

Not Just Eating, but Consuming:
Food and Cooks in
To the Lighthouse, *The Cook, the Thief,*
His Wife and Her Lover and *In the Mood for Love*

ESTELLA CIOBANU
Ovidius University of Constanța, Romania

Abstract

This essay examines the perspectives on food, cooking and commensality offered by three highly dissimilar works: Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse* (1927), Peter Greenaway's film *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (1989) and, as a cultural foil for the two British works, a Chinese film, Wong Kar-Wai's *In the Mood for Love* (2000). Food or eating is not the central topic of any of them, save Greenaway's film. Rather, their common denominator is the interplay of visibility and its implicit or explicit social reference, for all three works engage, however differently, with the *class differential* entailed in scenes featuring food or eating. I use Edmund Husserl's phenomenological concept of orientation – amended in intersectional terms – to examine the cook figures and instances of representing food or eating in the three works. My working hypothesis is that such representations may reveal both the permanent negotiation of cultural values attached to culinary practices, including to the agents involved, and what they conceal socially.

Keywords:: *To the Lighthouse* (Virginia Woolf), *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (Peter Greenaway), *In the Mood for Love* (Wong Kar-Wai), food, cooks, commensality,

intersectionality theory, philosophy, orientation (Edmund Husserl)

Laying the Table

The climax of the dinner party offered by Mrs Ramsay to their summer guests, in Part I of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), concerns a dish of fruit assembled by her daughter Rose. To Mrs Ramsay's art connoisseur's eye, the dish recalls the *still life* genre; however, Mrs Ramsay perceives the composition as a picturesque *landscape* of "lowland grapes" and "horny shell ridges" (Woolf 259). Curvaceous fruit shapes evoke yet another painterly genre – one devised for men's ocular consumption: the female nude, itself framed, in the dinner party context, as a *genre scene* (Ciobanu 149-150, 154). The memorableness of the fruit dish ekphrasis depends to a large extent on the readers' memories of a different kind of cultural consumption than either eating¹ or fiction reading. Nowadays, however, it may strike some readers as an ekphrastic *avant-la-lettre* instance of food porn: not only is the reader's gaze invited to linger on the fruit text(ure), but the dish, insistently returned to, is rich in erotic suggestions also through the thematisation of the gaze.²

The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover (1989), written and directed by Peter Greenaway, is a "marital revenge movie" (McEntee 42) which climaxes with a truly baroque cannibal banquet unfolding under the wall-size copy of a baroque genre painting by Frans Hals, *The Banquet of the Officers of the St George Militia Company* (1616). Georgina (Helen Mirren), an abused wife turned adulteress, punishes her jealous, violent and murderous husband, Albert Spica (Michael Gambon), to feast on her murdered lover, Michael (Alan Howard). In eating a bite, Spica consumes not only human flesh, but also the cultural tokens the roast is pregnant with.

In the Mood for Love (2000), written and directed by Wong Kar-Wai, begins with commensality: a neighbourly dinner in Hong Kong is partially interrupted by the rental settlement between the hostess and landlady, Mrs Suen (Rebecca Pan), and her would-be

tenant, Mrs Chan (Maggie Cheung Man-Yuk). The opening frustrates the spectators' expectations to see, not just hear, the participants gathered around the table. Ironically, this early denial in the film starts a convoluted trajectory of denials, such as seeing the adulterous spouses' faces (and perhaps their affair unfolding), actually seeing Mrs Chan cooking for her platonic lover, Mr Chow (Tony Leung Chiu-Wai), or learning why she fears to show her love. Some of these frustrating concealments occur in scenes connected with cooking or eating, framed cinematically and musically in memorable compositions.

This essay examines the perspectives on food, cooking and commensality offered by the British novel *To the Lighthouse* (henceforth *TL*), the British film *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (henceforth *CTWL*) and, as a cultural foil for the first two works, the Chinese film *In the Mood for Love* (henceforth *ML*). Food or eating is not the central topic of any of them, save Greenaway's film. Rather, ocularcentrism, especially the aesthetically exquisite compositions to be contemplated, provides their lowest common denominator (unavoidable in the films' case), albeit one which transcodes consumption in abstract terms. Equally important, and related to the former, is the interplay of visuality and its implicit/explicit social reference. All three works engage, however differently, with the *class differential* entailed in scenes featuring food or eating. For all her social concern, Woolf barely alludes to this differential in the dinner party scene of *TL*, the one explicitly focused on food and commensality, although she does suggest it elsewhere in the novel. Class underrepresentation also undergirds the depiction of eating-related scenes and unnamed servants in Wong's film. By contrast, Greenaway's film gives pride of place to the male cook, at title but also plot level: the chef watches the illicit romance unfolding in his kitchen (with his permission) and eventually consents to be an accessory to the wife's public abjection of her husband. Richard acts as a subversive "servant" with an agenda of his own, whose virtually mute legions of cooks, aides and waiters help him to resist Spica.

In what follows, I introduce first my theoretical leanings, viz., Edmund Husserl's phenomenological concept of orientation amended in intersectional terms. Then I examine the cook figures and instances of describing food or eating in the three works. Such characters or scenes may suggest the permanent negotiation of cultural values attached to culinary practices in relation to the social background, although the means to do so vary as a function of the authors' aesthetic-ideological choices.

Problematic Orientations

Seeing such possibilities in the three (or any other) works depends on one's metaepistemic self-consciousness, i.e., on one's *position*. As Donna Haraway has argued, it is imperative that scholars and theorists finally acknowledge their positioning as *non-innocent objectivity* (582-590). Regarded from the other end, one's position owes to one's *inheritance* as analysed by Sara Ahmed with respect to Husserl's theorisation of philosophical *orientation* in the first volume (1913) of *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*.

Husserl defines personal orientation as intertwined with world unfolding and achievable through the working of *intentional consciousness* (i.e., the consciousness *of* something). One's orientation – as physically grounded cognitive starting point – proceeds from the centre of experience, the “I” located in the here and now, which perceives the world unfolding as both “corporeal physical things” and animate beings, irrespective of whether or not the philosopher “is particularly heedful of them and busied with them in [his] considering, thinking, feeling, or willing” (Husserl 51). Indeed, as we shall see, he (*sic*) may be selectively heedless of many. Although mentioned only with respect to corporeal things, but not also to animate beings too, such entities have “some spatial distribution or other [and] are *simply there for [the philosopher]*, ‘on hand’ in the literal or the figurative sense” (Husserl 51, original emphasis).

