not entirely separate from this urban spectacle, as the ““eternity”” of the city also enters Louis’s more immediate environment as ““the hats bob up and down; the door perpetually shuts and opens”” (96; 93). He also enjoys the spectacular sensory offerings of the café itself, the ““rhythm”” and visual, spatial, and interpersonal ““harmony,”” in which ““waitresses, balancing trays, swing in and out, round and round, dealing plates of greens, of apricot and custard, dealing them at the right time, to the right customers”” (93; 94; 94). However, although this scene suggests some of the pleasures of the scene of urban food consumption, Louis is also painfully aware that he is a part of this spectacle, that he is also being observed by others (both within and from outside the glass-fronted café) as he eats his lunch, and, for Louis, this awareness translates into insecurity and self-conscious performance of the role that he believes will best allow him to fit in—that is, in this case, as some version of the ““little men,”” the ““average men,”” at the tables around him, someone who would not prompt the imagined scornful laughter of the ““waitress with the plaited wreaths of hair”” as she discovers that he has left too substantial a tip on the table (93; 94; 96). Despite Louis’s apparently earnest performance of ‘average man eating lunch in café,’ his charade is unsuccessful and he is unable to merge fully with this urban spectacle; ““I prop my book against a bottle of Worcester sauce

and try to look like the rest. Yet I cannot...I cannot read my book, or order my beef, with conviction. I repeat, 'I am an average Englishman; I am an average clerk,' yet I look at the little men at the next table to be sure that I do what they do'" (93). The reader is included—and implicated—within this scene, as, near the end of his meal, Louis suddenly shifts from describing his surroundings in third-person terms into a form of direct address, explaining that the waitress "'deals you your apricots and custard unhesitatingly, like a sister. You are her brothers'" (96). In this way, the text both brings the reader into the spectacle of this public dining scene as a whole, and invites the reader to judge Louis's 'performance' of social class and of 'appropriate' food consumption from the outside (an invitation which echoes our invited judgment of Hopper's food-consuming figures, and of Miss Kilman's act of food consumption in *Mrs. Dalloway*), even as Louis's personal thoughts about, and experiences of, this meal are made available to the reader via his soliloquizing, and he is therefore placed in a doubly vulnerable position during this act of food consumption.

Glenny has argued that Louis's choice to consume food in this inexpensive café is indicative of his "his hopeless desire for acceptance by ordinary people," and that this scene demonstrates the ways in which "Even when he has achieved a certain standing in commerce, he continues to gravitate toward...working-class districts" (164). However, I would argue that Louis is eating in this café because he is not yet financially secure and professionally successful, as this scene takes place when he is a young man just beginning his career; after all, after Louis becomes a middle-aged man who has achieved success, he remarks that "'I can dine where I like now'" (200, emphasis mine), which would seem to suggest that he had not previously been able to choose dining establishments according to preference, and, further, there is no evidence within the novel that he continues to frequent inexpensive cafés at this later point in his life. That said,

Glenny does raise an important point about the relative ridiculousness of Louis's attempt to "look like the rest" by "reading a book of poetry in a working class café," and I would suggest that this action potentially speaks to Louis's lack of actual desire to fit in—or, at least, his ambivalence about the notion, as does his repeated pejorative usage of the diminutive "little" to refer to the men at the other tables, as well as his evident disgust for these other café patrons (164). Although they make "all the right gestures" as they chat with one another, and Louis purportedly attempts to perform his own version of their actions and appearance, he also describes the spectacle of these men in terms both animalic and unappealing: "Supple-faced, with rippling skins, that are always twitching with the multiplicity of their sensations, prehensile like monkeys, greased to this particular moment" (93). All are apparently vulnerable to being noticed and judged by one another (and even by one's self), within this space of food consumption.

But one apparently also runs the risk of not being noticed *enough* within this urban spectacle, and of feeling alienated from those one watches and judges, and from those with whom one interacts. The spectacle, it seems, is not always exciting, and it is not always appealing; "If this is all," Louis tells the reader as he looks around the café, "this is worthless" (93). His earlier description of the spectacle just outside the windows of the café, a description that held notes of interest and excitement, shifts as he completes his meal, and he asserts:

'I will not submit to this aimless passing of billycock hats and Homburg hats and all the plumed and variegated head-dress of women...And the grinding and the steam that runs in unequal drops down the window pane; and the stopping and the starting with a jerk of motor-omnibuses; and the hesitations at counters; and the words that trail drearily without

human meaning.’ (95)

According to Janine Utell, Louis’s sense of “detachment from the world around him” is here also strongly contrasted to the “creation of community and connection in the eating-house” (9). And, indeed, it does appear as though everyone else within the café is interacting with one another while he is, as he indicates, simply ““not included”” (94). As Utell notes, this lack of inclusion, this disconnected interpersonality, echoes the distance between Louis and the food he consumes, and she suggests that “He is even separate from his food, not preparing it himself but paying money to have it prepared and served to him. He is an outsider. . . removed from the communion around him” (9). Although I would add that this separation between food preparation, distribution, and consumption is necessarily applicable to everyone within this scene—it is a fundamental part of dining within any version of a restaurant, after all—Utell’s remark raises an important point about the ways in which food consumption may (or may not) feel communal and/or social, even for strangers within a fully public setting.

These tensions regarding communality and sociality are also visible within the scenes within *The Waves* in which the characters all consume food together within public restaurant settings. Utell has suggested that the two extended dinner gathering scenes involving the six characters as adults should be read as forms of ritualized public mourning, with the first—the dinner at which the young adult characters bid farewell to their friend Percival, who is leaving for India the next morning—cast as a “proleptic funeral” dinner for this friend, and the second—the meeting of the six middle-aged characters at a Hampton Court Palace dining room for a meal—as an experience of “communion and consolation” in which the six characters mourn the eventual loss of one another (and themselves) “as they near the end of their lives” (6; 14). Percival is a character truly peripheral to the text itself—he is not one of the six characters who

are allowed to “speak” within the novel, he is only periodically and very briefly mentioned during the characters’ boarding school years (albeit in glowing terms: “Look now, how everybody follows Percival...His magnificence is that of some mediaeval commander. A wake of light seems to lie on the grass behind him” [37]), and, shortly after this meal, the reader is informed that Percival has been thrown to his death from a horse almost immediately after arriving in India. And yet, he clearly occupies a place curiously central to the lives of the six main characters within *The Waves*, a contradiction that neatly underlines the novel’s theme regarding the difficulties (or the impossibilities) of ‘accurate’ representation when telling a life story. Although Percival is present at his farewell dinner in London, he is mentioned almost not at all within the passages of the novel in which this dinner is described. According to Utell, however, the interlude preceding the chapter in which this dinner is described—which is one of the most food-focused interludes within the novel—prepares the reader both for the meal and for the subsequent death of Percival, with “the damp shreds and peelings thrown from the kitchen bucket, from which a slow steam oozed on the rubbish heap” thus providing pre-chapter imagery of a “liminal, transitional stage between sustenance and decay” which “takes the place of the corpse of Percival that we never see” (*Waves* 109; Utell 10). Utell’s reading of these scenes is well suited to the novel’s framework and thematics of natural life cycles and lived human experience, as well as its often elegiac tone, though what is important for our purposes are the ways in which both dinner scenes sketch both the anxieties and pleasures of eating in a public setting (particularly an urban one), emphasizing the vulnerabilities of the body and the self in such a situation, in ways both social and material.

It is notable that the reader is allowed to witness the coming together of these figures as adults who remain in varying levels of social contact with one another through meals, through

acts of food consumption, rather than through some other form of activity. This choice of social activity allows for both communality and alienation within—and without—the six-character group, as the complex negotiations of grappling with both their memories of one another and their current experiences of one another intersect with the complex negotiations of bodily consumption, material action, and the act of creating forms of “meaning” that is central to most eating experiences. It is further notable that these two meals take place in public, at restaurants and, therefore, act as scenes of spectacle and vulnerability (as noted above within our discussions of Hopper’s paintings, and Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*). Setting such social interactions at, for example, a fully private dinner party or tea service at someone’s home would not only suggest intimacies that may no longer exist between these characters—after all, particularly as they age, most of them seem to see little of one another—but would also necessarily require some address (or noticeable dismissal) of characters beyond their small circle, given that Susan is married and has children, Bernard is married and may have children, Neville and Louis each have significant others, and so forth. Within these dining scenes, the six characters are clearly not strangers to one another as they are to those who surround them within these public eating spaces, but they are also clearly less close to one another than they once were. Additionally, the public nature of these restaurants mark them as no single character’s ‘turf,’ but, rather, as neutral (and liminal) spaces, which also allow for some interaction with those outside their circle, and, thus, for the reader to glimpse the circle of six characters against a larger backdrop of the novel’s world. Although the narration remains in the form of soliloquy, and is ‘spoken’ only in the ‘voices’ of these six characters, public scenes such as the shared meals allow for the narration of multiple characters to pivot around the same moments of experience and social interaction, thus lending the soliloquies a sense of objectivity that they often seem to lack, grounded as they seem

to be in private thought and personal lived experience. For example, at the start of the Percival farewell dinner, Susan describes the effect the entrance of the vivaciously lovely Jinny has upon the restaurant: ““She stands in the door. Everything seems stayed. The waiter stops. The diners at the table by the door look. She seems to centre everything; round her tables, lines of doors, windows, ceilings, ray themselves, like rays round the star in the middle of a smashed window-pane. She brings thing to a point, to order”” (120). Such a moment is less easily attributed purely to Susan’s jealousy of Jinny’s beauty and social ease when, moments later, Jinny remarks: ““When I came in just now everything stood still in a pattern. Waiters stopped, diners raised their forks and held them”” (128).

