

Contro la Pastasciutta: Marinetti's Futurist Lunch

Michel Delville

As if a cook-book had anything to do with writing.
— Alice B. Toklas, *The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook*

"Futurist Lunch", the opening part of the now-lost film, *Vita futurista*, directed by Arnaldo Ginna in 1916, features an old gentleman (played by Futurist painter Lucio Venna) eating a bowl of soup outside a restaurant in Piazzale Michelangelo in Florence. The old man suddenly finds himself harangued by a group of young Futurists who accuse him of representing the passéist culinary establishment.¹ Sixteen years later, the publication of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's *Futurist Cookbook* (1932) confirmed the centrality of food and eating to Futurist aesthetics and philosophy. A late avatar of the movement, Marinetti's *cucina futurista* was the first systematic attempt to launch a design for a practical and performance-oriented aesthetics of food.² Ever the enemy of satiety and limiting contentment, Marinetti launched a series of public campaigns and manifestoes promoting a new culinary art that purported to "renew totally the Italian way of eating and fit it as quickly as possible to producing the new heroic and dynamic strength required of the race" (33), thereby establishing a direct link between his fascist sympathies and his new dietetic credo. The first task the Futurist cooks assigned themselves was to abolish pastasciutta, a passéist food accused of making people "sceptical, slow and pessimistic" (Marinetti's cookbook also cites Schopenhauer's remark that it is "the food of the resigned" [49]) and deemed unpatriotic because of its impact on the national economy. Indeed, in the "Manifesto of Futurist Cooking" (first published on December 28, 1930 in the *Gazzetta del Popolo* in Turin), Marinetti writes that, in addition to developing a "strarchy" neutralism and "nostalgic inactivity" in its consumers, pasta was also an impediment to economic prosperity in that its production required massive importation of foreign wheat.³ Its abolition would thus "free Italy from expensive foreign grain and promote the Italian rice industry" (37), a suggestion embraced by the fascist regime which also sought to boost the production of locally-grown rice, an ingredient considered more "virile" and which had historical origins in the industrial North, while pasta was identified with the economically backward South and the "barbaric" mores of the Ostrogoths (50).

¹ The synopses of this long lost film, as recounted by Ginna himself, are available on Bob Osborn's website *Futurism and the Futurists*: <http://www.futurism.org.uk/cinema/cinema.htm>

² Although it was by no means the first use of the term applied to cooking, as attested by Jules Maincave's early *La cuisine futuriste* (1913), whose revolutionary ideas about sweet and salty juxtapositions and unconventional use of spices inspired Marinetti's cookbook.

³ By contrast, the abundance of exotic fruits in Futurist dishes was a symptom of the fascist regime's desire for a firmer imperialist expansion in Africa.

In order to demonstrate the viability of their theories, Marinetti and his partner the "Aeropainter" and diet theorist Fillia devised hundreds of recipes in which they endeavored to dissociate food from nourishment and shift the discourse and practice of cookbooks to art production and consumption. They even went as far as founding a futurist restaurant, "The Holy Palate," which officially opened in 1931, in Turin, and in which they staged numerous culinary events. At a time of world economic crisis, Marinetti's opportunistic campaigns resonated with the urgency of global economic and political concerns. These campaigns were echoed in the press worldwide and, however unpopular they may have been with defenders of the old cuisine, they were endorsed by a number of prominent politicians and clinicians who voiced their support of Marinetti's anti-pasta propaganda in numerous articles and open letters full of pseudo-scientific evidence. One of the most famous defenders of the anti-pasta campaign was the now infamous Professor Nicola Pende, then Rector of the Università Adriatica Benito Mussolini in Bari and one of the co-authors of the "Manifest of Racist Scientists," published in July 1938 in the *Giornale d'Italia*. In a pamphlet which appeared in the journal *La cucina italiana* in 1930, Pende typically argues that pasta makes its consumers "forget the lofty dynamic obligations of the race and the searing speed and most violent contradictory forces that constitute the agonizing rush of modern life" (41). For Marinetti and his scientist supporters, people should abstain from eating pasta because "unlike bread [it] does not undergo sufficient preparation through mastication" (42). In order to counter the threat of indigestion caused by bloating of the digestive system, Marinetti calls for "the abolition of volume and weight in the conception and evaluation of food" (37), an aspect of the manifesto which has so far been neglected by critics and historians of the movement and which nonetheless prefigures subsequent developments in the history of Western cuisine, of which the Nouvelle Cuisine and the current fashion for light food are two of the most famous and best-selling manifestations.⁴ However, what is stake here is not just the future of the Italian (male) eater but also his ultimate transformation into a passive, desexualized body whose "exaggerated abdominal volume" discourages "physical enthusiasm for a woman" and does not favour the possibility of possessing her at any time" (41). Pasta thus stands accused not only of devitalizing the Italian people but also of destabilizing the distribution of gender codes and biological roles.⁵ In Western culture, the threat to sex distinctions constituted by the bloated stomach has a long history which goes back to the Pythagorean ban on beans, which was based on the belief that beans contained the human embryos of reincarnated souls and could make their eater's bodies

