Food, Appetite and Consumption in Postmodern Film

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Abstract

The following dissertation aims to analyse and explore the significance of consumption and consumerism, from both a personal and global perspective, by viewing society through the prism of what it chooses to eat. It will be argued that food is a powerful tool of communication, as it allows one to assert a sense of individuality and at the same time, integration in the world, with the choice of certain foods, the rejection of others and the specific preparation we choose to impose on our food in order to make it suit our personal and cultural tastes. Appetite is explored insofar as there are many kinds other than the culinary; the sexual, the violent and thus the origins and ramifications of these appetites must be explored in order to better understand *why* we consume. The choice of American, French and English texts allow for a broader scope of analysis, and what these countries choose to include in their cultural diets allows us to better understand the consumerism within their societies. The significance of using film is that it provides a richly visual impact which one could compare to the surveying of a sumptuous meal. It is said that we eat with our eyes first, and the camera allows us to witness the consumption we see taking place on screen and we are encouraged to *consume* the films by reflecting on our own consumptive habits and appetites. The theatrical style of Tarantino and Greenaway allows for the intertextuality between film and the stage. The blending of time frames in Jeunet and Caro's work with the use of a retro-style film that actually takes place in the future and Tarantino's use of a non-linear narrative, allows the potency and power of film to emerge; what the camera allows us to see and what it hides from us, especially when expressing the concerns of postmodernism. We are given the opportunity to relate to the characters of these films by viewing what they eat, what appetites they cultivate, the effects of their consumptive habits, and finally, we are encouraged to consider what role we play in the consumer world.

Contents

Introduction

However significant food is to the individual, it is undeniable that the food we eat speaks far more about us than we take the time to contemplate in the day to day routine of seeking out the food we prefer to eat and using it to alleviate our immediate hunger. Morse argues that food is in fact "the symbolic medium par excellence"[1] and Lupton elaborates on this point that food is used to "mark boundaries between social classes… nations, cultures, genders, life-cycle stages, religions and occupations…traditions, festivals, seasons and times of day".[2] The following chapter will cover the primary theoretical concerns of this dissertation. The first section will locate the film in the realm of *postmodernism*, its definition, meaning and its application in the films. Lyotard, Jameson and Gaylard will assist in gaining an understanding of the significance of the postmodern. The second section will be a discussion about the various choices, arenas and preparation of *food*, the desirability and appetites that surround food and eating as well as its preparation and how this connects to subjectivity, the shaping of identity and the role of this in postmodernism. Cannibalism will be explored in this section as well, as it applies to the films and represents the most extreme form of destructive consumption.

The third major section is about *consumption* and consumerism, what it means to be a consumer and the ramifications for society and for the self, with the help of theorists such as Baudrillard, Veblen and Löfgren and whether consumers are accountable or whether there should be an assumption of responsibility on the part of us, the viewers and consumers, as a result of watching these films. The fourth section will be a discussion about *health* versus contamination of the body, the symbolic as well as physical impact of what we eat, the fear that surrounds the poisoning of the body but also the fear of not having the means to continue consuming. Fischler and Heldke will assist us in understanding these fears, with theories such as *saccharophobia* and the ingesting or consuming of what is foreign to the body and to the self. Finally, the chapter will end with a fifth section on *hunger*, based mainly on the work of Susan George, how it

[1] From Lupton, D *Food, The Body and The Self,* London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1996, p.14
[2] Lupton, p.16

functions in relation to the consumer habits of the West, our own greed and our insatiable appetite to consume, the consequences for the developing world, and the broader context of social responsibility to which these films awaken us.

In Mark Kurlansky's article "The Food Chains That Link Us All," he writes:

> The famous dictum of the early 19th century French gastronome Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, "Tell me what you eat and I will tell you who you are," should be expanded. Tell me what you eat and I will tell you who you are, where you live, where you stand on political issues, who your neighbours are, how your economy functions, your country's history and foreign relations, and the state of the environment. By looking at food, the age we live in is better understood.[3]

When reading Eve Bertelsen's work on *Pulp Fiction*, it seems Tarantino would almost certainly agree with Kurlansky, as Tarantino uses "consumer ideology," explains Bertelsen, to drive the narratives of his characters:

> Consumption appears to be the constitutive principle of Tarantino's filmic universe. His texts consume movies … consumption supplies identity and motivation of his characters, and he imagines his audience as a community of consumers … par excellence.[4]

In each of the three films, consumption is explored through the scope of the postmodern age. In *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*, Greenaway presents us with the character of Albert Spica, who is highly wasteful of food and thus reckless with human life, revealing the reality that the two are closely interconnected. In *Pulp Fiction*, Tarantino shows us that the non-nutritious food his characters choose to consume communicates their relationship to the world. And in *Delicatessen*, Jeunet and Caro present to their viewer a world that has run out of food completely and has resorted to

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[3] Kurlansky, Mark. "The Food Chains that Link Us All." TIME *Magazine*. (25 June- 2 July 2007):169.
[4] Bertelsen, Eve. "'Serious Gourmet Shit': Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*." *Journal of Literary Studies*. 15 (1999): 8-32. p.13

cannibalism. And so postmodernism is critical of consumption in these films in that it portrays a society that now prides itself on excess, greed and self-destruction.

First, it is necessary to outline the key concerns of postmodernism further, in order to better understand how and why these films fit into the genre of the postmodern. In Connor's *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism,*[5] Catherine Constable explains Jean Baudrillard's key thesis in her essay on postmodernism and film. In his four phases of the image, Baudrillard describes how from the first phase (the image as a basic reflection of reality) to the fourth (the image no longer bears any relation to the real, "it is its own pure simulacrum"[6]) in which case, "the annihilation of the real" occurs.

From the real, to the loss of the integrity of the real, to lack of any resemblance of the real, Baudrillard helps us to understand how, from then on, "the real itself becomes film-like."[7] Eve Bertelsen argues that Tarantino "requires his actors, in addition to their prescribed genre business, to perform their own star history."[8] And so Samuel L. Jackson is his typical "bad-ass" self in this film and we recognise him almost immediately from other films in which he has played a similar role. John Travolta re-emerges, ever so slightly chubbier, as the "disco king down on his luck" and Bertelsen adds to this idea as she quips, "Is it Vince or John Travolta who is appalled at the prospect of a dance competition?"[9] Finally, Harvey Keitel virtually repeats the roles he has played previously in films such as *Bugsy* and *Mean Streets.*[10] We can start to see how the real becomes film-like and visa versa.

Tarantino manages to flirt with the real, even within a film that is practically a tribute to the crime film genre. Furthermore, Baudrillard claims that "the construction of reality as film marks the destruction of reality."[11] Tarantino does just this; he uses film to dictate

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[5] Ed. Connor, Steven *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
[6] Ed. Poster, Mark. Jean Baudrillard. *Selected Writings*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2001.
[7] Connor, p. 44
[8] Bertelsen,p.22
[9] Bertelsen, p.22
[10] Bertelsen, p.21
[11] Connor, p.44

reality, uses the actors' real lives and turns them into film characters. He constructs reality as film. The significance of this is that Tarantino doesn't claim to make a classic gangster film out of *Pulp Fiction*, and *Pulp Fiction* isn't even necessarily a film about gangster films, but according to Baudrillard, Tarantino takes it one step further, it is a film that causes its viewer to be *aware* of the process of making a gangster film. And so this metafiction, this self-awareness of the filmmaking process in the film itself is yet another way that the real becomes reel. Connor describes written metafiction as the way in which we are required to "remain aware all the time of the process by which the fiction we are reading is coming painfully into being on the page."[12] In *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*, the theatrical process of creating the film, reveals to its audience Greenaway's determination to portray an integrity in his story telling, an honesty in the process of telling that story. By never hiding the camera, by moving the camera between sets and scenes, Greenaway inserts himself in the film and the insertion of the filmmaker into his creation communicates that he is consistently self-reflexive. Jameson's concept of "autoreferentiality" elaborates upon this idea further, in that these films are comments on consumption, yet they are simultaneously products for consumption as well, "What has happened is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally."[13]

Jeunet and Caro do something similar in their film. *Delicatessen* is also an extension of Baudrillard's simulacrum, in which the image bears no relation to the real. The world that Jeunet and Caro construct in this film, more so than *Pulp Fiction* and *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*, does not resemble reality and is constructed with a somewhat hubristic tone. Perhaps the point of the this unreal world is once again connected to Baudrillard's thesis in that *Delicatessen* is intentionally divorced from the real to emphasise that both art and history have dictated the reality of the World War II experience, with which the film is chiefly concerned. Jeunet and Caro conflate fantasy with the reality of war in order to convey that, as argued previously in this thesis, history is a construct that is as subjective as art itself. The unreal is therefore used to demonstrate

[12] Connor, p.124
[13] Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Verso: London, 1991. p.7

a society that is out of touch with reality. And Jameson adds that Jeunet and Caro's text would be "an alarming and pathological symptom of a society that has become incapable of dealing with time and history."[14] This is based on an earlier assumption by Silverman about history as subjective, about its limited function as the telling of *his story*, which he describes as the challenge of the"postmodern textualization of history and the problems of memorializing the past" as well as "the distinction between history and memory."[15] Jameson also describes history as subjective and unreliable, "We are condemned to seek history by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach."[16]

Baudrillard uses Disney to exemplify his view of the unreal versus the real: "The elements of mockery and exaggeration are clear in this presentation of the hyper-real as the transformation of reality into a cartoon."[17] There are elements of the cartoon-like in *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* with it's flamboyant costumes and rich use of colour, even more so in *Delicatessen*, where the characters actually look like cartoon characters with their exaggerated features. In *Pulp Fiction*, hyper-reality pervades the entire film as it exaggerates a specific film genre, the crime film genre, and uses the real-life film careers of his actors in order to make his characters more recognisable.

But how is all of this connected to consumption? Bertelsen best explains it with her argument that

> From the start its [*Pulp Fiction*'s] characters emerge as synthetic products, hyperbolically constituted by consumer culture and the codes of their appointed genre.[18]

Thus Tarantino's use of 'recycled' characters communicates to us strongly about how Tarantino sees Hollywood as the empire of meaningless consumption. One actor can play

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[14] Connor, p.48
[15] Silverman, p.28-9
[16] Jameson, p.25
[17] Connor, p.45
[18] Bertelsen, p.20

one character in many different films and the consumer of these films will almost certainly continue to consume. Bertelsen adds the opinion of Willis in her analysis of *Pulp Fiction*, who argues that Tarantino's films present "a world where all culture is simultaneous … where movies only really watch other movies."[19] But Tarantino plays this up, as he explains in an interview: "In the first ten minutes… the movie tells you what kind of movie it's gonna be. It tells you everything that you basically need to know. And after that … you just know what's gonna happen …"[20]

Tarantino truly loves Hollywood film and *Pulp Fiction* is a tribute to that. But this thesis aspires to extend the significance of the film as more than simply "the story of a genre"[21] and argue rather that the choice of the context and environment of the criminal underworld serves to portray how Tarantino perceives American material mass consumption. As Bertelsen explains, "specialist studies of the genre read the crime story as a 'myth' in which the American Dream is writ large and ugly and its contradictions laid bare."[22] The underworld of any society is representative of its flaws and Tarantino reveals this world in all its ugliness.

Interspersed with a crime story, there is dialogue about food, events framed around food, and specific choices of food that convey how American society consumes and what the dangers and possible results of this are. Among the many roles of violence in all three films, (but most vividly in *Pulp Fiction* and *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*) is Baudrillard's "radical law of equivalence," explains Constable: Baudrillard claims that capitalism is largely responsible for the distortion of reality in that capitalism blurs the boundaries between true and false, good and evil. It is within the criminal underworld that truth and falsehood are confused at will, that good and evil are distorted for convenience, surely more so in the world of violent crime than any other. Jameson expands on the postmodern view of capitalism, which will be discussed a little later.

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[19] Bertelsen, p.23
[20] (Tarantino Quoted by Smith 1994: 42) Bertelsen, p.20
[21] Bertelsen, p.21
[22] Bertelsen, p.13

This "law of radical equivalence" to which Baudrillard refers reminds one of the characters of Albert Spica, Vince and Jules, (before he decides to extricate himself from the profession of crime) who do not possess a higher regard for human life. They show *equality* in their lack of mercy. Vince and Jules have an entirely casual conversation on their way to do a hit, as well as right outside the door of the apartment in which the men who they will very soon be killing sit and eat their breakfast. The men are jobs to Vince and Jules, targets to be eliminated, nothing more. They reveal 'equivalence' in whose lives they consume, which personifies the mafia world and it is driven by purely capitalistic motivations. Albert Spica treats Roy, the chef of Albert's restaurant, his entire band of cronies and his wife equally, with equally metered out violence and abuse. His behaviour is fuelled by greed, which Baudrillard believes is the chief symptom of capitalism.

And so it seems fairly obvious that whilst Tarantino may celebrate the crime film genre, among many other genres of film, he is also making a very clear statement about American consumer society: "He [Tarantino] is the 'no' to that great American 'yes' which is stamped so big on our official culture."[23] The idea of American culture being "stamped" implies that it has been branded and packaged for mass consumption – from its food, to its film – and Tarantino is not vehemently critical of this, but he certainly appears to be disdainfully amused.

Jameson, like Baudrillard, discusses capitalism in relation to postmodernism, which is highly relevant to this thesis in that capitalism is directly dependant upon consumption in order to function. In his essay 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society,' Jameson presents three stages in the progression of capitalism: The first is "market capitalism"[24], heralding the growth of industry and the production of food for national markets. In this first category, the traditional, nuclear family is the focus of production. The second phase is "monopoly capitalism", the creation of world markets designed for nation states. In this

[23] Bertelsen, p.22
[24] Connor, p.48

phase, says Jameson, modernism is the "cultural dominant."[25] The development of global markets and the breaking down of national barriers has given way to the third phase, "multinational capitalism" in which the cultural dominant is postmodernism. Jameson's three phases are significant, as the progression of the third and final phase has allowed for a rampant and largely uninhibited form of global consumption of which postmodernism and these three films are highly critical. Jeunet and Caro see it as disastrous and potentially apocalyptic. Greenaway's film expresses a disdain for Thatcher's specific brand of multinational capitalism and Jameson explains multinational capitalism further as resulting in "all the familiar social consequences, including the crisis of traditional labour, the emergence of yuppies, and gentrification on a now-global scale."[26] As discussed in much more detail in the chapter dedicated to *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*, Albert is portrayed as the worst kind of yuppie, lacking the class he is so convinced is automatically ushered in by wealth. Tarantino too finds his own American consumer culture to be gullible, incessant and self-destructive. Each filmmaker reflects on the age of postmodern multinational capitalism in their own countries and cultures and what the effects have been and stand to be in the future.

At their very core, postmodern films comment on the modernizing process of society, which must be clearly defined and which Jameson describes in the following way:

> If modernization has something to do with industrial progress, rationalization, reorganization of production … the assembly line, then modernism … comes into being in violent or muffled protest against modernization, an anti-modern modernism.[27]

Postmodernism then, is "that pure and random play of signifiers … which no longer produces monumental works of the modernist type, but ceaselessly reshuffles the fragments of preexistent texts … in some new and heightened bricolage," thus a reaction to postmodernity.

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[25] Connor, p.48
[26] Jameson, p.xviii.
[27] Jameson, p.304

For Jameson, pastiche is one of the key aspects of postmodern art:

> With the collapse of the high modernist ideology of style … the producers of culture have nowhere to turn but the past, the imitation of dead styles, speech, through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a now global culture.[28]

But what is significant about Jameson's pastiche for the purposes of this project is that it is "not incompatible with a certain humour … nor is it innocent of all passion."[29] The uses of humour in each of these films, whilst playful and true to postmodern form, is not in order to eradicate meaning, but to generate it. The fact that the use of pastiche incorporates many different texts and genres into one, the creation of "relationship" through "difference" is not to, as postmodernism is often accused of, create circular meaning until the meaning roles over onto and cancels out itself. Instead, the use of collage, "This new mode of relationship through difference" allows us to "rise somehow to a level at which the vivid perception of radical difference is in and of itself a new mode of grasping…"[30] What used to be the "mode of grasping" a story was a beginning first, then a middle and finally, an end. Tarantino encourages us toward this new mode of grasping with his non-linear narrative and Greenaway does something similar with his theatre-like film.

Thus what postmodernism serves to do, explains Jameson, is to "articulate visions of history in which the evaluation of the social moment in which we live today is the object of an essentially political affirmation or repudiation."[31] This is the chief argument of this thesis, that these three films show us a certain brand of postmodernism that is both politically and socially conscious, whilst still remaining in the realm of the playful and, in fact, utilizing this playfulness to that end.

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[28] Jameson, p.18
[29] Jameson, p.19
[30] Jameson, p.31
[31] Jameson, p.32

Staying with Jameson, it is also necessary to more closely examine the presence of humour in each of the films, as one of Jameson's key explanations of postmodernism is that it makes use of parody. Bertelsen argues that,

> Any analysis of *Pulp Fiction* that ignores the workings of humour is bound to be offended by its handling of cultural taboos …The point of humour is lost if taboos may not be transgressed, and transgressive humour is the lifeblood of Tarantino's comic texts.[32]

What is "the point of humour"? Bertelsen asserts that "while it is relatively simple to identify the formal devices and mechanisms that produce laughter, it is more difficult to explain what that laughter achieves."[33] The point of parody in each of these films is not simply to be funny, but to force the viewer to generate meaning for him/herself. When we laugh, we are encouraged to think about what is so funny and why. In *Pulp Fiction*, the use of humour seems to heighten the effect the violence has on us. It is a somewhat jarring experience to giggle at Vince and Jules's conversation in the car with Marvin in the backseat in one moment and in the very next, to be shocked out of our wits when Vince accidentally shoots Marvin in the face, spraying his skull across the windscreen. Humour heightens violence and vice versa. It has a defamiliarising effect, as discussed in some detail in earlier chapters: we do not expect to laugh when watching a violent scene and we do not expect violence when watching a funny scene. The experience is *unfamiliar* and thus, creates a greater impact on the viewer.

One can make a similar argument about *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*: Albert is by far the most repugnant character of the entire film and yet he is also the funniest. His antics around the table of the restaurant dining hall each night of the week as the film progresses are very amusing and he has the imposing and corpulent frame (like Boucher in *Delicatessen*), together with his elaborate costume of an evil cartoon

[32] Bertelsen, p.16-17
[33] Bertelsen, p.10

character. *Delicatessen,* more so than the other two films, is a comedy from start to finish. The reflections on France's role in World War II that are contained in the film are addressed though the caricature-like characters of Louison, Boucher and the Troglodytes. The fact that we laugh does not diminish the meaning of the film, but on the contrary, intensifies it.

In all three films, violence is paired with humour and this pairing also serves to reiterate this idea of the politically conscious postmodern film. Jameson explains that there are circumstances whereby "violence is necessary in order to oppose the whole weight and force of the system itself" and how,

> Violence can with impunity be tapped for social reconstruction; how a temperament suited for demolition of the old order can participate in the formation of a new one; how the purifying negative can be Utopian; how the destructive personality can be productively used.[34]

We see examples of what Jameson is arguing in all three films. In *Delicatessen*, in the final scene of the film, Louison and Julie play their musical instruments on the roof top (he a rusty saw, she a violin) and this could be read as a scene portraying the triumph of two lovers in the face of enormous adversity and challenges in the way of their relationship, but this is not only a meta-narrative of which postmodernism is weary, but perhaps the scene also needs to be read in a less romantic manner. Louison and Julie are quintessential individuals and perhaps the final scene of their creating their own music together is Jeunet and Caro's view of the individual versus the system to which that individual belongs. Jules and Butch in *Pulp Fiction*, Michael in *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* and these two lovers in *Delicatessen* all display qualities of individualism. Bertelsen describes the results of individual action in *Pulp Fiction*:

[34] Jameson, p.58

> While certain characters are required to return to square one, (most notably Mia, Marsellus…) characters with vision are permitted to escape (Jules and Butch) whilst yet others (Vince, the college lads…) fall foul of the bastard text and meet a gruesome end.[35]

The text is a "bastard" one, as Tarantino takes an established film genre, the classic gangster film, and 'bastardises' it by slicing the linearity of the narrative, diminishing its mystery (as Tarantino admits, we are familiar with this kind of film and thus we know what will eventually happen) and recycling its characters. Louison and Julie are the only characters with "vision" in Jeunet and Caro's film and they display this on a roof top with an old saw-cum-harp that Louison strums away to his own tune. Michael (in Greenaway's film) also expresses stark individualism when compared to Albert's brainless band of followers, but he must be sacrificed so that another character "with vision", Georgina, can eventually escape her own horrid reality. The idea of individual responsibility is introduced at this point – responsibility for what we consume which, though we often choose not to admit it, has a direct effect on our identity, our position in society, and the environment. Bertelsen asserts the following about *Pulp Fiction*; that whilst celebrating the crime film genre Tarantino adores, the film is also a "fair comment on our unthinking consumption,"[36] an assertion which is relevant to *Delicatessen* and *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* as well. There are no real heroes in any one of the three films, perhaps because the emphasis in each of them is on small actions, rather than big heroes.

We are encouraged as viewers and as consumers to consider the future of consumerism and how different our world would be if we did not write-off personal accountability in the belief that it will not and cannot make a material difference. Whilst some gorge and others starve, we are compelled to reflect on the imperative of 'doing our little bit,' of assuming full and individual responsibility for what we do, how we consume and thus, who we are.

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[35] Bertelsen, p.17
[36] Bertelsen, p.30

What resides in the final few scenes of each film and the only resounding message that comes as close to a 'solution' as these films, true to the postmodern genre, are willing to proffer is the idea of responsibility. The most sustained exploration of the notion of responsibility, individual or otherwise, is to be found in the work of the existentialists, Jean-Paul Sartre in particular. When considering that postmodern theory developed after existentialism, this thesis explores how postmodernism draws on its historical inheritance, how it has inherited the existential notion of responsibility but recasts it a playful manner.

According to Sartre, the absolute accountability of each individual for his own responsibility in this world is inescapable. As one of the classic existentialists, Sartre is quick to defend the accusation that existential thinking focuses on "the dark side of human life," a kind of philosophical black hole that leaves man without choice or escape, as Sartre articulates: "We [as existentialists] have been accused of … inviting people to remain in a desperate quietism because, since there are no solutions possible, we should have to consider action in this world as quite impossible."[37]

On the contrary, action is central to existential thinking, as it encourages us to take full responsibility for every thought, even before it translates into action. Sartre says that existentialism is a doctrine which "declares that every truth and every action implies a human setting and human subjectivity."[38] In other words, the functions of this world and the consequences of those functions have been determined by us, and only us. The world is as it is because we decide it to be that way, thus we cannot escape the absolute responsibility which existentialism imposes on us ─ itself a choice. Sartre explains further by using the example of people who say, 'If society is not kept in check, it will tend toward anarchy.' To this, Sartre responds that these are people who are clearly frightened by "man's possibility of choice."[39] We may feel weighted down by this

[37] Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism and Human Emotions*. New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1957. p.10
[38] Sartre, p.10
[39] Sartre, p.11

extreme responsibility, but it should also reveal to us an extreme freedom because, no matter what, we are in charge of the outcome of our own choices.

The idea of this unlimited choice allotted to each one of us should be taken further: Sartre declares that "existence precedes essence," which means that:

> Man arrives on earth first and only afterwards, defines himself. If man, as the existentialist conceives him, is indefinable, it is because at first he is nothing. Only afterward he will be something, and he himself will have made what he will be. There is no human nature … man is what he conceives himself to be.[40]

And so, from the very beginning, we decide, we determine, we conceive the nature and outcome of the universe around us. When considering the messages of *Pulp Fiction, Delicatessen and The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*, this is a daunting reality for us as viewers. It means we cannot excuse ourselves from the reality Tarantino, Jeunet and Caro and Greenaway are accusing us of creating, the reality of perpetual, self-indulgent and self-destructive consumption and consumerism. In addition, it is man specifically who possesses this responsibility above all other species; "Man is … at the start of a plan which is aware of itself, rather than a patch of moss, a piece of garbage, or a cauliflower."[41] And so we can no longer mourn the inevitability of the world destroying itself, as we are party to this suicide, we are creating it. And so the first function of existentialism is to make man responsible for his own existence, for what he is.

But Sartre takes his thesis one step further; he does not merely stop at individual responsibility but says that we are "responsible for all men. In choosing himself, man also chooses all men … If we grant that we exist and fashion our image, the image is valid for everybody and for our whole age."[42] And so the responsibility on us as individuals is even greater, when considering that it is inextricably linked to a collective consciousness. Sartre uses the example of monogamy to illustrate this point, that 'if I choose monogamy

[40] Sartre, p.15
[41] Sartre, p.16
[42] Sartre, p.21

for myself', "I am creating a certain image of man of my own choosing."[43] In light of Sartre's work, the three films urge us to ask ourselves what our role is in the processes of destructive consumption that dominate our society. If we were to conclude that our own individual excessive consumption is not destructive when compared with that of the entire world, Sartre would argue, "But what if everyone thought that way?"[44] And so the pervading principle of existentialism for Sartre is *action,* as he explains:

> What the existentialist says is that the coward makes himself cowardly, that the hero makes himself heroic. There's always a possibility for the coward not to be cowardly any more and for the hero to stop being heroic. What counts is total involvement.[45]

And so rather than assuming that the principles of existentialism stifle our choice, Sartre reminds us that there can be a no more liberating philosophy than one that encourages man to acknowledge that nothing foreign or external determines the life he leads, that "action is the only thing that enables a man to live."[46]

Even refusing to choose is a choice, as Sartre puts it, "In one sense choice is possible, but what is not possible is not to choose … if I do not choose, I am still choosing."[47] Perhaps this is why postmodernism rejects metanarratives, because metanarratives dictate our choices to us, they tell us what we should think. Connor explains that while the modernist text is concerned with epistemology, "anxieties about what can be truthfully known, understood and communicated about the world,"[48] postmodernism ignores epistemological inquiries in favour ontological ones, enquiries into the nature of being, the nature of our existence in the world. Postmodernism prefers to deconstruct metanarratives, so that they do not control ontology or the nature of our being. And so,

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[43] Sartre, p.20
[44] Sartre, p.21
[45] Sartre, p.23
[46] Sartre, p.23
[47] Sartre, p.41
[48] Ed. Connor, Steven. *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1989. p.124

the postmodernism presented in these three films is playful and deconstructive, but also a socially, politically and environmentally conscious one.