Within these public scenes of group dining, the characters’ emotions and experiences are altered by—and often told *through*—their interactions with food and food-linked social interaction, reminding us that any act of public food consumption consists of remarkable interplay between material object, material body and the lived experiences of that body, the emotional and intellectual life of the food consumer, and shifting social negotiations of the public moment. As with the scene of Louis lunching in the café, the publicness of these restaurant scenes is often cast as confusing, as introducing additional vulnerabilities to the act of food consumption via the liminality of the space, the proximity of other people, the inevitable display of one’s body (and, for Rhoda, the ensuing self-consciousness) during the act of consumption; ““The swing-door goes on opening,’ said Rhoda. ‘Strangers keep on coming, people we shall never see again, people who brush us disagreeably with their familiarity, their indifference, and the sense of a world continuing without us. We cannot sink down. We cannot forget our faces”” (122). According to Neville, ““the hostility, the indifference of other people dining here is oppressive. We look at each other; see that we do not know each other, stare and

go off. Such looks are lashes. I feel the whole cruelty and indifference of the world in them” (118-19). As “the door opens, the door keeps on opening,” the words of their conversation circle “red lobsters and yellow fruit, wreathing them into one beauty,” as they sit, “surrounded, lit up, many coloured” as “all things—hands, curtains, knives and forks, other people dining—run into each other” (141; 133; 135).

And yet, although the sensory overload of eating in public here appears potentially threatening and anxiety producing, these acts of consumption are also framed as being in some way beneficial, even necessary, to the members of this group. For Jinny, whose “imagination is the body’s,” the mixed materiality of such experiences brings pleasure and confirms her sense of self via her sense of her own preferences: “I see what is before me... This scarf, these wine-colored spots. This glass. This mustard pot. This flower. I like what one touches, what one tastes” (220). For Rhoda, who depends upon material objects and her sense of touch to confirm her very existence, as well as her friends for much of her sense of identity, despite her panic in public settings and more focused social interactions, “these rolls of bread and wine bottles are,” she tells the reader, “needed by me” (223). According to Bernard, such group meals act as calmatives, soothing social tensions within the group: “We have dined well. The fish, the veal cutlets, the wine have blunted the sharp tooth of egotism. Anxiety is at rest” (225). Neville suggests that the particularly public nature of these meals is fundamental to their interpersonal interactions, indicating that, since they are now adults, “the light falls upon real objects now. Here are knives and forks. The world is displayed, and we too, so that we can talk” (127). They are exposed, on display to one another (and to “the world”) as “real objects,” able to reconfirm their social and emotional bonds to one another and, the text suggests, to temporarily merge with one another into an intersubjective grouping, with Bernard explaining that he is “dissolved

utterly and become featureless and scarcely to be distinguished from another,” and Louis extending this metaphor by telling the reader that ““our separate drops are dissolved”” (224; 225). This temporary merging of self and other within their small group over an act of public food consumption is a precarious pleasure, however, and one apparently dependent upon a larger group of other “others” outside of their own grouping of six, their small circle which here seems to act as intermediary between the self and the ‘full’ otherness of other people. As Louis explains, ““we pray, holding in our hands this common feeling, ‘Do not move, do not let the swing-door cut to pieces the thing that we have made, that globes itself here, among these lights, these peelings, this litter of bread crumbs and people passing. Do not move, do not go. Hold it forever”” (145). In this way, the experiences of shared food consumption within the two extended public dinner gathering scenes within the novel take place not only within the liminal physical spaces of restaurants, but within the liminal—and ever-shifting—intersubjective spaces which figure notions of individual selfhood as existing both in spite of, and because of, the presence of others.

In much the same way that, within these communal meals, the line between self and other shifts, the food objects and their trappings themselves are often framed within these scenes, and within the novel as a whole, as shifting between familiar and strange and potentially threatening—or, rather, moments of interpersonal closeness and estrangement are often explored through the materiality of food objects and their trappings. Neville arrives early to Percival’s farewell dinner so that he may enjoy the anticipation of seeing Percival, with whom he is in love. He muses:

‘This is the place to which he is coming. This is the table at which he will sit. Here, incredible as it seems, will be his actual body. This table, these chairs, this metal vase

with its three red flowers are about to undergo an extraordinary transformation.

Already the room, with its swing-doors, its tables heaped with fruit, with cold joints, wear the wavering, unreal appearance of a place where one waits expecting something to happen. Things quiver as if not yet in being. The blankness of the white table-cloth glares...somebody must be seeing him now. He must be in some cab... every moment he seems to pump into this room this prickly light, this intensity of being so that things have lost their normal uses—this knife-blade is only a flash of light, not a thing to cut with.

The normal is abolished.’ (118-19)

Moments later, when Percival enters the restaurant, Neville notes that, “‘He has imposed order. Knives cut again’” (122). In these passages, the food- (and food-adjacent) objects within the restaurant are framed both as not yet existing and as lacking in functionality in the absence of one’s beloved, which suggests a figuration of material objects that depends upon meaning-making and the potential mutability of object functionality. The text also here emphasizes the very materiality of the human body—the “actual body”—through which the material object is made more, or is made properly, material by its interaction with the material human body. This experience of intensity of feeling via food-objects occurs elsewhere in the novel for Neville, as when, years later, his lover arrives and he explains “‘But when you come everything changes. The cups and saucers changed when you came in this morning,’” and when, at the Hampton Court group dinner, he comments: “‘When some one comes in at breakfast, even the embroidered fruit on my curtain swells so that parrots can peck it; one can break it off between one’s thumb and finger. The thin, skimmed milk of early morning turns opal, blue rose’” (178; 212). For Neville, it seems, everyday food-related things become “real,” complete, functional,

and, somehow, also extraordinary when in proximity to the bodies of certain others

(Percival, the unidentified “you,” the special “some one”).

Neville is not the only attendee of these dinner gatherings to experience food- and food-related objects as both familiar and somehow estranged from one’s body and comprehension. At the Hampton Court dinner, Rhoda explains the ways in which her public dining experience differs from those around her: “Here in this dining-room you see the antlers and the tumblers; the salt-cellars; the yellow stains on the tablecloth. ‘Waiter!’ says Bernard. ‘Bread!’ says Susan. And the waiter comes; he brings bread. But I see the side of a cup like a mountain and only parts of antlers, and the brightness on the side of that jug like a crack in darkness with wonder and terror” (223). For Rhoda, the food-related objects cannot shift back and forth between familiar/functional and unfamiliar, but remain fundamentally strange, partially viewed, perspectively muddled, and even threatening, and acts of consumption remain (relatively, given that she does subsist) unappealing. Susan, however, experiences a perceptive shift similar to those experienced by Neville whilst at Percival’s farewell dinner, though hers is framed as a form of material alienation rather than a coming-into-being/functionality. Upon hearing the news of (her long-ago crush) Bernard’s engagement, she remarks: “How strange...the little heaps of sugar look by the side of our plates. Also the mottled peelings of pears, and the plush rims to the looking-glasses. I had not seen them before. Everything is now set; everything is fixed. Bernard is engaged. Something irrevocable has happened” (142). These passages touch upon the agency of food- and food-related objects (and objects in general), and the ways in which these objects may not behave or be mastered, but, more than this, this tension between familiar and strange underlines the self-other anxieties present within a public scene of eating and reminds us of yet another vulnerability during such an act of consumption; a vulnerability to the objects one eats

and with which one interacts during eating that is not only due to the properties (agency) of each object itself, but to the ways in which one perceives the object in a given moment, and the ways in which these perceptions may be colored by others present within the scene of eating.

