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Art You Can Eat:
Explorations in the Art and Aesthetics of Food, Cooking, and the Meal

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Abstract

Auguste Escoffier once said, “Cooking is a science and an art, and the man who puts all his heart into satisfying his fellow men deserves consideration”. Escoffier’s encouragement embodies the fundamental purpose of this paper, to consider the cook. While he makes the statement that cooking is already an art, here, I elaborate on what he believes to be true, in an exploration of considering food, cooking, and the meal a high art form.

Introduction to the Text

This project is an expansion and an evolution of earlier, smaller scale projects dealing with the hierarchy of the senses and semiotics independently. Confronting the issues relating to the evolution of the hierarchy of the senses and how this led to the highly visual art system of today, I approached the issue from a theoretical position in an attempt to appeal to a system I was critiquing. More recently, I was exposed to ideas of semiotics, and most specifically the work of Roland Barthes. Through some preliminary research I found that he investigated sign systems in everything, and, most important for my work, in food and menus\(^1\). It was these two interests, and a fundamental passion for food, that eventually combined to yield, hopefully, something greater than its constituent parts. Though the end result was to confront some of the same issues that I will here, these previous works, in all reality, laid the foundation that allowed for the development of this project. Ultimately, the heart of the project remains the same but with a restructuring of the approach towards the material.

While systems are constantly restructured as society develops around them, there is, on occasion, the rare institution that, regardless of the movement around it, remains the same. The Western aesthetic and art historical institution is one stagnating in tradition. The institution itself constantly refers back to dated texts and contexts in an attempt to reckon with contemporary society. Certainly, these seminal texts must still be read, considered, and understood, as they are a part of a developing history, but they should be used and appropriated with discretion. As such, this paper exists as case study in reconsidering and reframing our contemporary understanding of art, of art history, and of aesthetics. With this in mind, if we use the art historical system as a tool of self-reflexive critique, we effectively attempt to paint a new color with a brush that has not yet been washed. Streaks of the old color will appear in the new layer. If, however, we use a new tool, a new brush, a new view on the same system, the new color will be clear of the streaks of the old, and we can progress forward. The constant repositioning and re-contextualizing of such texts only distances us from art, aesthetics, how we understand what these systems do, and, inevitably, from the world around us. As such, I attempt to straddle the threshold between tradition and progress, old and new, within and without as a means of bridging the gap between these spheres.

Considering the idea of food as art, it is necessary to acknowledge the use of food that does exist as a part of art historical tradition: specifically, food makes numerous appearances in painting and sculpture, and more recently, in performance. To be sure, Flemish still life painting depicts food with the utmost care and imitative quality. The rendering of fruits, meats, bread, and basket is truly stunning; however, it is not the representation of food in accepted art media nor is it food used as a medium for appealing to accepted art forms that I discuss here. While I will consider these still lives as a contextualization of the relationship between food and art, their
overlapping and interaction, it is for the ultimate purpose of framing the discussion. As such, I specifically consider the food itself, and the experience surrounding the process of eating as the art “object”.. While use of food in “folk art” and “agriculture art” does represent a desire to communicate the overwhelming availability of massive quantities of food, the use of food as a material for conventional art forms exists as a realm apart from the discussion here\(^2\). Specifically considering the ability to experience sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch simultaneously, the act of eating, of physically consuming food, is what I will discuss here.

It is important to consider here some definitional issues relating to the topic at hand. Within the context of this study, the food art object manifests in the form of the eatable dish, the physical presentation of that dish, and the meal as a holistic experience of food art. Though this seems to be an expansive constitution of a field, each of these elements forms a unique portion of the artistic experience of food as art. Considering that there is a diverse body of understandings of the word “food”, I make the distinction here between vernacular consumables and the food of the discussion, food art. With this in mind, I will maintain the use of the phrase “food art” as separate from the vernacular consumable. This is a clarifying term that distinguishes the food of the everyday from the food relevant to this discussion. Though there are manifestations of everyday consumables that could be a part of the discourse on food as art, for the purpose of this work, these are set aside to more specifically consider the restaurant environment.

While aesthetics theoreticians have done some work in dealing with food as art, they have, in part, relegated food to a popular form of art because of its ties to biological needs\(^3\). Ultimately, it is my goal to consider the practice of the Western art historical system and

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aesthetic tradition as a means of not only critiquing a restrictive system but also as a means of suggesting the inclusion of other neglected art forms. With this in mind, this paper attempts to create the understanding that contemporary culinary arts, in some specific incarnations, are in fact aesthetic and ultimate sensory experiences⁴. This exercise is not without historical precedence; the Italian Futurists briefly explored the idea of art using food as the medium for sculpture⁵, and today, Ferran Adriá, a leading chef of progressive cuisine, is pushing the boundaries, interconnecting, and systematically wearing away at the obstacles restricting food from art’s canon⁶. Though an exceptional start relating food and art, these works maintain the status quo by appealing to existing and accepted art forms of the day. Whether a block of marble or a block of mixed ingredients in the case of the Italian Futurists, sculpture is still an accepted art form. This paper considers, in part, the quality of food art as moving beyond a singularly taste-based experience into the realm of synesthetic and cross modal sensory experience that inevitably enhances knowledge of the art object ⁷.

I exist as a subjective observer of the current interaction and overlapping of food and art. In my own right, I am becoming a part of a historiographical tradition that is, as Hayden White explains⁸, necessarily subjective. I must acknowledge my own subjectivity as a means of allowing for that subjectivity, that bias, to be read, considered, and hopefully understood. Although I will discuss the merits of food as a high art form, I must insist upon this being a

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discussion and not yet another academic teleological exercise where I end up at an inescapable conclusion about food. As a student critiquing the institution of art history, and as a cook steeped in the excitement associated with cuisine generally, it is all too easy to make a statement and select evidence just to support that claim. I hope to avoid this self-indulgent methodology. To be sure, it is my goal through my research and through writing this paper to convince those reading of the aesthetic and art historical potency of food and cooking, but I hope to do so not through exclusion of relevant dissention but through the inclusion and analysis of the critiques against food as art.

Throughout the paper, I guide my analysis with three main questions:

First, why do art and aesthetics theory exclude food from a place in the realm of high art?
Second, why (on a theoretical and philosophical basis) should food be considered art?
Third, in the restaurants of today what proves food’s role as a high art form?

These framing questions aid in focusing the argument to a few of the issues regarding food as art. Though these questions do provide some guidance for the argumentation of the paper, they, by no means, encompass the entire scope of the work.

Throughout this paper, I hope to create an environment in which readers can, to a degree, become a part of a discussion not only with the text but also with each other. With this in mind, the structure of the essay will follow the development of a building. First, I will lay a historical foundation to provide the necessary background on the topic. Considering that there is a specific and occasionally restrictive vocabulary associated with food, art history, and aesthetic theory, I will attempt to verse the reader in these conditions with which to approach the rest of the paper.
From this point onwards, I will address, in some fashion, each of the three aforementioned questions. Lastly, I will consider each of the four restaurants I attended as individual case studies in the topic of food as art. These case studies will refer back both to the historical context provided as well to each of the three framing questions.