There is also a certain 'tolerance' in this idea of perpetual choice, action and choosing all mankind by choosing oneself in that,

> There is always a way to understand the idiot, the child, the savage, the foreigner, provided one has the necessary information. In this sense we may say that there is a universality of man … I build the universal in choosing myself; I build it in understanding the configuration of every other man.[49]

Thus by choosing what is right for ourselves in this world, we in turn determine the fate of others around us, we are brought closer to each other, we cause connection through our choices, perhaps without realizing it and we may come to understand others better through this connection. Thus connection through choice, action and responsibility are Sartre's main ideas and help to formulate an adequate reading of the concluding scenes of the films and their inherent messages. The films provide us with choices and the key figures such as Louison, Julie, Butch, Jules and Georgina remind us that "every event in the world can be revealed to me only as an opportunity (an opportunity made use of, lacked, neglected etc)."[50]

To expand on our understanding of postmodernism, let us discuss Jean-François Lyotard's take on the theory. Lyotard describes postmodernism as "incredulity towards metanarratives"[51], which as he explains, is the argument that:

> We have the Idea of the world (the totality of what is), but we do not have the capacity to show an example of it. We have the Idea of the simple (that which cannot be broken down, decomposed) but we cannot illustrate it with a sensible

[49] Sartre, p.39
[50] Sartre, p.58-9
[51] Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986. p. xxvi

> object which would be a 'case' of it. We can conceive of the infinitely great, the infinitely powerful, but every presentation of an object destined to 'make visible' this absolute greatness or power appears to us painfully inadequate.[52]

The three films that are explored in this project are not films that provide "simple" answers about "the totality" of the "the world" or about "power" or any other grand narrative for that matter. Postmodernism recognises that empiricism and rationality fall short in representing reality, that science can no longer be the only gauge of human progress, because "the notion of progress has become untenable, or at least been questioned, given the potential for human self-immolation in world wars, in nuclear technology and environmental destruction; a potential that has also issued in a more acute sense of mortality".[53] In the realm of technology, the human being is more powerful and more mortal than ever before, more informed about health but unhealthier than before as well. Thus it is in the midst of the age of advanced science that, ironically, we start to see the *limitations* of science and rationality, the shortcomings of "the rule that there is no reality unless testified by a consensus between partners over a certain knowledge and certain commitments".[54]

Postmodernism is therefore ever-evolving and imperfect, it rejects the quest for the empirically legitimate and resists definitive conclusions because it recognises that there rarely are any, and instead of attempting to provide answers, it doesn't claim to try. Although these three films may have political, social or economic statements to make, they do not offer themselves as objectively legitimate and empirically conceived texts. In the realm of postmodernism, Jameson explains that "legitimation becomes visible as a problem and an object of study only at the point in which it is called into question".[55] And so the films make no excuses for this lack of "legitimation": though we may derive from the all three films, that the directors are both reflecting on the lack of human connection in the world today and that far more of this empathy is needed, we endure a

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[52] Lyotard, p.76
[53] Gaylard, Gerald. *After Colonialism: African Postmodernism and Magical Realism.* Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2005. p.33
[54] Lyotard, p.77
[55] Lyotard, p.viii

harrowing and complex journey in order to arrive at this notion, and we are not *spoon-fed* the simple answer either. Rather, each of the three films leaves the way open for more than one interpretation. Rushdie elaborates further:

> The fiction of the Victorian age, which was realist, has to my way of thinking been inadequate as a description of the world for some time now…For realism to convince, there must be fairly broad agreement between author and reader about the nature of the world that is being described… But now we don't have that kind of consensus about the world.[56]

Tarantino's film most obviously resists the realist method of conveying reality and telling a story, as there is none of the classic beginning, middle, end linearity which defined the realist, modern novel. Postmodern resistance to this linearity renders the project incomplete and leaves the viewer to impose meaning for him/herself.

The body and consumption are thus effective metaphors to convey this sense of resistance toward the finite and the absolute. We need to constantly feed our bodies in order to sustain them; the body is therefore never 'complete' as the completion of a meal will only lead to further hunger later on. According to Baudrillard, if consumption was "absorption, a devouring, then we should achieve saturation".[57] Rather, "there are no limits to consumption"[58] because the project of consuming is also never complete, "it is ultimately because consumption is founded on a lack that it is irrepressible".[59]As consumers we will always "want what others do not have" and are continuously preoccupied with possessing the "'latest' model – the imperative fetish of social valorization".[60] And so because both the body and the consumer are never 'total', Lyotard suggests, "Let us wage a war on totality, let us be witnesses to the unpresentable".[61]

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[56] Gaylard, p.34
[57] Baudrillard, Jean. *Jean Baudrillard*: *Selected Writings.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001.
[58] Baudrillard, p.28.
[59] Baudrillard, p.28.
[60] Baudrillard, p.14.
[61] Baudrillard, p.81.

This is the reason for the humorous and playful approach of all three films despite their tragic subject matter. For Greenaway, Jeunet and Caro and Tarantino, the use of play and *jouissance*, frivolity and irony is a message to the viewer that their films are depictions of the world as *they* see it and thus intertextuality and pastiche is way of expressing this playful cynicism, a lack of loyalty to one ethos or genre, a submission to the reality that reality itself cannot be represented objectively. When considering *Delicatessen* and Jeunet and Caro's portrayal of post-war France and Greenaway's take on the legacy of Thatcher in *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover,* we are reminded that "there is little reverence for History in postmodernism, and History is regularly replaced by historiography as part of postmodernism's suspicion of metanarratives".[62] And so postmodernism is "not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant" and that the work of these filmmakers is not "governed by pre-established rules, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for".[63]

The second aspect of this introduction is a brief overview of the ways in which food is significant to the three films. Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*[64] introduces us to mafia hit men, Vince and Jules, whose low status in society with regard to class is reflected in the cheap, greasy, non-nutritional fast food that they eat. Only when Jules decides to change and improve his life, to give up the crime world in search of a far more honourable lifestyle, does his diet change completely, whilst his colleague, Vince, continues to consume his bacon, cigarettes and heroin as heroin. Changes or confirmations in class and social status are then reflected in consumption. The character of Albert Spica in Peter Greenaway's *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*[65] is of a similarly lower social class to Vince and Jules. He is part of the criminal underworld as they are, and yet his choice of cuisine is hardly cheap burgers and fries, but the best French *haute cuisine* on the market, thus indicating Albert's attempt to escape the low

[62] Gaylard, p.35.
[63] Lyotard, p.81
[64] Tarantino, Quentin. *Pulp Fiction.* Miramax Studios, 1994.
[65] Greenaway, Peter. *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover.* Anchor Bay Studios, 1989.

class gutter of his own background, to show the world around him that he has elevated himself in the social hierarchy of society. Though he owns his own restaurant and is certainly now a wealthy man, what betrays any façade of class is his crass Cockney accent, as does, perhaps more significantly, his mispronunciation of the food on the menu. Outbursts of Albert's such as "This is *Cock-Oh-Van*" reveal to his audience around the restaurant table as well as to us viewers that he is just as common as the thugs who work for him.

Like Albert, Marsellus Wallace asserts his own sense of culture over his associates, also through the prism of food, by alluding to his knowledge of the wine aging process and the potential it has to turn into vinegar. And yet, his sophisticated choice of French croissants changes to cheap, deep fried doughnuts just as his body will soon be debased by the degradation of sodomy. Albert has eaten the very finest food throughout the film until the very end, when his wife Georgina has her revenge, and he is forced to eat human flesh. As all audiences share in the revulsion of cannibalism, the scene represents not only a shift in power from Albert to Georgina, but also a recognition of Albert's total lack of humanity. Georgina holds a gun to her husband's head and forces him to eat the body of Michael, her lover. Once he has had a bite, she fires one shot into his head and exclaims the very last word of the film, "cannibal". Although *she* is the one who transforms Albert into a cannibal, the implication of Georgina's accusation is that Albert has actually been a cannibal all along, a consumer and destroyer of human life. And so her punishment to Albert is simply an affirmation of the idea that one's image is shaped in the world according to what one consumes. The fast food diner of *Pulp Fiction* becomes a space where some of the most compelling and significant action of the film takes place; the turning point in the criminal careers and lives of Pumpkin and Hunny Bunny for example, as Jules preaches his new personal gospel to them, thereby defusing a potentially fatal outcome of their robbery and also confirming for the viewer that Jules has truly changed. *Le Hollandaise,* the French restaurant in Greenaway's film, is also the stage where the characters are revealed, the story is formed and the dramatic *denouement* occurs. Thus not only does food communicate to us in these films, but *arenas* of food communicate as well.

It is precisely the revulsion of cannibalism that allows for the impact of a film such as Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro's *Delicatessen.*[66] The world that is created in this film is a starkly polarised one, in which there exist only those who consume human flesh and those who do not. Although it is not so simple as to label the flesh eaters as evil and the non-flesh eaters as good, what is certain is that the arch-villain of the film is a cannibal and the hero a vegetarian. Thus choices and shifts in the consumption of the characters are integral to the symbolic function of consumption itself. Morse's original argument about the symbolic potency of food gathers strength in light of these observations of the films. Lupton also mentions the position of gender with regard to food: In *Pulp Fiction,* one can detect the strength and power of a female character such as Mia simply by what she eats. Mia is an unashamed carnivore and her appetite for meat reveals her role in the film as a challenging competitor to her male counterparts. When considering the symbolism of food, meat is naturally associated with men, masculinity and virility, whilst women are automatically linked with the opposites of meat, or the weaker, less filling and significant accompaniment to meat, the mere accessory of meat – the vegetable. As mentioned in the chapter discussing *Pulp Fiction*, a person in a coma is described as a vegetable. And to be inactive is commonly referred to as *vegetating,* having little influence in the world, ineffectual: "Meat has connotations of lust, animal and masculine passion, strength, heartiness and energy; but also contamination, decay, anger, violence, aggression. By contrast, vegetables have meanings of purity, passiveness, cleanliness, femininity, weakness and idealism".[67]

Tarantino draws on popular associations of meat with masculine strength and women with weakness and passivity and uses these connections in order to stretch the stereotypes that surround them. Fabienne, however, prefers sweet foods packed with sugar, which causes the viewer to infantilise her, to think of her as an indulged child. As adults, our minds and bodies mature, and this extends to what we eat as we recognise the potential harm of too much sugar in our diets. Fabienne's immaturity almost costs Butch his life

[66] Caro, Marc, and Jeunet, Jean-Pierre. *Delicatessen,* Miramax Studios, 1991.
[67] Lupton, p.28

and this threat that she poses to him is represented in her choice of food. Plato argued that the 'true philosopher' is contemptuous of any matters concerning bodily pleasure because "we are slaves in the service of the body", and Lupton elaborates on this idea, explaining that "philosophy is masculine and disembodied; food and eating are feminine and always embodied".[68] And so the female characters of the film are portrayed as being guided purely by sensory indulgence and are therefore a threat to their men. Mia overdoses on heroin and almost causes Vince an undoubtedly very painful death at the hands of her husband. Fabienne craves blueberry pancakes in the midst of Butch's crisis, possessed by her hunger and unaware of the pending danger. Perhaps this is Tarantino's method of approaching gender in the film; Mia is deeply feminine in her beauty, yet her carnivorous nature renders her more of a 'man' than some of the male characters. Marsellus is perhaps the most macho of all the men, and yet he is stripped of his macho masculinity when he is raped. It therefore works for the director to utilise common associations we have with gender in order to begin the process of deconstructing them.

In addition, Lupton also mentions food as defining boundaries of religion, and the film which most obviously addresses this is once again Tarantino's. When Vince offers Jules some of his bacon in yet another diner scene, Jules responds that he does not eat pork, introducing an element of the religious in a largely spiritually void film, and once again this boundary definition is established through the use of food and helps to mould the identities of these two characters, so that they can be better understood by the audience. Tarantino also uses the typifications of what is commonly eaten at the various meal times, in order to throw off the time sequence of the film, favouring the classically postmodern non-linear narrative, which has its own implications that will be discussed in far more detail later on. The idea of reinventing hamburgers as breakfast food and cereal as dinner food allows Tarantino to communicate to his audience that the order of the story has been shifted.

Food is perhaps the most reliable indicator of the *subjective* experience: "Food and eating habits are not simply matters of fuelling ourselves, alleviating hunger pangs, or taking

[68] Lupton, p.3

enjoyment in gustatory sensations. Food and eating are central to our subjectivity or sense of self ".[69] The individual has tastes and distastes for everything he eats or rejects and this experience, although governed by external circumstances (culture, religion, allergy perhaps, or simply the availability of certain foods rather than others) is a personal one. One's craving or revulsion for certain kinds of food, or a specific way food is prepared, cannot be clarified by any rational explanation. There are physical and psychological views on food preference, yet they remain deeply subjective: If one eats too much of a certain food and becomes ill from it, there is a high probability one will never possess an appetite for that food again, or at least until the trauma of the experience has faded. If an individual relied on a certain kind of food as an emotional crutch during a very difficult time in their life, chances are that when that challenging time has passed, the individual will lose his taste for that food, as it evokes such powerful and unpleasant memories. Alternatively, we naturally crave the food we ate during the greatest times of our lives (carefree childhood experiences, memorable holidays) in order to relive or at least re-invoke those times. And then there are those of us who just love or hate certain foods, for absolutely no reason at all. It is simply the taste of the individual. Taste, appetite, craving and disgust are all experiences of the body, which cannot be analysed or quantified. The *preparation* of food is also integral to the subjective experience of the person preparing it: An apple, for instance, eaten in its raw and whole form, does not lend itself as much to individuality as it would be if it were transformed into one of many ingredients to produce classic apple pie, festive pork stuffing or Danish herring, all vastly different dishes that appeal to some and revolt others. And so food is a most reliable medium in communicating one of the most primary concerns of postmodernism: the subjective, individual, sensory experience.

Staying with the theme of food preparation, Lupton draws on the work of French anthropologist, Claude Levi-Strauss, who argues that the raw correlates with *nature* while the cooked has associations with *culture*, which implies that cooking is not simply

[69] Lupton, p.1

> the application of heat or other technologies to raw materials so as to render them more edible by changing their texture, flavour or digestibility, [it is also] a moral process, transferring raw matter from 'nature' to the state of 'culture', and thereby taming and domesticating it.[70]

When considering current food trends, the obsession with farm-reared and organic products as well as the advice we receive from nutritionists today about the importance of including raw food in our diets because cooked food has been virtually nuked of all its goodness, there indeed seems to be a yearning in today's ultra-modern societies for "nature" rather than "culture". Furthermore, this description of raw food versus cooked correlates quite comfortably with the postmodern nostalgia for a more traditional, homely, perhaps rural lifestyle that favours good, healthy food over fat-burning pills produced in a science lab. In *Pulp Fiction* the dominant food type is fast food, which by its very definition undergoes a process far beyond *cooking*, it is deep fried. One could certainly describe this kind of food as *over* cooked, its nutrition scorched beyond recognition in a vat of blistering oil. Perhaps Tarantino is making a very particular statement in his decision to incorporate this food in this particular film and Levi-Strauss's conception of culture provides a context: If food is cooked in order to reaffirm the particular culture that surrounds that food, deep fried American fast food is an assertion of its own culture too. The *over* cooking of this food can perhaps represent the *dominance* of American culture over the entire world. Tarantino seems to understand that if the food we eat defines who we are, the world's only super power can be represented by its *over* cooked, *over* sweetened, substanceless food.

Lupton argues that "to pay attention to such everyday banalities as food practices is to highlight the animality lurking within the 'civilised' veneer of the human subject".[71] It is this premise, and the basic assumption of the human being as a civilized species, on which the revulsion of cannibalism is based and which Caro and Jeunet utilise to its full extent in *Delicatessen.* The "food practice" of transforming the inedible into the edible

[70] Lupton, p.2
[71] Lupton, p.4

forces us to reconsider the very nature of the human subject, under which conditions one may turn to this vile form of consumption, how the society in the film justifies this choice and how we as consumers/viewers justify our own, perhaps questionable choices in this realm. However, the subject of cannibalism is not an easy one to address in terms of subjectivity and consumption which Lupton describes. According to the science of cannibalism[72], when a human being starves, the body consumes what it must in order to stay alive – itself. Body fat, muscle tissue and eventually all enzymes and nutrients are consumed by the body in order to prolong its life. After this stage of starvation, the body understands, independently of the individual, that the cerebral cortex is now the only obstacle in the way of survival. The cerebral cortex is the part of the brain that governs emotion; sympathy, love, compassion. As long as this section of the mind is still functioning, a human being cannot fathom the idea of eating one of his own. And so, without its owner even being aware, the cerebral cortex of the brain shuts down and the practice of cannibalism suddenly becomes a conceivable possibility. Thus if one views cannibal activity through the prism of science, one can certainly conclude that there is little free choice involved in cases of extreme desperation and that in these cases, the human body behaves independently of the conscious mind. In fact, the body actually takes over the mind to ensure survival.

And yet one of the earliest recordings of cannibalism in the Western world is of a group of English sailors who set out on an expedition in the early seventeenth century in search of the new world. They packed sufficient food supplies for the eight week trip and set out on their voyage. After a couple of weeks, they encountered a violent storm and their food was destroyed. After several days of abject starvation, having already eaten their leather shoes, the wood that had been torn form the ship after the storm and even the buttons of their coats, they captured the only slave that had been brought along for the voyage, dragged him to the captain and informed their leader that, because a slave was considered part of the cargo, they would eat him to alleviate their aching hunger. The captain did not object, but he did not partake either. The flesh of the slave lasted a few days, but it was

[72] Wikipedia. « Cannibalism. »
http://en.wikipedia.org/wik/cannibalism

not long before the sailors began to starve again. They decided on a system of drawing names from a hat, in order to most fairly determine who would be next to die and feed the group. The sailor's name that was drawn happened to be the most popular on the ship and out of respect for this man; the group decided that they would wait until morning before killing him. During the course of this night, the torture of knowing he would be eaten the very next day caused the sailor to lose his hearing completely, as well as his mind. The next morning, the sailors were rescued, but the man never regained his hearing and remained permanently insane for the rest of his life. The story is known because the captain recorded the events on board in his journal, and he never partook of the cannibal activity on his ship. Back home, the public did not quite know what to make of this disturbing event. If the captain was able to abstain, having suffered from exactly the same starvation as the other sailors, it seemed the natural conclusion that the others were barbaric cannibals. Opinions on this and other cases of cannibalism remain diverse.

The connection between what we already know scientifically about cannibal activity, the story of the English sailors, and Jeunet and Caro's film, is that it is virtually impossible to draw comfortable conclusions or make stark judgements when considering the inherent subjectivity of the human experience. The character of Tapioca in *Delicatessen* is a meat eater, one of the cannibals, and yet we do sympathise with him as he has a wife and two small children to feed as well as having to contend with his own constant hunger. He behaves dishonourably, but we are encouraged to ask our selves if it is fair to judge him for this. Perhaps *honour* is the mere luxury of a thriving, opulent, well fed society. Boucher is most obviously the malicious villain of the story and Louison and Julie are clearly the heroes. But we are faced with the challenge of positioning the other characters within the parameters of our own system of morality – a subjective undertaking in itself. Perhaps there is also symbolic relevance to the film, in the self-consumption that the body must perform in order to stay alive: When the body is starved, it must consume itself in order to remain alive and this is precisely what the society in the film has done, it has resorted to auto-consumption, to eating each other. It seems as if the people in *Delicatessen* see cannibalism as the next phase in the evolution (or devolution, more accurately) of the human being. Therefore this society of human beings does indeed

consume itself and although there are those who resist this consumption, the vegetarian troglodytes, they are the ones pushed *under*ground, as their choice of consumption has been largely rejected by the majority. And so the image of the cannibal society created for us in the work of Jeunet and Caro has a distinctly hubristic tone to it, as we are encouraged to consider what *we* choose to consume and why, as well as those who may be suffering at the expense of our own rampant and unstoppable consumerism.

Part of the symbolic impact of food lies in the inevitable fact that it is constantly nearing the stage of rot or, more repelling, excretement. "As a result", explains Lupton, "disgust is never far from the pleasures of food and eating".[73] As mentioned briefly, in *Delicatessen* Jeunet and Caro use the taboo of cannibalism as the main theme of their story, and therefore our reactions, opinions and conclusions about the film are coloured by this ever present disgust at the thought of eating the flesh of another human being. The element of the grotesque is a major tool in both *Delicatessen* and *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover,* as a way of ensuring that the concerns of the film are not lost on its viewers. Mikhail Bakhtin writes of the *grotesque* in his exploration of the carnival culture of Medieval Europe. In *Rabelais and His World*[74], Bakhtin explains the bizarre world of the Renaissance carnival through the discovery of the work of French writer, Francois Rabelais. Aside from the "unbridled lusting, crazed bingeing and even physical mutilation"[75] that occurred in the environment of the carnival, there was social and political impact in carnival culture as well; those marginalised members of society, ordinarily cast out, were embraced for their difference in the context of the carnival. The poorer classes of society were also suddenly given a voice during carnival time, and were able to mock and laugh at the noble or aristocratic classes without fear of punishment. Carnival culture therefore promotes "the temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions and barriers among men … and the prohibitions of usual life".[76] It is perhaps apt then, that the *carnivalesque* – "the spirit of carnival in literary form" exists in the richly visual stage of *Delicatessen.* Louison, with his quirky circus clown personality is

[73] Lupton, p.5
[74] Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World,* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1941.
[75] Bakhtin, p.47
[76] Bakhtin, p.15.

exactly the kind of character one would expect to see at the Renaissance carnival, he is distinctly odd looking, a loner and a performer. We learn that his partner, Livingstone the monkey, was killed and eaten recently and Julie has a nightmare about Louison and Livingstone, in which the monkey is portrayed as vicious, with unnaturally long teeth and Louison appears to Julie in her dream in full performance makeup, but frightening and indeed *grotesque.* Thus the image of the carnival is used intertextually, applied in the midst of a postmodern film and this use of *pastiche* allows Jeunet and Caro to create an original piece of film. In addition, part of the freedom of carnival time was that the authority of both church and state were inverted, if temporarily, and these are two institutions which postmodern thought would consider to promote among the most dominant of metanarratives, and so there is clearly a connection between the *carnivalesque,* born out of Renaissance culture, and postmodern film.

Perhaps one of the most influential works of Rabelais, which influenced Bakhtin's theories, is *Gargantua and Pantagrual,* which is described as "exaggeration, satire and violence".[77] We see all three in *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover,* in which Greenaway insists on barely fathomable images of the *grotesque,* including coprophagia, torture and finally cannibalism, in order to communicate his views on 1980s Britain, the imposition of Thatcherite principles on the economy, as well as a society that consumes merely to mask the fragility and uncertainty that exists beneath its surface.

As discussed previously, cannibalism is portrayed as the representation of destructive *consumption*, which is the third issue that needs some exploration. Baudrillard's definition of consumption is the "systematic act of the manipulation of signs".[78] In other words, we do not consume *things* so much as we consume what those things signify and thus the process of consumption as Baudrillard sees it, is endless. There may be financial barriers that prevent us from endless consumerism of physical objects, but the consumption of signs has no limitation. Baudrillard also argues that

[77] Bakhtin, p.60
[78] Ed. Poster, M. *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings,* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001, p.25

> consumption is not a passive mode of assimilation (absorption) and appropriation which we can oppose to an active mode of production, in order to bring to bare naïve concepts of action…consumption is an active mode of relations…a systematic mode of activity and a global response on which our whole cultural system is founded.

This introduces the idea of consensus reality and social responsibility. It is we, the consumers, who determine the rise or fall of consumer empires, through our choice of whether to consume or not to consume. Perhaps this is a possible explanation for why each of the films resists a final solution, a definitive conclusion, or in the case of Tarantino's film, an ending, because it is we as viewers of these films and as consumers in the world who decide the *ending,* the extent of the damage that destructive consumption can cause. The *viewer* is reminded that he/she is a consumer as well and is therefore given a certain measure of accountability in the ordinarily passive viewing process.

Thus Baudrillard's claim is that we as consumers ironically threaten the very society we comprise, because "advertising takes over the moral responsibility for all of society and replaces a puritan morality with a hedonistic morality of pure satisfaction".[79] Perhaps these films then offer themselves as an alternative media to the mass media that is advertising:

> advertising …is mass society, which, with aid of an arbitrary and systematic sign, induces receptivity, mobilizes consciousness, and reconstitutes itself in the very process as the collective. Through advertising, mass society and consumer society continuously ratify themselves.[80]

Thus every thing we consume, be it clothing, food or information, has to be *sold* to us in order to induce our desire and appetite for it. In *Pulp Fiction* we see the mystifying

[79] Baudrillard, p. 16
[80] Baudrillard, p. 13

effects of advertising; Jules' and Vince's discussion about the fast food industry, about brand names such as Burger King, Big Kahuna and McDonalds and the way in which their dialogue seems to exalt these fast food empires, are as a result of how these products are advertised. To engage in unhealthy and meaningless consumption, to feel satisfied with the process of spending our money in order to eat the kind of food that will probably kill us way before our time, we must be convinced through both deceptive and constant means. The pig that hangs over the delicatessen in Jeunet and Caro's film clearly expresses their views on the advertising industry; not only is pork not sold at that particular butchery, but the idea that is conveyed is that advertising itself is piggish – greedy, self-serving and dirty.

Swedish theorist Ovar Löfgren explains his theory of consumption in his essay 'Consuming Interests'. He explains that the identity of the 'modern consumer' has three main components: The first is *commodification,* which implies that the consumer of today will live his entire life relying on commodities, which he is convinced will give it meaning and structure. The second component is *shallowness,* whereby the consumer possesses "attitudes rather than values"[81], is defined by what he consumes and therefore lacks authenticity. The third is *fragmentation,* "a lack of integration and coherence". Thus the consumer will buy in order to set himself apart, but also to remain integrated in mainstream society. We want the things we consume to make us stand out, but not *too* far out. This particular aspect of consumptive behaviour is also echoed in the work of Thorstein Veblen, who argues that the desire to consume stems predominantly from the "envy of the rich and an associated desire to engage in emulative behaviour".[82] Thus Veblen's claim is that the consumer will buy a product simply because it is expensive, as he believes this purchase will elevate his status in society. Thus the purchase of an extremely expensive watch is really the consuming of a *symbol* and a value system, rather than simply a product, echoing Baudrillard's view of consumption as well. The characters of Greenaway's film behave in this emulative fashion, wearing expensive clothing and

[81] Friedman, Jonathan. *Consumption and Identity.* Postrasse: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994. p.49
[82] Friedman, p.24

eating the finest food as a way of attempting to 'buy' into a higher tier of society in a social hierarchy of which they are surely at the very bottom.

Löfgren refers to the 1980s, the decade in which Greenaway made his film (1989), and explains that this age gave rise to "the birth of a new breed of consumers… a breed characterised by having too much economic and too little cultural capital".[83] The character of Albert Spica fits this description perfectly, as he represents the emerging nouveau riche of the eighties, which was easily able to flourish as a result of Thatcher's pro-privatisation market model. The impact on the individual in this kind of environment however, is a lost and as previously mentioned, fragmented self. We see Georgina constantly oppressed by the arch capitalist of the film, her husband. And her revenge, although equally, if not far more brutal than the mercilessness of Albert, does not seem to bring her any real joy or self-actualisation and certainly does not give the viewer more than momentary satisfaction, coupled with a very severe disgust.