The conclusion of *The Waves* also takes place within a scene of public eating, though this scene takes place after five of the six main characters suddenly ‘drop out’ of the novel’s narration. The novel’s final chapter consists entirely of the now-elderly Bernard’s narration, as he is cast in a sort of one-sided conversation with an unidentified “you” upon whom he has come upon inside an urban café, and to whom he tells some version of the story of his life and of the lives of the five others before he exits the café to his confrontation with death; as he explains ““when I met you in the place where one goes to hang up one’s coat I said to myself, ‘It does not matter whom I meet...Who this is I do not know; nor care; we will dine together.’ So I hung up my coat, tapped you on the shoulder, and said, ‘Sit with me’” (288). Woolf’s choice of dining companion for Bernard within this scene is a particularly liminal figure—a stand-in for the reader, a potential death- or vanitas-figure, and simultaneously someone who Bernard claims not to know at all (““Who this is I do not know’” [288]), and someone he believes to be somehow familiar (““a person, whom I scarcely know save that I think we met once on the gangway of a ship bound for Africa’” [293]); someone not quite a stranger, an ““almost unknown person,”” as he describes the figure at the end of the meal (certainly, the figure should be less a stranger after dining with Bernard and listening to his life story) (294).⁴⁸ Bernard’s final dining companion thus exists somewhere between Bernard’s self, the threat of loneliness inherent in dining alone (something we glimpsed earlier in the novel during Louis’s visit to a café), the pleasures of desirable communality, and the threat of the other—in this case, a threat that takes the form of being judged whilst engaged in the vulnerable act of food consumption.

The reading of Bernard's dining companion within this last chapter as a reminder of death, for Utell, supports her own framing of the novel's meals as proleptically funereal.⁴⁹ Other critics, however, have variously—and curiously—read the Bernard-centered structure of this chapter as a sort of key to the novel as a whole, suggesting either that this chapter neatly confirms that the six characters were only ever six facets of a single central character upon whom the novel focuses (Bishop 99-100; Poresky 189), or that Bernard is here confirmed to be “Woolf's great image of the modernist writer,” and, as such, it is implied, acts as a potential stand-in for Woolf herself (Jackson 147).⁵⁰ What is particularly significant for our purposes, however, is the manner in which the novel concludes with this scene of public food consumption, an act that equates life with necessary sustenance, certainly, and one which calls attention to one of the text's central metaphors of storytelling and life experience as consistently being in some way edible—or, at least, as somehow mediated through food. Bernard, the storyteller, who once, as Neville told the reader, “rolled his bread into pellets as a child. One pellet was a man, one was a woman. We are all pellets. We are all phrases in Bernard's story,” now attempts to “dip again and bring up in my spoon another of these minute objects which we call optimistically, ‘characters of our friends,’” as he tells his story to his unidentified companion, to “break off this bunch and hand it to you” as though his friends, and these characters, were a cluster of grapes (70; 243; 288). More important than these things, however, are the ways in which this final scene of public eating allows, and even encourages, the reader to encounter the body as firmly embodied via its interactions with food, but also as fundamentally vulnerable—to the self, to the presence (or absence) of the other, as a potential spectacle, and through its lived bodily experience of pleasure and suffering.

Bernard suggests in this scene that his appetite for, and enjoyment of, food are fundamentally atavistic, implying a sort of dual embodiment inspired by food consumption, confessing that within him:

‘There is the old brute...the savage, the hairy man who dabbles his fingers in ropes of entrails; and gobbles and belches...He squats in me. Tonight he has been feasted on quails, salad, and sweetbread. He now holds a glass of fine old brandy in his paw...It is true, he washes his hands before dinner but they are still hairy. He buttons on trousers and waistcoats, but they contain the same organs. He jibs if I keep him waiting for dinner...The man, the hairy, the ape-like.’ (289-90)

In this passage, Bernard frames his food-consuming self as an “ape-like” form that is released at mealtimes, emphasizing the ways in which humans are similar to non-human animals in their appetites and need for sustenance in order to survive. Try as this figure might, to wash his hands, to dress for dinner, to consume fine food and expensive drink, he remains transgressive, “still hairy,” his food-centered behaviors and desires located outside the realm of the socially acceptable, the appropriate, the non-disgusting. More than this, however, this passage suggests that there is *pleasure* in such socially unacceptable mealtime atavism; that this figure is the one (though perhaps not the only one?) who takes pleasure in interacting with food, digging his hands into the meal, gorging himself. Further, as “the same organs” contained within the primitive Bernard-figure’s waistcoat may simultaneously refer to both Bernard’s organs and those he has just consumed—the sweetbreads—and, therefore, Bernard here reminds the reader that food-objects themselves are often not so very different from the human body itself in terms of materiality, and that acts of food consumption frequently require the consumer to reconcile or repress this awareness (and, again, potential disgust) in order to actually ingest the food (as

discussed within the previous chapter of this dissertation). Ultimately, this passage suggests the ways in which the bodiliness of one's private pleasures are at risk of incurring public disgust during an act of food consumption, reminding us that such consumption is a particularly risky act within a public setting, when these pleasures—and one's 'animalistic' appetites—may become visible to others.

Bernard not only takes pleasure (though perhaps of the socially unacceptable kind) in his meal, he takes tremendous pleasure in the food-objects at the table. Imagining himself looking down upon the leavings of their meal, he marvels at the visual and textural pleasures of food and food-related objects: “When I look down from this transcendency, how beautiful are even the crumbled relics of bread! What shapely spirals the peelings of pears make—how thin, and mottled like some sea-bird's egg. Even the forks laid straight side by side appear lucid, logical, exact; and the horns of the rolls which we have left are glazed, yellow-plated, hard” (290). Glennie reads this moment as a temporary disembodiment, a “moment of transcendent consciousness” that cannot last, given that “to be human is to engage with the reality of the body...as well as with the sublimity of the spirit” (173). And, indeed, the moment does not last, and Bernard is wrenched away from whatever form of potential sublimity he experiences when gazing upon the food-objects at the table by his awareness of the gaze of his dining companion: “Oh, but there is your face. I catch your eye. I, who had been thinking myself so vast, a temple...am now nothing but what you see—an elderly man, rather heavy, grey above the ears, who (I see myself in the glass) leans one elbow on the table...I have made an awful ass of myself and am justly laughed at by any passer-by” (292). Here, Bernard's awareness of “the eye” of his observing dining companion then triggers his own judgmental gaze as he glimpses his reflection in the nearby window (a vision of himself at a dining table, as if in one of Hopper's paintings)

which then triggers his awareness—and fear—of his vulnerability to the observation and judgments of “any passer-by” outside the restaurant, in a sort of telescoping moment of awareness of his body as spectacle within this dining establishment.

The vulnerability and fear exhibited by Bernard in this situation translates into a moment of overembodiment, or perhaps overmateriality, in which he experiences both his own body and the food-objects which he, moments before, perceived as some version of the aesthetic sublime, as part of an “unutterably disgusting” whole; ““Here we are among the breadcrumbs and the stained napkins again. That knife is already congealing with grease. Disorder, sordidity and corruption surround us. We have been taking into our mouths the bodies of dead birds. It is with these greasy crumbs, slobbered over napkins, and little corpses that we have to build”” (292). The delicious meal, and its aesthetically-pleasing remnants, both of which pleased Bernard greatly, here transforms from food into non-food, with juiciness becoming “congealed grease,” with bread becoming undesirable crumbs, with attempts at propriety via the napkins—which make the body less messy, less undesirably material, during a meal, mediating between food object, vulnerable body orifice, and the gaze of the other—becoming ‘slobber’-marked evidence of the ‘crime’ of consumption of animals, with dead animal (food) meeting living animal (food consumer) within the body’s mouth. This moment is Woolfian food description at its most condemnatory—after all, even the consumption-fearing Rhoda does not experience this level of food disgust—and, not only does it echo the combination of pleasure/disgust/shame present within the preceding moment which described “savage” mealtime Bernard, it is particularly significant that this condemnation takes place here, within a scene of consumption in which the act of eating is framed as being especially vulnerable to the public gaze.