⁴ In order to avoid the dangers of ingesting insufficiently prepared or masticated food, Marinetti also advocated the use of "powder or pills, albumoid compounds, synthetic fats and vitamins" (38) such as modern chemistry was to prove itself able to produce.

⁵ This is not to say that Marinetti's gender politics are limited to the Futurist cult of virility. In the "Manifesto of Futurist Cooking," Marinetti gets carried away by his own praise of voluptuousness, flexibility and movement and argues that the Italian male should "harmonize more and more with the Italian female, a swift spiralling transparency of passion, tenderness, light, will, vitality, heroic constancy" (36). More generally, Marinetti's rejection of the feminine in life and art was fundamentally directed at the representation of woman as "a magnet for sentimental passion or lust" (*Murder* 81).

pregnant (Huffman, unpag.). Reflecting upon food prohibitions and taboos, Robert Graves writes, in *The White Goddess*:

The Pythagorean mystics [. . .] were bound by a strong taboo against the eating of beans and quoted a verse attributed to Orpheus, to the effect that to eat beans was to eat one's parents' heads [. . .] The Platonists excused their abstention from beans on the rationalistic ground that they caused flatulence; but this came to much the same thing. Life was breath, and to break wind after eating beans was a proof that one had eaten a living soul—in Greek and Latin the same words, *anima* and *pneuma*, stand equally for gust of wind, breath and soul or spirit. (cited in Watson 3)

Whereas for the Pythagoreans eating beans amounts to endocannibalism (and farting to an abject form of abortion), in what Bataille might have called Marinetti's "general economy" of food production and consumption, flatulence becomes the conceptual ground of a politics of waste which points to unutilizable forms of food ingestion resulting in dangerous symbolic reversals of gender and natural differences between the sexes.⁶ More generally, Marinetti's vitalist philosophy, which purports to combat the deadening effects of "quantity, banality, repetition and expense," (Marinetti 21) condemns the dispersal of energy caused by the task of transforming heavy food into nourishing matter. The conjunction of diet and discourse in Futurist culinary theory ultimately gives way to a vision of the gradual closing of the Italian mind under the weight of spaghetti and tagliatelle, a vision that culminates in the "piggish enjoyment" experienced by an eater who aspires to a state of perfect fusion with his daily meal:

Our pasta is like our rhetoric, only good for filling up our mouths; its enjoyment lies entirely in the way it forces the jaws wide open, the way it demands voluptuous self-abandonment, the way it sticks to the palate and the intestines, the way the eater feels he has become one with it, knotted into a sticky ball and re-fashioned. (45)

⁶ Still on the subjects of breath, flatulence and sexuality, Hinduism also considers food as a symptom of the progressive degradation of the primal breath that determines human life and relates it to the wholeness of Brahma (also known as the world soul "ātman" which, in Sanskrit, means both "self" and "breath"). Whereas in the Golden Age of original time, "a man's vital breath (prāṇa) resided in his bones," he subsisted on air alone, "enjoyed a lifespan of 100,000 years and reproduced asexually" (Feher 496), we now live in the fourth epoch of the world cycle and "the vital breath resides in the grain we eat, we live to a maximum age of 125, and few are virtuous enough to attain even this modest target" (497). The connection between sex and food that underlies Hindu cosmology is once again reasserted by a doctrine that warns its followers against the health hazards of indulging in irregular or excessive dietary and sexual practices, which proves that, contrary to the common view, the rejection of the body considered as a "dirt-producing factory" (499) is by no means an exclusively Western phenomenon.