To be sure, this type of project is not new. The fact that there are dissenters, that there is any precedent at all, is a clear representation of this fact. However, the progress I make is in the same vein as the automobile; though the idea may not be a new one, the reinterpretation and representation of that old idea leads to some extraordinary leaps in meaning. The method of straddling the threshold appears as foundational to the progressive methodology used to approach this work. By combining traditional theoretical materials with admittedly subjective restaurant case studies, sourcing material from philosophers and chefs, and referencing textbook and cookbook, I aim to reintroduce, to return the prodigal son of art to the everyday after its long break in academia. By existing in this space in-between, or the movement between signifiers for Derrida\(^9\), I can appeal to the institution that I am critiquing. Simultaneously toeing the line at each threshold can be disastrous; the paper could risk being an overly academic colloquial paper or, conversely, an overly colloquial academic paper. At this point, I believe that it is not a situation of either/or but rather and; the paper will be both academic and colloquial. Ultimately, I will bring these two, seemingly divergent methods of thinking back into the same room to build something together.

The discussion of food as art is one that exists vernacularly, as opposed to institutionally. While these areas occasionally overlap, it appears that there is a divisive and strained relationship between that which is accepted de facto and that which is accepted de jure. Though

there are certainly instances where the vernacular and the institution align, foundational changes can occur only when these two exist together and harmoniously. By framing food within the context of cross modal sensory experience, and more generally as a cognitive activity, the exclusive world of art, and the accepting world of society, can come together to understand the aesthetic and artistic potency of food. This project will fill the gap between the art and aesthetic institution and the real world in an attempt to recognize the art of the everyday and to reconsider the neglected art form that is food.
How Do We Understand the Senses, Judgment, and Aesthetics?

*Historical context on sense perception, judgment, and aesthetics*

*Throughout this section of the paper, I attempt to consider a diverse body of thinkers dealing with the senses, perception, and judgment. Here, exploring the foundations of the hierarchy of the senses and approach to sense perception and judgment contextualizes the tradition associated with art history and aesthetics.*

In response to Kant’s, *What is Enlightenment?*, Foucault considers some of the issues brought up in relation to the institutional critique that Kant recommends as he refers to “tutelage”. One of the most significant issues, and certainly one of the more relevant for the current discussion, is Foucault’s analysis of the genealogy, the historical context necessary to practice institutional critique. As he understands, like any family tree, it is essential to first trace the lineage of the existing model as a means of understanding the steps that it took to arrive in its current state. Ultimately, this is the methodology that leads to a deeper understanding of the ingrained infrastructural problems associated with a specific institution. As such, this framing serves as a means of contextualizing the system to allow for further considerations as to how food operates within and transcends the institution that exists today. To a significant degree, it is this genealogy that results in the prohibition of food from a position in the category of high arts.

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12 Ibid. p. 50.
today. By unpacking the history of the current system, I hope to acknowledge the existing methodology to then use it to consider food as a high art.

**Sense Perception**

Considering the long tradition of art history and of aesthetics, a foundational contextualization of the senses and of judgment generally will allow for a systematic approach that addresses and deconstructs the system to which I appeal. Although there are a great number of thinkers that contributed to the institutional infrastructure that exists today as art history, I have selected from those a diverse body of representatives in an attempt to appropriately consider a progression and development of thought that leads to contemporary art history and aesthetics theory. As such, this section of the paper will follow a relatively strict chronology in an attempt to connect ideas and thinkers to ideas developing over time. Foundationally, this section will yield some of the tools and materials for analysis of food as art.

**Empedocles**

Although not often read in the context of art history, Greek philosopher Empedocles provides some insight into Pre-Socratic conceptions of the senses and sense perception. Though more of Empedocles’ text is extant than any other Pre-Socratic philosopher, the entirety of the surviving work amounts to approximately 450 lines.\(^\text{13}\) With this in mind, some of his theories are supplemented by later philosophers writing about, or critiquing, his theories. While the

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limited source material attributed to Empedocles is unfortunate, that which still remains is purposeful in an understanding of sensory perception of the time.

In considering sense perception, Empedocles serves as a relevant predecessor to Plato and, maybe more relevantly, to Aristotle. In his conception of sensory reception, “effluences” specific to each of five senses, would fit into pores that would then gather the relayed sense information. Though never stated as such, on a basic level, Empedocles understood all of the senses as an elaboration or extension of the sense of touch in that the effluences needed to make physical contact with the sensory receptors, the pores, in order to be sensed. Moreover, each of the effluences were of specific size and shape so as to be accepted by only the appropriate sense organ. Effectively, Empedocles considers sensory perception like a child’s game of shape sorting. If, for example, the effluence of smell is a square, and that of sight is a cylinder, these must drop through the corresponding square and circle pores of the body in order to be sensed.

While the specifics of Empedocles’ ideas on sense perception are certainly interesting, and are developed further, his general conception of the senses and the knowledge gained from them creates a unique environment that specifically counters the ideas of his successors. Specifically, though Empedocles acknowledged the potentially deceptive and fallible nature of the senses, he simultaneously recognized the fallibility of the mind. Guthrie notes that Empedocles understood both the senses and the mind as “feeble instruments” and that “man could scarcely hope for certainty.” In accepting the imperfections associated with the senses and the mind, Empedocles encouraged the use of all of the faculties of man as a means of attempting to understand and comprehend. In one of his poems on nature Empedocles states:

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14 Ibid. p. 238.
15 Ibid. p. 238-239.
16 Ibid. p. 138.
Come now, observe with all thy powers how each thing is clear, neither holding sight in
greater trust compared with hearing, nor noisy hearing above what the tongue makes
plain, nor withhold trust from any of the other limbs [organs, parts of the body], by
whatever way there is a channel to understanding, but grasp each thing in the way in
which it is clear.\textsuperscript{17}

Ultimately, this view of the senses and of the mind clearly condones the use of all of the senses
in their appropriate contexts, without holding one over the other, so as to attempt to achieve more
certainty. However, indirectly referencing statements such as this, Aristotle comments on
Empedocles and other early thinkers stating that they believed that “sensation and thought
were the same” \textsuperscript{18}. While Aristotle’s critique of Empedocles and other early thinkers may be
appropriate, the fact remains that if the distinction between sensation and thought were not yet
made, Empedocles and his compatriots nonetheless attempted to access as much information as
possible.

Regardless of his importance directly to art history, Empedocles’ understanding of the
senses and sense perception provides some continuity to the foundational thinkers of the field.

\emph{Plato}

In considering the lineage associated with ideas, Plato serves in the role of parent to
Aristotle thereby developing the chronological progression towards contemporary society.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. p. 139.
While there are numerous texts appropriate to the discussion of the senses and of judgment, “The Allegory of the Cave” in *The Republic* serves as an adequate and appropriate contemplation of the senses according to Plato. Recalling “The Allegory of the Cave”, the prisoners, who since childhood were bound by their legs and necks, look at a wall upon which shadows project. The layout of the cave is such that a walkway between the prisoners and a fire provides the material that is projected by the fire. The thought experiment continues and explores the idea that the prisoners would believe the shadows to be the truth, reality. Soon enough, the character Socrates introduces the idea of liberating the prisoners to then expose them to the light of the fire and eventually to the light of the sun. With each step towards the sunlight, the prisoners gain, simultaneously, new knowledge about the world around them and can dispel the false-truths they experienced before.