Given this vulnerability, it is perhaps unsurprising that, when Bernard's dining companion prepares to exit the now-empty restaurant late in the evening, leaving Bernard "among peelings and crumblings and old scraps of meat," his relief is palpable: "The face looking at me has gone. The pressure is removed" (293; 294). And yet, Bernard has also noted within this scene the ways in which the presence of others—and, particularly, a dining companion—during his meal has served to improve his own powers of observation and his ability to process the sensory onslaught of living within a modern urban environment. "Also under your gaze," he explains to his dining companion/the reader, "I begin to perceive this, that and the other. The clock ticks; the woman sneezes; the waiter comes — there is a gradual coming together, running into one, acceleration and unification. Listen: a whistle sounds, wheels rush, the door creaks on its hinges. I regain the sense of the complexity and the reality and the struggle, for which I thank you" (293-94). The gaze of the other within this scene of public dining, then, appears not only to act as threat, a visual conduit for disapproval or disgust regarding the food-consuming Bernard's body and behaviors, but also as catalyst for Bernard's appreciation and understanding of the multisensory spectacle of this scene of eating itself, as well as his place within it.

As we have seen, the scenes of eating within Woolf's *The Waves* frame the act of food consumption as an intimate encounter between food-object (and, perhaps, food-adjacent object) and the human body, an encounter throughout which the food consumer's engagement with this food-object may vacillate between familiarity and estrangement, desire and disgust, tactile play and actual consumption. These are, of course, thematics we have noted before within previous chapters of this dissertation, with regards to the works of Rebecca West, and the sculptural "readymade" food-objects of Duchamp, Oppenheim, and Oldenburg. But within *The Waves*,

much as within *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf begins to unpack the private lived experience of such food consumption *within* scenes of eating which are—like those within Hopper’s paintings—fundamentally public (or, at least, semi-public). As such, these acts of food consumption become further altered—and alterable—by additional issues of sociality, cultural expectation, and self-presentation, as well as the vulnerability that stems from turning this private act between body and food-object into a potential spectacle to be witnessed and/or judged.

The works discussed within this chapter all present scenes which foreground acts of food-object consumption, making the case for these scenes as moments of encounter worthy of our consideration within the visual art and literature of the early twentieth century, and within our lives more generally. More than this, however, the scenes of food consumption here offered by Edward Hopper and Virginia Woolf suggest that a specifically modernist artistic, literary, or cultural scene of eating might very well be a public one; that is, a human encounter with the food-object that has been made spectacle, and one composed of—or at least influenced by—the possibilities and vulnerabilities of its milieu. Consideration of Hopper’s *Automat*, *Chop Suey*, and *Nighthawks*, then, allows us to “set up” the scene of food consumption not only as an encounter worthy of our consideration within Hopper’s corner of the visual arts within the early twentieth century, and not only within modernism as a larger category, but also as an encounter which reflects cultural shifts of the period, and which places us (as viewers) in the position of interpreting the scene according to our own experiences and biases (and here we might think of the heavily narrativized and oversexualized critical readings of these paintings). Consideration of Woolf’s scenes of semi-public and fully public eating within *To the Lighthouse*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *The Waves*, allows us to continue exploring the issues of spectacularity, possibility, and

vulnerability raised within our examination of Hopper's paintings, but to extend these issues into more thorough discussions of communality and individuality; class, gender, and sexuality; and the respective (and eventually shared) materialities of the food-object and the human body as they interact within the multisensory act of food consumption—particularly as that multisensory act of food consumption is negotiated within (and altered by) a public setting.

These discussions dovetail with modernist interests in objecthood (particularly as this objecthood relates to the body and to the commodity), the category of the everyday, the potential animality of the body, and phenomenological and/or psychological accounts of shifting perception and experience, and they might also be fruitfully considered in further depth with regards to philosophical debates of selfhood and otherness, as well as postmodernist theories of the spectacle. But within the scope of this dissertation, these discussions broaden our previous analyses of the place of the food-object within modernist art, literature, and culture (as discussed within the introductory chapter, and throughout this project), of scenes of encounter with the food-object that are not necessarily “about” actual food consumption (as in our discussion of “readymade” food-object sculptures), and of more private scenes of food-object consumption which are either solitary in nature or which take place within a kinship/domestic sphere (as in our discussion of West's scenes of eating). Such broadening ultimately allows us to take into account the ways in which bodily interactions with the food-object take place within remarkably complex and ever-shifting spheres of influence upon the body, the food-object, and the food consumptive interaction itself—spheres that may be private and self-mediated (whether consciously or unconsciously), and/or imposed upon by others via their personal desires, needs, and socioculturally-inflected expectations.

Notes

¹ And yes, one might also point out that the food-object itself is vulnerable to its consumer—its transformer, its destroyer—within this act of food consumption.

² In fact, I might suggest that it is partly this vulnerability that makes dining together an act of potential closeness.

³ Although the automatic bread-slicing machine had been in prototype development since 1912, it did not become a commercially successful invention until 1928. (Latson) The first electric refrigerator for commercial use was introduced in 1914, though these appliances were not widely available until after World War I. (Bundy)

⁴ For more on the rise of these types of dining establishments, see Levenstein (*Revolution*), and McCracken. Chauncey discusses the ways in which automats and cafeterias in particular were, in the 1930s, “known as the salons of the poorer bohemians of the Village” in addition to being “places where prostitutes and customers might gather in the middle of the night,” as well as “among the safest refuges available to poorer gay men” and for “social outcasts and the unemployed” (164-65).

⁵ See Diehl and Hardart, who detail the at-the-time highly newsworthy popularity of the automat with public figures such as Jean Harlow, Gloria Vanderbilt, and Gregory Peck. Lana Turner, after all, was “discovered” at a soda fountain, at least as the story goes. (Wilkerson III)

⁶ According to Doss, fluorescent lights became commercially available in 1938 and increased in popularity throughout the 1940s. (23)

⁷ As Wagstaff explains in the introduction to *Edward Hopper*, which she edited, the Museum of Modern Art’s founding director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., “presented Hopper as the quintessential American modernist” in a 1933 MoMA exhibition, viewing Hopper’s paintings as being “part of a new international progressive trend emerging within modernism,” particularly due to the interplay of “form and content” in Hopper’s work (14).

⁸ Several critics writing within the exhibition catalogue for the Whitney Museum’s 2009 Hopper exhibition (See Westheider and Ansenk 11; Zurier 14) have been anxious to associate Hopper with Robert Henri’s Ashcan School of (American) realism, with mixed results at best. Hopper’s work lacks the “grit,” as well as the common occasion-related documentarian specificity, of such American artists, nor does he attend to the issues of social justice, class, and the intersection of urban immigration and race that compelled those artists invested in a more “social” form of realism. For association of Hopper with American Scene painting and Regionalism, see Goodrich; Jeffries. Hopper himself chafed repeatedly at his association with American Scene Painting, remarking that, “I don’t see why I must have the American Scene pinned on me” (qtd. in Kuh 135), and, later, “The thing that makes me so mad is this American Scene business. I never tried to do the American Scene” (qtd. in O’Doherty 72). For discussions of Hopper and Surrealism, see Barr “Postwar”; W. Jackson; and Wollen. In terms of Symbolism, Schjeldahl has called Hopper “a symbolist above all” (“Hopperesque” 5). For readings that focus upon Hopper’s association with forms of cinema, see O’Doherty; Wagstaff’s “Elation”; Lipinski; Slater. In terms of Hopper and photography, Greenberg famously remarked in his 1946 review of the Whitney’s annual show that “Hopper’s painting is essentially photography” (*Collected, Vol. 2* 118), and Lipinski has suggested that Greenberg was here calling for “the necessity to come up with a special category of art for Hopper, no longer a medium-specific sphere between

photography and painting” (164).

⁹ For Hopper’s self-categorization as a realist artist, see Hopper’s 1962 interview with Katherine Kuh: “Q: you said you were a realist. H: Yes I am. I guess the popular conception of a realist is one who imitates nature” (Kuh 141). The association of Hopper’s work with realism is inevitably complex, given that “realism” is fraught and subjective category if ever there was one (though substantial discussion of realism as problematic category is clearly beyond the scope of this project). For discussion of Hopper’s potential combination of realism and abstraction, see Fluck. As for the potentially documentarian aspects of Hopper’s work, Berman argues that “Viewers so trust Hopper’s bare honesty that they think he is simply reporting what he saw, and a street corner or a public place must have been empty when he visited it” (26).

¹⁰ Barr, Jr. has noted Hopper’s “indifference to skyscrapers” (“Edward” 14).

¹¹ Slater, for example, has argued that Hopper’s urban paintings are overwhelmingly suggestive of anti-urban discourse, and has even claimed that, although Hopper lived in New York City for much of his life, “it is hard to find a Hopper painting where this city is celebrated or loved, or presented with any optimism,” an assertion with which I would strongly disagree (141). In terms of Hopper’s potential nostalgia, Wells has suggested that “Hopper’s images, especially the urban ones, possess an incongruously prelapsarian quality. His city seems untainted, as though only at the start of its journey through mankind’s history of despoliation and sin” (13). Goodrich makes the subtler argument that Hopper was “one of our first representational painters to realize the pictorial possibilities of the modern city...and the many kinds of visual material it represents” (68).