Löfgren elaborates on the compromise of the self, as a result of continual and unconscious consumption, allowing for the "disintegration of social identity and emergence of a *homo consumens*, whose fragmented identity is constantly rearranged by the winds of fashion".[84] We may have lost our appetites completely from the very first moment of the film, but when considering the elaborate costumes of the characters, we are indeed treated to a visual feast. Each of the main characters is dressed in creative masterpieces, by one of the leading pioneers in fashion, Jean-Paul Gaultier. These outfits change colour automatically to match the colour of which ever room they are in. Perhaps this is Greenaway's way of illustrating Löfgren's assertion about consumption being governed by fashion and how consumers will shift and redirect their consumption, not according to personal taste or individual preference, but according to what the ever-changing "winds of fashion" dictate. The adaptability of Gaultier's clothing in the film is of course representative of *all* changing trends in the market, of anything that can be consumed, bought and sold, ironically, to help the consumer shape his individuality and identity.

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[83] Friedman, p.48
[84] Friedman, p.49

However, Löfgren does not neglect to discuss what is actually potentially liberating about consumption. In *Delicatessen* we are faced with the deception and manipulation of advertising, the vehicle that keeps consumers consuming. Yet ironically, Löfgren uses an example of an advertisement in order to *unravel* the view of advertising as manipulation. He refers to one for Standard Oil from the 1940s, in which the slogan read: "Freedom is the freedom of choice"[85]. This is the idea that in today's consumer market, more than ever before, the amount of choice we are offered can indeed allow us to shape a subjective identity for ourselves in the world. In the chapter that explores *Delicatessen,* there is the suggestion that the appetite of the consumer is satisfied (if temporarily, until the next symbol of desire presents itself) by consuming what one needs but also what one wants. The question that arises then is how does one really know the difference between the two? And the answer proposed is that, *thinking* we know what we need is often as real to us as really knowing it. In the case of free choice in consumption, the very same principle holds. Perhaps we *are* being deceived and exploited by the advertising industry, a group of people trained to understand what the consumer desires and therefore convinces us that we are not being told what to buy, but we are being *offered* options that will suit our *individual* needs and help us project a personalised image to the world, reiterating Baudrillard's claim that it is possible to view consumption as "an independent activity, allowing the expression of personal preference".[86] The falsehood that surrounds advertisements then seems irrelevant when considering the idea that *thinking* we have choice is as satisfying as having it. Surely *believing* that our individual needs are being met is virtually the same as this really being the case. If the consumer chooses to believe that the ever-competitive market provides him with an "egalitarian democracy", a plethora of choices and therefore a forum for self expression, he may in fact liberated by his own consumption and not the opposite.

Furthermore, surely consumers today are far wiser than ever before as well, as "marketing strategies or advertisement tricks that may have worked in the 1940s were

[85] Friedman, p.52
[86] Baudrillard, p.14

unthinkable in the 1960s".[87] How much more so in the year 2006. It is clear from the images of advertising in the *Delicatessen* that Jeunet and Caro do not favour this redemptive view of consumption, yet Löfgren allows for an entirely different possibility, which is perhaps worth mentioning in order to avoid the imposition of metanarratives of which postmodernism is suspicious.

And so perhaps one of the main assertions to be made about consumption is that consumers certainly hope and often believe that what they consume will define who they are. If we buy a certain car, a vehicle that is advertised as being driven by truly happy people, we hope the outside world believes we are happy as much as we do. It is not so much the case therefore that we are what we consume, but more accurately, we *believe* we are, and therefore we consume. In the world of food, the principle remains the same. Greenaway's Albert Spica truly believes that eating the finest French *haute cuisine* renders him less of a thug and more of a gentleman, that it plucks him from his lower class persona and grants him an aristocratic one. However, by witnessing Albert's behaviour from the beginning of the film, we are never even close to being convinced. The Thief cannot transform his identity by what he eats. Marsellus Wallace cannot escape his own status as a criminal of the underworld, despite his wealth and knowledge of fine wine. The thoroughly insane Monsieur Potin in *Delicatessen* eats the snails that are crawling all over his filthy and water logged basement apartment, giving them names and conversing with them as he eats them (a reference to the famous French delicacy *escargot)* and yet it does not matter how many of these he eats, poor Monsieur Potin will never escape the dark and murky sewer of which he is so much a part and in which he will surely remain. Thus again, despite Löfgren's and Baudrillard's views of consumption being potentially redemptive, these filmmakers do not agree.

And so if we cannot argue that 'we are what we eat', perhaps it is more accurate that we are the things with which we *contaminate* our bodies. The excess sugar and caffeine Hunny Bunny consumes truly does define her character, as well as the unhealthily sweet things Fabienne craves and the toxic fast food favoured by the gangsters of Tarantino's

[87] Friedman, p.67

film. It is this fear of contamination that drives the health food industries of contemporary society. Whilst our grandparents' generation were far less informed about the health risks of the regular consumption of cigarettes, alcohol and heavily fried food, our generation has more knowledge of what this kind of consumption will do to the body and now that we know, we cannot pretend we don't. The discovery of chilli, nuts and seafood as being major, potentially deadly allergens, recent rumours of pesticide residue in breakfast cereal and the warning that margarine causes heart disease, all contribute to our growing anxiety about what we put into our bodies. Thus food *technology* has given us more food *knowledge* which in turn results in more food *fear*. And yet we see Hunny Bunny's disregard for what she feeds her body and the direct results of this contamination. Fischler discusses the phenomenon of 'saccharophobia', the fear of sugar, the regarding of it as a source of disease, "the very whiteness and purity of which is threatening because of the association with the technology of the refinement process rather than with 'nature'".[88] And so although he may not realise it, Tarantino plays right into our saccharophobic fears through characters like Hunny Bunny, Fabienne and even Marsellus. These characters also reveal a lack of integration and coherence in their lives, as shown most obviously by their professions, but also in their relationships and this fragmentary condition is again indicated by the food we eat; what makes processed and refined foods so alien to our bodies is that they contain preservatives, the origin or makeup of which we are clueless. Fischler clarifies this idea, that "if one does not know what one is eating, one is liable to lose the awareness of certainty of what is oneself".[89] Heldke argues this idea even further, that a functioning and coherent self must be in touch with the food making process, a 'thoughtful practice', and that we as consumers should be aware of the "hidden connections that link the food on the shelves in supermarkets and the workers who produce it" and that this is essential for the "fully conscious, thinking, reflexive, consuming self, a self that buys, prepares and eats food with a heightened sense of that food's history".[90]

[88] Lupton, p.78
[89] Lupton, p.84
[90] Lupton, p.84

And yet it is indeed ironic that in an age of ever-evolving knowledge about the acquisition and maintenance of good health, there is more heart disease, high cholesterol and cancer than ever before. Turner writes about the eighteenth century physician George Cheyne, who, having suffered from obesity for much of his life, established a dietary regime that would promote better health and wellbeing. His claim was that "the rarest delicacies, the richest of foods and the most generous wines caused illness among the Rich, the Lazy, the Luxurious, and the Unactive".[91] In the postmodern age, unlike the eighteenth century, the food knowledge we have acquired means that, whatever level of wealth we have attained, we are nevertheless encouraged to eat 'home grown', 'farm harvested', 'peasant'- like food as a way of returning to good health. And any television cookery show on the air currently will reveal young, popular chefs demonstrating recipes of "good, home cooked" food made with only "organic" ingredients. Thus it seems that today this kind of food is not only known to be the healthiest, it also happens to be the trendiest.

And yet the stressful environment that the modern world imposes on us also contributes to the need to return to the symbolic *farm* by purchasing the food that, we read on the package, is straight from the womb of nature, right to our polluted door step. Aside from the obvious health reasons for eating 'natural' food, the consumption of it is also an expression of nostalgia for a simpler, more 'natural' lifestyle. In Greenaway's film specifically, the things that are forced into the bodies of Albert's victims are the very antithesis of what is natural. Lupton explains also that the environment in which we eat may have as much impact on our bodies as the actual food itself. In a recent focus group, as part of an investigation to determine the role and significance of food in people's lives, one woman recalled "My mother used to do the roast dinner with all the lard that used to sit around. You know, go to the butcher's and buy a whole lot of lard and put it in. And my parents lived until they were 91".[92] *Delicatessen* presents to us a world in which 'natural' living is merely a distant memory, the memory of when "people lived on the land, often in rural areas or farms, and engaged in manual labour involving heavy

[91] Turner, Bryan. "The Government of the Body: Medical Regimes and the Rationalization of Diet." *British Journal of Sociology* 33.2 (1999): 252-266.

[92] Lupton, p.85

exercise as well as eating large, hot meals cooked by the wife and mother and eaten with all the family in attendance".[93] One can easily see how food is so vital to understanding the yearning for these traditions, but more importantly, the values attached to them.

The inclusion of healthy foods in our diet is vital to good nutrition, but this also means the *exclusion* of other foods. The food we *deny* communicates just as strongly to the world as the food we accept into our bodies. The moment Jules begins to behave more selectively with the food he eats, we detect immediately that he is asserting his distance from the crime world. The society of *Delicatessen* is divided into those who indulge in human flesh and those who deny it and this is what shapes our opinion of each of them. Vince, Boucher and Albert are all noticeably corpulent men, we can see clearly that they deny themselves nothing, communicating to the audience that they over-indulge, contaminating their bodies with abandon, and this governs both how they live their lives and how they navigate their way in the external world. Their image is one that projects a rejection of health and well-being and a penchant for the greed and violence which we associate with them. The slimmer figures of Julie, Louison, Michael and Georgina conjure the opposite response from the viewer, as we see these characters as in control of their lives, their actions and their relationships. This is perhaps the reasoning behind Lupton's descriptions of the body as a 'map', to be 'read' by those around us, as healthy or unhealthy, happy or unhappy, controlled or reckless, coherent or fragmented, authentic or artificial. Awareness of these associations may also encourage viewers to address their own self image, as well as the assumptions we automatically make about weight and body image, our own and those of others as well, issues of control with regard to food and everything else we consume, as we consider the Western demands on our bodies today, whether they are realistic, attainable or even *truly* healthy.

The connection between control and hunger is that the denial of food allows a person to gain an extreme form of control over their body. The minute we ingest food, our bodies perform independently of our minds in order to process the food successfully. We are no longer consciously active in the process of digestion. By starving oneself, one is

[93] Lupton, p,85

constantly in control of one's body and food begins to symbolise weakness and is therefore rejected. The theme of *hunger,* the final section of this chapter, is therefore worth exploring in this discovery of the roles of food in postmodern society. There are different kinds of hunger that exist within all three of the films; there is actual starvation that slowly erodes the society in *Delicatessen* after food has rapidly run out, there is emotional hunger and a craving for power and control in the characters of *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* and in the *Pulp Fiction* chapter we explore Morgan Spurlock's discoveries about American portion size, the various influences this has on the Americans who eat this quantity of food, as well as how this impacts the rest of the world. In order to locate the primary texts of the film in a broader and more socially significant context, Susan George writes that "hunger is not an unavoidable phenomenon like death and taxes. We are no longer living in the seventeenth century when Europe suffered shortages on an average of every three years and famine every ten. Today's world has all the physical resources and technical skills necessary to feed the present population of the planet or a much larger one".[94] Thus George's claim is that in today's world, there is really no excuse or reason for people to be hungry, but the reality is that "whenever and where ever they live, rich people eat first" as they consume an amount of the world's food supply that is totally disproportionate to what they actually need. One just needs to walk the streets of Houston, Texas, the fattest city in the world, to witness proof of this. George argues further that the West has duped the rest of the world into believing that there are shortages as a result of famine, lack of infrastructure, education in the developing world and a plethora of other reasons, but that the bottom line is there is enough, the rich simply consume too much of it. Therefore, "hunger is not a scourge but a scandal".[95] It is not the purpose of this thesis to delve into the various political and economic factors that result in this staggering level of hunger the world over, although in order to better understand the various issues that arise in these films about the consumptive habits of the West, it is worth mentioning that recently, the world has produced approximately 1,250 million tons of food and feed grains annually, and that western countries have managed to consume half of that amount, even though they only

[94] George, Susan. *How the Other Half Dies: The Real Reasons for World Hunger.* New Jersey: Osmun & Montclair Ltd, 1977. p.3
[95] George, p.3

comprise about a quarter of the world's population. George concludes this argument by explaining that,

> If *you* are eating too much meat and animal fat, this is a matter between you and your doctor. If *millions* of consumers are eating such a proportion of the world's cereal grains in this form, it is a matter between them, their governments and those economic agents their governments primarily serve.[96]

But for the purposes of this project, it will be argued that the Western world must surely suffer from a hunger of an entirely *different* kind in order to consume the way it does, a hunger that deviates from the purely, desperately physical kind from which millions in the famine and disease-ridden Third World suffer.

George seeks to demystify a lot of the deception that the world is *served* about the reasons for hunger. We watch television shows that dictate to their viewers the reasons why so much of the world is dying of food shortage. Information is selected and manufactured for consumption in print media and over the radio, all with the purpose of *selling* to us the reasons why so much of the world is starving. And so George's claim is that, like so many other products we have been deceived into 'buying', the apparent knowledge we have about world hunger is in fact one of them:

> Hunger may have been the human race's constant companion… but in the twentieth century, one cannot take this fatalistic view of the destiny of millions of fellow creatures. Their condition is not inevitable but is caused by identifiable forces within the province of rational, human control.[97]

It also makes far more sense that the third world is starving to death when considering Spurlock's discovery that over the last thirty odd years, a regular portion of French fries at a fast food chain is now considered a kiddies portion, the large has now become the

[96] George, p.4
[97] George, p.xv

regular and the biggest size, the hugest possible portion of French fries can be enlarged even further with the Supersize option.[98] George therefore adds that despite eating a largely unjustifiable amount of food every day, we still want to feel that we're getting our money's worth: "The American food-system model has nearly reached the outer limits of what it can induce people to consume in *physical* terms, but since its only alternatives are expansion or stagnation and eventual collapse, it must increase the *value* of what is eaten".[99]

Furthermore, George explains that, hardly dissimilar to the industries that flourish as a result of the products *we* consume, world hunger is also all about Big Business. Richard explains to Georgina in *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* that the beautiful dishes which he produces and from which Albert profits, contain many *black* ingredients. Richard continues that his customers want to eat black food – truffles, grapes, currants and caviar as they are foods that help them to alleviate their fear of death. Boucher in *Delicatessen* also profits from fear. He intimidates and terrorises the tenants of his building into providing him with more meat to sell, be it the meat of their relatives or themselves and as the sole provider of meat in the film, he also threatens them with even worse hunger than they've already endured, if they do not comply. Being the "well-fed Westerners" that we are, our consumption is largely based on fear – fear of not having enough, fear of losing out, fear of compromising our image as modern consumers who can buy and have whatever we desire. As Marilyn Manson articulates in an interview with Michael Moore in the documentary *Bowling for Columbine*, "keep people scared and they'll keep consuming".[100]

[98] Spurlock, Morgan. *Supersize Me.* Hart Sharp Studios, 2004.
[99] George, p.9
[100] Moore, Michael. *Bowling for Columbine.* M6 Vidèo, 2002.

Pulp Fiction

Although one may not ordinarily think of Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* as a food-related film, it is worth noting that eighty three out of the published screenplay's ninety three scenes contain some connection or reference to food. The following chapter will explore how the characters of *Pulp Fiction* talk about food, their choice of food, when and where they eat it, the effect it has on them, the action that occurs as a result as well as what it tells the viewer about their position in society as a whole. Thus Epstein's view is that "Food lends depth to characters, advances the narrative, and, ultimately intensifies the brutal displays of violence".[101]

The film tells three stories that are linked by each character having some small connection to or role in each narrative. Yet the narratives are fragmented in such a way that the viewer only acquires some closure about each story at a point in the film where he/she least expects it. This has two functions: It provides the necessary suspense for us to continue watching, but it also forces us to suspend our judgement of these characters, to with hold our opinions and resist imposing our own value system on a situation about which we do not yet have all the information. The narrative of Hunny Bunny and Pumpkin is the first one we see and yet it only returns at the end of the film to reveal its conclusion. The film opens with these two characters, (Epstein points out that their names are clear culinary references, indicating the extent to which "food impacts language"[102] in the film) two lovers and criminals sitting in a diner that looks like it could be any one in America. The sheer normality and familiarity of this environment heightens the action that is approaching. In fact, Tarantino chose to have much of the film's narrative in restaurants or diners as they are so conducive to lengthy conversation.[103] The couple discuss the possibilities of robbing the very restaurant in which they are eating breakfast, rather than their usual choice of liquor stores. What the characters in *Pulp Fiction* choose

[101] Epstein, Elizabeth L. "Appetite for Destruction: Gangster Food and Genre Convention in Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction.*" *Reel Food: Essays on Food and Film.* Ed. Anne L. Bower. New York: Routledge, 2004. 195-209. p.196
[102] Epstein, p.197
[103] Epstein, p.196

to eat is highly indicative of their personalities as well as their cultural and *spiritual* preferences, and this will be expanded upon much later in this chapter.

In Pumpkin and Hunny Bunny's case, she drinks coffee with a perhaps unusually large amount of sugar, whilst Pumpkin chain-smokes cigarettes. This choice of breakfast fare - "non-nutritive stimulants" - is a hint toward the chaotic, manic action that is soon to follow and is also an indication of their relatively low status in society, criminals who cannot or refuse to make an honest living. They will not exercise integrity in their lifestyles, which is indicted by their negligence to exercise integrity in sustaining their bodies. They do not choose food that nourishes their bodies, but rather destructive substances such as caffeine and nicotine that help them with the superficial strength and courage they require to pull off the robbery of a restaurant. In the climax of this fragmented scene, the two jump up from their seats with guns and scream to their fellow diners:

> *Pumpkin:* Alright everybody be cool, this is a robbery.
> *Hunny Bunny:* Any of you fucking pricks move, and I'll execute every motherfucking last one of you!!

The irony of course, is that the only one who isn't being "cool" is Hunny Bunny, who is hyped, crazed and almost bloodthirsty from her caffeine and sugar high. An appetite for violence is amongst the various appetites explored in this film and the characters' choice of food as a result of their particular appetite reveals their essence. Hunny Bunny's appetite for sugar seems to reveal to us that she is an unstable character, one not to be trusted, and the viewer can detect this nature even before she has reached for a gun and screeched at her victims. Her unhinged character becomes better understood by the audience, as her personality is now linked with an excessive intake of sugar. Barthes sheds some light on this idea: "One needs to stop thinking of sugar as something that is simply 'eaten' and not 'consumed'".[104] Fischler's theory of 'saccharophobia' comes to

[104] Barthes, Roland. "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption." *Food and Culture* Eds. Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik. Routledge, New York: 1997. 9-36. p. 20

mind, the fear of sugar, of its refined nature which is the antithesis of what is natural and Hunny Bunny reveals the basis of this phobia.

A consideration of the quality and value of food in the film is vital to gaining an understanding of its themes. Cigarettes and cheap diner coffee hardly qualify as food, Pumpkin and Hunny Bunny's consumption of it hardly qualifies as a meal and perhaps this very first image of the film signifies Tarantino's negative references to a society of mass-consumption and turbo-capitalism, a society that abuses substances such as sugar and coffee in order to replace the real nourishment that is derived from taking the time to consume a healthy meal. The film conveys the realities of a society that functions on new terms such as 'multitasking' and 'speed-dating' and new inventions such as meal *replacement* pills and energy drinks. Saving time and a preoccupation with speed is the new 'macho ethos', as seen in Michael Douglas's character in Oliver Stone's *Wall Street* who exclaims, "Lunch? Lunch is for wimps".[105] We have replaced nutritious food that consumes a little more of our time to prepare with anything that can be cooked in two minutes on High in the microwave; "The key to the process is to speed everything up, whether in production, transport, the circulation of money or – nowadays particularly – consumption".[106] Thus the characters of Pumpkin and Hunny Bunny and their diets in *Pulp Fiction* reveal the reality of a hyper-modern, turbo-capitalistic society.

As mentioned before, every scene that involves food or discussions that take place where food is served (diners, steakhouses) lead to the film's most crucial action scenes. These discussions also reveal the cultural prejudices of the characters, linking the film to a much broader context of American patriotic bias, discrimination and racism. The character of Albert in *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* also expresses his own prejudice, by insisting that Michael is a Jew and asking him patronisingly if he eats Kosher food, thus broadening a portrayal of and contempt for the assumed superiority of the West and how both Tarantino and Greenaway oppose this assumption. Pumpkin

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[105] Swift, Richard. "Rush to Nowhere: Richard Swift says it's Time to Slam on the Breaks." *New Internationalist* (2002).
http://www.rewint.org/issue343/keynote.htm
[106] http://www.rewint.org/issue343/keynote.htm

reveals his own intolerance as he explains to Hunny Bunny that robbing liquor stores is proving to be less and less lucrative:

> There's too many foreigners that own liquor stores- Vietnamese, Koreans. They don't even speak fucking English. You tell them, "empty out the register", they don't know what the fuck you talking about… and if it's not the gooks, it's these old fucking Jews…

This dialogue between the ignorantly prejudiced Pumpkin and his obedient partner reveals a wider reference to a lack of Western tolerance for foreign culture, the *othering* of other cultures in the face of a perceived external threat. Foreigners living in the United States are victims of prejudice in a society of which Pumpkin is a part and this Western superiority has its effects on a global scale. The irony about this situation is that Pumpkin too, with his thick Cockney accent, is a foreigner in the United States, and obviously not making a very positive contribution to the society of his new home. Sigrid Rousing shows how this process of *othering* is connected to the process of consuming, in his study of an Estonian farming community in which "in the face of Soviet takeover, a new Estonian identity needed to take shape".[107] For this community, the term 'normal' was a very significant aspect in the process of transition and this was perceived to be achieved by the consumption of Western goods (even though the goods were unfamiliar to the consumers and far more expensive than local goods). This was seen as a necessary part of Estonia's becoming a 'normal' Western country. Thus one can see how globalisation, Westernisation and even this term 'normalising' are all connected through consumption. Czegledy writes of postsocialist Hungary in the 1990s: "Both scholarly and popular writing attests to the triumph of the West over state socialism as having had more to do with the heady attractions of consumerism than with the elusive promises of liberal democracy".[108] A little later on in this first scene of the film, Pumpkin calls to the female waiter, "Garçon! coffee!" to which she replies as she refills his cup, "Garçon means boy",

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[107] Rousing, Sigrid. "Modernisation is a Small Estonian Farming Community." *Markets and Moralities: Ethnographies of Postsocialism*. Eds. Caroline Humphrey and Ruth Mandel. Oxford: Berg Publishing 2002. 130-145. p. 131

[108] Rousing, p. 140

again displaying an ignorance and disregard of, in this instance, French culture. In his rant to Hunny Bunny about why they should start robbing restaurants, he explains that an employee of a restaurant will not object too strongly or risk his life in the robbery of a restaurant as he is probably "some wetback, getting paid a dollar fifty an hour, [would he] really give a fuck you're stealing from the owner?". Thus our very first introduction to the story of *Pulp Fiction* is through these two characters, people whose poisonous contamination of their bodies reflects their contamination of society through crime. And we will witness further examples of this as the film progresses.

In the next narrative, we are introduced to Vince and Jules, two assassins that work for a major crime boss, Marsellus Wallace. Whilst on their way to do a hit for Marsellus, Vince discusses with Jules his recent trip to Amsterdam:

> *Vince:* You know what the funniest thing about Europe is?
> *Jules:* What?
> *Vince:* It's the little differences. I mean, they got the same shit over here that they got there. Just there it's a little different… You know what they call a Quarter Pounder with cheese in Paris?
> *Jules:* They don't call it a Quarter Pounder with cheese?
> *Vince:* No man, they got the Metric system. They don't know what the fuck a Quarter Pounder is… they call it a Royale with Cheese.
> *Jules:* 'Royale with Cheese'. What do they call a Big Mac?
> *Vince:* A Big Mac's a Big Mac but they call it Le Big Mac… You know what they put on French Fries in Holland instead of ketchup? ... Mayonnaise.

Jules expresses disgust about the Dutch choice of mayonnaise as a condiment to the typical American (and ironically named) French fries. His disdain for Amsterdam lies in what its people choose to *consume* and how they consume it. Thus the dialogue between Pumpkin and Hunny Bunny and between Vince and Jules reveals the film's preoccupation with American capitalist consumption and its dominating influence over the entire world. Wollen explains in his essay *Cinema/ Americanism/ the Robot,* that in

response to the upsurge of modernity (in his context, the theatre world specifically), a Russian Avant-garde stage company exclaimed: "Yesterday, European culture. Today, American technology".[109] Jules's and Vince's xenophobia reveals a "culinary bias toward American cuisine"[110], an ignorance and therefore a discrimination against other cultures. Vince and Jules's Big Mac and Quarter Pounder narratives, as mentioned earlier, reveal their own culinary preferences as well as those of an entire culture. Keil and Beardsworth expand on this idea: "For humans, eating is not simply an activity aimed at obtaining required nutrients … when we consider the fact that all cultures are highly selective in what they actually define as food".[111]

Moving on from the critique of the bias against other cultures in the film, *Pulp Fiction* also distinguishes between the characters that are 'cultured' in an entirely different sense, and those who are not. Just as Vince and Jules assume superiority over other cultures that they consider to be beneath them, Marsellus assumes his own superiority over the other characters of the film - Vince, Jules, and, to his own detriment as we will see later on, Butch. What the characters choose to eat speaks to the audience about the culture to which they subscribe, the culture they abandon, or simply a complete lack of culture itself. In one scene, Marsellus meets with boxer Butch in order to bribe him into getting beaten in the fifth round of an upcoming match. Marsellus tells him:

> This business is filled to the brim with unrealistic motherfuckers, motherfuckers who thought their ass would age like wine. If you mean it turns to vinegar, it does.

Marsellus's reference to and knowledge of the aging process that wine must undergo in order to reach its full value and appreciation, speaks to the audience of his wealth, status and power in the film. Furthermore, in the breakfast scene at the diner, Vince wolfs down a "Grand-Slam" style breakfast of pancakes, eggs, bacon and coffee. Yet Marsellus

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[109] Wollen, Peter. "Cinema/Americanism/The Robot." *Modernity and Mass Culture*. Eds. James Naremore and Patrick Brantlinger. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press: 1991. 41-58. p.42
[110] Epstein, p.197
[111] Beardsworth, Alan, and Keil, Teresa. *Sociology on the Menu: An Invitation to the Study of Food and Society.* London: Routledge, 1997. p.51

prefers a more European choice of juice, tea and croissant.[112] The difference in the nutritional value of these two meals alone represents the position Marsellus holds in the power hierarchy of the gangster world in which they exist. Jules, however, in comparison to Vince, chooses a relatively 'light' breakfast of a bran muffin, which Epstein explains is representative of the religious experience he has just had as a result of dodging almost ten bullets, leading to his decision to leave the mafia world behind. The lightness of the meal makes reference to the 'body as temple' image, which indicates Jules' newly acquired spirituality.