Husserl's philosophic scape from whence his phenomenological orientation proceeds to grasp the world cognitively is not contingent, but is afforded, Ahmed argues, by the philosopher's biological and social inheritance (151-154). *Inheritance* "can be re-thought in terms of orientations: we *inherit the reachability of some objects*, those that are 'given' to us, or at least made available to us, within the 'what' that is around" (Ahmed 154, original emphasis). Yet Husserl's term *objects* also covers "styles, capacities, aspirations, techniques, habits" (Ahmed 154), all of which, Husserl acknowledges, come with *values* always already attached to them:

[T]his world is there for me not only as a world of mere things, but also with the same immediacy as a *world of objects with values, a world of goods, a practical world*. I simply find *the physical things in front of me furnished not only with merely material determinations but also with value-characteristics*, as beautiful and ugly, pleasant and unpleasant, agreeable and disagreeable, and the like.... These value-characteristics and practical characteristics also belong constitutively to the Objects "on hand" as Objects, regardless of whether or not I turn to such characteristics and the Objects. (53, original emphasis)

"Agreeable and disagreeable" and any other values do not, *pace* Husserl, "belong *constitutively* to the Objects 'on hand' as Objects" (Husserl 53). Rather, they depend on one's taste as forged within a certain habitus, as Pierre Bourdieu argues in *Distinctions*. Values owe to concealed forms of social privilege, i.e., Ahmed's "inheritance" as the very entitlement to a certain occupation by virtue of a privilege the philosopher was born into (e.g. maleness and middle class). Historically, they have rendered invisible the manifold contributions of the subaltern others. Writes Husserl:

I can let my attention wander away from the writing table which was just now seen and noticed out through the unseen parts of the room which are behind my back, to the verandah, into the garden,

to the children in the arbor, etc., to all the Objects I directly “know of” as being there and here in the surroundings... (51-52)

The philosopher can freely contemplate the world – phenomenologically or otherwise – because he has been unburdened of any domestic and matrimonial duties by those whose existence he barely heeds. His very environs tacitly testify to the existence of domestics, craftsmen and other suppliers who enable both basic sustenance and class-related taste.

What Ahmed reads behind Husserl’s orientation philosopheme tallies with the propositions of intersectionality theorists. bell hooks has analysed the traditional oppressive matrix of the patriarchal “politic of domination” (*Talking Back* 19) as comprised of the *interlocking systems of domination* of sex, race and class (19-27, 170-172, 175-176). Sexism, racism and classism work alongside other structures of oppression, such as sexuality, religion, able-bodiedness and nationality. Unsurprisingly, the kyriarchal³ make-up of society is responsible for the paradox that many individuals participate doubly in the chain of oppression (hooks, *Feminist Theory* 16; Grillo 18), by dint of belonging simultaneously to (at least) *one* dominant group (e.g. the white race; upper/middle classes; mankind) and *one* subordinate group (e.g. womankind; working class).

An intersectional approach to the three works may appear somewhat strained, for historically intersectionality has been concerned with the multiple subordination of colour women. Racial issues are irrelevant to the novel and the two films; however, ethnic issues appear in both *CTWL* (the chef is not British, but French, in a restaurant called Le Hollandais) and *ML* (the protagonists are Shanghainese refugees in British Hong Kong). Moreover, *CTWL* notwithstanding, women are but occasionally *shown* as oppressed; nonetheless, they participate in a patriarchal economy which *obliterates* their social contribution. Intersectionality provides an articulate analytic tool to better grasp the often invisible mechanics of domination within the household and/or in employment circumstances. Whilst fictional works do not record reality, they

hold the mirror up to society to various degrees and may therefore furnish a useful corpus for unravelling domination patterns rooted in the works' contemporary polity.

The Cook *sans* Food

Greenaway's film's *title* gives pride of place to a professional in an uncanny procession of stock professional and gender names that challenges societal expectations. Richard Boarst (Richard Bohringer), the Le Hollandais chef, becomes the master of revels in a nauseating game of power that engages the boorish gangster and restaurant owner, Albert Spica, acting as faux socialite, his abused wife, Georgina, and her restaurant lover, Michael, a passionate reader of history books. Richard watches the game from afar and intervenes where necessary; his non-oppressive deployment of power renders him the foil for Spica. Richard complicitly accommodates clandestine dealings – adulterous sex – in his kitchen where, ironically, the dishwasher boy, Pup (Paul Russell), chants about religious purification whilst meat is carved and steam suffuses the place. Symbolically, therefore, the Le Hollandais kitchen as a sex hothouse has to be green – a greenhouse.

When Richard devises the lovers' space for romance in – or way to flee from – the kitchen,⁴ he acts as a director and scriptwriter. His kitchen permits the unfolding of the love affair as if screened and curtained in the theatre wings⁵ (CTWL 00:33:13-00:33:20, 00:44:51-00:45:26, 00:59:46-01:02:22,⁶ 01:04:28-01:04:51,⁷ 01:07:44-01:07:59,⁸ 01:10:01-01:10:36⁹). Thus, the kitchen appears as much (e)utopian and theatricalised¹⁰ – magnified and artificial in relation to the patriarchal world of Spica's restaurant – as conspiratorial and dystopian.