¹² Hopper inherits the urban-social landscape genre from Manet and the Impressionists, who very often painted urban café, bar, park, and street scenes (for further discussion of such Impressionist scenes, see Clark).

¹³ I do not here disagree with Hobb’s suggestion that the viewer is here cast as voyeur, and the woman as spectacle—which should be quite clear from the rest of my argument within this section—only that the woman’s legs are brighter than other areas within the painting and Hobb’s suggestion that they are a central focus point (as well as Hobb’s suggestion that the viewer of this painting would automatically be one who is sexually attracted to women).

¹⁴ As for the argument that the fruit is somehow out of place, Junker has stated that, “large compotes brimming with mounds of fresh fruit, clear symbols of the assured freshness and sumptuousness of the offerings to be found within” were very common sights in the windows of automats (25), and Bendiner reminds us that such fruit might also not be edible: “The fine fruit in the bowl behind her...are not to be eaten. They are a window displays and probably made of plaster or plastic or papier-mâché” (159).

¹⁵ Particularly important given the ways in which the ways in which food adulteration and contamination had become major concerns at the beginning of the century, as detailed in Goodwin.

¹⁶ According to Junker, “One Automat under construction in the Yorkville district on the Upper East Side in December 1927 was built for a daily capacity of ten thousand diners” (24).

¹⁷ For a history of chop suey, see Roberts (138-39). In 1903, a *New York Times* article noted that “one hundred or more chop suey places” had suddenly opened across a section of Manhattan (“Chop Suey Resorts” 20).

¹⁸ In terms of the work's popularity, according to Barter in "Nighthawks: Transcending Reality," the immediate popularity of the painting led to it being "requested so continuously and lent so often to art galleries, museum exhibitions, and even state fairs that by 1953 it required conservation" ("Nighthawks" 203).

¹⁹ That is, if Hopper were here actually attempting "realism," which, as discussed earlier in this chapter, is not an unproblematic assumption. Additionally, Barter here briefly touches upon a compelling suggestion that the architectural elements of *Nighthawks* might place it into the realm of Surrealist landscape paintings, such as those by de Chirico. As for Lipinski's "aesthetics of desire," he argues that the "spatial wedge" of the restaurant, "encourages the spectator to physically enter the painting and 'window dine', but at the same time, frustrates any such attempt: the identification of the bar window with the frame of the painting, as if it was its original position, virtually doubles the materially invisible but functionally effective boundary. The material surface of the painting is additionally 'glazed' in the mind of the spectator by its association with the window. This double coding of the illusion of accessibility enhances the paradoxical experience of access and its denial" (169).

²⁰ See *Collected, Volume 4* (118). Greenberg's classification of Hopper as a "bad painter" was not meant as an insult, given that Greenberg immediately continues by stating: "But if he were a better painter, he would, most likely, not be so superior an artist."

²¹ Note: that the object in the woman's hand is a sandwich seems unlikely, given the lack of nearby plate.

²² For discussion of Woolf and the everyday, see Randall. For discussion of Woolf's interest in objects, see Mao's *Solid Objects*.

²³ For discussion of the novel's interest in interior/exterior boundaries, see, for example, Auerbach's "The Brown Stocking, and Koppen's response to Auerbach in "Embodied Form." As for readings of this dinner scene as successfully communal and harmonious, see Blodgett, "Mimesis" 288-89; Burgass 99; Kessler 155; Stelmach 318-19; Utell 4.

As for Mr. Ramsay's interest in the 'thingness' of tables—technically, as Andrew explains to Lily Briscoe "subject and object and the nature of reality," before instructing her to "think of a kitchen table," an image which comes to represent the idea of Mr. Ramsay's work as a whole to Lily, throughout the novel (23). As for Mr. Ramsay's disinterest in things beyond the table itself at mealtime, Mrs. Ramsay reflects of her husband: "But did he notice the flowers? No. Did he notice the view? No. Did he even notice his own daughter's beauty, or whether there was pudding on his plate or roast beef? He would sit at table with them like a person in a dream" (70).

²⁴ Or, yes, how truly anyone might "know" anyone else, which is clearly a notable concern within Woolf's oeuvre.

²⁵ Mrs. Ramsay, Tromanhauser here seems to imply, is a less-than-reliable narrator, an implication which is, of course, quite at home in any analysis of Woolf's novels, given Woolf's tendencies toward both stream of consciousness and irony, and her interest in subjectivity and disconnection.

²⁶ As William Bankes notes, "The children were dropping in still" (88); "His favorite, Cam, was in bed, he supposed" (89).

²⁷ Pre-dinner, Mrs. Ramsay looks forward to the "masterpiece" of the *boeuf en daube*, framing the preparation of the dish as involving great care: "Everything depended upon things being

served up to the precise moment they were ready. The beef, the bay leaf, and the wine—all must be done to a turn. To keep it waiting was out of the question” (80) [this is a curious suggestion, given the slow imprecision and forgiving nature of the actual preparation/serving of this dish, one might point out]. Mrs. Ramsay then worries that the main dish will be “spoilt,” that it is burning, but later worries that it is not being kept hot enough (80; 82; 88). The stew is unveiled somewhat dramatically before Mrs. Ramsay and we are informed: “The cook had spent three days over that dish” (100). Mr. Bankes explains to the reader that the dish was “perfectly cooked” and queries how Mrs. Ramsay could possibly “manage these things in the depths of the country” (100). Mrs. Ramsay answers that the recipe was her grandmother’s, and an apparently lengthy discussion ensues regarding the relative deliciousness and health of French and English methods of food preparation, with special emphasis placed upon retaining vegetable peels (100-101).

²⁸ A cook, and, one presumes, several kitchen helpers—the “they” of Mrs. Ramsay’s “Could they have let the *Boeuf en Daube* overboil?” (82).

²⁹ Those who prepare such food and those who consume it, as well as, one might point out, those who move between these spaces—in this case, the maid, Ellen, who acts as intermediary between the cook and Mrs. Ramsay.

³⁰ Woolf’s possible anorexia is discussed at some length in nearly every published biography of her life, as well as within (amongst others) Glenny; Trombley.

³¹ A late or second helping of the stew, given that she has just served “one very small piece more” to William Bankes, and that the diners will very soon be eating fruit from the centerpiece (105).

³² For discussions of this public-private interaction within the party scenes of the novel, see Sulkin; McGee.

³³ According to Dodd, Kilman is “not a very sympathetic character” (156). Marshik intones that “readers often feel little sympathy for this controlling, self-pitying character” (1). Trombley remarks that Kilman is “one of the few [characters] for whom...[Woolf] had no sympathy whatsoever” (65). Angelella describes Kilman as a ‘notoriously’ “vilified” character (176). And Blodgett agrees with Trombley, going on to suggest that this lack of sympathy on Woolf’s part allows Kilman to act as “a powermonger in a book that upholds the importance of not imposing one’s will on others” and to be marked as a “possessive lesbian” who ‘preys’ upon Elizabeth (“Food for Thought” 51) [this, I would argue, is a particularly problematic reading, both due to Blodgett’s phrasing and because I would suggest that the novel does not frame Elizabeth as being somehow ‘victimized’ by Kilman’s evident romantic feelings for her. More than this, that the text offers more than a little ambiguity as to whether or not some version of those feelings might be mutual]. On the other side of the “sympathy” argument, Bell suggests that, “What we learn about Miss Kilman...is almost more than it is possible to bear (102), and that the passages describing her life are “among the most wrenching and poignant in all of Virginia’s Woolf’s writing” (102-3). And Groover allows: “Although Woolf’s portrait of Miss Kilman is often scathing, she nonetheless reveals sympathetically that Miss Kilman’s best chance for a productive and fulfilling life as a teacher was ruined when she was sent away from her school.” Ultimately, I would argue that the critical focus upon the characterization of Doris Kilman as sympathetic or unsympathetic is relatively unproductive; such a concern mistakes personal subjectivity for objectivity and, further, given that the text’s strongest indictment of Kilman’s

behaviors and personage takes place fully within the thoughts of Clarissa Dalloway and it is difficult to imagine a reader able to characterize Clarissa herself as being wholly and consistently sympathetic (if one is to follow the “sympathy” argument), the point may be moot.

³⁴ For more on the rise of teashops and other dining establishments, see Rappaport; Whitaker.