Using the “Allegory” as a positioning factor in how Plato conceives and conceptualizes the senses, it is clear to see how he holds vision as the most significant sensory contributor to knowledge. As David Summers notes, the primacy of sight, can, to a degree, be tied back to Plato in that Plato believes that sight can bring us closer to an understanding “more than we can know by simple or lesser sensation”. Quite obviously, this logic is manifest in the “Allegory of the Cave” in that the prisoners come to understand their position as they learn to see, as they adjust to the fire and to the daylight respectively. Without extending Plato’s allegory too far beyond its original purpose, the recounting of the story communicates effectively, the connection between sight, light, and knowledge and how all of these are in communication with one another.

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Considering that Empedocles had previously theorized on how the eye functions in relation to light \(^{21}\), it is reasonable to consider how further investigations into the functioning of the eye resulted in a cementing of previously held stratifications of the senses. In this case, the prisoners move between different types of light, and have a net increase in intensity of the light, which inevitably contributes to their realizing the falsehoods of the world in which they previously lived. From projected shadows, to the fire, to the sunlight, the prisoners gain knowledge as their eyes, and minds, adjust to what the light, knowledge, reveals.

Though “The Allegory of the Cave” is but one of many of Plato’s writings, it exists as an exemplary, and popularized, genealogical and ideological tie to the primacy of sight and to Aristotle.

\textit{Aristotle}

Undoubtedly, Aristotle is one of the most important philosophers in the development of contemporary aesthetics and art history. Considering Aristotle’s tremendously prolific career and the diversity of the texts attributed to him, it is most purposeful here to discuss specifically his ideas on the senses and judgment apart from the entirety of the respective texts. While significant portions of the analysis come from a few main texts, there is a more fluid motion between these texts in an attempt to cover a broad area encompassing Aristotle’s contemplations of sense and sense experience.

One of the more significant texts associated in part with the senses and sensation is \textit{De Anima}, or \textit{On the Soul}. Though seemingly misplaced, at the beginning of Book III, Aristotle

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identifies his belief that the number of senses is limited to five\textsuperscript{22}. Though others have alluded to this idea prior to this statement, it is one of the first encounters with so straightforward an alignment with five senses. To a certain degree, Empedocles, or at least the ideational genealogy of ideas, is apparent in Aristotle’s discussion of the senses and sense perception. In Book II, Aristotle devotes a significant amount of time to the development of ideas of how each sense senses. In this explanation, Aristotle considers the idea that each sense has its respective medium through which the sense is communicated to the respective sense organ \textsuperscript{23}. Reflecting back on Empedocles’ sensory shape sorting of effluences and pores, Aristotle’s idea of sensory medium is not so distanced from that of his predecessor; in both cases, sense organs respond to stimuli that fit their purpose. While Empedocles stops his elaboration of the senses with effluence and pores, Aristotle continues his discussion of that which the senses have the capacity to sense by differentiating “special sense” from “common sense” \textsuperscript{24}. In distinguishing these two types of sensation, Aristotle alludes to a further developed idea that the five senses respond only to specific sensory stimuli (the eyes see, they cannot smell). He goes further to consider the idea that there is a common sensible that are “not the special objects of any single sense, but are common to all” \textsuperscript{25}.

Aristotle continues in the text to discuss more general ideas surrounding his conception of the senses. While there were some previous thoughts about hierarchizing the senses, Aristotle appears as the first person to definitively set the importance of the senses in \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid. p. 75, 77.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid. p. 77.
Ultimately, this one act has lasted to today’s interpretation of the senses falling in the order of greatest import to least: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Though this system did not go unopposed, the fact remains that it is Aristotle’s hierarchizing of the senses that, in some respects, has lasted for over two millennia. While Aristotle sets this hierarchy in Nicomachean Ethics, he alludes to this hierarchy of the senses through some of the generalizations he makes in regards to sensing and sense impression. Specifically, though Aristotle believes that the sense of touch is the “most exact of man’s senses” and is “indispensible”, the sense is still relegated to the bottom of the hierarchy. While this appears contradictory, it is necessary to recognize the fact that the senses are organized based not on their importance to human survival but rather to their relative objectivity in relation to the other senses. Though Aristotle does place touch at the bottom of the hierarchy, he still believes in the ultimate importance of the sense of touch as contributing to intelligence and survival. He notes:

In other senses man is inferior to many of the animals, but in delicacy of touch he is superior to the rest. And to this he owes his superior intelligence. For hard-skinned men are dull of intellect, while those who are soft-skinned are gifted.

In this example, the stratification of the senses, in part, seems to be connected to social stratification. It is important to note the correlation between social climate and the environment within which these principles of sense and sensation operate as their connection can be rooted in

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28 Ibid. p. 159.
29 Ibid. p. 91.
politics as opposed to logic. Interestingly, in a critique of Aristotle’s hierarchy, Arab philosopher Avicenna considers the primacy of sight to be related to honor as opposed to senses necessary for survival \(^{30}\). Inevitably, even Avicenna’s critique maintains the exalting of sight by alluding to its honor above the other senses. In considering the delicacy of touch, it is interesting to then juxtapose Aristotle’s commentary on sight as the sense man delights in most because of all the senses “makes us know and brings light to many differences between things.”\(^{31}\) Ultimately, it is the ability of sight to differentiate between things and the distance that it can maintain between the object and itself that holds it superior to the other senses; it is the objectivity of the sense that results in its associated honor. Yet again considering Aristotle’s placement of sight at the top of his hierarchy, he notes the etymological development of the Greek word for imagination being directly connected with the Greek word for light. In conjunction with this development, Aristotle presents the idea that “since sight is the principal sense, imagination has derived even its name from light, because without light one cannot see.”\(^{32}\) The statement is doubly revealing in that Aristotle again references the primacy of sight while simultaneously connecting light with sight. Though Empedocles noted the association of light and sight, Aristotle’s statement forces the acknowledgement that sight, because of its association with light, is supremely important. Referring back to Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave”, the transition from darkness to sunlight evidently corresponds to the importance of light to the sense of sight.

Lastly, though simple, Aristotle’s positioning of the senses as negotiating between two extremes creates the understanding of the senses as logical as they appeal to proportions. Put


simply, sensing is an act of means. “In the case of flavours, excess destroys the taste, and in
colours excessive brightness or darkness destroys the sight, and so with smell”\textsuperscript{33}. This logic
follows a tradition dating back to Pythagoras in that the Pythagorean proportions associated with
sound and music have here been extrapolated to comprehend the other senses \textsuperscript{34}. Though the
senses are not connected to reason or to wisdom \textsuperscript{35}, the senses still have the capacity to appeal to
logic.