F.T. Marinetti and the Dissociation of the Senses

The stupefying virtues of pasta, the eater's sense of "self-abandonment" and his identification with the "sticky ball" that fills his stomach—a form of symbolic, introjective autophagy—allegedly thwarted the Futurists' project to pave the ground for a new humanity whose Icarian movement to freedom and imagination committed it to "an art of self-nourishment" which, like all the other Futurist arts, "eschew[ed] plagiarism and demand[ed] creative originality" (21). Typically, Marinetti's dismissal of rhetoric (political and philosophical discussions were banned from the Futurist banquets and were supposed to give way to various kinds of musical and poetic accompaniments) is indicative of his aversion to all forms of self-absorption and his call for an activist, vitalist approach to life and art. But the peculiar blend of political, economic and psychosexual desires and anxieties that underlies Futurist food poetics should not obscure the Futurist emphasis on form, structure, composition and movement. The "Manifesto of Futurist Cooking" itself also had strong formalist overtones which are more central to the concerns of this essay. The first formal innovation concerned the necessary cooperation of the five senses in the apprehension and appreciation of food. The Futurist program for the "total renewal of food and cooking" (33) comprised all manner of synaesthetic experiments encouraging the interaction of taste and the other senses. The sense of touch was systematically enhanced through the banishment of knives and forks, which allowed the eater's body to become more fully involved in the process of holding and handchewing the food. Some of the more sophisticated experiments in "prelabial tactile pleasure", such as Fillia's "tactile dinner party" (125), clearly anticipate some of the experiments of late 20th century performance artists (one thinks, for example, of Alicia Rios' "masticating body") while simultaneously embodying, somewhat paradoxically, the delights of infantile regression as well as the dream of a new, more "civilized" eating culture ("Until now," Marinetti argued, "men have fed themselves like ants, rats, cats or oxen. Now with the Futurists the first human way of eating is born" [21]). Fillia's "formula" (Marinetti's preferred term over "recipe") required its guests to wear pyjamas covered with "different tactile material such as sponge, cork, sandpaper, felt, aluminium sheeting, bristles, steel wool, cardboard, silk, velvet, etc." and eat "magic balls" (125), each one filled with something different, served from small bowls also covered with various "tactile materials." They were then asked to bury their faces in a large plate containing raw and cooked vegetables which they had to empty without the help of their hands, the purpose of the culinary experiment being to bring food into direct contact (or conflict) with the skin of the cheeks. The "party" ended with the promise of sexual gratification as the guests were free to "let their fingertips feast uninterruptedly on their neighbour's pyjamas" (126).

The sense of touch, which has often occupied an intermediary position between the sensuous and the cognitive in Western philosophy, was considered by Kant as more objective than subjective in that, like vision and hearing, it "aroused the consciousness of the affected organ" (cited in Korsmeyer 57). Unlike taste and smell, which, from a Kantian perspective, "draw attention away from their objects and toward the perceiving body" (58), touch enables the whetted appetite to apprehend the textures and temperatures of different

substances before they are actually ingested, converting foodstuffs into objects worthy of tactile aesthetic contemplation (an ambition Kant denied the “lower” senses of smell and taste which were disqualified from the realm of aesthetics because they could not surrender universal judgments). More often than not, however, Futurist cooking chose to ignore all such distinctions between the cognitive and the bodily senses. On the contrary, it strove for a reassessment of the body’s global involvement in the operation of the senses and of how this involvement can lead to a reconsideration of the symbolic and cultural values of edible matter.