³⁵ One might here argue that this spectacle is incomplete, or perhaps subverted, given the illegibility of the message, though the spectators’ product-name familiarity that makes them what Abbott terms “modern consumers” and which allows them to guess at the content of the airborne message would certainly complicate this argument to some degree (202).

³⁶ According to Bordo, this interest in ‘slimming’ began just before the turn of the century: “In the late Victorian era, arguable for the first time in the West, those who could afford to eat well began systematically to deny themselves food in pursuit of an aesthetic ideal” (185). And Bell here incorrectly indicates that Kilman “derives her only pleasure in life from eating sweets,” while the text clearly notes, more than once, that her pleasure is derived from food more generally (102).

³⁷ As for Elizabeth as a beautiful object, she muses unhappily that “People were beginning to compare her to poplar trees, early dawn, hyacinths, fawns, running water, and garden lilies,” and, after boarding the omnibus, finds herself “delighted to be free” of “poor Miss Kilman who loved her without jealousy, to whom she had been a fawn in the open, a moon in a glade?” (134; 135).

³⁸ This *éclair* might also be read as a breast-like Kleinian “part-object” and further discussed in terms of oral fixation and the eroticization of physical food-object consumption and consumption.

³⁹ Grasping, quite literally—one of Kilman’s hands apparently spends much of the tea beginning to reach for Elizabeth, then pulling back; “her large hand opened and shut on the table,” “the thick fingers curled inwards...the great hand opened and shut” (131; 132). I might suggest that this potential invitation to find Kilman’s behavior here (and, perhaps, Kilman herself) disgusting has much to do with the critical tendency to find Kilman unappealing and “unsympathetic.”

⁴⁰ As Bordo details, “preoccupation with fat, diet, and slenderness are not abnormal...such preoccupation may function as one of the most powerful normalizing mechanisms of our century, insuring the production of self-monitoring and self-disciplining “docile bodies” sensitive to any departure from social norms” (186). She goes on to suggest that the “fat/slender body” is coded in both moral and economic ways, and that such coding “represents the culmination of a developing historical change in the social symbolism of body weight and size” by which, beginning in the late nineteenth century, the “slender body” came to “announc[e] aristocratic status...command[ing] social space invisibly rather than aggressively,” an ideal that was appropriated by the status-seeking middle class (191). Therefore, Kilman’s size/weight mark her out as being poor, a status confirmed (or vice versa) by her mackintosh coat.

⁴¹ A faith-based rejection of the flesh that, one might note, has traditionally been typified by underconsumption of food, or even starvation (See Gooldin).

⁴² To be fair, this “spider’s thread” of connection between people reappears in the subsequent scene, in which Richard Dalloway and Hugh Whitbread shop for gifts for their wives, and here the thread analogy transfers from Lady Bruton to Richard, from a connection between Bruton and the proximate dyad of Richard and Hugh Whitbread, to a connection between Richard and the absent Clarissa, in another form of the “baton-passing” narrative style of the novel. Richard’s version of the thread, however, is proposed as a sort of ‘reaching out’ toward desired romantic

connection with a loved one, rather than as a remnant of recent friendly contact over a meal: “and as a single spider’s thread after wavering here and there attaches itself to the point of a leaf, so Richard’s mind, recovering from its lethargy, set now on his wife” (114).

⁴³ In terms of the interludes, as Susan K. Dick has explained, “The movement of the sun across the sky in the interludes follows the progress of a day...The cyclical time of the natural world in the interludes is juxtaposed with the linear time that shapes the speakers lives” (67). The interludes, therefore, at once represent a day (the progress of the sun), a year (the cycle of the seasons), a lifetime (as the interludes occur throughout the novel, which traces the lifetime of each of the six characters), and, of course, a novelistic structure of sorts. The soliloquies might also be considered monologues, given that these characters both seem to be talking to themselves and to someone else (or perhaps to the world at large). Cohn has discussed the ways in which the characters’ speech patterns are not unique to each character and do not shift noticeably as each ages, both noting that these soliloquies seem to take place in what she calls (after George T. Wright), the “lyric present,” and arguing that, in terms of character, each is “cast in a uniform idiom, which varies neither laterally (from one character to another), nor temporally (from childhood to maturity), thereby dispelling all sense of psychological verisimilitude” (264). Further, as Jonsson has noted, the soliloquies “imply a you, a listener, signifying interlocution and intersubjectivity” (100).

⁴⁴ Any substantive debate regarding “realism” and modernism, or realism and Woolf in particular, is well outside the scope of this project, but it would almost certainly involve some discussion of Woolf’s “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” in which she seems to suggest that novelistic characterization might attempt to capture “life” via a character’s interactions with objects (rather than by simply describing those objects, which is a criticism she levels at Edwardian writers).

⁴⁵ “Most of the pre-chapter interludes” here meaning all, save for the first and for the final two. These interludes bear a striking resemblance, in their focus upon literally depersonalized scenes of shifting objecthood, to the “Time Passes” section in *To the Lighthouse*, but I would suggest (were there room within this project) that they might also be very fruitfully discussed in conjunction with both still life painting and cubism, as well as with Stein’s *Tender Buttons* (which might be a particularly interesting comparison, both given how Woolf apparently felt about Stein’s writing, and Woolf’s apparent interest within this novel in shifting food and food-related objects between a place of familiarization and comfort and defamiliarization and threat).

⁴⁶ The only explicit mention of human beings within the interludes is the brief mention of “washerwomen,” who, in their distant nonspecificity, seem to appear as part of a visual landscape: “*The sun beat on the crowded pinnacles of southern hills and glared into deep, stony river beds where the water was shrunk beneath the high slung bridge so that washerwomen kneeling on hot stones could scarcely wet their linen*” (149, italics in original).

⁴⁷ See Holmesland; Klitgard.

⁴⁸ According to Glenny, this dining companion is a Grim Reaper figure, upon “whose exit Bernard is bound to settle his account with life and depart the world” (172).

⁴⁹ Though Utell does here appear to fundamentally misunderstand Glenny by suggesting that Glenny is ‘misreading’ the “final meal” of the novel by claiming that the other five characters are absent (14). Utell is clearly confusing Glenny’s discussion of the final chapter of the novel, which indeed involves the final meal within the novel and which indeed physically involves only

Bernard and the unidentified dining companion with what Utell would like to believe is the final meal within the novel—the Hampton Court group dinner.

⁵⁰ Though such a reading of the characters as six facets of a single character does attempt to explain the ways in which the characters' "voices" are indistinct from one another, and to make tidy many of the difficulties and unevennesses of the text, I would suggest that it is deeply problematic precisely in those attempts, and that it demonstrates a deep discomfort with the fundamental experimentality of Woolf's novel and the ways in which the novel fits into Woolf's body of work as a whole.

Coda:

Consuming “Modernist” Food in the Twenty-First Century

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued for a place for the food-object within scholarly object/thing studies, and, even more centrally to this project, for consideration of the food-object and human encounters with the food-object within discussions of transatlantic literary, artistic, and cultural modernism(s). I have framed some of the ways in which a specifically modernist food-object tends to emphasize materiality and the tensions between objecthood and (human or animal) bodiliness, as well as the ways in which the modernist encounter with the food-object is one which foregrounds complexity, multisensory engagement and play, and (often) spectacle. I have discussed the ways in which concerns of class, gender, sexuality, control, kinship, and sociality are frequently enacted within—and informed by—these food-consuming encounters. And I have also gestured to the ways in which a modernist food-object, or an encounter with such a food-object, might operate beyond the periodized constraints of modernism as a movement (or collection of movements, as it were) specific to the early decades of the twentieth century. As such, I would like to conclude this dissertation with a brief discussion of the rise of what has come to be known as “modernist” cuisine within the culinary realm of the early twenty-first century, and to query what it might “mean” to encounter a modernist food-object nearly a century after the commonly accepted period constraints of modernism(s).

Throughout the 1990s, the forms of high-end cuisine now retroactively known as “New International” and marked by innovative techniques and the fusion of regional and international cooking styles and ingredients evolved an offshoot culinary movement that was much concerned

with the integration of food science into culinary preparation and presentation.¹ Drawing from—and expanding upon—the preservative and preparatory techniques used within the food canning and packaging industries in the early- to mid-twentieth century, this new movement experimented with cooking techniques such as *sous vide* (in which food-objects are vacuum sealed into plastic pouches and cooked within a hot water bath for an extended period of time), and the transformative possibilities of liquid nitrogen, gelatinizing and other texture-shifting agents, high-pressure foaming canisters, and so forth, resulting in a seemingly-endless supply of “newfangled foams, gels, ‘airs,’ and ‘soils,’ and ingredients doing impossible things” in the hands of chefs who wielded “tools as if they were jewelers” (Lanchester; Achatz 103).