Aristotle’s hierarchizing of the senses and his associated general theories related to sense
and sense perception construct a significant portion of the foundations and barriers with which
contemporary art history and aesthetics must reckon today.

\section*{Judgment and Aesthetics}

\textit{Immanuel Kant}

Immanuel Kant, and his \textit{Critique of Judgment} \textsuperscript{36}, is one of the most basic foundations in
the understanding and development of art history and aesthetics as fields. Throughout this text,
Kant manages to construct a conceptualization of the senses and of judgment that still exists in
contemporary art history.

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\item \textsuperscript{33} Ibid. p. 117.
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The Critique of Judgment is foundational to the development of aesthetics; throughout he
develops the ideas and subtleties of the practice of judgment. Nonetheless, however, in mulling
over the different forms of judgment, Kant’s ideas of aesthetics and of sensory perception make
themselves known. From the beginning of the Critique Kant develops the understanding that
judgment is to be separated into two distinct categories, that of determinant judgment and that of
reflective judgment. In conceiving of determinant judgment, he notes that this is based on the
relationship between the universal and the particular where the universal determines the
particular. In this manner, determinant judgment is rooted in “universal transcendental laws” that
are marked out for it a priori. As such, “it has no need to devise a law for its own guidance to
enable it to subordinate the particular in nature to the universal” 37. Conversely, reflective
judgment attempts to take the particular and draw out the universal. However, this type of
judgment cannot borrow principle or law from experience because it attempts to unify all
empirical principles under the higher universal. According to Kant then, this type of judgment
can only “give as a law from and to itself” 38.
Considering this as such, it is clear that the Critique is, for the most part, an exploration of ideas
relating to reflective judgment, a judgment that is not rooted a priori in natural and universal
laws.

Having established this precedent, Kant proceeds by considering the judgment of taste in
relation to the idea of aesthetics. Throughout this discussion, it seems as though Kant references
more specifically, the etymological root of aesthetic meaning, “to perceive”. In the first section
of the Critique, Kant explains that the determination of that which is beautiful, a judgment of
taste, that refers to “the representation to the Subject and its feeling of pleasure or displeasure”,

37 Ibid. p. 63.
38 Ibid. p. 63.
though not cognitive judgment, is still aesthetic. It is here that it appears as logical that Kant refers to the origins of the word “aesthetic” in that he alludes to the perception of pleasure or displeasure as the basis for the judgment of taste. However, logical judgment of the beautiful must refer not to the subject but rather to the object itself. This progression leads to the discussion of the object being the source of the beauty in and of itself and apart from any sort of interested pleasure or displeasure; there must be a dislocation of the object from its physical existence. As such, the pure judgment of taste exists apart from delight, apart from interest. Relatedly, it is in the practice of a pure judgment, and in practice of doing heedless of enjoyment results in “an absolute worth.”

In connection with a pure judgment of taste, Kant acknowledges three types of judgment of taste: the agreeable, the beautiful, and the good. He notes that both the agreeable and the good are connected to interest in their own ways. It is the pure, cognitive judgment of taste in the beautiful that is devoid of interest. Described as the definition of the beautiful from the first moment Kant states:

Taste is the faculty of estimating an object or a mode of representation by means of a delight or aversion apart from any interest. The object of such a delight is called beautiful.

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40 Ibid. p. 65.
41 Ibid. p. 68.
42 Ibid. p. 69.
Ultimately, the idea of the beautiful is connected both with disinterest and the idea of the object being universally beautiful 43. Kant explains that the agreeable is only so to the individual, and she could not claim the universality of the agreeableness of the thing. However, that which is beautiful cannot be recognized as beautiful to the individual, rather, that which is beautiful should conceivably be universally true 44.

Inevitably, Kant’s foundational Critique of Judgment introduces a number of aesthetic concepts that maintain a presence in art history and aesthetics today. The ideas of disinterested pleasure and of judgment of sensation more generally, are integral to the discussion of food as art.

_Friedrich Nietzsche_

Although Nietzsche is not often cited in the art history classroom, he exists as a purposeful intermediary between Kantian aesthetic theory and contemporary ideals.

Especially considering that Nietzsche falls within some of the same environmental and social influences as Kant, some of the differences in how he approaches aesthetics and judgment provide some insight into shifting ideas on aesthetics. One of the most interesting of Nietzsche’s aesthetic musings relates to the idea of aesthetic renewal as an institutional necessity as “inherited forms of aesthetic practice bear no meaningful relation to contemporary culture” 45. Though this idea references the role of aesthetics in society, it also justifies aesthetic restructuring and the development of institutional critique and rejuvenation as integral to the

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43 Ibid. p. 70  
44 Ibid. p. 73  
existence of that system. It is clear that Nietzsche and Schiller both are on a similar path in which aesthetic reform opens the way to cultural revolution, which, for Nietzsche, was necessary to shift away from the nihilism of modern society. Though in part distancing himself from some of Kant’s discussion of aesthetics, Nietzsche is indebted to the Kantian notion of the sublime, as he wants to shift away from an aesthetic based singularly on the spectator’s perception towards the sublime impulse. Matthew Rampley notes that the shift towards the sublime impulse “could be seen as a kind of constructive dissonance...essential to Nietzsche’s prescription of what a counter-metaphysical art should be based on” Even within this simple exploration of Nietzsche’s aesthetics, it is clear that there are remnants of the Kantian past which are exploited for the purpose of combating nihilism.

Certainly, traces of Nietzsche’s intellectual family tree are overtly visible in some of his considerations of aesthetics, however, these examples can be contextualized with examples illustrating his critique of Kantian aesthetics. In one broad example, Nietzsche moves directly against the Kantian ideal of disinterestedness in discussing the idea that art has instructed man in the need to “‘take pleasure in life and to regard the human life as a piece of nature’” When discussing further Nietzsche’s critique of Kantian disinterestedness, he comes to recognize that there is no choice but to have the human condition intrude upon the act of judgment. Nietzsche states in From the Will to Power, “It is not possible to remain objective, or to suspend the interpretive, additive, interpolating, poetizing power” when considering aesthetics and beauty. Even more directly, Nietzsche comes to the end that contemplation without interest is “a

46 Ibid. p. 215.
49 Ibid. p. 153.
nonsensical absurdity” and that objectivity is more appropriately viewed not as contemplation without interest but rather “the ability to control one’s Pro and Con and to dispose of them” ⁵⁰.

In some instances, Nietzsche seems to refer back to the sensory principles of Empedocles. A section entitled “On Redemption” in the text *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche describes a scene in which Zarathustra comes upon “men who are nothing more than a big eye or a big mouth or a big belly or something else big” ⁵¹. This seems to allude to the Empedoclean ideal that man should use all of the senses as opposed to placing undue attention on a single sense. As described in *Zarathustra*, these men were stalk-like in appearance, save the single, massive ear, or eye; unavoidably, this image encourages an interaction with all of the senses and an Aristotelian mean that extends not only to sense perception but in the *use* of sense receivers ⁵².