Prior to this conversion, when Jules and Vince arrive at the motel room where the young gangsters who have betrayed Marsellus are staying, Jules bites into one of their hamburgers, a way of creating an illusion of calm and normality which will only serve to heighten the horror of the violence that is to follow:

> Mmmm! That is one tasty burger! My girlfriend's a vegetarian so I don't get to eat them very often, but I do love the taste of a good burger.

The extreme manner in which fast food is used in this film seems to represent the greater threat that it poses in society as a whole, which will be discussed in much further detail later in this chapter. Jules also draws on associations of women with vegetables, portrayed as passive, weak, vegetating creatures whilst men are carnivorous, virile and active meat eaters and so Tarantino uses food in order to approach stereotypes that surround gender.

The traitors to Marsellus will very soon be dead and perhaps in the religious context of the film which Jules introduces, the meal of burgers, French fries and soda could be referred to as the gangsters' very own Last Supper. Jules also partakes in this final meal, as after this hit he will not return to the crime world. The presence of religiosity in Jules' character is seen even further in his famous recitation of Ezekiel 25:17 before killing his victims. This stirring biblical excerpt, describing G-d's lack of mercy for those whom He

[112] Epstein, p.198

judges harshly, seems to elevate Jules to a god himself. By using these words, he becomes the master of his *own* universe, with the power to save life mercifully (as he does with Pumpkin and Hunny Bunny in the diner) or, in this case, take it away:

> …And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger those who attempt to poison and destroy my brothers. And you will know My name is the Lord when I lay My vengeance upon thee.

Although it is recognisable to us as an excerpt from the bible, Jules has modified it somewhat for his own purposes, revealing that his religiosity is based very much on his *own* version of mercy and justice and his own idea of redemption. Nonetheless, Jules is the character who reminds us of G-d in this seemingly spiritually anarchic film. He becomes convinced of experiencing "divine intervention" in the midst of a hit, chooses to leave his entire profession and the world in which he is immersed as a result of this experience, rejects the eating of pork (which has very clear religious connotations). Jules and Vince arrive at the diner for breakfast after cleaning Marvin's brains out of their car with The Wolf's help and they enter into a dialogue about the consumption of pig meat:

> *Vince:* You want some bacon?
> *Jules:* No I don't eat pork.
> *Vince:* Are you Jewish?
> *Jules:* No I ain't Jewish, I just don't dig on swine, that's all.
> *Vince:* Why not?
> *Jules:* Pigs are filthy animals. I don't eat filthy animals.
> *Vince:* Yeah, but bacon tastes good, pork chops taste good.

Jules chooses to take moral a stand against eating pork because "pigs sleep and root in shit. I don't eat nothing that don't have the sense to disregard its own faeces". He understands that "the food he ingests in order to live will become assimilated into his

being, will become himself"[113] and this is a very religious concept. We are told in Lev.11:1 about the consumption of pig meat, "Of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch; they are unclean to you… everyone who touches them shall be unclean". The Koran of the Muslim faith states, "These things only has He forbidden you: carrion, blood and the flesh of swine" (Koran, 2, 168).

Despite the apparently pleasing taste of pork, Jules, unlike Vince, does not consider it worth consuming because of its filthy lifestyle, as well as what the consumption of it communicates to the outside world. The separation between what these two characters choose to eat or not to eat solidifies the major differences between them. Beardsworth and Keil elaborate on this point: "…One of the most fundamental distinctions made by human beings is that between *edible* and *inedible*", which relate closely to "more abstract binary oppositions; *us* and *them*, *same* and *other, inside* and *outside*, *good* and *bad, culture* and *nature*".[114] In the postmodern realm, Vince represents a world of consumerism and excess, an advocate of mass and meaningless consumption, whilst Jules reminds us of a nostalgia for religion and spirituality in an environment where the characters have become, to their own detriment it would seem for most, their own gods. And so it seems Jules is the postmodern missionary of this film.

Jules also connects the religiosity that he represents with fast food and therefore, consumption. This is seen clearly in the scene where he and Vince murder the young gangsters. His consumption of a Big Kahuna burger belonging to one of his victims reveals to us the flippancy with which he will soon also consume their lives, yet he *feeds* them a small biblical excerpt as one last source of nourishment for their souls before killing them. Ritzer takes this connection between consumption and religion even further. He mentions the work of Kowinski, who argues that shopping malls are the postmodern "cathedrals of consumption", the temples in which we *prey* in order to practice our "consumer religion". Ritzer continues that upon the opening of a McDonalds branch in

[113] Soler, James. "The Semiotics of Food in the Bible." *Food and Culture. A Reader*, Eds. Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik. New York: Routledge, 1997. 51-75. p. 55
[114] Beardsworth & Keil, p.51

Moscow, a journalist commented that the event was "as if it were the Cathedral in Chartres… a place to experience 'celestial joy'.[115]

This sense of spirituality in consumption is completely devoid in Vince, however, who cares only for what "tastes good". He has no culinary discretion, religious or non-religious, he indulges in anything that gives him pleasure, including the consumption of heroin, a substance that provides enormous sensory satisfaction but is irreparably harmful to the body. According to Epstein, the film makes definitive reference to heroin as a replacement of real food and an alternative form of consumption by the way it portrays the buying and using of the drug. When Vince arrives at Lance's house to buy his heroin, it is spread out in small packages on the table in a buffet style. We see drugs in this film used as 'junk food' or "junkie food".[116] In extreme close-up, Vince "cooks" the drug using a hot skillet and spoon (devices that belong in a kitchen) as some of his utensils and when he is finally stoned, he is "full", his hunger is satisfied.[117] When Vince arrives at Mia's house to pick her up for their dinner, they both enjoy an 'appetizer' of drugs, he a scotch, she a line of cocaine. Thus drugs and food are interchangeable in the film. Like Hunny Bunny and Pumpkin, Vince and Mia rely on a form of consumption that is destructive rather than nutritious as a way of every day survival, cementing their status in society and in the film. Therefore, although it is not always food that is being consumed, there are other forms of *consumption* at work in this film which echo the consumption of food.

Similar to Jules's experience, Marsellus's path also shifts dramatically by the end of the film as his power is taken from him almost entirely when he is sodomised. When Butch makes his escape attempt after betraying Marsellus in the boxing match, he sees Marsellus walking across the street with coffee and doughnuts, a low-class, low nutrition, deep fried and sickly sweet American junk food, its destructiveness to the body perhaps foreshadowing what is to follow to Marsellus's own body. Thus food and reference to food provides the audience with a hint at what is to follow in the story. After Marsellus has bribed Butch in the restaurant, Butch goes to the bar and buys a pack of Red Apple

[115] Ritzer, George. *The McDonaldization of Society*. California: Pine Forge Press, 1993. p.5
[116] Epstein, p.201
[117] Epstein, p.200

cigarettes, which reminds one of the apple that Snow White accepts from the evil witch in the famous fairy tale, thus introducing a well known reference to danger. It could also be connected with the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, and therefore a hint that Butch will indeed do what he is *forbidden* to, and betray Marsellus in the boxing ring.

The doughnuts that Marsellus buys in the scene mentioned above are just part of the much wider significance of the sugariness of food in *Pulp Fiction*. Epstein explains that sugar and its effect on the body, as well as its connotations in the culinary realm, is effectively used in the film in that the high sugar content of junk food and the characters that choose to consume it reveals to the audience the deeper layers of the story. From Hunny Bunny pouring a long, steady stream of it into her coffee to Fabienne ordering a massive breakfast of sweet blueberry pancakes and blueberry pie. This choice of American breakfast fare, Epstein claims, shows that the French character of Fabienne has apparently abandoned the food of her own culture in favour of typical American style cuisine. Like Vince, she places no boundaries on her hunger, she submits completely to her consumptive craving and in Epstein's words "personifies the film's ultimate critique of American physical and material mass consumption"[118]. Fabienne, in the childlike way she speaks and in the immaturity of her penchant for sweet things, is perhaps the most infantile of all the characters. Her obsession with "oral pleasure" represents a fetishisation of food and consumption. Yet Epstein argues that Butch too, with his shaven head and preference for Pop Tarts is just a "big baby", his sentimentality in holding onto the memory of his father by going back to his apartment for the watch that was given to him by the colonel. Thus the infantilisation of Butch and Fabienne is seen in what they choose to eat, echoing Beardsworth and Keil's point that, "when we eat… we are also consuming gustatory (i.e. taste-related) experiences and, in a very real sense, we are also 'consuming' *meanings* and *symbols*".[119] As an extension of the 'sugariness' that permeates Butch and Fabienne's partnership, they also refer to each other with names such as "sugar pop", "lemon pie" and "jelly bean".

[118] Epstein, p.200
[119] Beardsworth & Keil, p.51

The female characters of the film seem to pose a threat to their respective male counterparts: Hunny Bunny threatens her own and her partner's life when she almost guns down the entire diner when the pair attempt to hold up the place. And Fabienne puts Butch's life at risk when she leaves his father's watch at their house, forcing him to go back for it and indirectly causing the carnage that follows. However, this idea of a "foodie femme fatale"[120] is *most* obvious in the character of Mia. Unlike the other women in the film, with their weakness for sugary things, Mia is as much a carnivore as her male counterparts. She is alluring in her beauty and powerful in her status. Mia's choice of Jack Rabbit Slims as a dinner venue is initially a disappointment to Vince, but once he learns he can enjoy a steak at this restaurant, he is satisfied, if a little thrown by the 1950s and 70s retro décor and service. Yet she poses a grave threat to Vince in that she shares his addiction to drugs and should her overdose have resulted in death, Marsellus would surely have killed Vince.

Mia's most powerful assertion of her power in the film (aside from the obvious, being the boss's wife) is through her appetite for meat. Epstein discusses the famous Le Big Mac dialogue between Vince and Jules and argues, "Meat is so sacred that even the renaming of commercial American hamburgers strikes these characters as peculiar" and thus the film "extols stereotypical notions of American manliness through the consumption of beef".[121] In this dialogue, three fast food meat empires are mentioned - McDonalds, Big Kahuna and Burger King and thus it is perhaps worth discussing in some detail, what Ritzer refers to as "the McDonaldization of society", which he defines as:

> The process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world[122]

[120] Epstein, p.200
[121] Epstein, p.198
[122] Ritzer, p.1

Morgan Spurlock's documentary *Supersize Me* (2004), in which he embarks on a thirty day McDonalds diet in order to prove the detrimental effects of fast food, elaborates on Ritzer's point:

> Each day, one in four Americans visits a fast food restaurant… This hunger for fast food isn't just in America. It's happening on a global basis. McDonalds alone operates more than thirty thousand joints in over a hundred countries on six continents and feeds more than forty six million people every day. That's more than the entire population of Spain.

Mia's influence in the film is seen most obviously through her beauty, but also because she lacks that stereotypical female fragility that the other women of the film (Hunny Bunny, Fabienne) possess. She orders a burger at her dinner with Vince and prefers it "bloody as hell", representing her almost masculine power in the film. Jules displays this show of control through the consumption of meat in the scene of the hit he and Vince perform on the young men in the motel room. However, Jules's "food choices become increasingly devoid of meat products as the narrative progresses"[123], revealing that he is apparently relinquishing that all important control that is required to work and live in such a world.

Beardsworth and Keil refer to Twigg's culinary hierarchy of "Status & Potency": Red meat features at the very top, followed by white meat and fish, then other animal products such as eggs and cheese and finally at the bottom , the "lowest of all", vegetable foods. They also explain that "the feature which places red meat in such a high position… is its high blood content…It is the compelling and ambivalent charge of blood which gives red meat its power and appeal… and is associated with virility, strength, aggression and sexuality"[124] Thus Mia's "meat hunger" for a hamburger that's "bloody as hell" reveals to the viewer what clearly sets her apart. We see her role in the film from a culinary perspective and this is emphasised further by fact that she even ends off her 'date' with

[123] Epstein, p.199
[124] Beardsworth & Keil, p.210

Vince with her food joke about the tomatoes and the ketchup. Beardsworth and Keil also turn to the work of Adams, who argues that meat connotes the "essence" of something whilst *vegetable* suggests inactivity and monotony, hence, to 'vegetate' (which makes us think of Fabienne but certainly not Mia). Mia seduces Vince through the act of enjoying a meal and this leads to her overdose and the disaster that is to follow.

The characters of *Pulp Fiction* exist in a world where life itself is disposable and no other industry functions on disposability quite as heavily as the fast food industry. The gangsters Vince and Jules kill under Marsellus's orders are as disposable and replaceable as the fast food they eat. Thus the food they choose to eat indicates their quality of life, their role in their society and, especially, what the future holds for them – they are very soon to be disposed of. This aspect of the film seems to represent a greater message about the destructive nature of a fast food-consuming world. *Pulp Fiction's* reliance on fast food perhaps indicates one of the film's messages about a postmodern world of McDonaldization. Ritzer explains that there are now Ronald McDonald nursing homes for sick children and through McDonalds' advertising, consumers are convinced that by buying the food they are actually contributing to charity. A high school in Illinois created a program called "A for cheeseburger" whereby students who achieved A's on their reports received a cheeseburger as a reward, thus linking excellence in school with fast food. Furthermore, Ritzer shows how both the running and consuming of McDonalds truly represents the society that consumes it: "McDonalds offers us food and service that can be easily *quantified* and *calculated*… we often feel that we are getting a lot of food for a modest amount of money. Quantity has become equivalent to quality".[125]

Ritzer also mentions that the super-efficiency of the fast food industry is based on the fact that the employees of these restaurants are trained to do a few tasks in precisely the way they are taught to do them. In fact, the customers too, albeit in far more subtle ways, are controlled: "Lines, limited menus, few options and uncomfortable seats all lead diners to do exactly what management wishes them to do - eat quickly and leave".[126] In the film

[125] Ritzer, p.8
[126] Ritzer, p.9

too we witness many of the characters being subjected to various forms of control that ensure that Marsellus's mob operations run efficiently. Even Mia, who appears to hold almost as much power as her husband, is very much under his control. One can see this in the scene where Vince has just saved Mia's life after her heroin overdose and he is understandably fearful for his life:

> *Vince:* Mia, what's your thoughts on how to handle this?
> *Mia:* What's yours?
> *Vince:* Well, I'm of the opinion that if Marsellus lived his whole life, he doesn't need to know nothing about this incident.
> *Mia:* If Marsellus knew about this incident, I'd be in as much trouble as you.
> *Vince:* I seriously doubt that.
> *Mia*: I can keep a secret if you can…

The element of control that governs the fast food industry as well as the society it serves connects directly to the postmodern condition with which this film is concerned, the condition of being suspicious of *any* form of control. Thus it seems to be part of one of the main messages of the film that, although there are no real 'winners' in *Pulp Fiction*, many of the characters do succeed in breaking free from this control. Jules frees himself by taking a decision to abandon the mob world. Butch breaks free from Marsellus's controlling bribery in the boxing match. Even Marsellus himself is freed (ironically by Butch) from the ultimate form of control - rape. Thus there are both redemptive as well as deeply pessimistic aspects of this film, which is perhaps Tarantino's invitation to his audience to impose meaning on the realities of the story for him/herself.

This challenge to the viewer of individual interpretation in *Pulp Fiction* is exacerbated by the pattern of the normal followed abruptly by the abnormal, absolute calm before complete chaos, and all these events are framed by meals. Hunny Bunny and Pumpkin chat casually during breakfast in the diner right before the shock of their outburst in sticking everybody up with guns, Vince and Mia enjoy a satisfying meal at Jack Rabbit Slims, which is then followed by the harrowing overdose incident that ensues -Vince

goes to the bathroom and Mia proceeds to sniff his stash of heroin up her nose. Also, the breakfast meal that Vince and Jules enjoy in the diner *also* leads to action because they are caught up in Pumpkin and Hunny Bunny's robbery. In order for Pumpkin to convince Hunny Bunny that diners are the future of successful robberies, he says:

> The customers are sitting there with food in their mouths. They don't know what's going on. One minute they're having a Denver Omelette, the next minute someone's sticking a gun their face.

Thus through skilful dialogue, Tarantino has connected the narrative, making reference to the conclusion of the film at the beginning of it. Vince and Jules *become* these unsuspecting omelette eaters sitting in the diner, although the viewer will have no knowledge of this until the very end.

This non-linear structure of the film, typically postmodern, is emphasised through food and mealtimes. We know from Vince asking Jules the time outside the apartment of the young men they are about to kill, that it is the morning. And yet the two arrive at the apartment to find the men eating burgers - not typically breakfast food. When Jules calls on Mr Winston "The Wolf" Wolfe to help clean the car after Marvin is shot, it is 8:30 A.M and yet The Wolf arrives in a tuxedo, having been called away from a cocktail party, not an event typically held in the early morning.[127] Lance, Vince's drug dealer, is always dressed in pyjamas (indicating ambivalence as to the time of day and the temporal flow of the film as a whole) and when Vince brings Mia over to Lance's house so that he may help to revive her, it is late at night and yet Lance is eating Cap 'n Crunch. Thus cereal is eaten at night and burgers in the morning as an indication to the viewer that Tarantino rejects the idea of the ordinary time sequence of morning-noon-night as much as he rejects the sequence of beginning-middle-end for his films. Through the application of food and meal time, Tarantino reveals his disregard for a comfortable, common linear narrative.

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[127] Epstein, p.201

As mentioned at the very beginning of this chapter, Tarantino's fragmented narrative forces us as viewers to wait until the end of the film in order to attain that imperative sense of *control* and closure that we crave after witnessing a scene as intense as that of the very first between Pumpkin and Hunny Bunny. It is as if we have been wrenched from a sumptuous meal and forced to wait a few hours before being able to finish it. Perhaps Tarantino is trying to convey the postmodern reality that our society is an impatient one and that this impatience grows with every passing moment. As consumer products take less and less time to produce as a result of the efficiency of technology, the pace at which one consumes speeds up as well. Time itself has been compressed into tiny nuggets for easy consumption and once again, the fast food industry is relevant here: Ritzter explains that one of the key factors in the colossal success of McDonalds is its marketing and manipulation of time. A common consumer of this food will calculate how long it would take to drive to the nearest McDonalds, eat one's food and drive home again and compare it to the amount of time it would take to prepare a meal at home. Predictably, the conclusion is that a consumer's time would be far better utilised with a quick trip to McDonalds. Even better, Domino's Pizza guarantees delivery to one's doorstep within a half hour or the pizza is free. Thus time itself is not appreciated and therefore it is misused. In the fast food industry, time is perceived to be *saved*, yet in return the food that is produced is devoid of nourishment and harmful to the body. Thus it is plausible that the abuse of time is conveyed to us in this film through a non-linear narrative that forces us to slow down our rapid consumption of it. However, perhaps it is also shown in the scene between Captain (Koontz) and Butch as a child. The Captain tells Butch the peculiar story of his father's watch, which his father kept hidden in his anus whilst being held in a prisoner of war camp in Vietnam during World War II. The relevance of this rather disturbing tale is that it is the story of a person who has literally shoved time up his ass.

Tarantino's use of a non-linear narrative is also a way of avoiding the familiar and rejecting the predictable. Again there is a direct correlation between the fast food industry and *Pulp Fiction.* Ritzer elaborates on yet another aspect of McDonalds' winning formula and that is *predictability*. "We know that the Egg McMuffin we eat in New York will be,

for all intents and purposes, identical to those we have eaten in Chicago and Los Angeles. We also know that the one we order next week or next year will be identical to the one we eat today".[128] The comfort of predictability in the fast food industry connects directly to the consumer's addictive consumption of it. From even a superficial viewing of *Pulp Fiction*, one can easily tell that Tarantino clearly despises the predictable. And so it would seem that the statements he makes in this film are about the controlling, addictive and indeed predictable nature of the world of mass consumption.

And so, to conclude what has been covered in this chapter: firstly we see food being used as a way of expressing status, the characters' location in the hierarchy of their societies and this is determined by what they eat. This is an idea that is also explored in *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* and also somewhat in *Delicatessen.* The presence and use of food also alerts us to the way Tarantino defamiliarises the normal process of eating, of satiating one's hunger, perhaps the most ordinary activity one can think of, because the scenes of meal times always precede the most explosive violence in the film thereby creating the shocking distance from the familiar that we experience. Through the characters of Pumpkin and Vince especially, we see Tarantino's views about the assumed superiority of American culture and prejudice toward other cultures, again expressed in either arenas of food or through discussions of food itself. It seems clear that Tarantino himself is not necessarily promoting social change or actively pursuing it, but rather reflecting on this in his own personal style, a style that shocks its viewer into considering what the story is communicating. And yet there is no dogmatic metanarrative offered as an answer, which is almost certainly part of the point of this film, displayed by Tarantino's use of a non-linear narrative and his resistance to a definitive ending to the story.

Through the character of Jules, the film addresses religion and refers to the nostalgia for a religious value system that forbids the kind of violence which dominates this film. The film also addresses issues of gender, and how society naturally associates certain kinds of food with men and women, weakness and strength, triumph over bodily over-indulgence

[128] Ritzer, p.10

versus control of it and this allows the viewer to ask him/herself questions about the personal differentiations we make between appetite, hunger and addiction In conclusion, *Pulp Fiction* shows its viewer the many aspects of Epstein's argument that "food lends depth to characters:"[129] we notice what they eat, what they reject, what they are repulsed by and what they prefer and this provides us with some insight into who they are and how *we* as viewers, but more significantly, as consumers, relate to them and to the world around us.

[129] Epstein, p.199

Delicatessen

Essentially, Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro's *Delicatessen* is a love story, and if one is to begin to fathom the solution to the shortcomings of society that this dystopian film represents, it is necessary to bear that in mind. It is difficult to imagine an enduring love in a world reduced to such an extreme brutality, where love itself seems a merely wasteful and even dangerous emotion. Yet it is this endurance that seems to be one of the main messages of the film: the idea that caring for one another is what sets us human beings apart, it is what keeps us from slipping into an anarchic state where anything is acceptable if it is in the name of sustaining life, even if it means that a society reduces itself to cannibalism. The abject shortage of basic sustenance pushes the characters of the film further into this anarchic state, and yet, we cannot help but ask our selves if it is really fair to blame them. *Delicatessen* poses the question of whether the primal need to survive in the postmodern world is being confused with simple human selfishness? And have the modern consumers of today cultivated a kind of greed that will certainly bring about the eventual demise of a society we perceive as civilised?

Exactly where and when the film is set are both uncertain. The only location we are certain about is the country in which the story takes place and that food, specifically meat, has run out. In the midst of this sense of oblivion and apocalypse, the majority of the population have resorted to cannibalism, popularly considered to be the ultimate form of anarchy and thus a sure indication of a civilisation that has crashed. This scenario requires the audience to consider what they would do in the case of such deprivation. What does this deprivation do to our choices, instincts and morality? Can we so easily judge those who choose a seemingly more barbaric path in order to survive and what does this say about the future of 'civilised' society as we perceive it? This film introduces a stark contrast of a utopian versus dystopian image; authentic, selfless, human companionship in the face of anarchic consumption and greed. Julie and Louison are able to cultivate a relationship of shared concern and respect which grows in the midst of an environment in which life is not valued, it is taken violently and consumed. In connection with Peter Greenaway's *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*, we see that there

are 'lovers' in both films; Michael and Georgina in Greenaway's film and Julie and Louison in *Delicatessen.* It would be difficult to argue whether these couples are actually even *in* love, yet the relevance of these relationships in both films is that it is authentic, human connection which, put crudely, keeps us from consuming each other. These four characters are capable of such connectivity and they survive. Boucher and Albert are not capable of it (or have refused to exercise it). They are ferocious consumers, destroyers of human life, rather than preservers of it and they do not survive. Thus the motivations for these two films, although very different, contain this same, simple principle. When Julie realises that Louison will be next to come under her father's knife, she *cooks up* a rebellion with the vegetarian freedom fighters in order to save her lover. Unfortunately for Georgina, it is not the threat of losing her lover that forces her into action; it is the loss of him altogether, in a ferocious and torturous manner. Therefore, both directors display the importance of cherishing the relationships that ensure our connection to and empathy with humanity.

Claflin explains that *Delicatessen* is a story which addresses the various realities the French people were faced with after the German Occupation of World War II, a phenomenon known as the Vichy Syndrome[130] first advanced by Henry Rousso. What makes the film difficult to label so hastily, however, is that it takes place within the context of war, with meat-eaters and vegetarians representing collaborators and resistance, the difficulties and challenges of the characters representing both groups, and therefore it encourages us to retreat from clambering to pick sides. During this time, the nation was split into three distinct camps; those who collaborated, those who resisted, and those who simply had no involvement and went about their ordinary lives as best they could. Mademoiselle Plusse introduces yet another party, adding to the complexity of the film. She begins as a fairly apathetic character, she is even the bully Boucher's lover, but as she gets to know Louison, she becomes sympathetic to his cause and switches sides in order to help him. Once again, one of the most vital and indeed postmodern messages

[130] Claflin, Kyri Watson. "Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro's *Delicatessen*: An Ambiguous Memory, an Ambivalent Meal." *Reel Food: Essays on Food and Film.* Ed. Anne L. Bower. New York: Routledge, 2004. 235-251. p. 235

inherent in the film is that there was and still is no typical good-and-evil, hero versus villain, model that can be easily applied to post-war France.

Claflin continues that the film portrays the conflict between the English and the French during the war but also, as we can see in the struggles between the tenants in *Delicatessen*, the *internal* conflict or "civil war" that took place in France after the war, as it did in many other countries conquered by the Nazis.[131] As Claflin puts it, "When we read cannibal as collaborator, the characters resonate rather differently in a society torn apart by guilt and blame".[132] Thus Boucher is obviously the arch-collaborator of the film, who slaughters without mercy and, according to the resisters' view of the collaborators during the war, literally *sacrifices* his fellow citizens. Thus Jeunet and Caro utilise the Western disgust for cannibalism in order to convey the distaste that resonates for those who collaborated with the Germans for their own gain or simply to avoid conflict, but it also represents the French citizens who remained detached from the conflict altogether, who chose to wait it out until either victory or defeat. The ambiguity of the film, however, lies in the unsophisticated nature of the resistance, represented by the Troglodytes, thus disguising, if not totally masking the true view of the filmmakers themselves. The vegetarian Troglodytes are absurdly dressed, rather insane as a result of a purely subterranean existence and somewhat self-serving. They certainly do not fight injustice for its own sake, but only if Julie pays them with bags of corn. They are therefore not quintessential heroes. As for the tenants, they consume the human flesh Boucher provides for them, but they do not act out of sheer evil and malice, and so they are not quintessential villains either.