Catalan chef Ferran Adrià, the progenitor of this movement, whose restaurant elBulli (sometimes written as El Bulli in culinary reviews and articles) was considered one of the best restaurants in the world from the early 1990s until its closure in 2012, became famous for his innovative dishes—“caviar” made of jellified melon juice, smoked water turned into a foam and topped with croutons, a “balloon” made of frozen gorgonzola cheese, boiled rose petals forming the shape of an artichoke with an artichoke reduction at the center, a “piña colada” consisting of a piece of dehydrated pineapple and dabs of rum gel and coconut foam atop a small spoon—served in a parade of (sometimes dozens of) tiny courses over a space of several hours, as well as his series of unusually analytical cookbooks in which he thoroughly documents many of these dishes, and theorizes at length regarding his creative process, the preparation of food, and the act of food consumption in ways that “would be more at home in a book of literary criticism than in a cookbook” (Myhrvold 37). In addition to Adrià’s foregrounded sense of innovation and experimentation (he famously eschewed repetition of dishes throughout his tenure at elBulli), his philosophy of food emphasized the interplay between food preparer and food-object (often

through forms of deconstruction and reconstruction of “classic” dishes, as in his version of chicken curry, which arranged curry ice cream, chicken demi-glace, coconut milk, and green onions atop a plate), between food-object and food consumer, and between food preparer and food consumer via the notion of “dining [as] a dialogue between the chef and the diner” (Myhrvold 37). Such interplay was not only intellectual, but also fundamentally affective, aiming to “provoke a reaction” in the food consumer based upon emotional impact, to evoke memories, surprise, amusement, and so forth (Myhrvold 37). As noted above, this new culinary movement was in large part grounded in science, but it was also unapologetic about its pretensions to “cuisine as art,” and its engagement with modes of aesthetics used within the visual and plastic arts (Myhrvold 36).

Adrià’s influence would prove wide-ranging, and this new culinary movement spread throughout Europe and the United States, impacting the creation of restaurants such as René Redzepi’s Noma in Copenhagen, Heston Blumenthal’s The Fat Duck in Berkshire, England, and Grant Achatz’s Alinea in Chicago, restaurants that would (also) be counted amongst the best in the world throughout the 2000s and 2010s. The issue was what to call it; some continued to refer to this movement as a form of New International, but, by the early 2000s, most were calling it “molecular gastronomy,” a term meant to capture the lab-like kitchens, deconstructive/reconstructive tendencies, and the focus upon scientific and/or chemical food preparatory processes prominent within the movement. This term also, however, garnered much criticism; many chefs tended (and still tend) not to appreciate the ways in which the term casts what they do as “too scientific,” without creativity, without art, as well as the ways in which this term ‘plays into’ criticisms often leveled at this style of cuisine—that it is coldly clinical, *too* intellectually challenging and artistic, and in some way soulless (Myhrvold 47).² Other terms

floated for the movement were Adrià's preferred "deconstructivist" or "technoemotional" cuisine, chef/molecular gastronomist Homaro Cantu's favored "Postmodern cuisine," food critic Jeffrey Steingarten's "hypermodern" cuisine, and the more anodyne-sounding "experimental cooking" (Sheets; Myhrvold 57).³ But, ultimately, it was former Microsoft CTO and food science enthusiast Nathan Myhrvold who would in 2011 propose and popularize what would become the movement's defining terminology with his six-volume, 2,438-page cookbook *Modernist Cuisine*, which was followed by the two-volume *Modernist Cuisine at Home* in 2012, a tome on modernist food photography in 2013, and *Modernist Bread* of 2017.

Itself a rather compelling food-adjacent object in its shining, forty-six-pound, acrylic-cased materiality, especially given the ways in which reviewers have tended to categorize the cookbook (set) as "the most useful cookbook you'll probably never cook from" (Viestad), Myhrvold's *Modernist Cuisine* boasts thousands of "modernist" recipes, and thousands of photographs depicting ingredients; cross-sections of food-objects being transformed within blenders, bubbling pots of water, and the like; and finished dishes both from the recipes within the book and from restaurants such as elBulli. It also provides context for what Myhrvold terms the "Modernist revolution" within culinary history, arguing that the terminological choice for this new movement—rather than focusing solely upon the food-science-interested aspects of the movement, as does the term "molecular gastronomy"—should borrow from literary and artistic modernism(s), particularly in terms of avant-garde movements and their (and here he draws from the popular conception of modernism as rupture) "break from the past" (52). He suggests that the "themes and driving forces" of this culinary movement "are similar to Impressionism, the Bauhaus, and other Modernist avant-garde movements" that strongly 'challenged' "the old system," and that, "When tradition is found in [this new form of] cuisine, it is generally as a

rhetorical foil, highlighting the contrast between the old and the new in deconstruction”

(52; 56).⁴ Ultimately, Myhrvold argues that this movement is simply the long-overdue emergence of modernism within the culinary world, many decades later than it emerged within literature and the (non-culinary) arts.

Myhrvold’s argument is a compelling one, if often vague and underformed (though, to be fair, even scholars are still debating precisely what modernism is and is not), and it is unclear whether a definition of this culinary movement as somehow being truly “modernist” without any relation to relevant historical and/or cultural shifts might withstand full critical scrutiny. That said, the implication that “modernism” might be a way of thinking about patterns, or of analyzing qualities inherent to a particular object and/or mode of creation/interaction, and that pockets of modernism (or other movements associated with literature and the arts) might therefore float freely above—or across—centuries, untethered to historical events and cultural shifts, unreliant upon these events and shifts as means of context and interpretation—this is a notion both potentially problematic and one worthy of further consideration. That said, despite the ways in which such a notion might relate to some of the discussions of modernism within this dissertation (critical categorization of Rebecca West as potentially “intermodernist,” my own tracing of the modernist “readymade” sculptural object through mid-century and beyond, and so forth), substantial theorization regarding this notion is beyond the scope of this dissertation, as is more in-depth analysis of Myhrvold’s version of culinary modernism. What is most significant for our purposes at the moment is that Myhrvold’s cookbook (set) brought to the forefront (and very heavily popularized) the term “modernist cuisine” as the accepted descriptor for culinary activity that incorporates elements of food science and forms of industrial food technology in the service of innovation; that focuses upon material, intellectual, and affective “play” between food-

object, chef/food-preparer, and food consumer; and that consciously sets out to be (some form of) “art.”

Despite any reservations I may have about fully accepting Myhrvold’s terminology without more thorough consideration of the ways in which this twenty-first-century version of culinary modernism might “work,” it is undeniable that the sorts of food-objects/dishes prepared and presented by chefs working within what has become known as “modernist” cuisine do share many of the concerns of the early-twentieth-century modernist food-object, and the human encounter with this food-object, that I have discussed throughout this dissertation. For example, these consumables foreground forms of process and experimentation during all stages of food preparation and consumption, whilst emphasizing associative “play” with the material properties, intellectual and emotional resonances, and cultural expectations of the food-objects involved. Such play often echoes the forms of play with food-objects that we have examined within this dissertation—particularly in terms of interplay between edibility and inedibility and the “replacement” of food-objects with non-food-objects (or, in this case, typically the other way around), as discussed in relation to “readymade” sculptural food-objects in Chapter Three—often resulting in acts of encounter between chef/food-preparer and food-object, and diner/food-consumer and food-object, that are extraordinarily elaborate and evocative. We might here note chef Heston Blumenthal’s tribute to Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* at The Fat Duck, a dish which consists of a gelatinized concentrate of mock turtle soup solidified within a rubberized pocketwatch-fob mold, then covered in (edible) gold leaf and (within the most complicated iteration of the dish) served within a wooden “jewelry” box that contains a “ticking sound” mechanism.⁵ At the table, the food consumer places the golden fob into a teacup and pours hot water from a teapot over the fob, watching this food-object dissolve into a consommé,

and then pours this consommé into a dish containing vegetables and bits of meat that have been arranged to vaguely resemble a mushroom and a caterpillar. This collection of food-objects showcases the complex processes of their preparation and of their consumption—the soup-fob is a food-object “transformed” into a non-food-object by the chef/food-preparer, and then “transformed” back into a food-object by the food consumer—but it also draws attention to the objecthood of food via material play and the replacement of an expected edible object with an apparently inedible object (which, of course, turns out to be edible).