Richard camouflages Georgina and Michael in the pantry before engineering their escape by first hiding them from Spica in the kitchen's freezer room (CTWL 01:14:56-01:15:16) and subsequently in the smelly freezer van (01:17:20-01:18:18)¹¹ that will drive them to safety. In either case, the lovers consume their

passion (01:15:31-01:15:36, 01:17:08-01:17:12), or rather reap its fruits, shivering amongst pig carcasses that terrify Georgina (01:18:19-01:18:32). In keeping with Greenaway's famed *intermediality*, i.e., indebtedness to the visual arts in his films, cinematography lures the spectators to consume these scenes visually as an animated genre painting whose raw food becomes the set for a life-size Rembrandtesque still life.¹²

Richard scripts and stages Georgina and her lover's escape whilst acting as a multi-task chef vis-à-vis the restaurant staff, owner and patrons. He plucks ducks (CTWL 00:06:08-00:07:14) to make a point when Spica first inspects the kitchen. Richard participates in the preparation of dishes (00:32:36-00:33:00), supervises restaurant service (00:57:34-00:57:48), serves some patrons (00:17:04-00:18:13, 00:29:07-00:29:10) or helps them to remove their overcoats (00:29:31-00:29:41), supplies food to the lovers hidden in Michael's book depository, either through Pup (01:21:25-01:23:05) or in person (01:26:05-01:27:57). He refuses to cook an unpalatable dinner¹³ until he learns it is meant for Spica (01:43:04-01:50:16). In all these cases, Richard is pre-eminently hospitable to everyone, save Spica, whose power-position the chef constantly challenges and undermines.

It is debatable to what extent Greenaway's chef truly wields power or may afford a new power model. However, he is by far the most fortunate cook of the ones featured in the three works. By contrast, Woolf's female cook is rather shadowy. At the time of the dinner party, she is mentioned obliquely, in connection with how Cam, the Ramsays' youngest daughter, reports to her mother having relayed the latter's orders to the cook:

What message would Cam give *the cook*? Mrs. Ramsay wondered. And indeed it was only by waiting patiently, and hearing that there was *an old woman in the kitchen with very red cheeks, drinking soup out of a basin*, that Mrs. Ramsay at last prompted that parrot-like instinct... (Woolf 219, emphasis added)

The cook's professional presence can be inferred from Mrs

Ramsay's and William Bankes's appreciation of her kitchen's output. Sadly, however successful her dishes, they do not earn *the cook* praise. Rather, Bankes lavishes his praise "abstractly" on the *boeuf en daube*¹⁴ as if it had an existence of its own, independent of human agency.

Part I only briefly reveals the old cook's first name: Mildred. Preparing herself for the dinner party, with the aid of her children Jasper and Rose, Mrs Ramsay takes the final decisions whilst privately thinking about the dinner being spoilt by her reckless young guests:

Jasper and Rose said that Mildred wanted to know whether she should wait dinner.

"Not for the Queen of England," said Mrs. Ramsay emphatically....

[S]he wished the dinner to be particularly nice, since William Bankes had at last consented to dine with them; and they were having *Mildred's masterpiece – Boeuf en Daube*. Everything depended upon things being served up the precise moment they were ready. The beef, the bayleaf, and the wine – all must be done to a turn. To keep it waiting was out of the question. Yet of course to-night, of all nights, out they went, and they came in late, and things had to be sent out, things had to be kept hot; the Boeuf en Daube would be entirely spoilt. (Woolf 237-238, emphasis added)

Mildred the cook is at least acknowledged as the maker of a culinary masterpiece, with no interference in this praise, unlike later, of the source of the recipe.

Part II also mentions the cook, albeit somewhat cryptically. Dusting the Ramsays' temporarily desert house, the cook reminisces the good old days before WWI and Mrs Ramsay's likeable nature: "'Good-evening, Mrs. McNab,' she [Mrs Ramsay] said, and told the cook to keep a plate of milk soup for her – quite thought she wanted it, carrying that heavy basket all the way up from town" (Woolf 281). Good-natured Mrs Ramsay may have been. Nevertheless, she would associate the savoury *boeuf en daube* not so much with the cook (238) who had prepared it for three days

(238, 252), but with a French recipe inherited from her own grandmother (252-253) – the legacy of bourgeois taste and token of a habitus which largely ignored the contribution of subalterns.

ML features an army of *nameless* cooks from the amah (Tsi-Ang Chin), i.e., the female live-in domestic in the Hong Kong flat of the Suens,¹⁵ to the male cooks in the street noodle stall. Fairly garrulous and over-protective of the fragile-looking tenant (*ML* 00:26:40-00:26:46, 00:50:03-00:50:28), the amah often acts as a hospitable hostess *lieutenant*: she invites Mrs Chan to dine with the Suens (01:02:53-01:03:01) or, in 1966, fetches Mrs Chan a cup of tea before inviting her to stay for dinner (01:25:31-01:25:50). Never *shown* either *effectively at work* in the kitchen, where she rather busies herself with indefinite cooking tasks, or doing other chores,¹⁶ such as going to the market (01:25:35-01:25:37) or doing the laundry (00:39:38-00:39:40), but only answering the phone (00:27:40-00:27:47), the amah appears to be a cook/servant only metonymically. The character may strike Euro-American spectators rather as a congenial personal assistant with a modicum of decisional power. In fact, she replicates the traditional amah, whether a pre-1945 immigrant or post-1945 refugee, who strictly adheres to “the classical standards of the master-servant relationship” of full subservience and loyalty, of “unquestioningly dedicat[ing] her life to the master’s family” (Sankar qtd. in Constable 54).

Precisely the amah’s savoury dishes and generally her service enable the Suens to welcome their neighbour friends and tenants to dinner and subsequently to entertain them with mah-jong games. Similarly, the noodle stall cooks sweat for their customers’ takeaway food, silently and invisibly. Apart from their public work, shown metonymically, they present no interest to the film economy, just as their real-life counterparts presented none to their customers. However different, both cook categories in *ML* seem virtually dehumanised: their routine transforms them into reliable domestics in the service of the lower middle-class protagonists, but otherwise individuals with no lives of their own. Unsurprisingly, when her mistress emigrates to the US in 1966, the amah will be rented out

alongside Mrs Suen's flat to Mrs Chan (01:26:33-01:26:55, 01:28:56-01:29:04), now a single mother, as if the cook were indistinguishable from the cooker – both “objects” which sustenance depends on and orientation may proceed from.

Food *sans* the Cook

Food in the three works studied is shown being cooked only in Greenaway, before being served with panache. More often than not, though, food is dissociated from the kitchen and its cook(s) and only shown being consumed or strewn all over the place. As a product artificially detached from the kitchen and those who prepare it, food can *signify* status not just in terms of embodied habitus, but especially through the ideological choice to ignore the cook's agency.