In this context of deprivation, Jeunet and Caro explore what this scenario does to a society, how it affects their relationships, choices and appetites, and how far its people will go in order to fulfil their most primal cravings for sustenance. With this background of a starving French people in the postmodern age, Claflin argues that, "Reflections on the meaning of food in France during troubled times offer more than a morsel of cultural

[131] Claflin, p.237
[132] Claflin, p.238

insight".[133] We are not left with a comfortable set of circumstances or choices after viewing this film. Every act of violence, be it greedy or desperate, is encouraged by enormous hunger. And yet at the same time, we are introduced to a far more humane way to survive in this world with the vegetarian Troglodytes. However, their choice to help rescue Louison from certain death is not without its own brand of greed as well; they mock and harass Julie when she asks for their help and only agree to save Louison when she drops a bag of corn on the floor in front of them and promises more after the rescue. Thus greed and betrayal are rampant, whether cannibal or vegetarian, collaborator or resistance, and therefore Jeunet and Caro seem to understand that the writing of the political history of any country can be taken seriously only in so far as we understand *who* is writing it. In the context of postmodernity, Jeunet and Caro must recognise that France's history itself is subjective. The historian Francois Bedarida clarifies this idea: "The objective of memory is fidelity, whilst the objective of history is truth".[134] We refer to history because it locates us in the world. We cling to memory because it defines us as individuals. And so, whilst *Delicatessen* is a film about France's political embarrassment in World War II, its struggle through history and its evolution as a nation, *this* story unfolds in a *single* building, with maybe a dozen characters and no glimpse of the outside world at all. Thus the filmmakers do not present a truly post-war France to their audience, nor do they intend to, but rather present a minute and dysfunctional microcosm of it that exits in their imagination. They present to us a counterfactual version of history, perhaps to remind one that by definition, all history is subjectively, *his story.* Silverman explains that these are the challenges of the "postmodern textualization of history and the problems of memorializing the past" as well as the importance of defining "the distinction between history and memory".[135]

With this in mind, universally recognised and nationally treasured French delicacies, such as frogs' legs and snails, are parodied in this film, with the insane Monsieur Potin living in the damp and murky basement of the building, who sinks further into his lunacy as he

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[133] Claflin, p.239
[134] Silverman, Maxim. *Facing Postmodernity: Contemporary French Though on Culture and Society.* London: Routledge, 1999. p.28-29.
[135] Silverman, p.30

eats his snails and talks to his frogs. He holds one of the slimy molluscs above his mouth before eating it and says, almost by way of apology for the purely selfish greed that society has recently adopted, "My dear Hercule, every man for himself, and G-d for all". But the portrayal of the character of Monsieur Potin and his ridiculousness is perhaps also to assert Jeunet and Caro's view about a perceived 'higher' French culture, which we see in the portrayal of treasured French delicacy and cuisine. Silverman explains this idea:

> The democratization of culture today, and the relativism of cultural values, has provided a space for a whole new range of voices and modes of expression. The blurring of the distinction between high and popular culture today… is part of the anti-authoritarian thrust of modern democratic societies which is empowering for that part of the population who formerly occupied a subordinate position.[136]

The cuisine of France reflects its political history and has resulted from a process of constant change and evolution. This began in the 1540s, when Catherine de Medici, daughter of Lorenzo, the Duke of Urbino, was brought to France to marry Henri II, the future king of France. The Italian Medici brought with her entourage several chefs who were trained in the food and culinary skills of Florence, where ingredients such as mushrooms, truffles and garlic were being discovered and used to make the most sumptuous dishes. This culinary innovation, first introduced by Medici led to the very first blueprint for French cuisine, a book written by France's leading chef, La Varenne, entitled "Le Cuisine François". Recipes were listed alphabetically and new techniques were introduced. With the rise of Louis XIV, the palace of Versailles introduced a far more elaborate form of dining. The fork, previously viewed as a complicated kitchen tool, now appeared regularly on the dining table and the idea of courses was introduced, bringing different dishes at various intervals, rather than all at once, resulting in the food turning cold and the meal being over too quickly.[137]

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[136] Silverman, p. 104
[137] Hartman, Paul V. "A History of French Cuisine."
http://www.naciente.com/essay93.htm

With revolution, however, knowledge of fine food became far more 'democratized', yet it did not necessarily transform the massive chasm that lay between the classes. At the time of the storming of the Bastille and the French Revolution in 1789, eighty percent of the French population were "subsistence farmers, with bread and cereals as the basis of their diet, essentially unchanged since the time of the ancient Gauls nearly two millennia before".[138] With the fall of the aristocracy, food was representative of a certain social status, which was adopted immediately by a new ruling class of bourgeoisie, who reinvented the richly opulent meals of the very aristocracy for whom they had such disdain. All the while, the majority of Parisians were ill fed, some virtually starving and were five times more likely to rely on vegetable proteins as nutrition rather than any meat or dairy products. And so *haute cuisine* was really only enjoyed by those wealthy enough to afford it, and "it took a world war at the beginning of the twentieth century to halt the gross inequality of wealth at the table, and to bring about a more even distribution of the nation's produce".[139] The vast improvements in transportation, specifically in the railway industry, allowed for food to be spread far more efficiently to previously remote regions.

More recently, in the late 1950s, young and emerging French chefs such as Bocuse, Guérard and Chapel invented what we know today as *Nouvelle Cuisine.* This food rejected, for example, the traditional heavy sauces and introduced alternative methods of reducing stocks instead, to thicken and to concentrate flavours, as well as the presentation of diminutive portions served on over-sized plates, 'painted' with various sauces, resembling abstract art rather than food. Whilst this was the new food of the rich, exorbitant and unaffordable for the average Frenchman, today French food embraces the traditional as well as the nouvelle, which causes one to reconsider the concept of *delicacy* more closely. If the food eaten by the monarchs of pre-revolutionary France separated and elevated them from the rest of society, this film urges us to consider the gaps that are formed between classes in societies of today, as a result of materialism and the consumption that follows. Jeunet and Caro use Monsieur Potin to reveal the snobbery inherent in this materialism. The mockery of French delicacy, seen in Potin's treatment of

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[138] The French American Cultural Foundation, Washington. "An Introduction to French Cuisine." http://www.discoverfrance.net/france/food/DF_cuisine.shtml.
[139] http://www.discoverfrance.net/france/food/DF_cuisine.shtml

the frogs and snails, seem to convey the filmmakers' own mockery of what is known as The Veblen Effect (which will be discussed in further detail a little later on in this chapter), products that are purchased merely because they are expensive, because they are considered 'delicacy' and because they elevate the consumer in class and status.

And so, as discussed earlier, the food of France was largely influenced by the Italians and contemporary French food is a blend of traditional and nouvelle cuisine. The film's preoccupation with food makes reference to this intertextuality, perhaps most obviously with the blending of time periods. There is every suggestion, from the cars, televisions and costumes that the film is set in the 1950s and the context of it, a world that has used up all its resources and is now in the midst of starvation and self-destruction, suggests a story that takes place in the *future,* it has the hubristic tone of a film that warns us of what might become of our planet if we do not restore it. Thus Jeunet and Caro blend the past and the present into an entirely original use of time itself. It is the intertextuality of postmodernism that gives *Delicatessen* its richness, the fusing of texts that gives it its originality, even if French food, true love and the end of the world are subjects that have been portrayed and addressed in film before.

Jeunet and Caro draw on France's culinary history in order to express their views on contemporary French society. The tragic slaughter of Louison's performance partner and life long companion, Livingstone the monkey, explains Claflin, has historical as well as culinary significance: "It is hardly a coincidence that the French referred to the wartime canned meat rations, which they thought were bad for their health and their palates, as *singe* (French for "monkey")". [140] Claflin continues by noting that, even in 1870, with the Prussian siege of Paris and Parisians were forced to eat rats, dogs, cats and even the elephants from the zoo, monkeys were still out of the question for consumption as a result of a "Darwinist interpretation of proximity to self and other. The monkeys were too close to human".[141] But other references to food in the film are used to express a sense of nostalgia for the former glory days of France *before* the humiliation of the World War II

[140] Claflin, p.241
[141] Claflin, p.254

experience, a reflection on the sense of *Gourmandise* for which the French are so famous and therefore also the severity of war time desperation for a food-obsessed nation. During the rescue mission of Louison, the code names that are used are French recipes and culinary methods. During the mission, one Troglodyte radio's to another, "Scout to Sauce-Master". Another calls out "Cordon Bleu calling Onion Snipers!". Louison is codenamed Artichoke Heart, Julie refers to his rescue as "Artichoke heart soufflé" and the instructions she gives over the radio (which was formerly a coffee grinder) is in the mode of a recipe: "H minus thirty-five minutes. Throw in the onions. Simmer the snipers. Cover them for fifteen minutes. H minus twenty minutes. Stir the sauce". Louison is indeed the "heart" of the film, a caring and empathic character who brings about the destruction of Boucher's cannibalistic delicatessen. The association of onions with tears is perhaps also significant; it could represent the tragedy of vegetarians being driven underground because they refuse to eat the meat of human beings, or perhaps it foreshadows the tragedy of the death of one of the Troglodytes during the attempted rescue of Louison. We saw Jeunet and Caro use snails and frogs in a previous scene in order to express their views on French delicacy. In this scene, there is once again the use of food, artichoke hearts and onions, as a tool for allowing deeper messages of non-violence to surface.

However, despite the sombre realities inherent in this story (severe food shortage, starvation, a loss of humanity, cannibalism) one cannot deny that it is a hilarious film. The hysterical lunacy of the Troglodytes, "their comic treatment and bungled missions reflect very vividly the questioning of the Resistance myth that was created by Charles De Gaulle after the Liberation".[142] But it seems also that the humour of the film and the element of the absurd about it convey its inherent themes and messages far more effectively than any other approach. The actual world in which *Delicatessen* takes place is a truly absurd one. As we see in the children who smoke and Louison's warped bathroom taps, it is a confused and confusing world that is contrary to what is widely considered *normal* in contemporary Western society. The absurdity of the film is also necessary as it allows for the introduction of humour into what is a film about a tragic set

[142] Claflin, p.241

of circumstances, and the impact of the film itself is in its humour. Thus not only is the dialogue funny, the characters with their extremely expressive faces and appearance (Boucher, Louison, Tapioca, Monsieur Potin) remind us more of cartoon-like caricatures than true representatives of humanity and even the hero of the film, Louison, is a circus clown. It is the humour of the film that, ironically, causes us to consider the themes of it more profoundly: "Treated comically, motivations are easier to understand. When the ogre [of a story] is a cannibal, the people dependent on him who stupidly follow his philosophy can be caricatured".[143] The film has to be absurd by necessity, so that the audience is able to relate to this alien world in some way, otherwise it is at risk of being categorised as another bizarre sci-fi horror. With the addition of humour, it is more of a newspaper political cartoon in motion. The over-the-top nature of it is also unfamiliar to the audience. Jeunet and Caro probably recognise that the subject matter of the film is not new or original, thus an original take on it is essential for it to have any impact. Therefore there seems to be a certain element of what Julia Kristeva refers to as the *jouissance* of the text and Jeunet and Caro insert this sense of 'jollity' and frivolity in a film about a clearly horrific subject.

There is a seemingly impossible element of humour in this film, a sense of the absurd that makes us laugh, despite ourselves. When Louison arrives at the delicatessen, he is forced to give up his shoes, clearly the only normal pair he owns, and for the rest of the film he wears the absurdly elongated shoes of his circus days. And so, in a sense, Louison is constantly performing for us. When one considers Aurore's varied and creative suicide attempts, though tragic, we cannot help but laugh at her. Tapioca's desperation to feed his family is sad, yet the scene in which he attempts to sell the rat-call whistle, the 'bull shit detector' and eventually his mother in law to Boucher, is hilarious. The tea scene between Louison and Julie is also rather funny, she pours tea in every direction and sways blindly with her teapot, as he follows the spout of the pot and catches the tea expertly in his cup, eventually piling cups and saucers upon one another, allowing the tea to cascade quietly like a small fountain, so as not to embarrass her. Thus the viewer is able reflect on his/her own sense of humour, even when viewing a film that introduces a compromise to the self

[143] Claflin, p.238

in times of modernity and consumption. When we watch this film, in spite of what it is about, we laugh. The Butcher is the villain, yet he is undoubtedly funny in his appearance, mannerisms, facial expressions and interactions with the other characters (the taxi driver, the postman). The significance and impact of humour in *Delicatessen* is that to be merely revolted by the images of a film is far more forgettable than to laugh at them. We *consider* what we laugh at; we contemplate *why* it is funny.

And so the dark humour of the film is ironically what encourages its audience to take it far more seriously and there is a distinct sense of warning about this film, a notion of what the world *could* become if it continues to consume itself. Baudrillard accentuates this point: "the only revolution in things is today no longer their dialectical transcendence, but in their potentialization, in their elevation to the second power, in their elevation to the *n*th power, whether that of terrorism, irony or simulation".[144] Everything we have seen in this world teaches us that we can never really be prepared for what we have *not* yet seen, what is still to come. What we have witnessed so far in the modern world, what the phenomenon of modernity has given us and what it has taken from us, should indicate that there is virtually no limit, only "potentialization", and so the potential anarchy of limitlessness means that the world can easily slip into the realm of the absurd, as presented to us in this film. As long as something is in the realm of the absurd, it does not have to submit to any limitation and therefore we as viewers of this film can better understand the seemingly far-fetched ridiculousness of the *Delicatessen* world. This relates to Lyotard's view of postmodernism as "incredulity toward metanarratives"[145], the argument that a text should not dictate to its audience what something *is*, but rather leave the way open for interpretation of what it *could* be. In this light, the "potentialization" of simulation is *more true than true*, seduction is *more false than false*, obesity is *more fat than fat*, hypereality is *more real than real.*[146]

The portrayal of cannibalistic behaviour in this film is through the approach of black humour, which is funnier than funny. Cannibalism is therefore *more consumption than*

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[144] Baudrillard, Jean. *Fatal Strategies.* London: Pluto Press, 1983.
http://www.backflip.com/members/wgrobin/9340801/=/
[145] Lyotard, p.xxvu
[146]www.backflip.com/members/wgrobin/9340801/sort=/

consumption, as it is the process of actually consuming the consumer. This is not simply a film that addresses consumption. The characters actually consume each other and so *Delicatessen* is far *more absurd than absurd*. Jeunet and Caro present to us a film that is absurd in the extreme and we generally label the absurd as 'that which can never happen', as that which lies outside the boundaries of reality. This film encourages us to reconsider what is real now, in light of what we already know about the damage our excessive consumption has caused, and what has *potential* to become real in the future.

It has certainly become clear so far that Jeunet and Caro do not indulge their audience with the opportunity for swift and sweeping judgements about the film and its characters, or the greater political significance it represents. This is why Claflin argues that, in *Delicatessen,* "ambivalence and ambiguity are qualities Jeunet and Caro accentuate to make their statement".[147] If we are tempted immediately to label the cruel Butcher as the sole instigator of violence and the serial murderer of the entire film, Claflin reminds us to think again: "What can we make of a Butcher who murders a series of employees, and of customers who knowingly indulge in an appetite, indeed a craving for human flesh?".[148] When Louison arrives at the delicatessen to apply for a job, Boucher inspects his appearance, as if to establish whether Louison has the physical strength to do the maintenance job for which he is about to be employed. If the viewer is not already aware that the butcher is sizing up this new tenant to see how much meat he will yield in order to sell to his hungry customers, it will soon become clear:

> *Boucher:* Turn around.
> *Louison:* Pardon me..?
> *Boucher*: Turn around. How much do you weigh?
> *Louison*: 63 or 64 kilos. Why?
> *Boucher*: You're not exactly hefty. The job I've got takes muscles.
> *Louison*: Don't worry about that.

[147] Claflin, p.236
[148] Claflin, p.236

> *Boucher:* I'm a butcher. I'm straight with people. So I'd say you haven't got what it takes. You don't have the body structure. The right breadth. Nonetheless I'll give you a try.

This scene hints to us that Louison is about to become one of Boucher's ever-fearful tenants and eventually a victim of the ruthless villain. Yet later on we see that the tenants themselves, desperately hungry and craving the protein-rich nourishment of meat, share in the Butcher's appetite. Whilst making their mooing cow toys, Roger Kube asks his brother Robert, "What do you think of the new guy?" to which Robert replies, "He's skinny." Tapioca craves the taste of human flesh as well as he also has an entire family to feed and fears Boucher is stalling with the use of Louison for their next meal:

> *Tapioca:* That G-d damn Butcher. I'm sure he won't do it tonight. He's taking his time just to make me mad.
> *Mrs Tapioca*: He's obviously succeeded.
> *Tapioca*: What's he waiting for anyway? Till the new guy tries to escape in a garbage bag too? How long did the other guy last us?
> *Mrs Tapioca*: A week. Not counting the broth that is.
> *Tapioca:* One week. We polished off the last chunk two days ago. I'm hungry. I'm bloody starving. I'm fucking starving!

Thus Tapioca fully supports the murderous exploits of the Butcher because he is hungry, but is intimidated and threatened later on when Boucher forces him to give up his mother-in-law to feed the tenants. Robert awaits the murder of Louison so that he can eat again, but is brutalised himself when he goes out onto the stairwell at night and sacrifices his leg to Boucher. And so we see that it is extremely difficult to distinguish between perpetrator and victim and that those roles switch and shift from scene to scene, in typical postmodern fashion, leaving its audience with no easy choices. Jeunet and Caro encourage their audience to ask themselves what they would do in times of absolute deprivation and despair. We are asked to consider to what extent we are accountable to

the societies that surround us, the limitations to which we submit within those boundaries, as well as the choices we enjoy.

The film opens with a view of the building in which the delicatessen is situated, as well as a few others in the foggy distance. The structures look bombed out (perhaps a reference to the context of war in the film's background) and literally skeletal, perhaps to convey the idea that the very landscape itself is starved and sick. In Silverman's writings about a postmodern French society, he considers the principles behind the creation of the modern city. Paris, for example would be considered to embody the "Utopian dream" of what a truly urban space should be - "founded on the Enlightenment principles of rational design, uniformity and equality".[149] The metropolitan vocabulary used to describe this space can be best explained, argues Silverman, through metaphors about the body. He cites the work of Marxist historian, Henri Lefebvre, who explains that "Disorder is unhealthy. The doctors of modern society saw their role as doctors of a sick social space. What is the remedy? *Coherence.*" (Lefebvre 1968: 27)[150]. The environment of *Delicatessen* is not simply a sick space, it is a severely starved and virtually dead space and so when one considers the shortcomings and obstacles encountered in the modern, urban world, as explained by Silverman and Lefevbre, one can begin to understand just how far into decay the society of the film has fallen. Modernity sees the shift from the rural to the urban, yet the environment of the film is one in which even the urban has been destroyed and surpassed. The only building we see, the only representation of industry and urbanisation has fallen into disrepair. Thus *Delicatessen* is post-urban, rampant, capitalist appetite taken to its absolute extreme. Perhaps the connection between desperate starvation and capitalist appetite is that in the former case, we know what we really need, in the latter case, we *think* we know what we really need.

We are aware that the world in the film does not resemble the real world, but it seems Jeunet is trying to say to us that, 'well, not *yet'*. There is a distinct feeling of warning about the film. The murky red glow in the atmosphere that surrounds the delicatessen and

[149] Silverman, p.66
[150]Silverman, p.66.

looms within it reminds one of what would typically resemble hell, the apocalypse, society's plummet into the end of the world. Perhaps one could argue then that Jeunet and Caro utilise this apocalypticism in order to warn the viewer of both the dangers of an insatiable appetite (in both an individual and political sense) and the pursuit of an extreme kind of freedom that merely masks a very destructive chaos. To elaborate on Lefebvre's argument, the sick and starving space that surrounds the characters of the film represents their internal condition. Silverman uses the work of Olivier Mongin to further explain this idea; "In our contemporary democracies, the city appears to be the result of a multiplicity of contradictory and incoherent processes. It escapes control and unity… Is this unpredictability, multiplicity and disorder the sign of greater freedom?" (Mongin 1995: 9).[151] The pursuit of limitless freedom for freedom's sake is therefore a metanarrative which Jeunet and Caro firmly reject. The characters live in a discordant, lawless pandemonium which contributes to their *demise,* rather than their freedom. And as we see, the entire system, as represented by the physical structure of the building, has to be demolished, literally drowned in a Noah's Ark-like flood of water in order for society to restore and revitalise itself once more. The final scene of the film is of Louison and Julie sitting on the roof of the building playing music, the same tune that they played together in Julie's apartment, where they first established their connection and affection for each other. They play completely different types of musical instruments, she a cello, he a rusty saw. One may debate whether Louison's even qualifies as an instrument and this is an apt expression of the quirkiness of his personality. What is most significant about the difference in their instruments is that they produce beautiful music together. Perhaps this is indicative of one of Jeunet and Caro's messages in this film; that there can in fact be *harmony* in difference, rather than chaos, and that difference should be respected and even celebrated rather than feared, so that society should not be so easily convinced by the idea of categorising people and creating hierarchies out of them, in order to justify the process of mistreating them.

This echoes the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and his theory of the *carnivalesque.* The freedom, both social and political, that the carnivals of Medieval Europe promoted is

[151]Silverman, p.71.

embodied in the circus clown character of Louison. Jeunet and Caro also communicate the *lack* of political and social freedom that accompanies war, the underlying influence of the story. France's humiliation in World War II was about the compromise, the lack of patriotism in collaboration. It seems there is a correlation between resistance and individuality, collaboration with a submission of individuality. Louison is the quintessential individual in this film and together with Julie and the Troglodytes, leads a resistance against the tyranny of Boucher. Thus when considering the political connotations of the film, there is the quest for autonomy and the freedom inherent in incommensurability.

Thus the loss and sacrifice of the individual is perhaps reflected in the sense of oblivion about the film. One can never be sure throughout the entire film exactly *where* the story takes place. The characters, like the building in which they live, seem lost in time and space as well. We learn very little about them during the film, how they came to live in this building, under these circumstances. Louison is the only character whose history we see a tiny glimpse of, when he explains to Julie about his life as a performer with Livingstone. We are even unsure at any given point during the film about whether it is day or night, thus the viewer is immersed in this world of confusion, as he/she is deprived of the comfort of even knowing what time of day it is. The film presents a world that is warped and distorted, which is presented to us when Louison is in the bathroom of his new home in the butcher's apartment building and water flows from the left tap when he turns the right one on and from the right tap when the left is turned on. This reveals a reality that is contrary and confusing: What is barbaric and unacceptable about society, such as Tapioca's two sons, merely toddlers, who are seen smoking cigarettes while sitting on the stairs, is on the *surface* rather than hidden and underground. We see in the only children characters of the film that, childhood innocence is as much a luxury as meat. The last remaining members of society who *do* retain enough human emotion not to eat their fellow human beings, the subterranean Troglodytes, are forced *underground* with their sympathy and compassion.

The Troglodytes choose to eat grains and corn to sustain them, and consider the "surfacers" or "carnivores" to be barbaric, greedy and submitting to a most base form of desire. The tenants, however, crave meat and consider the consuming of it an absolute necessity. *Delicatessen* is a film that encourages its viewer to distinguish the very basic difference between need and desire. When Boucher confronts Tapioca about being behind on the rent, he offers the butcher two other forms of possible payment. One is a rat-call whistle which, when blown, makes the squealing noise of a rat (not unlike the cow devices that the Kube brothers produce). This object is obviously obsolete to the butcher and to society as a whole. Boucher reminds Tapioca that "There are no rats left" as they have all been eaten long ago. Next, Tapioca offers him the "bullshit detector"; he holds it up to Boucher's mouth and says, "Start bullshitting", to which Boucher replies "Life is wonderful". The bullshit detector responds immediately by squawking and vibrating, indicating that the statement is surely bullshit! Again, Boucher is dissatisfied. He knows the demands of a cannibal society and that the things Tapioca is offering him are no longer commodities. Jeunet and Caro make the point well in this scene, that whilst certain consumers in a luxury consumer society might have a *desire* for such devices, there is certainly no *need* for a rat-call whistle or a device that detects nonsense in a world governed solely by desperation. Jean Baudrillard, in his *Le Systeme des objets*, discusses the nature of need in a consumer society. He argues that *need* itself is actually created by the objects of consumption: "Objects are *categories of objects* which quite tyrannically induce *categories of persons*".[152] In the film, this is exactly what has taken place. Human flesh has been newly categorised by some as food, which has in turn categorised people into those who will eat it, and those who refuse it. Thus need is the product of consumption, says Baudrillard, and not the opposite. The Troglodytes have no need or appetite for human meat, as they have never chosen to eat it.

The Baudrillardian school of thought that consumption is the "systematic act of the manipulation of signs"[153] comes to mind when considering the Kube brothers. They do not produce meat; they produce the memory or idea of meat, through the production of a

[152] Baudrillard, Jean. "The System of Objects." *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*. Ed. Mark Poster. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988. p.16-17
[153] Baudrillard, p.22

device that *signifies* meat. The characters know they are not consuming the best cuts of animal flesh that fetch a high price in the non-cannibal, culinary world, yet their purchase of human flesh, for the amount of lentils which is the *equivalent* of a large sum of money, allows them to cling to the romance and memory of fine food. Economist Thorstein Veblen's Veblen Effect states that a commodity is a *Veblen Good* if "people's preference for buying it increases as a direct function of its price".[154] In the real world, fine wines and expensive perfumes would qualify as Veblen goods and in the world of the film; Boucher *creates* such demand for human meat as a direct result of the almost impossibly high prices he charges. We see the alternative to cannibalism just below the surface and it is obvious by the appearance of the vegetarians in the film that they are hardly underfed. On a purely physical level at least, vegetarianism seems to have served the Troglodytes well, as we see later in the film during the rescue of Louison, one of the rescuers is actually killed because he is unable to fit through a small hole in order to escape, having "put on too much weight". Thus it seems that the choice of cannibalism in this film may perhaps reach beyond sheer desperation, but also involve a desperate desire to feel like a true consumer in the world, with all the snobbery and deception it entails.

And so the system of supply and demand that the cannibal contingent of society have chosen, is a system that according to Baudrillard, will always "exacerbate the desire for discrimination… we can observe the unfolding of an always renewed obsession of hierarchy and distinction".[155] The physical structure of the apartment building, the film's only set, which shows the characters ascending and descending the stairwell, displays this hierarchical reality quite literally. The staircase of the building, the core of the hierarchical system, is where the butcher murders his victims and yet another tenant gets his/her turn to be at the very bottom of the food-chain, taken to the very *bottom* of the building, the basement, and chopped into pieces in order to feed the other tenants in the apartments *above*. It seems the film is trying to project the message that there are, ironically, stringent and exclusive hierarchies in times of virtual anarchy and perhaps this means that people actually crave boundaries, they want to be governed in some way by

[154] Wikipedia. « Veblen Good. »
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veblen_good
[155] Baudrillard, p.23

some form of authority. It may take the pressure out of a purely self-governing existence, it may make them feel safer, or it simply may give people someone to blame when things go horribly wrong. Whatever the reason, if cannibalism is presented in this film as the ultimate display of anarchy, then the characters of *Delicatessen* convey the idea that perhaps it is the very anarchists who shy away from anarchy in its purest form. They have created rules in the face of rulelessness. The film seems to suggest a system which embraces balance, which provides the parameters for one to pursue individual freedom, whilst not encroaching on the freedom of another.