Building upon the realization that “the distinction of the senses is arbitrary,” to quote the earlier “Manifesto on Tactilism,” Futurist recipes and dinners also often comprised musical backgrounds. “Raw Meat Torn by Trumpet Blasts,” for example, instructs the “Drum Roll of Colonial Fish,” which was to be eaten “to a continuous roll of drums.” (102) Olfactory props were also common. They ranged from the “*conprofumo*⁷ of carnations” sprayed on the necks of the eaters of Fillia’s “Aerofood” (144) to the “ozonizer,” a kitchen appliance which would “give to liquids the taste and perfume of ozone” (56). Marinetti’s two-day long “Extremist Banquet,” where no one eats and “the only satiety comes from perfumes” (116), aims at a further dissociation of smell from taste which implicitly problematizes the ways in which the two “lower” senses can cooperate or conflict with one another in a single sensory operation. Indeed, part of the thrill experienced by Marinetti’s guests is that they are inhaling “vaporizing food sculptures” through a sense which is bound to remain “ambiguous in its phenomenal placement.” (Korsmeyer 96-97) Poised between intentionality and unintentionality, the inside and the outside, the smell sensation is “‘in’ the body; but the smell qualities are perceived as belonging to the object of smell in such a way that one perceives a greater distance between the site of sensation and the producer of sensation than one does in the case of taste” (97). It is precisely the ambivalent distance of smell sensations which leaves the guests at Marinetti’s “Extremist Banquet” alternately “thoughtful” and “astonished” until they “begin feverishly chewing the emptiness.” (Marinetti 117) The “obtrusive nature” of smell (Gigante 150) which compels eaters to inhale the scent whether they want it or not, led natural philosophers like J. G. Spurzheim to conclude that it was the only unmediated sensation since “smell in its immediate functions perceives odorous particles emanating from external bodies, without any reference to the object” (149), a reflection that echoes Kant’s pronouncement that smell, like taste, is a private, passive sense without claim to aesthetic judgment. For Hans Ruin, “the paradoxical objectivity of smell is that it is more intruding, more immediate, than any other sensation, and at the same time essentially fleeting and elusive [...] The nose must continue to act incessantly, without being able to store the impression. The impression does not become more dense, it is not solidified as when we concentrate on a tone or a color.” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 7) More recently, Derrida wrote that “by limitlessly violating our enjoyment, without granting it any determining limit, [smell] abolishes representative distance [...] It irresistibly forces one to consume, but without allowing any chance for idealization.” (Korsmeyer 150) Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett makes a similar

⁷ The term indicates “the tactile affinity of a given material with the flavour of a given food” (172).

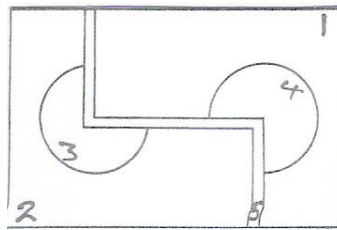
claim when she writes that "while taste is an analytical sense—we can clearly distinguish between sweet, salt, sour, and bitter—smell is widely held to be a holistic sense." (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 6) In Marinetti's "Extremist Banquet," the resistance of olfactory sensations to analytical representation would thus seem to account for the guests' complete disorientation and their desperate attempts to ward off the overwhelming scents produced by the experiment, "us[ing] their hands like shields" (117) and diverting them to the "powerful suction fan" (116) located in a corner of the dining room. The inability of olfaction to integrate stable objects and pause to "store impressions," confirms the status of smelling as a *tasting* activity in immediate relation to itself, which preempts reflexive self-examination. In this respect, the disorienting ambivalence of smell is clearly in line with an aesthetics that subordinates analysis to movement, and rhetoric to action, and thwarts any attempt to oppose the intelligence of the mind to that of the body, preferring to explore the eater's somatic knowledge of the world around him (a principle best summarized by the "critical rumble" produced by the intestines of the guests at the "Aeropoeitic Futurist Dinner" [124]).

The body in Futurist food aesthetics is also the site of a living experiment which questions the very notion of selfhood. The absence of full-fledged characters in the formulas and culinary stories contained in the *Futurist Cookbook* (they are almost always referred to as interchangeable "guests"), added to their authors' tendency to dissociate and individualize the guests' body parts (Marinetti and Fillia refer to "the stomach of the human diner" and "the mouth of the human diner" [124] as separate entities), results in an allegorical landscape which paves the way for a radical redefinition of body, art and world. In "White and Black," a recipe created by Futurist poet Farfa, this principle extends to the interior body as the inside surface of the eater's stomach becomes an organic canvas covered with "free-form arabesques of whipped cream sprinkled with lime-tree charcoal" (156). If "White and Black" is the only recipe that makes the reader visualize the inner surfaces of the eater's viscera, the wealth of *stuffing* recipes contained in the *Cookbook* continually insists upon the necessity to consider corporeality as a fragile totality liable to be upset by the cook's transgression of inside and outside boundaries.