Friedrich Nietzsche appears as a relevant in-between that seems to draw upon a tradition extending beyond his own environment and time.

**Conclusion**

To be sure, the philosophers and thinkers discussed here are but a few of the many who have contributed to contemporary understanding of the field of aesthetics and of art history. Though this may be the case, those who are cited contribute not only to a diverse body of aesthetic understanding but allow for an expanding conversation. Certainly, these thinkers have contributed to the system with which we interact today, but it is important to consider the movement through time and theory that, to a degree ignores a genuine disconnect between art

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⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 155.

history and aesthetics. While I do not claim to have an answer, an important question in considering the development of the art historical system and even of this paper is: “Where does aesthetics begin and end in relation to art history, do they overlap and how?” Throughout the paper, I hope to confront some of the inconsistencies and problematics associated with such institutional development.
Representing Food

*Exploring representations of food*

While the purpose of this paper is to explore the idea of food as an art form specifically in the context of its creation and associated act of consumption, it is purposeful to consider the representation of food in other environments as a means of contextualizing the argument.

In considering the instances in which food is represented, some of the most significant examples exist in literature, specifically the Bible. Quite obviously, the first encounter the reader has with food is in the Old Testament in reference to the fall of Adam and Eve as they partake of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. With this in mind, the act of consuming food, has, in one sense, been imbrued with a negative connotation; the consumption of this specific food is inevitably the reason for the fall of mankind. Though this example may oversimplify the Bible’s representation of the act of consuming food, it regardless contextualizes an experience of food that would have been widely disseminated.

In a related but opposite manner, the story of the loaves and fishes yields an interesting juxtaposition to a negative presentation of consuming food (appears in all four gospels). Though the numbers differ from gospel to gospel, the foundation of the example communicates the majesty of Jesus and his ability to perform miracles as he feeds thousands with two fish and five loaves of bread. This example, undoubtedly more positive than the previous, alludes to food communicating the power of an individual; in the presence of Jesus, all people are fed where otherwise they would have gone hungry. Though the story does recontextualize food, the story of

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the loaves and fishes is, unavoidably, representative of providing food as opposed to the actual consumption of that food.

As a union of both the positive and the negative, the description of the Last Supper in Corinthians 54 coupled with accounts from the Canonical Gospels combines both into one scene. Considering the context of the Last Supper as the occasion where Jesus describes the Eucharist, a holy form of consumption, and reveals the fact that someone at the table will betray him, the duality of the scene is apparent. In relation to the Eucharist as described in Corinthians, it can easily be associated positively with the act of consuming as the individual consumes the body and blood of Christ. In a poignant juxtaposition, the explanation of the Eucharist as holy consumption with Judas’ monetary consumption yields an important duality of consumption generally. In a way, the scene described serves as a warning of sorts, encouraging conscious and aware forms of consumption that exist apart from greed and selfishness. Though Biblical examples are somewhat specific, representation of food in art, specifically painting, often refer to stories from the Bible, and it is one of the more widely disseminated texts and topics of artistic production.

The representation of food extends beyond Biblical literature into painting; as a framing element, it is the food that exists within the context of art that is especially interesting in juxtaposing the art of food and food as art. To be sure, it would be a great oversight to ignore the representation of food within painting. Especially in the context of religion, the experience of food was one that meant to communicate the indulgence of the individual viewing. Some of these scenes incorporate Biblical scenes but they are proportionally insignificant by contrast to

the images of food. Many art historians suggest that the shift in attention from Biblical scene to secularized images relates to the idea that the “aim is to show the morally reprehensible blotting out of spiritual truths by gross materialism” 55. Though this may be true, and there are certainly a number of examples that display an overwhelming amount of food, the shift can also be attributed to an increased interest in secular and peasant issues. Considering that there were laws preserving the exclusive right of the upper classes to hunt, whereas the peasants could not; these “market scenes represent the democratization of the pleasure of aristocratic food gathering” 56. Even these scenes, however, tie back to religiosity in that there is an overt and hyperbolic sensualizing of food meant to discourage materialism. Ultimately, these issues become the subject of discussion that eventually falls into two categories, one of secular and peasant interests and the development of large-scale still life painting. On one hand, this type of painting is apart from the discussion because the food that is represented is done so with moralistic overtones. On the other hand, the food is not considered art, it is the painting.

Quite obviously, contemporary artists do work with food as a medium for creating works. The discussion can easily begin with the “biodegradable” works of Dieter Roth. In these works, Roth would layer foodstuffs on a panel, cover the panel with yoghurt, then cover this with a layer of plaster. He would then let the piece rot until only the non-biodegradable parts remained 57. In a similar use of food as material, Janine Antoni is another readily accessible example when considering her work Gnaw. In this work, Antoni slowly gnawed away at massive blocks of

56 Ibid. p. 44.
chocolate and lard, using her mouth as a sculpting tool. Undoubtedly, the use of both chocolate and lard is a direct use of foodstuff as a material for the creation of the resulting sculptures.

While both of these artists did use food, their work revolves around the use of that food as material that appeals to the status quo of the art world. Roth’s work is simultaneously sculptural and painterly and Antoni’s work is sculptural and performative. In their respective cases, Roth and Antoni made use of the material of food in ways that though involved food, did not focus on the aesthetic and artistic potency of food. More significantly, the food was not the creative product of the efforts of either artist, it was simply the material used.

As a reference to the Derridian idea of the frame having meaning in and of itself, the discussion of the representation of food in other forms, Biblical and in painting, aids in creating a meaningful discussion about that which is included. By considering an idea of food that exists within the canon, within the archive, it is then possible to contemplate how this idea relates to the food itself being considered a high art form.

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Barring the Gates

*Why food has been excluded from the canon of art*

This section of the paper will consider how the development of the arts, in part, creates some of the foundational arguments against food art. Ultimately, the historical development of the can provide some insight into how the system of arts operates and what tradition grew from initial ideas of art. More relevantly, these progressions provide more context as to reasoning behind restriction of food art from a place in the canon of high art.

**Development of the arts**

While I will not attempt to define a work of art, having an understanding of what constitutes art allows for a deepening of understanding into what it then means to be excluded from this categorization. Undoubtedly, the meaning of the word “art” has changed over time, but, the foundations of art seem to lie in the mid 18th century. Paul Oskar Kristeller’s two part study, “The Modern System of the Arts”, recounts a long history of the development of the arts. He recognizes the idea that though there were earlier conceptions of art the core of the fine arts was not set until around 1750. This core was composed of poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture, and music, to which one or more arts might be added such as dance, rhetoric, or landscape gardening. These seemingly disparate categories of creation were united by four main principles: genius, imagination, pleasure versus utility, and taste. It was these principles that justified the uniting of the visual, the verbal, and the musical into one conglomerate called the

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60 Ibid. p. 497.
fine arts. Kristeller considers how the contemporary understanding of the word “art” does not have any equivalent for the Ancients who classified all human production under the Latin word “ars”, meaning art. In this sense, the Ancients had no linguistic differentiation between the contemporary distinction between craft production and the fine arts. Unpacking this idea already alludes to a certain arbitrary development of modern aesthetics as individuals decide to repurpose, or retroactively interpret, the Ancient’s writing for the advancement of modern ideas of aesthetics and art.