Whether consumption in all its variations contributes to our freedom or detracts from it is a matter of personal opinion. But what drives this consumption, the process of advertising, of being convinced that we must have something, or more characteristically of modernity, many things, is largely out of our control as it surrounds us and penetrates our internal insecurities and desires, often without our even being aware of it. The tenants of the building reinstate the solid hierarchy in which they live over and over, with the inferior or superior cuts of meat they buy, how much they pay for it and how often they buy it. We see this system at work in the first scene of the film, with the tenants lining up at Boucher's counter, as he weighs the chunks of meat, decides on a price, no doubt a higher one than the last time and snatches his bag of corn from the customer, after which he calls out, "Who's next?". The film takes the consequences of consumption to an extreme: as consumers in the real world, our greatest fear is that we might fall behind on our consumption of goods, Veblen goods preferably, and we will no longer be able to keep up with the proverbial Jones's. In the 'economy' of the film, falling behind on consumption, on paying the butcher with a decent sized bag of grains and keeping him satisfied, means that the tenants actually risk being consumed themselves. All the while, every tenant that queues at the counter of the evil butcher has walked under the banner of the pig that hangs over the door way of the delicatessen, the banner that advertises pork meat, but sells human flesh. This banner is representative of the reality that advertising drives consumption, which maintains social hierarchies. The tenants locate the butchery according to this advertisement and when it is their turn to buy, the size and cut of meat they are able to afford will once again position them in the pyramid of consumerism. In

reality too, it is the advertisements we consume around us which crystallise the reality that there exists a target market either far above, or below us in class and status. In the film, we see only two forms of advertising. The first is the sign of a pig that hangs over the entrance of the butchery, a clear symbol of the greedy appetites and excessive consumption that has destroyed this society. It is also a sign of deception (as is typical of all good advertising) in that pork is certainly no longer on the list of items one could buy at *this* delicatessen, nor any other animal-meat product for that matter. The tenants are not deceived by the sign however, and perhaps this is a reference to the idea that the things we buy *create* the desire to consume more, which makes us far more vulnerable to advertising. This echoes Mourrain's argument that "categories of objects… tyrannically induce categories of persons"[156], rather than the other way around. With hardly any "objects" left in their possession, the tenants are not fooled by the advertisement, they understand they are not really buying pork, but they prefer that the Butcher disguise it as real meat so that they feel better about their choice of cannibalism.

The second introduction of advertising in the film is a scene in which Aurore's husband sits in his living room in front of the television, watching a 1940s-like advert for Kraft cheese. He laughs and tells Aurore she must come and watch it with him because it is so "funny". And so advertising has been transformed into comedy. It *is* comical to consider the idea that any form of advertising would have an influence in this society whatsoever. One cannot manipulate people into senselessly consuming things they are not even sure they *want* when they have lost everything they truly *need.* Therefore in the context of this film, advertising is a sheer waste. In a world where men are forced into eating their mothers-in-law, advertising is literally a joke. This way of representing the manipulation of advertising is one of the film's greatest tools. As discussed earlier, the element of humour causes us to consider the idea more seriously. It may even reflect the filmmakers' personal view of the advertising industry, but it certainly adds severity to the deception inherent in producing and consuming advertisements, hinting to us that the only triumph of advertising is simply that it preys on the weakest form of desire, and we may even laugh at ourselves at how easily manipulated and greedy *we* are. *That,* however, *is* a

[156] Baudrillard, p.16-17

triumph – a piece of film that causes the audience to view a distant and remote environment on a movie screen and be sufficiently moved to peer deeply into themselves.

When the kind-natured former circus clown, Louison first arrives at the delicatessen, he asks Boucher if he has the right address, to which Boucher replies, “Whether here or there, this is nowhere”, thus adding to the general sense that the world has virtually ended and that the space and time with which any civilisation usually functions has disappeared along with basics such as meat and fish .The sense of nostalgia for these two vital sources of protein is shown to us in the scene between the Kube brothers, Robert and Roger, who produce tin-like gadgets with a series of holes punched into them, which produce the mooing noise of a cow. The two brothers manufacture this ‘toy’ in the method of a production line in their apartment, which reminds one of a kind of consuming that is very different to the one most obviously craved in this story, the consumption that is capitalism. The very nature of the process of buying and selling has changed in this society. Corn and lentils seem to be the most sought after currency, and yet when Louison offers his taxi driver a bag of lentils as payment, the driver refuses and demands Louison’s shoes instead.

And so, the fundamentals of any society, such as daylight savings, basic geography, and yes, capitalism, are the things that reassure us that society is functioning and should certainly continue to function. The very nature of *demand*, on which capitalism is solely based, has also changed completely. The potential demand for the quirky toys that the Kube brothers produce is that they are gadgets which make the noise of a now extinct species. Thus if people ‘buy’ this product, their demand is for the memory of a cow, not for the cow itself. During production, Robert asks if they can open a window to release the fumes from all the glue in the room. Roger replies that he would rather keep it closed as the smell reminds him of fish and therefore brings back “memories”. Baudrillard comes to mind here, and his idea that consumption is irrepressible. There is a sense of hubris here in that the characters of the film have continued to consume even when meat itself has run out, only the idea of meat remains and money has been replaced with corn.

The opening scene of the film is Boucher sharpening his carving knife, the piercing sound echoing through the irrigation pipes of the building so that the tenants in the surrounding apartments can hear it. This recurs in the film at various times with different characters: Aurore is tortured and driven to multiple suicide attempts by what she believes to be her own dementia as she listens to an eerily invisible voice communicating with her, which turns out at the end of the film to be Roger calling to her through a pipe sticking out of his bathroom wall. Boucher listens to Julie, his daughter, and Louison through the piping as they begin their love affair and Julie listens through the piping to hear if Louison is still alive, not yet murdered by her bloodthirsty father and she is reassured when she hears Louison snoring in his bed. It seems that Jeunet and Caro are communicating to the viewer the reality that in times of deprivation, there may be *physical* connectedness between people, as they are brought together out of a shared desperation, but there is a severe *emotional* and *spiritual* fragmentation that occurs. It is a well known fact that although, in this time of modernity, rapid urbanisation ensures that we are living in closer and closer proximity to our fellow human beings than ever before, it is by no means a guarantee that we are necessarily *caring* for one another more. In fact, in today's super-competitive, capitalistic society, we have less regard for each other than ever before.

In the starving society in which the story of *Delicatessen* is told, this postmodern reality is taken to an extreme. The characters of the story will not only sabotage one another to survive, they will eat each other. Only Louison and Julie display acts of selflessness in their growing love for one another and whilst the other tenants of the building use the inter-connected piping in order to spy on and plot against one another, the lovers use it to protect one another and remain connected. She accidentally feeds him tea that puts him into a deep sleep and after she carries him home, she drops his key into the pipe in her apartment back down to Louison. These are the few signs of rare trust that we see in this film; Louison and Julie, Robert and Aurore, and the Boucher's lover, who assists Louison and Julie in their escape. She is a character who cultivates a compassion for others as the film progresses, even though she is Boucher's lover. She 'changes sides', which is a reference to those in the Second World War in France who did the same, switched from

collaborator to resistance. When Julie invites Louison to her apartment for tea, they have the following discussion:

> *Julie*: Thank you… you rescued my parcel on the steps. I was very moved by your concern.
> *Louison*: That goes without saying.
> *Julie*: No, no on the contrary. People usually only think of themselves nowadays.
> *Louison*: Only because they have nothing. Deep down, they're still good people.

Hoping to appear more attractive to Louison, Julie takes off her glasses, without which she is virtually "blind as a bat", and attempts to serve tea to Louison without them. Whilst one may be tempted to label this scene with the 'love is blind' cliché, the message that is inherent in Julie's behaviour is that it reveals and induces trust, a rare commodity in a starving society. We see how vital it is not to lose sight of one's possessions even for a moment, which is clearly shown in one of the scenes on the stairwell, when the postman comes to deliver a parcel to Julie and drops it when he falls down the stairs after tripping on a loose step. Tapioca, his wife and their two sons attack the unsuspecting postman and attempt to fight him for the small package and are only persuaded to relinquish this violent pursuit when threatened at gun point.

One wonders when viewing this film whether the characters are desperate because they were greedy, or greedy because they are desperate. The film urges us to consider the difference, not only between need and desire, but between greed and desperation. Although we may not have been given a clear and definitive answer, the resolution to this film as shown to us by Louison and Julie is a romantic one. In the midst of such tragic and desperate circumstances, the genuine and sensitive relationship that emerges between Louison and Julie continues to grow. And so perhaps Jeunet and Caro are suggesting that, in order to remedy the consumption, destruction, indeed *cannibalism* of our own planet, the solution is human connection. Cyberspace has rendered the world easily accessible, and therefore smaller than ever before, but our preference for virtual communication has ensured that human beings are less connected than ever before as well. Our reliance on

technology to inform and connect seems to have taken the 'humanness' out of humanity. Our priority is to be *in*formed, but our relationships have *de*formed. Julie and Louison take us back to the imperative of human connectivity. Their communication is in fact mainly with*out* words, it is musical. A loss of human connection is therefore a loss of humanity itself and within this context cannibalism is conceivable, perhaps almost acceptable and maybe even one day, inevitable.

Boucher, in contrast to his daughter, is the embodiment of greed in the film. He is focused solely on his growing wealth and motivated purely by greed. Boucher discusses the food supply situation of the country with the cab driver who delivers Louison and there is mention of some kind of famine:

> *Boucher:* How are things in town?
> *Taxi Driver*: Terrible. Really terrible. It's the rationing. They'd eat their shoes. Kind of touch and go.
> *Boucher*: They haven't got any street smarts.
> *Taxi Driver*: It's a mess. Till things grow back.
> *Boucher:* Nothing will ever grow back. Ever.
> *Taxi Driver*: You're quite the optimist.
> *Boucher:* Get that through your thick skull. Is your hair ever growing back?
> *Taxi Driver*: No.
> *Boucher*: You see? It's the same thing.

Aside from the concern that some of the tenants cultivate for one another, there is a general sense of lawlessness and disorder that resides over the entire building. As a result of the cannibalism that this society has turned to in order to survive, morality or religion is virtually non-existent. Instead, the tenants of the building, with Boucher in full control, have established their own system of morality. This is shown most obviously when Boucher confronts Tapioca that he is behind on his rent:

> *Boucher:* Want to pay up? Give me the granny tonight.

Tapioca: She's one of us. It's against the rules.

Boucher: The rules, the rules… the age limit is a rule too. She's only good for pâté

Tapioca: She's my mother-in-law.

Out of pure desperation to feed his children, Tapioca sends his mother-in-law out onto the stairwell at night, which all the tenants know is tantamount to either maiming or death, which Robert experiences first hand on the same night, having gone out onto the stairwell too and lost his leg to the ruthless Boucher. And so we see that Boucher has instilled a quasi-religion of sorts in which the rules are bent according to his own needs and desires, thus revealing even further the reality of a dismembered society. In Tanahil's *Flesh and Blood,* there is a chapter entitled 'Eating People is Wrong', in which he explains the role of religion in a society with regard to the potential for cannibalism. Tannahil argues that the trouble started, not when human beings discovered the idea of a soul, nor that the soul lives on beyond the death of the body, nor that this soul may soon exist in a place called the "afterworld".[157] But rather, the chaos began when humans decided to populate this afterworld with "gods of their own kind - human enough to understand their problems and superhuman enough to solve them - it [therefore] became possible to shuffle off some of the responsibility". Thus what Tannahil is arguing here is that as long as man is his own god, the levels of disorder, savagery and chaos to which we may stoop are largely immeasurable and unpredictable. And so with religion completely non-existent in the film, Tannahil explains what the significance of its absence is:

> On those occasions when instances of cannibalism are reported in the modern world, there is always talk of breaking 'humanity's oldest tabu'. Yet the tabu on eating human flesh is by no means the oldest tabu in the world – just one of those most deeply ingrained in the religions which have shaped the societies and beliefs of the most influential nations in the world.[158]

[157] Tannahil, Reay. *Flesh & Blood. A History of the Cannibal Complex*. London: Abacus, 1996. p.65
[158] Tannahil, p.29

Sanday explains that the three major anthropological debates surrounding cannibalism are as follows: the first is a "psychogenic" explanation of cannibalism which suggests that the practice of it is in order to satisfy various "psychosexual needs". The second is a "materialist" argument, which is a "utilitarian, adaptive model – people adapt to hunger or protein deficiency by eating one another". The third theory about cannibalism is simply that it fits into "the broader cultural logic of life, death and reproduction"[159]. In order to understand the character of Boucher, perhaps it is necessary to make a connection between Sanday's first and third explanations. In light of the third argument, it is logical then that in order to reproduce we must live and in order to live we must eat. This explanation introduces a basic need for the continuation of a species. Boucher is not reproducing, however. He is only indulging and destroying. Thus perhaps the connection between two differing explanations for cannibal behaviour is the difference between sex and reproduction, need and desire, craving and indulgence. The craving of the tenants for human flesh may be seen by the troglodytes as indulgence, yet the tenants view it only as the necessary fulfilment of a most primal need.

Thus the needs of a society, both collective and individual, are translated into a very extreme desperation for the purposes of this film. *Delicatessen* presents a very obvious sense of a society's desperation through the microcosm of one building and the people who inhabit it. We see this deprivation in the immediate physical landscape, in Louison being forced to give up his shoes to the taxi driver because the usual currency of lentils is no longer sufficient for the driver, who is also clearly a desperate man. We see it on the faces of the customers who stand in line to buy human flesh, the butcher's knife, scale and the way the body parts are wrapped, all serving to normalise the ongoing cannibalism that dominates this society.

The use of cannibalism allows Jeunet and Caro to reference an entire history of cannibal activity. With Sanday's second argument in mind: a famine in Italy in 450 AD caused parents to cannibalise their children. From 695 to 700, England and Ireland suffered a

[159] Sanday, Peggy.Reeves. *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism As A Cultural System.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. p. 198

famine in which it was recorded, "men ate each other". Bulgaria experienced extreme drought from 841 to 851 and Scotland's famine of 936 was so severe, "people began to devour one another".[160] Thus it would seem that this film and the individual stories that unfold within it fall into the framework of the materialist hypothesis. As Louison points out to Julie, at their very core, the tenants of the building (and surely Jeunet is suggesting all of France) are basically good people, who, as a result of desperate starvation, have been forced into dishonourable acts.

But perhaps it would be short sighed to leave it at that. Boucher's character is an ambivalent one. He is bloodthirsty, devoid of all mercy in the way that he seeks out his victims and yet, he is the provider of sustenance for an expectant group of very hungry people. The only words of sympathy or goodness which he reveals to his lover are merely a repetition of what he heard Louison saying to Julie through the intricate piping system of the building. Nevertheless, essentially, the existence of the majority of the characters in the story is almost totally dependant upon the butcher. Perhaps this reality is best displayed in the scene of Boucher making love to his mistress. As the springs of their bed squeak with every thrust, so too do the actions of the tenants take place in time to the springs: Julie strums at her cello, another tenant pumps his bicycle wheel, Tapioca's wife beats the dust out of her carpet, the metronome in someone's apartment ticks back and forth, Louison makes strokes of paint on the ceiling in time to this and the Kube brothers make their cow toys, punching holes in the tins and testing for the 'moo' noise, also in time to the actions of the other tenants, which in turn is in time with the butcher. This entire sequence of actions, its rhythm almost musical, its quickening pace and finally its conclusion, orgasm, begins and ends with the butcher. The result for him is release and satisfaction, for the others it is the snapping of the cello strings, the bursting of the bicycle wheel, Louison crashing to the floor off the ladder from which he was painting the ceiling. Thus it seems the process of destruction is fetishised and the psychogenic explanation of cannibalism could be connected to the film as well, when considering *how* the sexual needs of the arch-cannibal of the film are fulfilled.

[160] Tannahil, p.65

The tenants of the delicatessen fear Boucher and so in his lovemaking scene, we see that they operate according to his tempo, they function in time with *his* rhythm. What does this communicate about our own societies? Are we sufficiently manipulated by the forces of mass consumerism that we march, like soldiers, to a pulse that dictates what we buy, when and where we buy it and how much of it? We are influenced by what others have, by what others think we should have, according to Thorstein Veblen, and therefore we keep consuming as we strive to integrate, to assimilate into a utopian ideal where every one *fits in.* Thus Jeunet and Caro address questions about social consensus in contemporary society and to what extent this furthers our quest for a utopia. The only hint of this ideal in the film is perhaps Julie's apartment. In stark contrast to the rest of the building, the tenants' homes which appear cold, damp and sparse, Julie's home is painted in a warm peach hue, decorated with trinkets and ornaments. Julie's apartment creates a feeling of comfort and well-being, which the film tragically lacks. She invites Louison to her home for tea, and the ritualisation inherent in the tradition of tea time reminds the viewer of how reassuring meal times are, as well as of the fact that people unite and share food with one another in order to connect.

Connection and harmony amongst the members of a society are the foundations of the utopian ideal. This harmony is represented by the music Julie plays for Louison at their tea date, where he joins her with an entirely different kind of instrument and the two lovers create music together. The image of this music scene is introduced in the beginning of the film and *re*introduced at the end, except in the final scene there are children playing nearby. This is what one would expect of children, rather than one of the previous scenes of the two young boys smoking cigarettes whilst sitting on the stairs of the building, a profoundly dystopian image. The children mimic Julie and Louison playing their instruments, reminding us of the importance of passing on to generations after us a world in which vibrancy and vitality have been restored and preserved. *Delicatessen* works with the idea that it is our greed and materialism that cause us to endlessly consume and that humanity may survive only if we acknowledge that we cannot take more from the world than what it can offer us, and that if we continue to consume our way through the planet, we in turn consume ourselves.

The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover

Greg Dancer writes, "*The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* feels like a test: how much flesh, sex and violence can be put up onto the screen before the audience will stop enjoying it, become uncomfortable and begin to dislike images with which they would normally associate eroticism and pleasure?".[161] In contrast, Elizabeth Jones argues that in the realm of film, "We feel the pain of others without the fear which reality imposes. In fact we feel pain with pleasure. Because we know it isn't real, we can enjoy the pain".[162] At certain points in this film, we want to avert our eyes from the screen, as we cannot quite comprehend what we have just seen. Yet the film achieves a level of fascination along with the revolting, so that it is actually difficult to do so. We are repulsed, yet we continue to consume. In fact, we develop an appetite to view and therefore consume even more. As viewers, we are forced to question all of this, especially what it is that keeps us fascinated. Jones asks, "Is our fascination with the pain of others unethical and inhuman or is it all too human?"[163] This chapter explores issues of politics, violence, revenge and sex, all through the approach of defamiliarisation, the insertion of theatre and the use of the grotesque. Greenaway demands that we question the very nature of appetite itself - our own, others', the worlds.

Drawing on Jones's argument, as viewers of this kind of film in the present day, the trope of 'the gross out' is all too familiar, especially with regard to food and eating. The global phenomenon of reality television has newly revealed the sensation-seeking, fame-hungry, flawed logic of humanity, in the form of the unashamed (albeit contrived) display of the *gross.* Television shows such as *Survivor* and *Fear Factor* have shown us that the only *reality* in reality T.V is that viewers love to watch the contestants on screen eating the most unfathomably vile things, as a way of competing, of showing mastery over disgust, of making the inedible edible. The gross out trope in *Survivor* is also to do with cultural relativism as there is a prejudice exposed by the contestants in their disgust at the idea of

[161] Dancer, Greg. "*The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*: Violence and Voyeurism." http://www.petergreenaway.co.uk
[162] www.petergreenaway.co.uk
[163] www.petergreenaway.co.uk

eating some of the local, relatively unusual dishes of the remote island communities in which the show takes place. Our addiction to the revolting eating contests we watch on television lies in just that, *watching.* We find a perverse enjoyment in seeing other people choking down rotting fish heads, pickled bulls' testicles or fried tarantulas precisely because we do not partake. We witness. Taking into account the obvious difference between reality television shows and the movies, the impact of such grotesque displays is extremely similar. The purpose of Greenaway's film is that it is so visceral, it requires, or rather demands, a very physical and bodily reaction from its viewer. Western societies seem to rely on science, logic and intellect in order to relate to the body, whilst other cultures embrace a far more organic approach, one in which the mind, the body and the earth are connected. Upon viewing the very first scene of the film, a scene of coprophagia, we cannot help but respond in an earthly, bodily way, which resonates and is cultivated as the film continues. Perhaps Greenaway's intention in this approach is that if we are sickened by watching a person consume something which should not be consumed, this should force us to reflect on our own indulgent, superfluous and sometimes obscene consumption. Surely the passivity of watching rather than partaking, is, according to Greenaway, a way of relinquishing all accountability. If one is not involved, one does not have to assume responsibility, and so he forces our involvement with the visceral directness of this film.

Staying with the use of the *gross* in television and film, there is also political significance in the use of the *grotesque* as it is at the heart of Bahktin's theories of the Carnivalesque. The term 'grotesque' is from the Italian word for grottos, *grotteschi,* ruins in which statuettes of warped figures were discovered in the XV and XVI centuries. The significance of the grotesque in the carnivals of Medieval Europe, as well as its application in this film, is that it involves "disruption and distortion of hierarchical or canonical assumptions. The notion combines ugliness and ornament, the bizarre and the ridiculous, the excessive and the unreal".[164] The film presents these conflicting images to us; ornate dining room in which the ugliest displays of violence take place, beautiful

[164] The Division of Rare Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. "The Grotesque." http://fanatastic.library.cornell.edu/grotesque.php

French cuisine being eaten and then nauseatingly regurgitated (by Mitchell, one of Albert's employees). The effectiveness of the grotesque is that it introduces the disruption of order, the tumbling of hierarchies and opposition to high art. Greenaway makes a very stern political statement about the Thatcherite system in *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* with the use of grotesque images, as "it brings down to earth anything ineffable or authoritarian, a task achieved principally through mockery".[165] Greenaway feeds to his audience the fusion of that which seemingly cannot be fused; the sexual with the unthinkably cruel, the delicious with the grotesque. The film's first line, screeched violently by Albert to one of his victims, is a message from Greenaway to his viewers as well: "Come on now, open your mouth… learn to appreciate your food!". At times we feel we are being fed a sumptuously visual feast. At others, we feel the most grotesque spectacle is being shoved down our throats. Yet no matter which, if we want to turn away, the director will simply not let us. *The Cook The Thief His Wife and Her Lover* reveals in the most shocking possible way the effect of appetite, consumption, and an appetite *for* consumption. Greenaway himself explains, "This is a movie about consumer society, it's about greed – a society's, a man's".[166]

For filmmakers of today, the challenge is to present material that conveys a certain message, yet in as novel a way as possible, thereby avoiding the boredom and anomie from which the modern viewer may suffer. Mose explains this challenge as "the struggle for originality, the quest for difference, the attempt to project reality within a new light".[167] And so, for Peter Greenaway, a piece of film that delves into what he believes to be the materialism and greed of Margaret Thatcher's Britain and the entire world would have to arrive at our cinemas in all its shock and glory, as *this* bizarre piece of cinema. Even if its message is lost or disregarded, it certainly leaves its viewers thoroughly unsettled. At its most essential level, this is a film that intends to wrench us far from the orbit of the familiar, from the comfortable perceptions we have cultivated

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[165] http://fanatastic.library.cornell.edu/grotesque.php
[166] Armstrong, Raymond. "All-Consuming Passions: Peter Greenaway's *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover." Reel Food: Essays on Food and Film. Ed. Anne L.*Bower. New York: Routledge, 2004. 219-235. p.224
[167] Mose, Kenrick. *Defamiliarisation in the Work of Gabriel Garcia Marquez From 1947-1967.* Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989. p.2

about the world and instead *serves up* a spectacle which, whether one is repulsed or fascinated by, one will certainly not forget in a hurry. Greenaway draws on the method of *defamiliarisation,* a term first conceived by Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky, who recognised the need to create *newness*, via the use of surprise. Translated from the Russian *ostranenie,* defamiliarisation is the process of "making strange the habitual by presenting it in a novel light", which is "created to remove the automatism of perception [and produce] the vision which results from that deautomized perception".[168]

Anthropologist Mary Douglas discusses the process of 'Deciphering a Meal', in which she argues that "food categories encode, and therefore structure, social events" and that they "constitute a social boundary system; the predictable structure of each meal creates order out of potential disorder. The meal is thus a microcosm of wider social structures and boundary definitions".[169] The structure and order associated with a formal meal is a very effective tool for defamiliarisation as it produces the juiciest of ironies. The meal is a ritual. It is repetitive and therefore familiar. And so in *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover,* it is the *restaurant,* a space that represents and encourages the decorum which Douglas describes, that will host the absolute chaos and *dis*order that ensues in this film. All the comforting familiarity of a meal is deconstructed, as the Last Supper of the film is an act of cannibalism: "In this context, the process of being fed clearly has more to do with mortification rather than nutrition, punishment rather than pleasure, and ultimately… death rather then life".[170]

Greenaway's intentions with *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* are to expose the pitfalls, injustice and shortcomings of the Thatcherite era, a regime he regarded as one of rampant and unadulterated capitalism, privatisation and, most tragically for Greenaway, little effort made to fund and support the arts. Greenaway himself found funding for this film in Holland and he pays tribute to this by naming the restaurant in the film, *Le Hollandais.* Also, the head chef of the restaurant, Richard, is the only character

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[168] Shklovsky, Victor. "Art as Technique." *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays.* Eds. Lee Lemon & Marion Reis. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965. 20-45. p.22
[169] Lupton, p.9
[170] Armstrong, p.228-9

in the entire film who is not at all intimidated by the aggressive dogma of the Thief and asserts himself every time Albert attempts to bully him. What is most noticeable about the relationship between the Thief and the Cook is that Albert does not attack Richard as violently as he does the other characters, perhaps because Richard is bold and confrontational with him. Greenaway presents Richard as the enlightened, significantly non-English artist, untainted by the self absorption of British Thatcherism, and also the one who provides the various hiding places (the plucking room, the bread room, the cold storage room) for Georgina to have her affair. Richard is the one who supports the searching of the two lovers to find comfort, sensuality and freedom. He provides the safe space for them to break free from Albert's oppressive grip, if only for a few moments at a time.