The "one-man-show on the internal walls of the Stomach" (156) of "White and Black" indicates that the Futurists, for all their obsession with synaesthetic meals, did not neglect the visual dimensions of their art of cooking. Surprisingly enough, the visual arrangements described in Futurist recipes were far from living up to the standards for experimentalism set out by Marinetti's revolution of the palate. On the contrary, they largely subscribed to the traditional laws of symmetry and "harmony" (the word is used repeatedly in Marinetti's recipes which often capitalize on a network of synaesthetic "affinities" between specific flavors, smells, sounds and tactile impressions), often verging on the merely decorative. The majority of the recipes contained in the *Futurist Cookbook* incorporate simple geometrical forms (the Futurist cult of the mechanically-produced and the inorganic extended to their culinary practices) such as circles, balls and cylinders arranged in equal spacings, as in the "synoptic-syngustatory plate" (105) of the "Springtime Meal of the Word in Liberty" (peppers, garlic, rose petals, bicarbonate of soda, peeled bananas and cod live oil equidistant from each other" [105]) or the twenty different kinds of salad "placed in a pattern of

squares" (122) of the "Aeropictorial Dinner in the Cockpit." While Mino Rosso's "Network in the Sky" emerges as a poor attempt to emulate the dynamic curves of a Futurist sculpture, P. A. Saladin's "Cubist Vegetable Patch" had more affinities with the simple, proto-minimalist geometrical design of the Russian constructivist variety than with the more dynamic and perspectival tensions of analytical and synthetic Cubism:

1. Little cubes of celery from Verona fried and sprinkled with paprika;
 2. Little cubes of fried carrot sprinkled with grated horseradish;
 3. Boiled peas;
 4. Little pickled onions from Ivrea sprinkled with chopped parsley;
 5. Little bars of Fontina cheese;
- (156)



Saladin's specification that "the cubes must not be larger than 1 cubic centimeter" is symptomatic of the Futurist emphasis on form as a means of controlling and limiting the body's appetite. The Futurists, who believed that "modern man must have a flat stomach, under the sun, to think clearly" (55), favored servings that were only a few mouthfuls in size. This reductionist bend climaxes in Marinetti's advocacy of synthetic food and vitamins that would achieve "a real lowering of the cost of living and of salaries" as well as the complete separation of food from nourishment. As suggested above, the Futurist cult of harmonious and pure forms is typical of a movement caught between its cult of formal freedom, imagination and experimentalism and its entanglement in fascist politics. The conservative nature of the Futurist "geometrical meals" — which also found its architectural correlative in the shining, streamlined furniture of their real and imaginary dining rooms and restaurants—betrays the need for order, symmetry and uniformity that lurked beneath the "revolution of the senses" promoted by the movement as a whole. As epitomized by the perfect cube of beef of "Raw Meat Torn by Trumpet Blasts" and the identical discs of chicken meat of "The Flavor of Steel" (77), the Futurists' devotion to perfect forms reflected their phantasmagorical and libidinal investment in a mechanically ruled world devoid of the messiness and contingencies of the subjective and the organic. As Peter Nicholls aptly puts it, "the triumph of the mechanical over the natural" in Futurist poetics "encapsulates the capacity of the modern subject to experience himself as pure origin, as uncontaminated by tradition" (86).

Boiled Fish and Banana Slices: The Simultaneist Meal

This principle also affected the Futurist approach to aesthetic and sensory pleasure, which was touched upon earlier in my discussion of the "Extremist Banquet," an olfactory orgy whose eleven guests (five women, five men and a "neuter"⁸ [116]) are confined to an isolated villa for a period of two days and whose scrupulously defined parameters are not unlike those of the Sadian orgy, which also took place in enclosed spaces and whose language of sexual and psychological freedom was paradoxically controlled by various forms of rational obsessions. As in the case of Sade, who, as Barthes puts it, "makes pleasure, happiness, communication depend on an inflexible order or, to put it even more offensively, a combinatory art" (*Sade* 7), Marinetti's regimentation of pleasure is the other side of the coin whose obverse is the liberation of the senses. Even though the abundance of food in Sade's orgies⁹ contrasts with Marinetti's more frugal meals and though the latter are deprived of the former's rituals of pain, violence and death, the two share an approach to food which is essentially "functional and systematic" (*Sade* 128), repeated and serialized, and which can only express itself in painstakingly constructed scenarios of imaginary pleasure, titillation and power. In the worst of cases, they also give theatrical expression to the monstrous rationality of fascism which Pasolini allegorized in *Salò or The 120 Days of Sodom*.¹⁰