On the face of it, *ML* approaches food in straightforward terms. Though *mentioned* explicitly (typically by Mrs Suen), the food enjoyed by the dinner guests at the Suens,' prepared by the amah, remains *invisible*. In the film's earliest scene, when Mrs Suen must withdraw for a while for the rental talk, she invites the diners to try a certain fish dish because of the “very fresh” fish (*ML* 00:01:15-00:01:18). On another occasion, Mrs Suen invites Mr Chow to try a Shanghai dish (00:04:47-00:04:50) – to “taste” home. The first time Mrs Chan takes the thermos flask to buy noodles, Mrs Suen invites her to dine with them on pork soup (00:08:08-00:08:10), which the amah has been shown – rather metonymically – preparing. On another occasion, Mrs Chan enters the kitchen to cook something for herself, yet the amah, who is invisibly cooking vegetable won-tons, successfully invites her to join the family dinner (01:02:53-01:03:01). Such instances demonstrate that a concern with fostering conviviality (or a sense of homeliness) through eating together (by refugees) overrides interest in food as either nourishment or labour product: *ML* frames convivial meals, cinematographically too, as the degree zero of food consumption.

Food acquires a *visibility* of its own only when it appears to be emotionally overdetermined, i.e., to feed emotions yet replace

them physically/visually. Sometimes food may *divide* rather than bring people together as friends. Food such as (necessarily *takeaway*) noodles provides meagre (viz., not much desired) nourishment to the lonely cheated spouses.¹⁷ Not food proper, nor eating divides the couple, but spousal unfaithfulness. A different case of division becomes apparent when Chow and Ah Ping (Ping Lam Siu), his dissolute colleague, eat out after office hours at the Singapore newspaper (*ML* 01:20:07-01:21:20). Unlike on previous occasions in Hong Kong (in 1962), now (in 1963) the conversation is interrupted: Chow mentions a legend about how people of old could share (or rather disburden themselves of) their secrets safely, to his friend's bafflement and prurient interest in Chow's unspeakable secret. When eventually shown, the plates on their table (01:21:00-01:21:15) suggest culinary tastes as widely apart as their reaction to being overburdened by secrets. Eating food together, here, visualises loneliness more painfully than eating alone did early in the film.

Yet food may also *connect* through commensality or otherwise. Mrs Chan and Mr Chow eat takeaway noodle soup together when co-writing martial-arts serials (*ML* 00:45:28-00:46:05).¹⁸ Commensality also frames rehearsals of confronting the respective unfaithful spouse, as if to provide the necessary emotional support to Mrs Chan, though not, later, to Chow too. Thus, food – a bowl of rice with vegetables (possibly bought from a takeaway stall) – functions as a prop for, or, alternatively, a marker of *homeliness* that enables Mrs Chan's painful role-playing (00:57:41-01:01:00). Food nourishes the ill and feeds sentiments: Chow craves sesame syrup, Mrs Chan learns from Ping; she prepares it for her neighbour as if by accident (00:39:10-00:40:11, 00:42:20-00:42:35).¹⁹ Although never shown, the sesame syrup qualifies in this class, for it suggests an emotional breach at an early time in the two cheated spouses' relationship: as she admits to Chow, Mrs Chan dislikes cooking for herself when her husband travels to Japan on business (00:26:22-00:26:26). Finally, there is the cheated spouses' dining out together in a classy restaurant (00:35:01-00:35:49) with western trappings from cutlery to Nat

King Cole's music.²⁰ The first time Chow invites Mrs Chan to the restaurant and she accepts, it is to verify what each has sensed: their respective spouse's infidelity and object of affection (00:27:55-00:30:45). Later, however, Mrs Chan and Mr Chow will also order their courses so as to learn about the food preferences of their unfaithful spouse's lover (00:33:13-00:35:00), as if to try physically the taste of adultery and gauge how their spouses' affair might have started. Notwithstanding their early reasons for eating out together, the middle-class protagonists enjoy not just dining in style, but also escaping from their daily routine in the Hong Kong of 1962 – where, as Shanghainese refugees they feel socio-politically alienated – into a culturally alien haven.

In *TL*, the dinner party plays off food for the palate and for the eyes of its characters, and metaphorical food for the readers' thought. Rose's fruit dish on the dining table strikes Mrs Ramsay as a cornucopia served to them visually as a still life with fruit (Ciobanu 149-153). The still life composition not only defies two-dimensionality, but it comes to life when Augustus Carmichael, who has "feasted his eyes" on the fruit dish, "plunge[s] in, [breaks] off a bloom there, a tassel here" (Woolf 250). Unsurprisingly, Mrs Ramsay regards the people around the table, especially Augustus, as predators on the exquisitely wrought dish of fruit, in what becomes globally a chiaroscuro genre piece. Carnality – the fruits' quasi-female curvaceous forms (Woolf 259; Ciobanu 150-153) – and fleshliness – the dinner guests' – repel the aesthetically-minded hostess.

Ironically, those responsible for the food on the table, in *TL*, are largely ignored, excepting Rose. The Ramsays' cook is only briefly acknowledged in relation to the tasty dish (Woolf 238) made after Mrs Ramsay's grandmother's French recipe. Their maids receive somewhat more attention on the spot, Marthe for serving dinner (251-252) and Ellen for offering Carmichael another soup helping (249) – for smoothing over social relations around the dining table – or for clearing away the tea (219). The dish, however, enjoys pride of place:

... an exquisite scent of olives and oil and juice rose from the great brown dish as Marthe, with a little flourish, took the cover off. The cook had spent three days over that dish. And she must take great care, Mrs. Ramsay thought, diving into the soft mass, to choose a specially tender piece for William Bankes. And she peered into the dish, with its shiny walls and its confusion of savoury brown and yellow meats, and its bay leaves and its wine....

"It is a triumph," said Mr. Bankes, laying his knife down for a moment. He had eaten attentively. It was rich; it was tender. It was perfectly cooked. How did she manage these things in the depths of the country? he asked her....