The Thief has no artistic or culinary appreciation for the beautiful food Richard produces. He is in the restaurant business for the sole purpose of making money. Schlotterbeck explains therefore that *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* is "an angry film. The 1980s political situation that existed in Britain was of such extreme self-interest and greed, and there's a way in which *The Cook* is a parody of consumer society, personified in the Thief".[171] In one of the very first scenes, Albert tries to contribute to the décor of the restaurant by introducing a massive and gaudy neon sign with the letters of Richard's name, misspell, strung up across the kitchen. There is a power shortage and the luminous green and blue monstrosity suddenly spews sparks and then explodes altogether, causing a black out in most of the kitchen. Needham explains that this represents Thatcher's attempt to involve herself and her purely capitalist policies in the art world. The fact that Richard, the artist's name is spelt incorrectly shows what Greenaway considers to be her lack of appreciation for art and culture.[172] In order to illustrate his views about this society, Greenaway emphasises a representation of falsehood, of superficiality, from the décor to the food: *Haute cuisine* is served in *Le Hollandais,* which according to Greenaway is merely a "false art" which serves only to heighten the pretentiousness of

[171] Schlotterbeck, Jesse. "Cannibal Culture: Greenaway's *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* as Cultural Critique of Thatcherism."
http://www.geocities.com/athens/forum/5820/cook.htm

[172] Needham, Christopher. Freeing Georgina. "Music, Books and Violence in Peter Greenaway's Film, *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover."* English Honours Essay, 2002. p.11

the ostentatious diners who consume it. Hence food is a powerful way to learn about those who eat it.[173] In order to add to the artificiality the film is trying to portray, Armstrong explains that *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* is the first of Greenaway's films that is produced completely within a studio, thus deliberately creating an atmosphere of the artificial in which we do not see the world outside of this new and strange one and the one we do see does not seem quite real. And so Greenaway's choice of an artificial set is in order to portray a shallow and superficial society, encouraged by Thatcher and her government.

The irony about Thatcher, according to Pearce, is that she "celebrated a culture of rampant materialism… fundamentally at odds with her own values which were essentially conservative".[174] She was premier for longer than anyone else in twentieth-century Britain and won three election victories successively in 1979, 1983 and 1987, leading Conservative governments for eleven years in total. A hugely controversial politician, Thatcher has been both idolised and demonised simultaneously. Her monetarist policies allowed for free market forces to operate, keeping taxation minimal and privatising state-controlled industry. She was a right wing economic thinker, whose governments attempted to reduce welfare spending and insisted that "It was not governments which caused unemployment… it was trade unions, whose demands for higher wages priced their members out of jobs".[175] This was her motivation behind the successful defeat of the 1984-85 miners' strike. Thatcher attained a "high degree of personal dominance in Britain", and eventually began using the 'Royal We' ("We are a grandmother"). But perhaps most significant for Greenaway was her refusal to "prop up" small or ailing industries, such as the arts, and this film specifically, for which he was unable to achieve any government funding. The Thatcherite system encouraged consumption on a mass and meaningless scale according to Greenaway, and therefore he creates a set for his film that is totally artificial, representative of the superficiality inherent in meaningless consumerism. A Dutch painting, Franz Hals's famous "Banquet

[173] Armstrong, p.224
[174] Pearce, R, Pearce, Robert. "Thatcherism: New Perspective 9:3." http://www.history-ontheweb.co.uk/concepts/thatcherism93.htm
[175] http://www.history-ontheweb.co.uk/concepts/thatcherism93.htm

of the Officers of the St George Civic Guard" (1616) looms over the set in order to pay homage to the country in which Greenaway found financial backing for this film.

Staying with the image of falsity in this film, the most alluring and prominent set of the film is the dining room, in which Hals's painting dominates. Albert and his band of fellow criminals *resemble* the officers in the painting, with their regal looking matching outfits, sitting round a table eating dinner, yet resemblance is the only similarity. As Jones describes, "The sets are lavish recreations of the Baroque paintings of Hals and the Dutch School. Opulent banqueting tables laden with cascades of rich meats and succulent fruits echo the Dutch still life paintings so prized in the seventeenth century".[176] Thus the falsity of the set is emphasised even further as Albert and his cronies may appear to mirror the image of the men in the painting, but their greed and destructive behaviour betray them and their lack of originality or authenticity emerges. As viewers, we may be moved to consider the various false images *we* project, with the superficial consumerism that dominates our society.

The juxtaposition of these two images, one in front of the other: the massive painting of the officers around their festive table and the men of the film at their own dinner party, serves to reiterate the falsehood of a society that favours selfish gain and merely pretends, as Thatcher is accused of in this case, to care for the endeavours of the artist because they do not necessarily rake in the corporate millions. The officers in the painting mirror our own experience, as they watch the spectacle of Albert and his men, as they make a mockery of the painted image they attempt to emulate, and as they insult and ruin the food they eat. From our vantage point, we share in the experience of the "virtual diners" of the film, the officers sitting at their banquet in Hals's painting. Their experience of viewing the action in the restaurant mirrors our own viewing experience, thus drawing us closer into the drama.[177] It seems therefore that Greenaway views Thatcher's form of government as a system that 'puts on a show', but has little integrity behind it. Thus Armstrong explains that "the synthetic environment of the studio was perfectly suited to

[176] www.petergreenaway.co.uk
[177] Armstrong, p.221

the director's purpose, since he was primarily interested in cultivating a heightened sense of artifice and theatricality".[178]

To accentuate this, Greenaway uses the highly artificial technique of colour-coding the atmosphere, the sets and the costumes. Each of the six areas of the film is divided distinctly by colour. The back of the restaurant is "arctic blue", the place where the horrific torture of Roy takes place and is thus aptly portrayed as a cold place. The kitchen is "jungle green", the colour of organic, vibrant vitality. We see fresh ingredients of all kinds being prepared by Richard's staff in order to make his signature beautiful dishes. The dining room is "blood red", which is appropriate as much of Albert's violence is carried out in this space (his brutalisation of Naughty Willie, his stabbing of Patricia and his general abuse of his colleagues and the surrounding diners) as well as, ironically, his own death. The toilet is "heavenly white", the place where Georgina and Michael first discover each other physically for the first time and where they sneak off to be together before Richard allows them to use the hidden places of his kitchen. The book depository is "golden brown" and the hospital "egg-yolk yellow"[179], both warm colours that represent comfort, nourishment and healing.

To add to the fantastical drama, as Albert, Georgina or one of Albert's crew walk from one room to the next, their costumes change colour to match the colour of that room, reminding us that consumerism is fickle, heavily dependant on the ever-changing trends of fashion and thus unfaithful to the consumer him/herself. The colour black is also utilised, for all the connotations it possesses, in order to address the subject of death in the film. Richard tells Georgina that the most expensive items on his menu are black; grapes, black olives, blackcurrants, black truffles and caviar. He explains that, "People like to remind themselves of death – eating black food is like consuming death – like saying, ha, ha, Death! – I'm eating you!" Greenaway seems all too aware that, in order to 'consume' this film the way he intends us to, one eats with the eyes first and then the

[178] Armstrong, p.223
[179] Armstrong, p.223

mouth, and as Armstrong puts it, the director is therefore "concerned almost as much with the palette as he is with the palate".[180]

Another political aspect of the film which Greenaway introduces, in addition to his views on the Thatcherite era and consumerism run amok more generally, is the issue of racism. Albert is of course the archetypal racist, contemptuous of the human race as a whole, but specifically those who threaten him with their difference in culture, language and values. Greenaway uses food and eating to introduce and address this. At the end of the first scene, a young Asian boy who works in the kitchen brings Albert a bucket of water to wash the faeces off his hands after he has tortured Roy with it. Albert looks at the boy and says, "I never liked Chinese food. By the look of you now, I like it even less", before dumping the entire bucket over the boy's head. Later on, he proclaims at the table in the middle of yet another lavish meal, "I think these Ethiopians like starving. It keeps them slim and graceful". Another example of Albert's prejudice is a scene in which Richard approaches Albert's table as the waiters present the party with their food. Albert insults Richard and his culture in order to entertain his guests:

> *Albert:* You should thicken your French accent up a bit, hey? Make it sound as if you've just come over from *Paris* [pronounced 'paree']. Give'em a bit of that *ooh la la* stuff. Bit more of that *Parlais vous Francais.*
>
> *Richard*: You would not understand me, Mr Spica.
>
> *Albert*: I don't know. I've always been able to understand French Letters!

At which point his cronies burst into loud and mocking laughter. The culinary heritage and culture with which Richard cooks his food is totally lost on Albert, who is in the restaurant business for purely financial gain. His prejudice toward French culture even lends itself to further abuse of his wife. When listening to the menu as Richard calls it out in the kitchen at the very beginning of the film, Albert mispronounces *Poisson* and when Georgina corrects him, he slaps her violently with the menu. It is also significant that Albert displays such mockery and contempt for the French cuisine for which Georgina

[180] Armstrong, p.223

has such “an excellent palate”, as Richard points out to Albert. Albert’s prejudice is thus a way of extending yet more disrespect in his wife’s direction, and this is seen even more blatantly when, whilst Georgina is in the restroom, he pours salt and wine all over Georgina’s food, to the amusement of Rose, an insane old woman who thinks Albert is hilarious.

Thus Albert finds a way to ruin and degrade even the smallest pleasure his wife may have, the fine French cuisine Richard produces, and so we find ourselves relieved for her when she finds another pleasure in which to indulge, her Lover. It is worth noting at this point that, although food and sex are connected throughout the film, this is one of the first examples of it and this correlation seems to suggest that the two are largely interchangeable, as both satisfy a type of hunger. After the lovers have found each other, we only see them actually eating on one other occasion, but their relationship is predominantly defined by the fulfilling of their sexual appetites. Food is also encoded in language in this film, as we see the non-verbal communication of Michael and Georgina through their ordering and eating of the same dish on the menu. However, staying with the racial element of the film, in addition to the many cultures he has thus far insulted, it seems Albert has anti-Semitic leanings as well. When Albert brings Michael over to his table to in order to introduce him to his wife, he exclaims mockingly, “Is that a Jewish name Michael? Do you eat kosher food then, Michael? Sit down and tell us all about kosher food Michael”. As it turns out, Michael is actually not Jewish, but Albert’s contempt for the human race in general encompasses an intolerance for all cultures and religions not his own. Finally, when Albert is insulted by the “intimate details” that Georgina has shared with Michael about her sex life in front of the entire table, he drags her into the kitchen and confronts her about it: “What’s all this about a gynaecologist? Who is he? It better be a she… I don’t want some bloke fingering my wife about!” Georgina, temporarily empowered by Michael’s presence at her table and fully aware of the kind of response that will incense Albert the most, responds:

> It's a man. He's Jewish. And he's from Ethiopia. His mother is a Roman Catholic; he's been in prison in South Africa. He's as black as the Ace of Spades and he probably drinks his own pee!

Albert, shocked and infuriated, punches Georgina in the stomach and drags her out of the kitchen, into his car and home for yet another beating, undoubtedly one of the worst she will have. Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* also addresses cultural prejudices and racism through the prism of food. Vince and Jules cannot fathom the idea of the Dutch using mayonnaise to accompany their *French* Fries and the childish, over-indulged Fabienne is portrayed as a weaker character in that she rejects the cuisine of her own French culture in favour of typically American food, blueberry pie and pancakes. The character of Pumpkin in *Pulp Fiction* also expresses the xenophobia of the West with his descriptions of "too many foreigners that own liquor stores – Vietnamese, Koreans", which he refers to with the racial slur "gooks" as well as his disdain for "old fucking Jews". Thus it seems the directors of these two vastly different films are extremely aware of the xenophobia and racism that they feel exists within the boundaries of the Western superpowers of the world. The relevance of prejudice, Albert's, Pumpkin's, Vince's and Jules's, is that these characters all consume in order to rise above their circumstances, above the other cultures that they belittle, to elevate themselves in class and status.

The discrimination these characters have for people of other cultures is clearly based on an assumed superiority over them. The Veblen Effect comes to mind, advanced by economist Thorstein Veblen, who argues that we desire and consume expensive goods in the hopes that our consumerism will lift us onto a higher social plane and that we consume out of an "associated desire to engage in emulative behaviour".[181] In the case of Albert and the other *Pulp Fiction* characters, this process functions simultaneously with the demeaning of *other* cultures, people who they believe are moving into the West in their droves and taking lucrative financial opportunities from deserving Westerners. Ironically, the characters of these films are criminals, the parasites of society, which is how they perceive foreigners. If prejudice is based on fear, fear of the *other,* the threat of

[181]Friedman, p.24

a culture which we do not understand, these films present the idea that much of our consumerism is based on fear as well, of being viewed as inferior in the social hierarchy of society, of not being *able* to consume, and this fear is projected onto the cultures which we believe threaten us. By consuming, be it in the culinary, criminal or financial realm, these men are able to temporarily alleviate this trepidation. All these assertions of intolerance in both films take place in connection with food, the medium that connects consumption and prejudice.

This idea can be connected to Löfgren's three components of the 'modern consumer'.[182] Commodification is the first, in which the consumer believes that only the possession of commodities will give their life meaning. The second is shallowness, as the consumer exists on "attitudes rather than values", and thus he/she lacks both integrity and authenticity in his/her consumption. Thirdly, the final component is fragmentation, an apt explanation for prejudice, as it is also based on "a lack of integration and coherence" in society and, indeed, within one's self. And so according to Löfgren, we buy things essentially because we believe they will exalt us over others. In the case of Greenaway's and Tarantino's characters, it is not simply the exaltation over fellow consumers, but also over other *cultures* they deem to be inferior.

If Greenaway is determined to define the nature of his characters through their approach to food, as well as shock his audiences through unusual and somewhat nauseating *uses* of food, it is surely because he is all too aware of what audiences are accustomed to viewing, of what their usual cinematic experience is. So he abandons the methodology of cinema in *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* almost completely and rather utilises the storytelling potency of the *stage*. This means that he can amplify the set and embellish the costume design, décor and even dialogue. Aside from his appreciation of the visceral directness of the theatre, Greenaway is also considering the honesty of the stage, as a far purer art form to the cinema, with its selective and deceptive angles, allowing us to see only what is shown to us through a narrow lens. This approach is appropriate as the film itself addresses deception, both of the self and the other and it

[182] Friedman, p.49

seems apt that he would use the integrity of the theatre in *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*. The union of theatre and cinema is also an extension of intertextual defamiliarisation, the mixture of two genres perhaps ordinarily regarded as artistically separate from one another. We view the parking lot, the kitchen and the dining room as the camera moves from one set to another through the walls of these rooms in one "continuous long shot" and there are very few cinematic 'cuts' of the camera from one scene to the next. The effect of this is that we are introduced to the set before the story unfolds within it; we are given the impression that there are no secrets, that there is a greater level of candour and sincerity in the story telling process.

As we enter the grand dining room, dramatic theatrical music blares when the huge doors open, signalling the start of the show. The size and shape of these doors resemble stage curtains and in fact, when the film finally comes to a close, actual red velvet stage curtains close on the final scene, rather than the usual cinematic black out. Dancer explains that many of the scenes take place before a stationary camera, thus the audience actually experiences the film as a theatre audience would. Also, when Roy approaches the kitchen, filthy and battered from Albert's abuse, Richard calls for a chair for Roy to sit down on and places it in front of the audience, so that Roy has to walk around it in order to sit down. "Narratively, there is no motivation behind Roy's actions, stylistically, it produces a theatrical effect".[183] There are huge double doors in the kitchen, the dining room and the book depository and so the characters "make an entrance" in the film, once again, as in the theatre. There is also very little of the manufacturing of suspense that is so typical of movie-making today, as Dancer explains, "When a character looks at an object, the audience can already see it within the frame. Thus the audience watches the scene as if from theatre seats".[184] At the beginning of the film, the camera follows Albert and his gang from the outside of the restaurant, through the kitchen and into the dining room. We do not lose sight of him while this happens, and in fact we feel as if we are walking *with* him. And so the film seeks to introduce a greater transparency to viewers who, in Greenaway's mind, exist in a society rampant with deceit and the effect is

[183] http://petergreenaway.co.uk/
[184] http://petergreenaway.co.uk/

defamiliarising; in the midst of the fanciful décor and artificially coloured sets, the message is a simple one and the intention is the pursuit of honesty.

The most effective tool in defamiliarising food, appetite and consumption in such a way as to force audiences to consider these issues more seriously, is, for Greenaway, to make the inedible edible. In our general viewing experiences, we do not expect the kind of consumption we see in this film; we are "offered a scene of coprophagia as a starter and, and later treated to an act of cannibalism for dessert".[185] In this first scene of the film Roy, a proprietor who has failed to pay his protection money to Albert, is stripped naked and force fed canine faeces. This scene, undoubtedly one of the most gruesome of the film, is shown as an introduction to the character of the Thief, a vile and cruel creature who will clearly go to any lengths to bring absolute degradation to his fellow human beings.[186] Perhaps more significantly, however, this scene also portrays the most severe betrayal and abuse of the human body; what is destined and designed to be discarded by the body has now been forced back into it. There is no build up to this grotesque display, but rather it is the first image we witness and this is intentional on Greenaway's behalf: despite some of the delicate and sumptuous ingredients and meals we may see during the film, we cannot help but feel nauseated throughout as we cannot shake the memory of that first scene. Albert is the owner of the restaurant in which these beautiful dishes are produced and he is also the representation of the greediest and most destructive member of a capitalist society and so perhaps the ill feeling that resonates with us throughout the film after viewing the very first scene is Greenaway's message that anything produced out of greed and abuse can never be truly savoured or enjoyed. If the less fortunate in society have to be exploited so that the more affluent can benefit, as is clearly Greenaway's view of classic capitalism (in other words, if Roy has to be abused so that Albert can maintain his business interests, and affluent diners can continue eating exclusive, over-priced cuisine at Le Hollandais), then that society is sick.

[185] Armstrong, p.219
[186] Armstrong, p.226

The second example of the defamilarisation of the edible is in the restaurant itself. Albert wants to impress one of his criminal associates by arranging a cabaret show, complete with dancers, inside the dining hall. When one of the diners protests to being removed from the restaurant before he has finished eating, Albert forces spoonfuls of mushroom soup into the customer's mouth before finally dumping the entire soup terrine over the man's head. This is a force feeding of a different kind in that, unlike the other examples in the film, the soup is an edible substance. Yet the message seems to be that anything one can consume belongs in the realm of the grotesque if it is abused. We lose any taste or culinary preference for mushroom soup in this scene, as it is used here in a vile manner and any familiarity we had in relation to it is taken from us. As force feeding seems to be Albert's punishment method of choice, it appears he therefore has about as much regard for delicious French mushroom soup cooked by a *cordon bleu* chef, as he does for dog excrement, and this further emphasises his total lack of respect for the creative cook, or *artist*.

A third example of this abuse of the act of eating is directed at the singing wash-boy in the restaurant kitchen, Pup. Pup, with his bleach-blonde hair and angelic voice, reminds one of an unusual, modern day cherub and his singing gives one the feeling of being in a church. He sings as he scrubs the dishes, "Wash me thoroughly of my iniquities…wash me, and I shall be white as snow". This character perhaps represents the only reminder of religion or spirituality in the film. He sings of yearning to be washed of his sins, when ironically he is the most innocent of all the characters in a film drenched in "iniquity". Perhaps the insertion of this strange yet gentle character is simply to introduce a glimmer of the religious nostalgia so typical of modern film and the message that perhaps capitalism has made men into their *own* gods, or at the very least, replaced G-d with the worship of money. Of course, Albert will prey on this poor boy and we once again witness the transforming of the inedible when Albert and his men catch Pup on his way back from bringing Michael and Georgina a meal, made especially for them by Richard. In order to extract information from Pup, Albert cuts the buttons off the boy's uniform and forces him to eat them one by one. When there are no more, Albert tells the others that the only button Pup hasn't swallowed yet is his own belly button, but when he

attempts to cut that off too, the boy faints out of shear terror. Thus Pup has narrowly escaped the horror of having to consume his own flesh, but the incident foreshadows the film's grand finale of cannibalism.

The fourth example of force-feeding is the scene in which Albert has finally succeeded in hunting down Michael and proceeds, with the help of Mitchell, one of the most deranged of Albert's men, to tear the pages out of Michael's favourite book, *The French Revolution* by Pascal Astruc-Latalle, and force-feed them to him, using a wooden spoon (a tool of the kitchen) to shove them down Michael's throat. When Albert first sees the quiet and genteel book curator eating alone in his restaurant, he picks up the book on Michael's table and tosses it on the floor, as if extending an invitation to Michael to protest this rudeness. The second time the Thief sees the Lover, again reading at his table, he scolds Michael for his rudeness, informing him that "This is a restaurant, not a library" and that "reading gives you indigestion – didn't you know that?" Michael will indeed suffer the most extreme form of indigestion and when Albert takes Michael's book off his table for a second time, he throws it to a waiter and says, "Here, this needs cooking. Grill it with some mashed peas", a hint to the audience that Michael's favourite book will soon be eaten. Georgina also hints at this gruesome ending, when she asks Michael in the book depository, "What good are all these books to you? You can't eat them!" blissfully unaware that Michael *will* soon be eating his words.

The pronounced irony and the particular placement of these comments by the characters seems to portray a constant self-reflexivity on Greenaway's part, the quest for honesty, discussed previously and a self-awareness that demystifies the potentially deceptive technique – the 'smoke and mirrors' of the cinema, and this again is a form of defamiliarisation in itself. After Albert's tirade through the kitchen in search of his wife and her lover, destroying everything he sees, he lifts a knife and fork, with his white napkin still tucked into his shirt collar, ready for a feast, and announces what he intends to do to Michael, "I'll eat him…I'll kill him, and then I'll eat him!". Once again, the film does not deceive, as this is precisely what happens in the final scene.

Another aspect of the film which is systematically defamiliarised is the act of voyeurism. Ordinarily perceived negatively, voyeurism takes place in many forms in this film. Albert's voyeurism with his wife is the cruellest we find in the film. As Georgina admits, Albert doesn't enjoy sex so much as he enjoys *watching* his wife perform sexually violent acts on herself. Richard is a more obvious voyeur. He says very little until the very end of the film and is a constant witness to Albert's treatment of Georgina. One can sense that Richard has a better understanding of Georgina's pain and yearning than even Michael. Richard supports Georgina's love affair with Michael, providing the secret places for them to be together. And yet he is also a voyeur in their affair, as he reveals to Georgina at the very end of the film when he tells Georgina, at her request, every act of lovemaking he witnessed them performing. Georgina at this point, further defamiliarises the negativity surrounding voyeurism and in fact, embraces it. She asks Richard desperately,

> What did you see? I need to know! Nobody knew but you. Everyone pitied me, I mean even you pitied me. How can I know that he loved me if there were no witnesses? … How could I know that it was real unless someone else was watching?

Thus Georgina has transformed this male scopophilia of her into a validation of what she believes to be her love for another man. From even a superficial glance at this film, it seems implausible that Michael and Georgina are truly in love. She has almost certainly forgotten what real love is, and he is perhaps simply infatuated with her and eager to protect her from her vicious husband. Their relationship is sexual, having little to do with meaningful emotional connection as they hardly have time to even speak to one another. She fulfils her appetite for contact through her affair with Michael and later conveys this experience to Richard, equating it with love. If we are tempted to label Georgina, or "pity" her as Richard does, Dancer reminds us that she is many things, she is a "spectacle and a spectator", she is "object and exhibitionist, sexually abused wife and physically starving lover".[187] Her own voyeuristic tendencies are displayed by her constant peering around the room and when she spots Michael, she watches him closely. We connect with

[187] http://petergreenaway.co.uk/

her as she is a consumer of images, doing very little talking, which is exactly our role as viewers of this film. She is also a spectator in that Michael must "perform for her or risk her losing interest".[188] Michael and Georgina do not speak in their affair initially, ironically until Albert forcefully introduces them. When alone, Michael tells Georgina about a film he saw in which the main character did not speak for the first half hour, "I was completely absorbed as to what might happen, because anything was possible. But he spoiled it, he spoke". Georgina asks him, "Now you've opened your mouth, do you expect me to lose interest?" to which Michael responds, "It was only a film". With this last line, it is almost as if Greenaway is speaking to his audience through the character of Michael, expressing his own self-consciousness about his film and the limitations of the film genre in influencing audiences. A similar occurrence of this is when Georgina begs Richard to tell her what he witnessed between her and Michael, all those nights in the various hiding places of the kitchen. Richard answers her, "What I saw was what you let me see": never was a truer line spoken about the genre of film, and it seems that Greenaway acknowledges this truth before his audience.

This metafictional insertion of the film director into the film itself adds new dimension to the mode of self-conscious and subjective film-making of which Greenaway is so fond. He does not adhere to the dogma of attempted objectivity in film, and in this film, refreshingly, he doesn't even try. He defamiliarises the cinematic norm of creating distance between the film and the filmmaker in order to achieve a greater level of credibility. Instead, he is presenting the world to us as he sees it. We see another example of this in *Pulp Fiction* with Tarantino inserting himself in his own film by playing a character in it, a friend of Jules's who helps him and Vince rid their car of Marvin's remains. The injection of the film's creator is not quite as obvious in *Delicatessen,* but it should be noted that it is a film about France's political history, created by two *French* filmmakers. And so Jeunet and Caro cannot help but insert themselves in their own film because their perception about their country's history is subjective.

[188] http://petergreenaway.co.uk/

Yet another example of Greenaway's self-reflexive approach is when Georgina insists that Richard tell her what he witnessed of her affair:

> *Georgina:* Do lovers always behave like that?
> *Richard:* My parents behaved like that.
> *Georgina:* They did? You saw them?
> *Richard*: And lovers in the cinema sometimes behave like that.
> *Georgina:* No, that doesn't count.

Again, Greenaway expresses self-consciousness in that he allows the cinema to question itself. Dancer adds "their [the audience's] expectations of a certain type of film come from previously viewing films of the same type. Thus we draw on previous experiences to judge whether the lovers have behaved appropriately".[189] Greenaway thus acknowledges and admits to the possibility that to some audience members, the message and intention of this film simply "doesn't count". Greenaway seems to know that viewers will disregard the validity or integrity of his film, and in the spirit of honesty to which this film aspires, he actually allows his own characters to partake in the act of self-doubt. And so, by admitting that we as viewers will certainly judge Georgina and Richard's affair by considering the behaviour of lovers we have previously seen in the cinema, Greenaway understands that, as Dyer explains, the world makes sense of itself by way of "generalities" and "typifications" and that stereotypes, of lovers in this case, help to order the "mass of complex and inchoate data that we receive from the world".[190] Once again, this is the honesty to which postmodern film (or perhaps one should say *Greenaway's brand* of postmodern film) strives for, and even achieves in certain instances, in that it is definitively self-reflexive in its process of creation, aware of its own flaws and even able to approach those flaws with a certain measure of humour.

Furthermore, there is the defamiliarisation of nudity in the affair between Michael and Georgina, again throwing us off the path of generalising her as a classic battered wife.