Sometimes, the power relationships that unite the dominant and the dominated are transposed onto the antagonism between the cooks and the clients. In the "Extremist Banquet," for example, this leads to a reversal of roles in which the increasingly nervous (and hungry) clients confronted with the vaporizing food sculptures are scolded by their cooks and waiters who become exasperated by their constant chattering ("You are the bosses, but you're rascals too! Are you or are you not going to eat these exquisite dishes which we great artists have prepared for you? Stop all this mumbling or we'll boot you!" [117]). Like the "Extremist Banquet" and many other "formulas" in the collection, "Springtime Meal of the Word in Liberty" (105), also typically takes the form of a lyrical narrative told in the present tense whose factual tone is akin to the shot by shot film script format. The "formula" begins with three young men walking

⁸ The function of the ungendered guest in the formula seems to be that of a neutral witness whose detachment from sexual activities allows it to report on the diners' potential lapse into cannibalism ("For pity's sake, beautiful cooks, bring us something to chew on, otherwise, we will see the ugly mouths of these rude men bite into the insipid flesh of our five lady friends" [117]).

⁹ For a detailed description of what Sade's libertines and their slaves eat, see Barthes, *Sade* 21-23.

¹⁰ Barthes himself was of a completely different opinion and considered Pasolini's analogy between sadism and fascism as dangerously misleading: "Fascism is too serious and too insidious a danger to be treated by simple analogy, the fascist masters coming 'simply' to take the place of the libertines. Fascism is a coercive object: it forces us to think it accurately, analytically, philosophically. All that art can do with it, if it deals with it, is to make fascism believable, to demonstrate how it happens not to show what it resembles" (cited in Magda Romanska; Romanska, Magda, "Sade/Salò". *Proceedings of the Red River Conference on World Literature*. Vol. 5, 2003: <http://www.ndsu.edu/RRCWL/V5/romanska.html>; unpag.).

across a spring garden whom “the gentle flames of a dawn full of childish timidity” has plunged into “a state of literary and erotic anxiety that cannot be appeased by a normal meal” (105). They are immediately served “a synoptic-syngustatory plate” and begin to make “unusual metaphorical connection[s]” between the dish’s peppers (a “symbol of rustic strength”) and the cod liver oil (a “symbol of ferocious northern seas and the need to cure sick lungs”). They then proceed to wrap cloves of garlic in rose petals, “thus entertain[ing] themselves with the coupling of poetry and prose” (an apt metaphor given the hybrid status of Marinetti formulas which generally hesitate between the utilitarian, transparent logic of prose and the ambivalent and self-referential functions of poetry). Eventually, “a buxom country young girl in her twenties” enters the scene “holding in her arms a huge bowl of strawberries floating in well-sweetened Grignolino wine.” At the end of the script, the alliance of gastronomy and eroticism gives way to a fable of infantile and animal regression, a stylized, spasmodic poetico-culinary pastoral inspired by the flamboyant aesthetics of the celebrated Futurist *parole in libertà*:

The young men invite her with high-flown words-in-liberty devoid of all logic and directly expressing their nervous condition, to serve them as quickly as possible. She serves them by tipping it over their heads. They end up eating, licking, mopping themselves up, fighting each other across the table with illuminating adjectives, verbs shut between full stops, abstract noises and animal cries which seduce all the beasts of springtime, as they ruminate, snore, grumble, whistle, bray and chirrup in turn.