More relevant to the current discussion is the development of the categorization of the arts into mechanical and liberal arts. As Kristeller notes, “Hugo of St. Victor was probably the first to formulate a scheme of seven mechanical arts corresponding to the seven liberal arts.” These mechanical arts are understood as a means of coping with the physical weakness of man and within this category fall “fabric-making, armament, commerce, agriculture, hunting and food preparation, medicine, and theatrics.” It is from this point on that food art is relegated to the realm of a mechanical art. While these traditions have since been disposed, Hugo St. Victor’s placement of food preparation within the context of mechanical arts, though somewhat inclusive in its correspondence to the liberal arts, simultaneously excludes it from the archive of the liberal arts. Leonardo da Vinci reinforces the development of the mechanical arts, and in part yields the modern distinction of the arts, throughout his paragone arguments. Throughout the paragone arguments, Leonardo argues for the primacy of painting over poetry. Some of the argument, as Kristeller notes, relates to the idea of painting as a science based on geometry. He suggests that

62 Ibid. p.507.
this is, in part, due to the liberal arts being primarily associated with the sciences or teachable knowledge. Simultaneously, the work is also firmly established in an Aristotelian tradition in maintaining the primacy of sight as the sense most connected with the common sense and the soul. Inevitably, the regardless of Leonardo’s participation in the act of organizing the paragone, the arrangement of the text, suggests a means for hierarchizing the arts, one that has traces in contemporary society.

Although structurally, the separation of the arts into liberal and mechanical no longer exists, I suggest that the differentiation between these forms of production have affected the development of food art. Undoubtedly, it is important to examine the development and distinction of human production to then understand the restrictions that have been put on food art.

**Imitation**

While Kristeller’s idea of the creation of art creates a basis upon which contemporary understandings of high art develop, philosophers predating the 18th century had previously considered what it means to be a work of art. In his article *The Artworld* Arthur Danto recognizes Socrates vision of art as “a mirror held up to nature”. Throughout the beginning of the article,

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Danto suggests that up until the invention of photography 68, imitation was foundational to the work of art existing as such. Though he contributes his own musings as to the fact that mirroring objects does not holistically or necessarily imply “art”, he acknowledges imitation as a part of the history of art. Recalling the story of Zeuxis and Parrhasius provides some allusion to the importance placed on realism and mimesis in painting in specific and art more generally. With two artists pitted against one another to create the most realistic painting, Zeuxis represented some grapes, “painted so naturally that the birds flew towards the spot where the painting was exhibited”, and Parrhasius “exhibited a curtain, drawn with such singular truthfulness” that Zeuxis, an artist, was fooled by the imitation 69. Regardless of the truthfulness of the story, the hyperbole serves as a litmus test that indicates the artistic climate of the time: mirroring nature is of utmost importance. In considering the foundations of art within the context of imitation of nature, it is clear why food does not exist within the realm of fine art. In this environment, food and cooking cannot represent or mirror nature because, in some degree, food is contiguous to nature. Following the tradition of Structuralism, Claude Lévi-Strauss attempted to qualify this distance between nature and cooking. In “The Culinary Triangle” he categorizes cooking into culture, nature, death 70. Within this framework, Lévi-Strauss considers how certain cooking techniques are associated with portions of the Triangle, specifically, roasting with nature, boiling with culture, and smoking with rotting 71. Boiling, according to Lévi-Strauss must be associated with culture because of its use of a container and in the cooking process yielding a more cooked

68 Ibid. p. 571.

end result. Within this Triangle, then, there are distinguishing factors that separate one cooking technique from another, and thereby develop a distance from and discontinuity between nature and vernacular food.

The exclusion of food from the realm of high art, under the category described in imitation theory, is unavoidably appropriate. Considering that the production appropriate to the time in which imitation theory reigned, the “artworld” associated with this time and place could be exclusive as to the type of art that was produced. As Danto explains, this “artworld” is “something the eye cannot deny- an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art” \(^{73}\). With this in mind, imitation theory was the artworld of Socrates, but the current artworld expanded to accommodate the “recalcitrant facts” of imitation theory \(^{74}\). As such, in terms of the historical exclusion of food, the argument remains perfectly logical; food was not, nor is it currently, a representative art. To be sure, however, to the degree that the art institution expanded throughout time, the argument against food as a non-representative art is a discussion that inevitably enters a much larger category of all non-mimetic art forms.

Though the issues of mimesis link more directly with the Ancients than with contemporary society, this link alludes to the historical foundations for excluding food.

Bourdieu on Materialism and Aestheticism

Regardless of the transience of the food itself, Pierre Bourdieu considers the materialism associated with bourgeois food consumption in France. Though Bourdieu does not speak only of food, or specifically of food as art, in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*

\(^{72}\) Ibid. p. 37-39.
\(^{74}\) Ibid. p. 572.
(1984) addresses the issue of bourgeois food habits. Throughout his argument, Bourdieu follows a transparently Marxist methodology as he sets up the dichotomy between the habits of the proletariat and the middle class. Within this construction, he notes:

Even the field of primary tastes is organized according to the fundamental opposition, with the antithesis between quantity and quality, belly and palate, matter and manners, substance and form.

From just this line it is easy to surmise that Bourdieu intends to create a stark juxtaposition between the proletariat, consuming food as it is, and the bourgeoisie, consuming the ritual created around the food they consume. Within his discussion, however, Bourdieu happens upon some subtleties of food consumption that are relevant to the discussion of food as art. Regardless of what the individual believes, and to a certain degree referring to the Kantian discussion of the agreeable and the beautiful, the enjoyment of food may simply be agreeable to that individual. Even in this fashion however, food exists as an aesthetic experience, just one that is not definite, within the Kantian constraints as “beautiful”. Though presented in a somewhat hyperbolic fashion, Bourdieu believes that the proletariat has “a taste for what they are

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76 Ibid. p. 177.
anyway condemned to” 79. While the statement is noticeably tinged with resentment towards an oppressive middle class, the point is well taken: each individual has her own understanding of taste and judgment, but it is a matter again, as Nietzsche considers, of the ability “to control one’s Pro and Con and to dispose of them” 80. In addressing Bourdieu’s concerns from this Nietzschean perspective, judgment participates in all forms of pleasure, it is what the senses do, but it is a matter of controlling one’s judgment to assess the object. Inevitably, Bourdieu develops in more explicit terms the idea that the working class treats food as nourishment whereas the bourgeoisie “imbue food with all kinds of values other than those relevant to basic nutrition” 81. Again, it seems as though the underlying tones of Marx surface here. Bourdieu quite obviously valorizes the position of the working class individual, but he fails to consider that the discussion of the dichotomy of working and middle class transcends issues limited to food and consumption. Working within the context of the commodity and, more appropriately, the fetish commodity “art is no longer a luxury by-product of financial capital that can transcend political and economic structures; it must be seen as central to these ‘new’ economies” 82.