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[189] www.petergreenaway.co.uk
[190] Dyer, Richard. *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation.* London: Routledge, 1993. p.12

Although, one may struggle to be 'familiar' with nudity, there nevertheless are norms in the use of nakedness in movies. And so we are taken aback in this film, as there is probably far more full frontal *male* nudity in *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* than other films a regular viewer may have encountered in 1989, the year of the film's release and Dancer explains that this makes "typical male audiences feel self-conscious and inviting the female to satisfy her own voyeuristic tendencies".[191]

Thus Greenaway presents us with conflicting images of Georgina. She is a severely battered, downtrodden, servile female character, and yet both men in her life have to perform for her, Michael during sex and Albert at the end when he forced at gunpoint by Georgina to eat the roasted corpse of her lover. We cannot categorise Georgina, we cannot label her safely and this makes us uncomfortable, confused and self-conscious. It introduces the element of *pastiche*, as there is the blending of seemingly disconnected and conflicting ideas in this film; Michael and Georgina choose loveless sex over sexless love, the film favours the repulsive over the attractive, and the director prefers the theatre to the cinema and even finds a way to meld the two, perhaps as a way of encouraging the viewer to rethink the way he/she perceives these things, as well as how we perceive other conventions and norms we may adhere to and by which we are easily convinced. As viewers, drawing on the romantic norms of the cinema, we want the relationship between Michael and Georgina to be the redeeming aspect of the entire film, as there is clearly little else. Yet we are denied the comfort, as their affair is simply too brief, having begun and ended in the space of less than a week, providing us with little insight into it. At the end of the film Georgina is desperate for Richard to validate her affair with his voyeurism, to relay to her exactly what he saw of her affair with Michael. Conventionally thought of as invasion and even abuse, Georgina relies on and is hungry for the voyeurism of Michael and Richard, as if to exacerbate the extremely dangerous and damaging exhibitionism to which she is subjected by her husband. Thus voyeurism and the associations, mainly negative, which we attach to voyeurism, are inverted and reconsidered in *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* and, once again, this is the function of defamiliarisation. Thus there is hardly a disdain for voyeurism, but on the

[191] http://www.petergreenaway.com/

contrary, a *reliance* on it; Georgina is as much a spectacle for Richard (who watches her with Michael, extremely closely as we come to realise as he can relay to Georgina in explicit detail what he witnessed between the two lovers) as Michael is for Georgina. Dancer explains that Richard and the audience are connected in that we too are voyeurs of Georgina's affair with Michael. We are separate from the bizarre and manic action of this film, until suddenly Georgina steps over this barrier by not only asking Richard if he wants to join in the spectacle of her and Michael, but she also offers herself to Richard as well. Through Richard, *we* are now being invited to cross the barrier between watching the action and being part of it, between fantasy and reality, between spectacle and spectator. And so Greenaway has "challenged the barrier between audience space and stage space… [he] certainly cannot shatter that barrier… yet he consistently and successfully pushes his way into the audience's hemisphere".[192]

What conventionally defines voyeurism, the relationship between object and subject, the viewer and viewed, is the assertion of *power* over the spectacle. Yet, as discussed earlier, voyeurism itself is defamiliarised, and so is the power ordinarily attached to it. The subject of power is addressed by Albert, once again using food as a framing device. After his despicable torture of the Lover, he sits once again at his table in the restaurant for yet another meal, and considers some of the most powerful men in history in connection with their culinary preferences:

> The French Revolution was easier to swallow than Napolean? Napolean was a prat, he wasted everything, he threw everything away. Napolean was keen on seafood. His favourite dish was *Oysters Florentine*. It's amazing, isn't it? Churchill liked seafood. All the great generals were keen on seafood. What did Julius Caesar like? Or Hitler? Hitler liked clams. And Mussolini liked squid…

In this monologue, Albert conflates Churchill and Hitler. This would surely surprise the audience as we are acutely aware of the vast divergences between the two men. Yet Albert's interest is only in the enormous power these leaders had at their disposal. What

[192] http://www.petergreenaway.com/

is profoundly ironic about Albert's words is that Michael, his latest victim, really has been forced to swallow *The French Revolution,* but as we will see in the final few shocking moments of the film, Albert will soon 'feast' on the man on whom he imposed one of his notorious force-feedings. The power Albert once had will be wrenched from him and transferred to the corpse of the man he violated so terribly. In this final scene, in which we view the shocking act of cannibalism, the film truly relishes in the absolute humiliation of the man who, throughout the entire film, exists only to humiliate. There is certainly a message here on the filmmaker's behalf about what could very possibly become of a society obsessed with the greed and power attached to endless wasting and consuming. As Greenaway says, "When you've finally devoured everything there is to be eaten, you end up eating one another".[193]

There are, however, no easy conclusions, in that although the humiliation of Albert may give us pleasure, we still cannot truly extract much closure in this process, it actually only leaves us in revulsion and this connects with Lyotard's words about an "incredulity toward metanarratives" in the postmodern genre. If Albert is humiliated, it should logically follow that Georgina is empowered. Yet we cannot rely on this 'tit-for-tat' metanarrative, as we do not come away with the feeling that she has attained any peace or self-actualisation, and her total reliance on Richard to attribute meaning to her affair with his witnessing of it is testament to this. Dancer explains, "Georgina exhibits for Richard in much the same way that Greenaway exhibits for us. Unfortunately, Georgina has been an exhibitionist for too long. Her response indicates a dependence on her audience"[194], which, as we have experienced with Greenaway already in this film, could also be an insecurity of his own – an over-reliance on audience approval and a compromise of the self in return.

Thus the effect of defamiliarisation is that, although we may relate to the feeling of humiliation or empowerment, we are still not at all prepared for the way in which these common human emotions are utilised in this film, because humiliation and empowerment

[193] Armstrong, p.234
[194] http://www.petergreenaway.com/

are re-examined by the audience in *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover,* when viewed through the prism of acts such as coprophagia and cannibalism. Therefore even if we were to view each one of these characters and detect something familiar and recognisable to us, it would be impossible for us to claim that we *know* them, that we have seen characters just like them in, perhaps, another film we saw last week and this causes us to look closer at the screen even though we are repulsed.

Albert is perhaps the most difficult character on whom to peg generalisations. Despite his ferocious appetite for violence and sexual and physical abuse of his wife, it is quite possible that Albert is a repressed homosexual. Armstrong elaborates on this idea, by drawing attention to "Albert's peculiar fixation with the removal of the victim's clothing – especially the nether garments".[195] Roy is stripped naked in order for his punishment to have its full effect. The man over whose head Albert dumps an entire bowl of mushroom soup is referred to by Albert (or at least Albert thinks he hears the name William correctly through the muffled response of the half-drowning man) as Naughty Willie and Little Willie, a reference to the male penis and that Willie needs to have his bottom spanked. Pup has his trousers pulled down during his torture and almost all of Michael's clothes are removed when he is killed, except for his underpants. Armstrong further explains that, not only are each of these acts an "affront to male dignity, but [are] in fact tantamount to an act of rape".[196] His behaviour is perhaps far better understood in this light, as he possesses, like Georgina, deep seated cravings and appetites of his own. We see Georgina's keen sexual appetite as it is translated into her affair with Michael, and we can actually begin to understand Albert's sexual vulnerabilities. His brutalisation of both men and women is an expression of his inadequacies about being unable to please a woman (or as Armstrong claims, a man) and so he relies on violence and depravity toward the human body to combat this sense of worthlessness. The only point in the film where we witness any sign of suffering or pain in Albert is when he bursts into tears at Mitchell's questioning him as to why he does not have children. "Kids? Who needs kids? Who wants kids? I want kids! We'll have kids one day, Georgie, wont we?" he sobs.

[195] Armstrong, p.227
[196] Armstrong, p.227

Dancer explains that "as part of the dominant patriarchal order, Albert feels a need to produce offspring – extensions of himself. His insecurities surrounding his manhood manifest themselves in violent behaviour toward Georgina".[197]

At one point in the film, Albert, who has already harassed Michael a number of times in the restaurant, calls Michael over to his table and forces Georgina to tell the Lover about all the money and beautiful things that Albert has given her. Emboldened by Michael's presence, she defies Albert, "I go to a good hairdresser, a good dentist and a good gynaecologist. The gynaecologist says it's unlikely I'll ever have a baby. The three miscarriages I've had so far have ruined my insides… being infertile makes me a safe bet for a good screw", at which point Albert drags her home to punish her for her insolence. Thus perhaps Georgina's sexual appetite is also a compensation for the profound suffering of perpetual childlessness, and Albert's incurable rage by the end of this scene shows his fragility over his own masculinity. This can be detected, although not overtly revealed in the film itself, when Georgina describes her sexual encounters with her husband. She tells the violated corpse of Michael after Albert and his men have murdered him, that Albert would make her insert various phallic objects inside herself, all of which have oral significance, again connecting sex and violence with food and consumption: "a toothbrush, a wooden spoon, a plastic, train, a wine bottle". She explains to Michael that "at least when *I* did it, it hurt less". Dancer explains:

> [Albert] removes himself from this situation another step by not using his penis during intercourse… withdrawing himself to a point where Georgina is merely an object. Any pleasure derived from her is not from sex, but from his control over her. Albert's need is not a physical, sexual one but a psychological craving[198].

And so it seems that the appetites of the characters in this film are derived from the darker, repressed and therefore dangerous crevices of the mind, and they are manifested in the environment of a restaurant, where the most basic sensual appetites are supposedly satisfied.

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[197] http://www.petergreenaway.com/
[198] http://www.petergreenaway.com/

Greenway uses food, its taste, preparation and sumptuousness as a way of revealing the darker appetites and insecurities of the self, and the greed that causes such severe devastation. The beginning scene of Roy's gruesome treatment by Albert and his crew is actually framed by food, as the characters in the parking lot are flanked on screen by two delivery trucks, one filled with meat on the right and the left one with fish. When Albert discovers Michael and Georgina's affair, Richard knows they must escape immediately before the Thief discovers them. He arranges a lift to safety for them in a truck filled with fowl and maggot-infested flesh of beef and pork, as if to communicate that their affair is doomed, but perhaps also, on a more global scale, that it is unadulterated greed that rots an entire society. In a sense, greed is misplaced and confused appetite, as we can never be sure in this age of excess what it is that we really need and what it is that we want because we have over-indulged our bodies and minds, feeding off a system that encourages, virtually forces, us to keep consuming. Perhaps Greenaway's message is that our habits of consumption are like the Thief's, in that what defines his character is a man who, in the words of Oscar Wilde, "knows the price of everything and the value of nothing".[199] And so our choices are determined by a craving to possess everything and value nothing and this is the character of Albert personified. We also see very clearly, ironically in one of Albert's many long-winded, nasal monologues, how Greenway connects sexuality and greed with food:

> What you've got to realise is that the clever cook puts unlikely things together, like duck and orange, like pineapple and ham. It's called artistry. You know I'm an artist, the way I combine my business and my pleasure. Money's my business. Eating's my pleasure. And Georgie's my pleasure too, though in a more private kind of way than stuffing the mouth and feeding the sewers. Though the pleasures are related, cos the naughty bits and the dirty bits are so close together, that it just goes to show how eating and sex are related. Georgie's naughty bits are nicely related, aren't they Georgie?

[199] (From Wilde's play *Lady Windermere's Fan)* Armstrong, p.224

Albert's comment that "sex and eating are related" is ironically far truer than he realises, as his wife is currently making love to a gentle book dealer within the vast restaurant kitchen, a room designed to produce beautiful food. Equally ironic is the assertion that a "clever cook puts unlikely things together": Richard will soon put together a most unlikely dish for Albert to eat, the cooked corpse of his latest victim. Richard is absolutely recognisable to us when he is served as a dish, his human form is not disguised and therefore we as viewers are not deceived. Thus once again, Greenaway seems to intend that the viewer has a very honest cinematic experience in viewing this film, from the use of theatrical technique, to the insertion of the creator in the creation, thereby negating the dogma of contrived objectivity, to the integrity in portraying even a perverse act, such as cannibalism.

Armstrong introduces a further extension of this idea. As Greenaway explained to Andreas Kilb in an interview, "Obviously I am the cook. The cook is the director. He arranges the menu, the seating order of the guests; he gives refuge to the lovers; he prepares the repast of the lover's body. The cook is a perfectionist and a rationalist, a portrait of myself".[200] Perhaps then, when Georgina reminds Richard that he is a chef who has a "reputation for a wide range of experimental dishes", it is in fact Greenaway informing us of his own personal style. The Cook can also be paralleled with the director in that, as Dancer adds, Richard is a secondary character to the others, injecting his own significance only at the end of the film, but with considerable impact. Following this metaphor, Armstrong continues that the thief would surely then represent "the more commercial elements of the film industry", the Hollywood executive or financier who "patronizingly praise the cook's skills, but is constantly reminding him who's boss, by interfering with the creative process, trying to impose his dubious taste on things, and threatening to shut down the whole operation if he doesn't get his way".[201] The wife is then the deprived viewer, who as a result of the abuse of the director by commercial Hollywood, aches for something deeper in his cinematic experience, but is starved of it. The lover would then be that exact brand of "enlightened" cinema which Greenaway is

[200] Armstrong, p.222
[201] Armstrong, p.222

trying to produce and obviously the fact that the lover is violently murdered explains Armstrong, shows "the apparent triumph of the dominant cinema over the cinema of ideas".

Albert is the representative of an entire societal grouping of the 1980s, born out of Thatcher's economic policies of free market privatisation. There is a connection to be made between this film and Jeunet and Caro's. In *Delicatessen,* there is the character of *Boucher,* the Butcher. In *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*, although the characters have names, the title of the film introduces them simply as The Thief and the Lover. This lack of individuality in the characters seems to convey a sense of generalisation about the societies that these films convey. Boucher is the character that feeds off the misery and devastation of the famine-ravaged French society in which the film is set, as well as the characters within it, signifying *all* consumers who benefit from the deprivation of others and indulge in their own selfish capitalistic whims. The Thief embodies England's "new breed of consumers… a breed characterised as having too much economic and too little cultural capital".[202]

Finally, the grand finale is perhaps the most shocking scene of the entire film. Albert's leanings toward cannibalism are actually foreshadowed earlier in the film when he sticks a fork into the face of Patricia, a mistress of one of his employees, after she defiantly reveals to Albert that his wife is indeed having an affair with "that Jew", Michael.[203] What is also hinted at is that Georgina will be using Michael's body for the torture of her husband later on; she leaves the book depository to find and comfort Pup, whom she discovers has been brutalised by Albert and says to Michael on her way out, "Leave me something to eat". This particular display of cannibalism in film is perhaps more shocking than most, because, as Amy Lawrence points out, "in the majority of cannibal texts… people do not know what they're eating… [in] Greenaway's film, they do".[204] In fact, Albert has actually met and conversed with the man he is now forced to eat, which is perhaps another way Greenaway is constantly trying to steer clear of deception and

[202] Friedman, p.48
[203] Armstrong, p. 230
[204] Armstrong, p.232

remain as honest as possible in the images he portrays. As Albert sits down for his final act of consumption, Georgina performs her own final act of consumption at this point in the film as well, as indicated by the dress she is wearing during Albert's 'Last Supper' - a long, black, dramatic evening gown that has a latticed train, resembling a spider's web. The image and connotation is of a black widow which eats the male after she has copulated with him. Although Georgina and Albert do not actually engage in intercourse, Greenaway has nonetheless found a way to connect sex and sexuality with food and consumption.

When Georgina and the other characters trap Albert in the dining hall and present him with Michael's cooked corpse, Albert frantically pulls out his gun, a phallic symbol. As viewers, we cannot quite believe what we are seeing, yet our morbid appetites and fascination with the grotesque (as discussed earlier with regard to reality television) ensure that we continue to watch. Each of Albert's victims gets a chance to hold the gun, as it grabbed from Albert's hands by the restaurant staff and passed along before it is finally handed to Georgina. Dancer explains that the body of his wife's lover is yet another reminder of Albert's inadequacies in the sexual realm. He is now stripped of the only phallus that gave him any power. We view the entire body of Michael as the camera moves over it slowly and from head to toe and it is obvious that even in death, "[Michael] still possesses what Albert is missing [and] remains the more potent of the two men, even in death".[205] When Georgina is satisfied that Albert has had a taste of her dead lover's roasted flesh, she shoots her husband in the head and, as the gun is a phallus, Georgina's pulling of the trigger is an "ejaculation" or orgasm for her, one of the many things of which she was so severely deprived. This is her revenge; it is cruel, sexual and shocking.

This scene of Albert's punishment is the film's very first introduction of some form of justice. However, justice itself is defamiliarised. Some of us may have cultivated a vengeful appetite by this point in the film, after witnessing the evil of the Thief throughout the film. And yet, as Armstrong argues, "The problem is… that here 'justice' means forcing a man to commit an act of cannibalism. Greenaway unsettles the audience

[205] www.petergreenaway.co.uk

by challenging us to accept that such a thing can be morally defensible". We crave justice by the end of a film such as this, yet "we still feel somewhat queasy as we watch him get his comeuppance".[206] Right before we see Michael in his final role of the film, Georgina introduces her husband's final meal to the unsuspecting Albert:

> I've brought a present for you. And Richard has cooked it under my instructions, knowing how you like to eat, knowing how you like to gorge yourself. It's Michael. My lover. And you vowed you would eat him. Now eat him… Try the cock Albert. It's a delicacy. And you know where it's been.

She not only refers to Albert's insatiable appetite - for food, violence and indeed a combination of the two, she brags to him about her affair. And so it seems that the consumption of another human being, in all its vile horror, is an apt punishment for the Thief, as he has been consuming those around him in many other ways for so long. He is a man who loves to eat and it is fitting then that the justice imposed upon him violates and warps this pleasure irreversibly. Armstrong explains further the choice to include cannibalism:

> Greenaway sees cannibalism as the perfect metaphor for the end of consumerist society. A sign of the fundamental breakdown of civilized culture, cannibalism abolishes the hierarchical distinction between the person who is doing the eating and the thing that is being eaten. It therefore represents the ultimate negation of a common sense of humanity… If the insatiable of capitalist consumerism is allowed to go unchecked then the logical result will be wholesale cannibalism[207].

In *Delicatessen,* we see cannibalism as a solution in a world that has eaten everything there is to be consumed. Perhaps Greenaway's own introduction of cannibalism at the end of his film is his personal view of what Thatcherism has unleashed on English society, the privilege, preservation and nourishment of self-destructive consumption. In

[206] Armstrong, p.233
[207] Armstrong, p.233-34

Delicatessen, the scene of Boucher's lovemaking and the characters that function according to the rhythm of his thrusts, displays his power over the other characters. Albert's perverse form of sexual intercourse that he performs on his wife, the insertion of various foreign phallic objects into her vagina displays his power over her. At the end of the film, Georgina's suggestion that he "try the cock" is a reference to his latent homosexuality, his confused and thus destructive sexual behaviour. Thus both these characters, Albert and Boucher, do not have sex in order to "reproduce" life, but in order to annihilate it. Both consume human flesh, both destroy human life. And so these two films provide various connections between sex, consumption, violence and power, all through the trope of cannibalism.

Conclusion

Perhaps the best way to describe the motivation behind and significance of this project is Gaye Poole's suggestion that:

> It is possible to 'say' things with food – resentment, love, compassion, anger, rebellion, withdrawal. This makes it a perfect conveyor of subtext; messages which are often implicit rather than explicit, but surprisingly varied, strong and sometimes violent or subversive.[208]

The power that food has to communicate about oneself and the world is revealed to us in these three vastly different films. We may sense a familiarity with Tarantino's Fabienne if we share in her love of blueberry pancakes and we might identify with and relate to Vince's love of bacon, yet we learn of their the flaws, we are aware of their destructive behaviour in the societies they inhabit and we are thus reminded to withhold our judgement of them. Thus through the tool of food, we relate to and are repelled by the characters of the films simultaneously, and are thus encouraged to resist the labelling and polarisation of the supposedly villainous versus virtuous characters, because these films reject the metanarrative of universally recognised 'good' and 'evil'. Perhaps this is partially owing to the fact that the binary difference between the two is blurred, but perhaps more significantly because we see the characters (Pumpkin, Hunny Bunny, Vince, Mia, Boucher, Albert) bring about such destruction through the process of ferocious consumption, and we are urged when we watch these films to identify and reconsider the consumer within ourselves, to reconsider the power we have as consumers in the postmodern world. It is the aesthetics of the three films which have been explored in this project, new combinations of genres, new light on prior genres, the use of humour and surprise, that allow food to 'say' the 'things' Poole claims it does through the approach of postmodernism.

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[208] Poole, Gaye. *Real Meals. Set Meals: Food in Film and Theatre.* Sydney: Currency Press, 1999. p.3

When considering the films in the sequence in which they appear in this project, there is a build up, an accumulation in the portrayals of consumption and its ramifications. *Pulp Fiction* presents us with the perils of mass consumerism. *Delicatessen* shows us hubristically how this consumerism has devolved into cannibalism. *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* rams a combination of the two right down our throats. Greenaway achieves this through an extremely visceral approach to filmmaking, which almost makes us feel as if the characters are leaping off the stage-like set and attacking us *personally* and our reaction to this film is both psychological and physical. Tarantino's film reveals what he believes to be the value system of an entire nation, through the representation of the fast food empire. There is the use of sugar, its associations with childlike impulsiveness, indulgence and recklessness in order to convey the weak and threatening female characters of the film, and meat, with its connections to masculinity, virility and essence. These two key ingredients, in the film as well as in fast food, are a few of Tarantino's tools we see used to convey his reflection of American material mass-consumption.

The non-nutritional substances that are consumed in all three films, specifically Greenaway's and Tarantino's, convey messages to us about those who consume it. The contamination of the body and in turn, society, through the consumption of these poisonous substances is revealed to us in *Pulp Fiction,* with Pumpkin and Hunny Bunny's reliance on caffeine and nicotine, Vince and Mia's addiction to cocaine and heroin, the symptoms of an over-fed, yet spiritually starved society begin to surface. Although there is no cannibal activity in *Pulp Fiction* or drug abuse in *Delicatessen,* we can make a connection between the two films with the argument that postmodernity itself *is* cannibalistic; we consume harmful substances, knowing that they are poisonous to the body and we knowingly contaminate rather than nourish our own planet, aware that we will eventually destroy it and destroy ourselves.

And from the non-nutritional to the purely perverse, we see in *The Cook , The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* the forced consumption of everything from canine faeces, buttons and the pages of a book. This choice of torture that Albert Spica inflicts upon his victims

reveals his destructive nature as a vitriolic, contaminating presence in society. In this instance, the work of Jean Baudrillard adds complexity to Poole's theory when we consider Baudrillard's claim that it is the consumption of *signs* far more than *things* that communicate the effects of consumerism itself and that this process is endless, because it has less to do with economic, and more to do with *symbolic* capital. Various acts of consuming merely simulate meals and the age of postmodernity renders meal *replacements* or simulations of meals as sufficient for the nourishment of the body. We also see the application of Thorstein Veblen's work in these films and the idea that the emulative behaviour in which Marsellus and Albert engage as a result of their criminally accumulated wealth cannot buy them culture and class. And so, whilst Veblen reveals the limitations of consumption, Baudrillard reveals the perpetual limitlessness of it.

On a far less serious level however, Tarantino's use of pastiche and intertextuality, the retro décor of Jack Rabbit Slims, the eating of cereal for dinner and burgers for breakfast, as well as the use of a non-linear narrative which fascinatingly reflects on the thoughtless linearity of the consuming process (we desire, and therefore we buy, and so the process continues) show a playfulness with the text, a resistance toward imposing a grand solution to the problems of violence, addiction and mass consumption. *Pulp Fiction* is thus aware of Baudrillard's argument that consumption is endless and irrepressible and so there is a dark humour, a sense of *jouissance* about the film (about all three films, in fact) which reflects a lack of resolution. Although there is a more grave sense in the political and historical motivations behind Greenaway's and Jeunet and Caro's films, we must keep in mind Bedarida's and Gaylard's assertions about historiography and the unavoidable insertion of subjectivity of the filmmaker into the film. Greenaway's many instances of self-reflexivity in his film specifically reveal the filmmaker as reluctant to represent their texts as empirical and objective metanarratives.

Another danger of consumerism which *Pulp Fiction and The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* reveal is racism and prejudice and the idea that we consume in order to set ourselves apart from those we deem inferior. The work of Beardsworth and Keil clarify this in the *Pulp Fiction* chapter, with their claim that our distinction between what we

choose to consume and choose to reject, also reveals the oppositions between "us and them, same and other… culture and nature".[209] This motivation for consumption can only bring further discord and distance in society, rather than acceptance and integration, at odds with the quest for the human connectivity which the films seem to gravitate toward.

And so postmodern film also utilises and represents fragmentation – spiritual, personal, societal: in *Delicatessen,* we see the application of Henri Lefebvre's urbanisation theory about the modern city as a place of disorder, a space in search of harmony and coherence[210]. Yet fragmentation is also revealed within the self, as Baudrillard explains once again, we buy things in order to separate ourselves from society, to elevate ourselves, but also to *integrate* ourselves and feel a part of society at the same time. Again, the paradoxical nature of postmodernity is revealed: drug consumption is deadly, yet addictive, consumerism is fragmenting, yet compulsive.

The only suggestion of withdrawal or withholding from this compulsive consuming is through the representation of religion, which we see in *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* with the cherub-like character of Pup who sings angelically as he cleans the excess food off the dirty plates of diners about washing himself of iniquity. In *Pulp Fiction* it is Jules who reminds us of spirituality in a film in which this is tragically deficient. Jules recites the bible before he kills, believes he has experienced divine intervention and abandons the crime world in order to embark on a more pious path. What is common to all major religions is the periodic withholding from food, fasting. The practice of Lent in Catholicism, Ramadan in the Islam religion and Yom Kippur (among others) in Judaism, all endorse the idea of denying the body what it usually indulges in, in order to abandon bodily distraction and allow a greater spiritual awareness to emerge. And yet although this idea features in these films as yet another text, it is certainly not advanced as a solution.

[209] Beardsworth, p.51
[210] Silverman, p.66

However what *is* offered, though perhaps not explicitly imposed as a possible answer to the challenges presented in these films is the endurance of human connection. Butch and Fabienne are motivated to escape from the tyranny of Marsellus in order to preserve their love and independence. They triumph in the film, as we watch them literally ride off into the sunset on Zed's chopper. Jules rediscovers his humanity by choosing *not* to kill Pumpkin in the denouement of the diner scene and this display of connection with the internal struggle of Pumpkin, the choice to show compassion and empathy for him is how Jules extricates himself from his destructive surroundings. Most obviously, we see the triumph of human connectivity in the relationship between Julie and Louison in *Delicatessen*, their growing affection and care for one another gives them the courage to destroy the cannibalistic reign of Boucher and bring about the birth of what the end of the film hints at, a renewed society. In Greenaway's film, Georgina's affair with Michael, her rediscovery of what is human in her, the desire to connect is what empowers her to rid herself of the most destructive presence in her life, her husband. And so whilst it may be too sweeping a contention that postmodernism is *romantic,* there is an expression of yearning for a reawakened connectivity in society which postmodernity has denied us.

None of the three films is wildly optimistic and perhaps this is because we are being urged to *insert* a sense of hope, to *reflect* on the sense of hopelessness that is portrayed in the reality of endless and destructive consumption. There is a sense of personal and social responsibility that is encouraged in these films, a reminder that we as individual consumers are accountable to our societies, our environment and each other. In conclusion, although we may be *viewers* in the cinematic experience, these films are definitive in their portrayals of a society of which we are very much a part, and thus we are encouraged to engage in a process of re-evaluation of our own choices of consumption, which largely determine who we are. This is why "food is a very good way to critique the people who eat it"[211] and "when food appears in a film, it is loaded with much more than calories".[212]

[211] Armstrong, p.224
[212] Bower, p.12

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