"It is a French recipe of my grandmother's," said Mrs. Ramsay, speaking with a ring of great pleasure in her voice. Of course it was French. What passes for cookery in England is an abomination (they agreed). (Woolf 252-253)

Regarding the cook's work, save a brief mention of the three-day labour to prepare the *boeuf en daube* (Woolf 238, 252), the text obfuscates agency by praising the owner of the recipe – hence the character's (and author's) middle-class French-tinted sophistication – over the cook *qua* labourer. Food simply *is*. It *is* in ontological terms, as the much-vaunted French recipe testifies. It also *is* in aesthetic terms, as an object of visual, palatal and olfactory pleasure (as well as class-inflected self-pleasure).

There is a lot to consume, in *CTWL*, either physically and visually as a character or only visually as a spectator. A telling instance occurs in the kitchen after Michael's death. Prodded by Georgina to tell her what he saw (*CTWL* 01:45:09-01:47:19), in order to have his testimony as evidence that her love story was real, Richard says, amongst others, "I saw you take his penis in your mouth" (01:47:10-01:47:13). Reminiscing about oral sex in the pantry connects not just sexuality and food consumption, but also Georgina's embodied knowledge of her lover and orally transmitted/prompted memory thereof. Later, Georgina sarcastically instructs Spica, during the cannibal banquet, to "try the cock" of (roasted) Michael, for "it's a delicacy... and you know

where it's been" (01:58:58-01:59:05). Spica declines the invitation and chooses a different piece.

Consuming sex (including visually by the spectators) does not override consumption of actual food in Greenaway. The very act of eating/feeding attaches cultural value to food: "proper" or "improper" (even abject), wholesome or not. Consuming such scenes visually may conceivably align the spectator with Spica (or, conversely, with his wife), but especially with the cultural valences of certain foodstuffs, although the very act of eating is problematised as culturally and ideologically unstable in meaning.

Occasionally, food may be dreamt about, rather than eaten. On finding Michael murdered, Georgina cuddles by his side and tells him what she'd like to have for breakfast: coffee, fresh rolls, butter, marmalade and toast (CTWL 01:36:13-01:36:28). The mere thought of food soothes anguish by affording a new, sweet object of concern.²¹ Typically, though, food is shown eaten and/or talked about, even adulterated on purpose, as Spica does to spite Georgina²² (00:31:53-00:32:04). Whether he enjoys or despises Richard's dishes, or at least Georgina's gourmet tastes (00:16:46-00:17:13, 00:21:07-00:21:15, 00:30:54-00:31:08), Spica is shown mostly eating; conspicuous consumption advertises his status. His other-relationship is often mediated by food: he feeds others by force²³ (00:30:02-00:30:15), teaches them table manners (00:13:46-00:15:08) or how to eat certain foodstuffs (00:16:03-00:16:08, 01:32:36-01:32:54²⁴), and humiliates them with the aid of actual or imaginary, even abject, foodstuffs (00:02:06-00:04:22,²⁵ 00:47:30-00:48:44²⁶). Whilst he conceives of food in assimilationist terms,²⁷ occasionally with some ironic showing off (00:02:29-00:02:36, 00:16:09-00:16:19, 00:20:02-00:20:08,²⁸ 00:59:00-00:59:12²⁹), Spica has no qualms about devising the terrible punishments for both Michael, his wife's lover, and Pup, the lovers' liaison person, in mock culinary terms. The cases, however similar, deserve close scrutiny.

Pup obsessively sings *Miserere* in the kitchen (CTWL 00:05:00-00:06:00, 00:41:18-00:41:34). Its religious lyrics enmesh the culinary and the polluting: the *cleanse me* leitmotif (realised as

“*blot out my transgressions*”; “*purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean*”; “*wash me thoroughly*”³⁰ simultaneously confirms and undoes the kitchen’s traditional association with symbolic pollution.³¹ Invited by Georgina to join the lovers – now in their hideout – for dinner, he refuses, for he “will eat later with Mr Boarst” (01:22:03-01:22:12). Pup couldn’t possibly envisage what he will eat, though alone: his buttons and then his own navel (“belly button”), ripped off and shoved down his throat by Spica for refusing to reveal the lovers’ hideout (01:23:51-01:25:55).

Michael’s book depository, a cosy hideout for the lovers and unusual background to their classy dinners cooked by Richard, becomes a baroque execution stage. “What good are all these books to you? *You can’t eat them!* How can they make you happy?” (CTWL 01:20:58-01:21:03), Georgina wonders, overwhelmed by the stacked bookshelves in Michael’s book depository. (One can *ruminate* on, or *chew* over, and try to *digest* ideas learnt from books – but *eat* books? Perhaps *swallow* their bitter lessons?) Spica, who *nurses revenge*, reveals his imaginatively pragmatic (*sic*) approach to books: one can be *stuffed* to death with their pages. Michael dies (01:29:43-01:31:53) as a spatiotemporally remote victim of the French Revolution, which he studied fondly at the restaurant too.³² In Spica’s pithy words (imagining the posterity’s admiration for his dignified style of revenge), Michael “was stuffed. And Albert liked good food. They might even smile: ‘He was stuffed with the tools of his trade. He was stuffed with books. The crummy little book-keeper was...’” (01:31:22-01:31:36).³³ Spica chokes on the final line, but recoups his power position and orders his henchmen to “Finish him off! ... [R]am the bloody books down his throat” (01:31:43-01:31:48). *Bloody* books indeed, which enshrine the memory of a literally bloody past,³⁴ and, in Michael’s case, also make up the “librarian” à la Arcimboldo, though grimly so (01:33:10-01:33:06).

If the book on the French Revolution is turned into an “improper” dish appositely shoved down his throat with a wooden spoon (CTWL 01:30:12-01:31:02), Michael’s “stuffing” does not end there. Georgina builds on Spica’s early oath, *I’ll bloody kill him*

and I'll eat him! (01:17:00-01:17:19),³⁵ to devise her own revengeful course (I use the pun advisedly).³⁶ She organises a one-course banquet for Spica:

"Happy anniversary, Albert."

"What are you talking about, 'Happy anniversary'? It's not my birthday."

"No, but it's an anniversary that I shall always celebrate, even if you won't. And you won't." (CTWL 01:53:05-01:53:18)

"Since it is your anniversary..."

"What bloody anniversary?"

"I've brought you a present. [...] And Richard has cooked it for you. Under my instructions."

"Oh."