As such, though Bourdieu’s commentary does fit within a tradition of Marxist theory and is purposeful in a critique of the bourgeoisie, it overlooks some of the foundational changes that commodify art, aesthetics, and consumption generally and not food specifically.

A Contemporary Argument

Considering the vast amount of information regarding the issue, Carolyn Korsmeyer, an aesthetics philosopher, provides the main four compiled fundamental arguments against food as art. These arguments are as follows:

1. The formal arrangements and expressive range of food is limited by four tastes.
2. Food is a transient medium that either decomposes or is consumed.

Connectedly, there is a “temporal limitation” that “eliminates…the possibility of studied appreciation over generations that could serve to elevate the culinary art”.

3. “Foods do not have meaning in that they have limited representational capacity to portray anything other than what they are, unlike literature, painting, or sculpture”.
4. “Food cannot express emotions…Flavors, unlike sights and sounds, arguably have no expressive connections with emotions like love, hate, grief, joy, suffering, or yearning, for example.”

Though these are by no means the extent of the arguments against food as a high art form, Korsmeyer appeals to the archaic infrastructure of the hierarchy of the senses and of aesthetics generally to frame these qualms. Inevitably, there are some basic arguments that confront her reductive approach to the creative and artistic endeavor of food.

Considering the first of the four arguments regarding the limitation of the formal and expressive elements of food, Korsmeyer falls into the trap that the hierarchy of the senses has set for all Western thinkers. While it is impossible to disagree that the ability of the tongue to sense has definite limits, sour, sweet, salty, and bitter, the argument isolates the senses as they have been isolated within the hierarchy of the senses. Though the hierarchy was established before a full understanding of the science of taste existed, it is now clear that the sense of taste is directly connected to that of smell. By only considering the idea of the four tastes, Korsmeyer completely avoids the issue of the connection of these four tastes of the tongue with the infinite range of smells, textures, sounds, and visual displays which combine to create a single dish. Her comparison is clearly in reference to the infinite nature of a painter’s palette, or of possibilities for a marble block, or even for the bow of a violin, but this logic is unavoidably flawed through the isolation of the senses.

Although the sense of sound is ranked as a higher sense on the hierarchy of the senses, it too is a transient medium that should be considered. For example, Bach’s compositions are replayed as new experiences, not the original. The second idea of limited possibility for “studied appreciation over generations” demands a comparison of the idea of the score to that of the recipe. Philosopher Elizabeth Telfer considers that it is impossible to accurately and precisely account for works of food art in the form of a recipe as one can achieve with a musical score. This progression then leads to her conclusion that a recipe is relevantly different from a score in that a score can be performed in the same fashion as was the original performance. Certainly, Telfer’s acknowledgment and furthering of Korsmeyer’s argument appears logical, but the fact

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remains that no performance can be repeated exactly as the original. Whether this idea manifests in the slight shift of a bow or in the few extra grains of salt is ultimately irrelevant when considering that it is impossible, regardless of translation from score or recipe, to recreate any performance.

To some degree, a comparison can be drawn between Sol LeWitt’s “draftsman” versus “artist” dichotomy. In the case of LeWitt, he exists as the origin of the idea, but the draftsmen may be the people who bring this idea into the realm of the physical. Following this logic, it is irrational to place food as a lower art when it is similar to the performance of music from a score. Moreover, Korsmeyer’s restriction not only limits the capacity of food as a form of art but also many of the temporary works of today’s contemporary artists. Installation piece or performance work, extrapolating these criteria to similar art forms reveals that her logic effectively eliminates forms of art that are already accepted as such.

In terms of her third argument against food as art, Korsmeyer suggests that food does not have the ability to represent anything beyond what it is already. To be fair, the movement of food when she was writing (1999) is not the same as it is in today’s thriving culinary world; however, especially within the realm of modernist cuisine, degustation, and deconstructivist food, there is no doubt as to the ability of food to represent something other than itself. In a dish for which he has become famous (amid a sundry of other reasons), Ferran Adria, chef of elBulli, transforms apples into “apple caviar” in which the shape and texture of the dish resembles that of caviar, while the flavor remains that of apples. Though this technique does still appeal to Western ideas

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of art as representation based on optical naturalism, it departs from this tradition via the experience of taste in conjunction with vision. This technique, called spherification, effectively moves away from the conventional understanding of food as a non-representative “craft.” \(^{87,88}\)

The culinary trend of foams and gels applies to this analysis of food moving beyond what it is by completely confounding the idea of the initial ingredient. At elBulli, this transformation is occasionally known through the example of 100 pounds of white asparagus being concentrated into a night’s serving of white asparagus foam \(^{89}\). In this case, visually, the eater does not know what she is eating until it has entered her mouth. Even at this point, the flavor is concentrated to a degree that it is no longer what it once was but has transformed into a beautifully neo-Platonic “ideal real” experience of white asparagus.

Finally, in her final argument against the idea of food as a fine art, she believes that food has no connection to emotions. The clearest example of the connection of food to emotions is Proust’s “episode of the Madeleine” as an example of Proust’s idea of “involuntary” memory. As Gilroy relays, “The taste of the morsels of cake soaking in the spoonful of tea awakens memories lying deep in his subconscious and brings his entire childhood in Combray back to life.” \(^{90}\) Ultimately, it is the resurgence of these memories, otherwise lost or distorted, that results in the production of emotion for Proust. It is specifically the involuntary reaction to this bite of tea and Madeleine that alludes to a Kantian interpretation of the beautiful object itself having meaning. While it would be inappropriate to suggest that this experience was necessarily


beautiful, in that it is not a universal experience, it is appropriate in the sense of the object itself, containing inciting meaning. This teleportation of sorts is a completely representative observation of the capacity of food to communicate emotions as no other field of art. While contemplating in front of a masterwork of the Renaissance, most would not be transported back, physically and emotionally, to another time in their lives. Again in reference to the work of Ferran Adria at elBulli, within his manifesto on the cuisine of the restaurant he states that food has the capacity to express “harmony, creativity, happiness, beauty, poetry, complexity, magic, humour, provocation and culture” ⁹¹. The juxtaposition of these vastly different experiences with food illustrates the timeless nature of these experiences. Though it would be naïve to say that one could have precisely the same awakening of memory as Proust with a Madeleine, experiences with taste, texture, and smell all have a direct connection with memory and emotion, a point later developed in a consideration of synesthesia.

These arguments against food as an art form are reductive in nature, and though food has progressed since the time in which Korsmeyer wrote in 1999, her arguments are similar to those of philosopher Elizabeth Telfer writing in 1996, who will be discussed in the next section.

Another Contemporary View of Food as Art

Philosopher Elizabeth Telfer addresses the topic of food as art and ultimately comes to the conclusion that occasionally food is art but should only be considered a minor art ⁹². While she shares some of the same arguments as Korsmeyer, one of her differing arguments is based on her concern that people would mistake all food as art while only some is intended as such.