The encounters with food-objects provided by practitioners of this recent culinary “modernism” also typically emphasize the sorts of multisensory encounter and/or sensory conflation considered throughout this dissertation—particularly in our discussions of food-object encounters within modernist literary works by West and Woolf, and modernist artistic works by Oppenheim. Heston Blumenthal’s “Sound of the Sea” dish, for example, initially presents the food consumer with a conch shell, into which an iPod has been placed. The food consumer inserts the earbuds of the device into their ears and listens to the sound of waves lapping on a beach as they consume the miniature seashore scene that has been placed before them: a “sand” mixture made of vegetable and seaweed powders, bread crumbs, and ground ice cream cones; flavored “sea” foams; assorted edible sea plants and various forms of raw and cooked fish and shellfish. The dish was partially inspired by Blumenthal’s work with psychology researcher Charles Spence, whose research on cross-modal/multisensory information integration has elucidated the ways in which auditory cues (as well as visual and tactile ones) have significant impact upon our perceptions of taste, nourishment, “freshness,” and so forth. The experience of consuming this dish, therefore, is not simply one of multisensory engagement, but a directed act

of sense conflation that provides neurobiological prompts that (have been proven to) intensify the food consumer's perception of the specific flavors of these food-objects.⁶

Further, the scenes of encounter with food-objects within twenty-first-century "modernist" acts of food consumption typically provide us with scenes of public eating that are in many ways "about" spectacle—albeit in ways that are far less class inclusive than those scenes of eating provided by Hopper and Woolf, given that the dining establishments of culinary "modernism" tend to be high-end to say the least, with many also discreetly separating food consumers from passersby outside the restaurant (by including few windows in the architectural design of these establishments, for example).⁷ And yet, the act of food consumption becomes spectacle for those within the space of these restaurants, whether this spectacle be small-scale—as when, at Grant Achatz's Alinea, a helium-filled soft-candy balloon is floated to each diner at their table and each is then encouraged to suck out the helium, and then to chat with others at the table in their temporarily altered voices before finally consuming the food-object—or large-scale, as with Achatz's "Table Dessert." In "Table Dessert," one of the ceiling tiles (which have been painted by a local artist) hanging above the tables is removed and placed atop the table (in an earlier version of the dish, this tile was replaced by a plain rubber mat), and the chefs emerge from the kitchen to take turns painting a colorful assortment of sweet sauces directly onto the covered table in artistic dollops, swirls, and blobs; dropping spoonfuls of powdered ingredients (such as chocolate-peanut powder) at intervals; scattering cubed gelées, chunks of nougatine, tiny candies, berries, herb-leaves and flower petals here and there; blow-torching tiny rounds of crème brûlée at the table and arranging them within the other ingredients; and dramatically cracking loaves or spheres of liquid-nitrogen-frozen mousse into "smoking" shards in the midst of the composition. These actions are performed with a flourish over a period of several minutes,

and (in later iterations of the dish) with the lights above the table turned low and alternative rock music playing over the localized sound system, and the results are the equivalent of an edible Abstract Expressionist painting. The food-objects involved in this dish are obviously prepared within the kitchen, but their presentation is here enacted as a mode of performance art, a spectacular version of both food preparation and artistic composition. The diners then consume the *mélange* of food-objects in whatever combination they wish, using both utensils and fingers, an interaction in which they perform a version of preparing their own food by combining the food-objects upon the table, thereby continuing the “show” put on by the chefs moments before.

Considered within these contexts, we can begin to see the ways in which this culinary movement, and these twenty-first-century encounters with food-objects, might effectively qualify as modernist, as well as the ways in which further examination of these food-objects (and their preparation and consumption) is necessary. Although “modernist cuisine” has now become the default term for this movement, theorization of this “modernism” in conjunction with other modernisms has not extended beyond Myhrvold’s brief claims, and scholarly work upon this topic is, thus far, almost nonexistent. In addition to providing us with a body of analysis and theoretical support and/or problematization regarding this “modernist cuisine” as a form of modernism, I would suggest that further exploration of this category of food-objects might enrich our understanding of more “traditional” forms of modernism (that is, those modernisms of the early twentieth century). For example, it is clear that the chefs who practice this new form of “modernist cuisine” have—whether intentionally or unintentionally—tapped into the vein of the understudied modernist avant-garde movement of Futurism by way of F.T. Marinetti’s *Futurist Cookbook*, a volume which proffers recipes (or “formulas,” as Marinetti prefers to call them) such as “Aerofood,” a selection of food-objects consumed whilst stroking “a rectangle made of

sandpaper, silk, and velvet,” as waiters spray perfume upon the necks of the food consumers and play recordings of Bach music and the sounds of an “aeroplane motor”; and “Veal Fuselage,” which consists of “Slices of veal attached to a fuselage composed of cooked chestnuts, little onions and sausages...sprinkled with powdered chocolate” (144; 160).⁸ Such dishes clearly bear very common concerns and approaches to those found within “modernist cuisine,” and joint theorization of the two would, no doubt, prove quite fruitful. Further, existing critical work upon modernist art and literature provides us with modes of analysis to be used for theorization of the food-objects and embodied food-object encounters of this new “modernist cuisine,” and such theorization would also lend new dimensions to the neglected area of food-object study more generally.

The emergence of “modernist” food-objects and encounters with these food-objects at the turn of the twenty-first century serves to underline the importance of the modernist food-object more generally—and, it follows, the imperative of further scholarly examination of the food-object and acts of food consumption within modernism(s)—providing us with fresh opportunity to realize the ways in which the modernist food-object matters. This emergence also encourages us to more closely examine the ways in which we define and delimit modernism(s), particularly with regard to periodization and historicization. Further, this emergence of a ‘new’ “modernist cuisine” acts as further encouragement to bring food studies more fully into the fold of the interdisciplinary humanities, and to consider movements ‘within food’ in conjunction with those within (and across) categories of literature, art, and beyond. Such inclusion is a particularly useful endeavor given the ways in which—as has been discussed throughout this dissertation—the food-object is actually quite prominent within modernist literature and art, as well as the ways in which modernist depictions of human encounters with the food-object have much to say

about objecthood, the body, lived experience, class, gender, sexuality, and acts of food interaction and consumption both (and often simultaneously) individual and communal, everyday and extraordinary.

Notes

¹ For a brief discussion of this movement's association with food science, see Myhrvold 48-49.

² For a discussion of the history and tenets of molecular gastronomy, see Myhrvold 44-47. As for criticisms leveled at this type of cuisine, one of its most famous detractors—Alice Waters, founder of the “slow food” movement—has suggested that she does not enjoy molecular gastronomy because, as she states, “I am so hungry for the taste of the real that I’m just not able to get into that which doesn’t feel real to me. It’s a kind of scientific experiment, and I think that there are good scientists and crazy old scientists that can be very amazing. But it’s more like a museum to me. It’s not a kind of way of eating that we need to really live on this planet together” (qtd. in Friedman).

³ It does seem that there would be quite a case to be made for Cantu’s favored term, as the especial focus upon elements of deconstruction within “modernist” food does align smoothly with similar elements within “postmodernist” literature, art, philosophy, and so forth. Myhrvold argues that, “the term ‘Postmodern cuisine’ only makes sense if there is a clear body of Modernist cuisine to react to; and unlike art and architecture, there simply has been no previous Modernist phase. As a result, ‘Postmodern’ as a culinary movement makes little sense—it is based more on simply copying the term Postmodern from other fields than accepting what Postmodern means” (57). This is a curious rejoinder, particularly given the ways in which Myhrvold’s own argument for the classification of this culinary movement as “modernist” draw directly from only certain elements of modernism within those same “other fields”; however, substantive discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of this coda.

⁴ Note: Myrvold here includes Impressionism within the list of modernist avant-garde movements, but, elsewhere within this volume of the cookbook, he (correctly) qualifies Impressionism as a precursor movement to modernism.

⁵ For a description of this version of the dish, see Gerard.

⁶ At least, for those with similar physical and neurological makeups (and similar enough life experiences) to those within Spence’s studies. For brief discussion of this dish, see Spence 230-231.

⁷ The relationship of “modernist cuisine” to issues of class is beyond the scope of this coda, but this would be a particularly rich avenue for further study, especially given the ways in which food-science-interested techniques common to this form of high-end cuisine have also become popular within far less expensive, and far more accessible, gustatory realms—for example, the liquid-nitrogen-dipped ice cream mini-spheres known as Dippin’ Dots sold at shopping malls throughout the United States.

⁸ Curiously, Myhyvold does not mention Futurism in his list of the modernist avant-garde movements that he views as precursors to twenty-first-century “modernist cuisine,” though it should be noted that psychologist Charles Spence (who, as discussed above, has collaborated with chef Heston Blumenthal) does so (See Spence 244-266).

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