"Knowing how you like to eat. Knowing how you like to gorge yourself." (CTWL 01:54:09-01:54:14, 01:54:23-01:54:34)

A procession of kitchen staff (with Pup in a wheelchair) headed by the chef, alongside Spica's victims, walks to Spica's table to present Georgina's culinary present, for now mysteriously wrapped up in a pall. "What sort of party is this, Georgie?" (CTWL 01:55:47-01:55:59), Spica wonders apprehensively. Georgina assumes full directorial prerogatives: she invites Spica to sit down for a "special treat" (01:55:57). "You're here to enjoy yourself" (01:56:11), Georgina smiles to him, all graces, and pours him a glass of wine before uncovering the present (01:56:36-01:56:38). Spica will have to consume, at gunpoint (01:58:11-02:00:22),³⁷ an abject dish: Michael's body, roasted and spiced by Richard to Georgina's orders in her well-staged banquet-cum-revenge drama.³⁸ The knife and fork in Spica's hands, in his revenge oath scene,³⁹ become his eating utensils for cannibalism, in the banquet scene. Georgina suavely instructs Spica: "You have your knife and fork. You do know how to use them. Or have all those carefully learnt table manners gone to waste?" (01:57:13-01:57:20). His rabid disposition in the oath scene has now imploded to revulsion: Spica throws up before even touching the morsel of human flesh

(01:59:36-01:59:37) – he abjects the thought of death, *his* through Michael's. Once he has swallowed the morsel, Georgina shoots Spica dead and then reviles him as a cannibal (02:00:39). Food, not just gunfire, provided by his wife, not simply by the chef, who has cooked and presents it with panache (01:54:43-01:57:54), has mortified and killed the abusive gangster. Staging cannibal eating and choreographing the on-set spectators' response render Georgina herself a consummate stage director.

The cannibal feast devised by Georgina to avenge her murdered lover (as well as herself as abused wife) should provide us food for thought. Critics describe rape-revenge films "as vehicles for challenging phallocentrism" that show "gender role reversal" (McEntee 41). Granted that often "redress for rape is pursued outside the law, which limits the extent of the threat posed by the angry woman to masculine power" (41). What happens agency- and threat-wise, in Greenaway's film, insofar as Georgina's redress for (matrimonial) rape has a long cultural pedigree? Coerced cannibalism recalls Ovid's Philomela story, in *The Metamorphoses* (6.421-676), where the raped woman, prodded by her sister, avenges herself (6.619-666), and its deliberate mirror-story, Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (5.2.167-206, 5.3.54-63), where the father avenges the raped woman, with the latter as coerced (half-)accessory (5.2.183-184, 197-198).⁴⁰ In the male-authored *Metamorphoses*, the cannibal scene showing women avenging rape has a ventriloquist dimension: a man (Ovid) voices the woman's plight (rape and consequent trauma) and construes female agency (revenge) as malefic gender bending (Bacchae's mad savagery). Accordingly, it is debatable to what extent gender role reversal in *CTWL* truly challenges phallocentrism. Rather, the motif of cannibalism as the self-empowered woman's punishment for her husband furnishes a spicy ingredient to the *film noir*.

Conclusion

This intersectional-phenomenological study of orientation by examining the cook and food (or eating) in Woolf's *TL*,

Greenaway's *CTWL* and Wong's *ML* suggests that cooking agent and eaten matter enter into a complex relationship which articulates power beyond culinary acts proper. On the one hand, power becomes apparent intratextually. Spica, in *CTWL*, may seek absolute power, yet he is defeated at his own game by those whom his power has oppressed, whether wife, chef or associates. Conversely, the disempowered cooks in *TL* and *ML* are (quasi)anonymous cogs in patriarchy's sustenance mechanism, whose indispensable activity nevertheless goes unacknowledged and unrewarded. On the other hand, power relations insinuate themselves metadiscursively too. It was, after all, the writer's or filmmaker's decision whether to depict their characters engaging in power clashes (in *CTWL*), ready for dignified renunciation (Mrs Ramsay as custodian of aestheticised food preyed on by voracious men), feigning agency (Wong's amah), or acting as unaware contributors (Mrs Suen) to the preservation of patriarchal power through both matter-of-fact reliance on female domestics to do the house chores and custodial coaching of the young woman to surrender to the strictures of matrimony instead of pursuing a modicum of freedom.

Commensality may suggest a smoothing over of power relations (e.g. landlady/tenant; gangster/associates; established professor/aspiring philosopher) through the sharing of food. Yet, not only does it not annihilate them, but it may even exacerbate them. The master/slave relationship is retained intact both in the low-key version offered by *ML* (whether at home or in the noodle stall) or *TL* and in the violent version of *CTWL*. Commensality may create or enforce quasi-convivial or other bonds.⁴¹ Often, however, it is the obvious conduit for power: the flow of power, whether turbulent (*CTWL*) or still (*TL* and *ML*), able to shatter the seat of power or not aiming at it, suggests not liquefaction of power, though, but a unidirectional stream, if subject to temporary interruptions (*CTWL*). It is not unidirectionality which should concern us, though, but the *illusion* of liquefaction, for it does not entail the definitive demise of power or of the status quo, but rather vents a utopian yearning for breaking free.

Notes:

¹ I include eating amongst cultural practices in view of its habitus-related significance, as analysed by Pierre Bourdieu (esp. 177-200): class-related distinctions in habitus transpire also in eating habits as part of one's cultural taste.

² Although "increasingly used to describe the act of styling and capturing food on mobile gadgets, eliciting an invitation to gaze and vicariously consume, and to tag images of food through digital platforms," the term *food porn* – used originally synonymously with *gastro porn* – "alludes to the fetishisation of food and its coalescence with desire by styling culinary offerings through the vantage point of the camera lens to be consumed by hungry publics" (Ibrahim 2).

³ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (11-14) has coined the term *kyriarchy* to describe the implicit hierarchy within patriarchy as a matrix of domination.

⁴ Whether Richard acts thus in revenge or for any other (baroque) reason is irrelevant to my argument.