Marinetti’s “formulas” literalize Barthes’ pronouncement that taste can “develop somewhat like a narrative or a language” (*Bruissement* 304), a process which, far from being linear, “practices multiple and successive apprehensions: beginnings, recurrences, overlaps, a whole counterpoint of sensation” (303-4). The *parole in libertà*—which were themselves an attempt to defeat the linearity of reading and writing and allowed the lyric self to deploy itself in a state of pure spatialization—also aimed at a spatialization of the complex *duration* of gustatory taste. The explicit references to words-in-freedom which abound in the *Futurist Cookbook* clearly point to the contrapuntal and eminently poetic nature of the living experiments of Futurist cuisine. According to Marinetti himself, these recipes were an attempt to transpose the aesthetics of simultaneity that had characterized the earlier manifestations of the movement, especially in the field of literature. The Futurist cook must generate “surprises with illogical syntheses and dramas of inanimate objects” (36) that manifest themselves in unexpected juxtapositions and the alliance of contraries: combinations (they were often preferred to mixtures as they allowed the separate ingredients to remain identifiable) of sweet and salty, bitter and sour ingredients, such as mortadella and caramel or boiled fish and banana slices,¹¹ were encouraged. To the 21st century reader, the results of such combinations are often disappointing and largely fail to live up to Marinetti’s ambition to allow “experiment, intelligence and imagination [to] economically take the place of quantity, banality, repetition and expense” (21). The Futurist concept of “simultaneist food,” for example, was

¹¹ See Fillia’s “Edible Alphabet” (144) and “Italian Sea” (143), respectively.

often reduced to a simple alliance of antithetical terms (Giuseppe Steiner's "simultaneous ice cream" only consisted of "dairy cream and little squares of raw onion frozen together" [152]). Worse, at least if one bears in mind Marinetti's wish to renew the whole Italian character through a culinary revolution, they are far from being innovative since many of these juxtapositions and "innovations" (including the combination of sweet and savory flavors and the use of subtle mixtures of spices and herbs) date back to medieval times and continued to prevail until the 19th century with the advent of the "bourgeois" cuisine of Antonin Carême and his followers.¹²

This being said, the examples discussed earlier show that the "poeticity" of Futurist cooking does not limit itself to the bombastic imagery and inflated diction of the "Springtime Meal of the Word in Liberty." After Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* (1914),¹³ Marinetti's *Cookbook*—despite its marginal and late status within the history of the Futurist movement—is the second important example of an aesthetic *détournement* of the language of cooking towards a poetics of micro-sensations and polysensory inspirations. If we agree with anthropologist Mary Douglas that the meal is a structured system which "distinguishes order, bounds it, and separates it from disorder" and that "the more appropriate comparison for [its] interpretation is versification" (Counihan 44), then the function of poetic *form*—versified or not—is to contain the potential organic excesses of the hungry, unfinished body and the dangers of open form. Far from confining itself to an act of poetic "defamiliarization" of foodstuff, Marinetti's *Futurist Cookbook* appears as a logical extension of his more general attitude to the lyrical mode which sought to surpass the limits of free verse in the name of the pictorial dynamism and "unbounded lyricism" of the *parole in libertà*. In the "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature," Marinetti argued for the destruction of punctuation and syntax and pronounced himself in favor of a "lyric obsession with matter" (*Murder* 95) which would do away with the subjectivist, sentimental and nostalgic premises of Symbolist and decadent poetic language ("Destroy the *I* in literature: that is all psychology" [95]).¹⁴ Perhaps more than anything, it is Marinetti's ambivalent relationship to the lyric and his obsession with *matter* which have remained a constant in the poetic food experiments of the Futurists and their attempts to treat cooking as a means of redefining the parameters of the edible and the non-edible while acknowledging the dangers and attractions of mixing life and art.

¹² Paradoxically, however, Marinetti's willingness to aversion to "volume and weight" and his attention to texture and visual detail prefigured the development of the Nouvelle Cuisine and of the later "culinary art" of Ferran Adria and his followers. For a brief and informative overview of the history of bourgeois gastronomy, see chapter 6 of Michel Onfray's *La raison gourmande* (Paris: Grasset 1995).

¹³ For a discussion of Stein's food poetics, see Chapter 2 of my *Food, Poetry, and the Aesthetics of Consumption: Eating the Avant-Garde*. London/New York: Routledge, 2007.

¹⁴ One of Marinetti's favorite targets was Gabriele D'Annunzio who, to him, symbolized the "sickly, nostalgic poetry of distance and memory" (Nicholls 68).

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