⁵ The first time Georgina enters the kitchen with Michael, first she tries the sauce hollandaise, to which Richard adds extra salt to refine its taste (CTWL 00:32:40-00:33:00); subsequently, a silent eye-to-eye dialogue prompts Richard to invite the lovers "backstage" into the "curtained" pantry (00:33:00-00:33:14).

⁶ The pantry décor appears lush with vegetation (CTWL 00:59:47-00:59:55).

⁷ Yet the lovers' haven is not sealed: a black cook enters, for "someone's having a pheasant for dinner" (CTWL 01:04:33-01:04:40).

⁸ This and the other two scenes quoted before form one discontinuous love scene in the "green" pantry.

⁹ Georgina's persuasive remarks to Michael suggest that sex between courses elides sexual intercourse in the kitchen with eating at the restaurant as symmetrical consumption acts.

¹⁰ The kitchen can be associated with theatricality from the outset, but especially when it becomes the lovers' haven. When Georgina returns, after Michael's death, to talk to Richard, a long shot reveals the fortress-like appearance of the kitchen, whose massive walls and Romanesque arches alternate with curtained spaces (CTWL 01:42:34-01:43:00) – the hard/soft pattern of Georgina's life and of the theatre's make-believe world.

¹¹ When the police force open the two vans parked at the kitchen entrance, the contents of one (CTWL 01:14:16) are visualised as an animated *vanitas*

still life (01:14:22-01:14:26) which anticipates the film's deadly denouement.

¹² See, for instance, Rembrandt's *Carcass of Beef* (1657, Louvre), inspirational to Francis Bacon's *Figure with Meat* (1954, Art Institute of Chicago) and his entire "screaming pope" series. Greenaway's first Rembrandtesque glimpses of the freezer van with open doors (CTWL 00:10:34-00:10:45) associate the carcasses with consumption: a hungry/thirsty young woman who licks a huge ice cube from the van is watched with (sexual?) interest by the young driver who "pulls" the ropes (from which pig heads hang) in one van.

¹³ Georgina begs Richard to grant her request: "In memory of us [she and Michael] making love in your kitchen and in your fantasies, help me now. [...] Cook Michael for me" (CTWL 01:48:15-01:48:19, 01:48:39).

¹⁴ Beef cooked in "an earthenware recipient [*daube*] high for its circumference" (Woolf 515, n. 50).

¹⁵ "Amah" – a common noun for *Chinese* (or more infrequently *foreign*) live-in servants – is used in the Chinese spoken in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia (but *not* in China as well) either by natives or by English colonists (Constable 52–62).

¹⁶ Mrs Suen offers the amah to help Mrs Chan to move in, which the tenant politely refuses (ML 00:03:38-00:03:41).

¹⁷ Mrs Chan buys noodles from the street stall to take away (ML 00:15:26-00:15:30); Chow (00:16:38-00:16:54), like other customers (00:15:12-00:15:38), prefers eating on the premises. Mrs Chan and Chow sometimes intersect on the stall staircase (00:16:58-00:17:07, 00:24:37-00:24:64).

¹⁸ Alternatively, they may have fried rice (ML 00:47:44-00:49:07) or Mrs Chan may munch a cookie (00:57:00-00:57:10).

¹⁹ It remains much of a mystery whether the food Mrs Chan promises to bring Chow when he is again ill, now alone in his hotel room, is home prepared (ML 00:55:02-00:55:05).

²⁰ There is also the special dinner – never shown – to which Chow invites Mrs Chan since she has refused her share of the writing fee for the martial-arts story he has published (ML 00:51:15-00:51:28).

²¹ *Mutatis mutandis*, the same happens in Wong's *ML* scenes of spousal confrontation.

²² The dish adulteration occurs during Georgina's first love-making with Michael in the kitchen after the previous day's but half-consumed act in the toilet, when Spica nearly caught them red-handed.

²³ Spica threatens Mitchel (Tim Roth) to stuff him with his own vomit

should the miserable man throw up the mussels he is eating.

²⁴ Crayfish – right after the murder of Michael.

²⁵ Spica smears the body of Roy (Willie Ross) with excrement, then pisses on him (couched as eating and drinking, respectively), seasoned with threats of feeding him his own excrement.

²⁶ Spica makes Mitchel imagine he's swallowing prairie oysters, viz., ram bullocks.

²⁷ However, Spica may wax philosophical and discourse on the relatedness of (his pleasure of) eating and sex (CTWL 00:16:26-00:16:51).

²⁸ Concerning Richard's need to over-Frenchify his accent for the sake of the restaurant.

²⁹ The coq au vin.

³⁰ The second time Pup chants *Miserere* (CTWL 00:11:31-00:13:15), Richard has Roy cleansed of the excrement Spica and his henchmen have smeared him with in revenge for unpaid debts; the third time, Richard drags Georgina out of the restaurant through the kitchen to punish her for disobedience (if unaware of her early affair in the kitchen) and bullies Pup, who volunteers to sing to appease him (00:41:51-00:42:30). The chanting resumes as voice-over (00:44:34-00:44:47) whilst Spica beats and rapes his wife in the car, and also provides the lovers' background music for sex-making in the kitchen the next day. Pup chants *Miserere* when he brings food to the lovers hidden in the book depository, until Michael politely stops him (01:21:25-01:21:40).

³¹ See Mary Douglas's structuralist anthropology of ritual and secular (un)cleanliness and pollution, esp. chapters 1 and 2.

³² Spica reminds his henchmen after the murder: "What did he [Michael] say [at the restaurant]? The French Revolution was easier to swallow than Napoleon" (CTWL 01:34:13-01:34:19). The gangster continues with a fanciful excursus on what Napoleon liked to eat, to show he, the mighty Spica, shared his liking for seafood with illustrious predecessors from Churchill to Hitler and Mussolini (01:34:23-01:34:43). Ironically, his associates enquire about Michael's food preferences: "What did the bookseller eat?" – "You could tell from his vomit" (01:34:46-01:34:49). As usual, Spica thinks excrementally: "It all comes out as shit in the end" (01:34:51-01:34:52).

³³ Greenaway interlaces three uncanny culinary scenes. The earliest concerns Spica's contempt for Michael's books, which Spica repeatedly throws away (CTWL 00:36:38-00:36:43; 00:40:41-00:41:00) before ordering Richard to "grill [one of Michael's books] with some mashed

peas" (00:41:03-00:41:08). The other two scenes focus on Michael's culinary-bookish demise and Georgina's wayward handling of foodstuffs in her revenge through abject feeding.

³⁴ Ironically, Spica *re-enacts* the French Revolution: the *coarse* gangster executes the *dignified* restaurant patron, if with the tools of the latter's trade and a spoon rather than with a guillotine blade, hence the decorously minimal bloodshed.

³⁵ Spica utters it whilst storming the kitchen searching for the lovers (now in the freezer van, about to be driven to safety). When Spica is horrified to be served Michael's roasted body (CTWL 01:56:59-01:57:00), Georgina reminds him of the oath and orders: "Now eat him!" (01:57:08).

³⁶ Richard misconstrues Georgina's insistence to have Michael cooked: "You may have liked Michael. [...] But you don't have to eat him, Georgina. Do you... do you have some idea that by eating him he can become part of you? You can't believe that by eating him you can always be together!" (CTWL 01:49:20-01:49:41). "I'm not eating him," Georgina laughs at the misunderstanding, "Albert is" (01:49:44-01:49:50).

³⁷ The gun belongs to Spica, who loses it whilst putting up resistance.

³⁸ Interestingly, Michael's roasted flesh appears dark enough to evoke the black ingredients for which Richard charges most since they provide a *sui generis memento mori* (CTWL 01:43:53-01:44:43): "People like to remind themselves of death; eating black food is like consuming death, like saying 'Death, I'm eating you'" (01:44:10-01:44:23), Richard answers Georgina. Abjection (in Kristeva's sense) as warding off yet constantly remembering death couldn't be more theatrically presented.

³⁹ Having learnt about his wife's adultery, performed with gusto (< It. < Lat. *gustus*, "taste") in the restaurant kitchen, Spica storms the place searching for the lovers (CTWL 01:15:41-01:15:52). The scene climaxes with his paroxysmal vow to find the lovers and kill Michael, which Spica repeats fork and knife in hand (01:17:03-01:17:07).

⁴⁰ Historically, the two texts were connected by Seneca's *Thyestes*, the drama of twin brothers' rivalry for the throne of Mycenae. Thyestes will do anything to win it – such as also seducing his brother Atreus's wife, Aërope (ll. 220–4) – yet he changes heart and retreats to seclusion, from whence Atreus, who nurses revenge, lures his brother back and also offers him half the kingdom. Tricked by the welcome, Thyestes gets drunk and is served an unwholesome soup: as the Messenger reports (ll. 627–788), Atreus has butchered two of his brother's three sons and cooked them for the unsuspecting father. Ignorant of what he has eaten, Thyestes is

served a cup of wine mixed with blood and shown his sons' heads on a platter, only to learn, to his horror, why he cannot bury their bodies.

⁴¹ See Kerner and Chou's review (1-3) of theorisations of commensality (both ritual or festive and everyday): commensality, Georg Simmel argues, was invented *to establish social bonds*; it is a "total social fact" that affords multiple intercourse (economic, jural, political, religious, aesthetic, moral), according to Marcel Mauss, in a *power nexus* of (partial or total) inclusion/exclusion, according to Michel Foucault.

Works Cited

- Ahmed, Sara. "A Phenomenology of Whiteness." *Feminist Theory* 8.2 (2007): 149-168. Print.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1984. Print.
- Ciobanu, Estella. "Food for Thought: Of Tables, Art and Women in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*." *American, British and Canadian Studies* 29.1 (2017): 147-168. Print.
- Constable, Nicole. *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Migrant Workers*. 2nd ed. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2007. Print.
- The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*. Dir. Peter Greenaway. Perf. Richard Bohringer, Michael Gambon, Helen Mirren. Allarts Cook, Erato Film and Film Inc., 1989. DVD.
- Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. 1966. London: Routledge, 1984. Print.
- Grillo, Trina. "Anti-Essentialism and Intersectionality: Tools to Dismantle the Master's House." *Berkeley Journal of Gender, Law and Justice* 10.1 (1995): 16-30. Web. 12. Nov. 2013.
- Haraway, Donna. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14.3 (1988): 575-599. Web. 18 May 2006.
- hooks, bell. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. Cambridge, MA: South End P, 1989. Print.
- . *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: South End P, 2000. Print.

- Husserl, Edmund. *Collected Works II: Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*. First Book: *General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*. Trans. F. Kersten. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983. Print.
- Ibrahim, Yasmin. "Food Porn and the Invitation to Gaze: Ephemeral Consumption and the Digital Spectacle." *International Journal of E-Politics* 6.3 (2015): 1-12. Web. 19 Oct. 2018.
- In the Mood for Love*. Dir. Wong Kar-Wai. Perf. Maggie Cheung, Tony Chiu-Wai Leung, Ping Lam Siu. Jet Tone Films Ltd., Hong Kong, 2000. DVD.
- Kerner, Susanne, and Cynthia Chou. "Introduction." *Commensality: From Everyday Food to Feast*. Ed. Susanne Kerner, Cynthia Chou, and Morten Warmind. London: Bloomsbury, 2015. 1-10. Print.
- McEntee, Joy. "Ladies, Bring a Poisoned Plate: Cinematic Representations of the Vengeful Woman." *Media Information Australia* 72.1 (1994): 41-48. Web. 12 June 2014.
- Ovid. *Ovid in Six Volumes. III-IV: Metamorphoses*. Trans. Frank Justus Miller. 2 vols. Loeb Classical Library 42, 43. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1968, 1971. Print.
- Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. Introduction. *Democratizing Biblical Studies: Toward an Emancipatory Educational Space*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox P, 2009. 1-21. Print.
- Seneca. *Seneca in Nine Volumes. Tragedies II: Agamemnon. Thyestes. Hercules Oetaeus. Phoenissae. Octavia*. Loeb Classical Library 78. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1958. Print.
- Shakespeare, William. *Titus Andronicus*. Ed. John Dover Wilson. The Cambridge Dover Wilson Shakespeare 35. 1968. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009. Print.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Collected Novels of Virginia Woolf: Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, The Waves*. Ed. Stella McNichol. London: Macmillan, 1992. Print.