Though again this appears to be a logical concern, the fact remains that not all works made by man are considered works of art, there are qualifications, requirements that distinguish works of art from those of non-art. Interestingly, Telfer draws the comparison between architecture and food in the sense that architecture is a high art though it serves a utilitarian purpose; she notes that there must be an “abstraction from usefulness” as a means of aesthetic contemplation. Following this logic, not all buildings can be, or should be, abstracted from their usefulness because they serve a purely utilitarian function. On the same token, not all food is considered art, as not all food is intended as such. Prior to her analysis of food as art, she considers qualifications of art so as to provide a foundation for the rest of the essay. Ultimately, she concludes that there must be intentionality, as in the creator must intend for the work to be viewed as art, and “a thing is a work of art for a society if it is treated by that society as primarily an object of aesthetic consideration.” In “Synthesis of elBulli cuisine”, Ferran Adria states that “The information given off by a dish is enjoyed through the senses; it is also enjoyed and interpreted by reflection.” The statement quite clearly addresses the issue of intentionality in that Adria quite evidently intends for the eater to be a contemplative consumer that revisits the experience to “reflect”. Ultimately, this Kantian notion of reflective judgment is, in part, the foundation of aesthetic judgment and is incorporated into contemporary visions of experiencing food art. Relatedly, in 2007, Adria participated in Documenta 12, the five-yearly art show is Kassel, Germany, by flying out a few guests to elBulli. Because Adria could not bring the artistic experience of the restaurant to the event, as the recontextualization would have negatively

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93 Ibid. p.51-52.
96 elBulli. 2007. *Ferran adrià brings documenta 12 to cala montjoï*. Cala Montjoï: elBulli,
altered the experience of the work, the guests were to experience his art in Cala Montjoi, Spain. In an allusion to Pierre Bourdieu’s discussion of language developing a field, Roger M. Buergel justifies inviting Chef Adria to Documenta by saying “he has managed to create his own language.” While Documenta is not necessarily representative of the entire global community of art, his participation in this event shows a broadening of the understanding of art and addresses Telfer’s concern of society determining what is art.

As another foundational argument against food, some scholars consider that the universality of eating renders food a non-art because “appreciation of the arts requires a cultivated understanding, but everyone eats.” In considering these elements of the argument against food as art, John Dewey appears as a foundation for the aesthetics of the everyday. Dewey suggests, “traditional classifications of ‘Art’ hinder our appreciation and understanding of new forms” and this specifically refers to this argument against food and any other form of functional aesthetic experience. As a sort of precursor to the musings of Nicolas Bourriaud and the ideas of relational aesthetics, Dewey reasons, “aesthetics is not merely ‘reactive,’ but is in fact imbedded in understanding of interactive experience itself.” In this manner exactly food exists as an artistic expression that yields aesthetic experiences. Additionally, the logic expressed within Dewey’s theory considers that “all experiences are potentially aesthetic” Not only does this address the concerns of Telfer by allowing for the possibility of aesthetic experience while not guaranteeing it, but the statement is also inherently inclusive of all forms of experience

97 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
by recognizing that they each have potential (aesthetic) energy. Of course, within the context of the Ancients, referring to aesthetic as movement of the senses, the discussion is limited. However, considering experience in the context of the Kantian notion of the aesthetic and the beautiful furthers a discussion of how and where one can experience something artistic and aesthetic.

Even when considering the systems that do accept food art as an art and aesthetic form, food is consistently degraded to the position of low art. In using this system, however, it becomes clearer that contemporary explorations of food and cooking transcend the conventional boundaries of aesthetic experience and is deserving of recognition. Again, though these examples represent a portion of the dissent that exists in relation to food as a high art form, they do lay a solid foundation that embodies some of the most significant arguments against food art and the use of the edible to produce art.
Interpretations on a Dish: Why Food is Art

Contemplations in synesthesia and semiotics

Throughout this section of the paper I discuss both synesthesia and semiotics as factors that develop or aid in an understanding of food art as a form of high art. Within the context of synesthesia, the encouragement of an interaction of the senses has been addressed by the Italian Futurists in the form of the meal, and should be considered as appealing to artistic tradition. Furthermore, semiotics provides a framework through which the meaningfulness of food can be interpreted. Using Roland Barthes explorations of sign systems in everything, I suggest that these associated sign systems develop a foundation for food art having meaning beyond itself.

While there are a number of different mechanisms operating within the context of food art, synesthesia appears as one, to a certain degree, partially rooted in established tradition. While Aristotle does emphasize the primacy of sight, I suggest that synesthesia mimics the combination of the senses within Aristotle’s idea of the “common sense” and can yield a deeper knowledge of the art object itself.

Synesthesia

In considering Aristotle, it is clear that his hierarchizing of the senses in Nichomachean Ethics exists as the foundation to a long standing tradition of the primacy of sight. The intentional engagement of multiple senses simultaneously is foundationally, one of the main reasons that food art transcends the artistic boundaries that remain stuck in tradition.
Naturally, the discussion of synesthesia and cross modal sensory experience as they connect with food as art, demands an exploration of what these phrases mean and their relevance to the discussion of art. Throughout this paper, the idea of cross modal sensory experience and synesthesia will, for the most part, be used interchangeably. While the conventional use of the term synesthesia refers to a brain disorder, I appeal to an etymologically based use. With this in mind, synesthesia splits into two component parts, syn and aesthesia. The prefix syn is etymologically connected to the Greek word sun meaning, “with” or “together”. The second half of the phrase, aesthesia, comes from the Greek word aisthesthai, meaning, “perceive”. When combined, the idea of synesthesia is relatively simple, perceiving senses together. Again, contemporary, and specifically medical, use of this phrase is often connected with a brain disorder in which the hemispheres of the brain remain connected so as to allow for interplay between the senses\textsuperscript{102}. Though the disorder can manifest in a number of different manners, some of the more easily understood examples involve tasting color or smelling shapes. The use of these two phrases in this context, therefore, alludes to contemporary ideas of the disorder but more specifically considers its etymological roots. As such, the connection between synesthesia and food lies in the understanding that when eating, an individual interacts with all five senses simultaneously. Certainly, this conception of synesthesia is distanced from the thought of tasting color, however, its use is relevant in that consumption of food does engage each of the senses together, and with one enhancing the other.

Undoubtedly, the Italian Futurists exist as some of the leading producers of cuisine directed at both synesthesia and aesthetics. In considering the age of the Futurists, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti attempted to create a new cuisine that followed the progressive,

\textsuperscript{102} Ward, Jamie. \textit{The Frog Who Croaked Blue :Synesthesia and the Mixing of the Senses}. London; New York: Routledge, 2008. 41. Print
technologically-driven mentality of the time. As such, he felt as though the cuisine of the past, the cuisine of tradition, needed to be renovated to more appropriately fit the Futurist lifestyle. He notes that up until the development of the first Futurist restaurant, the Holy Palate, there had been little discussion as to the “aesthetic” side of cooking. Marinetti considers the idea that in order to eat futuristically, one must use “all the five senses”; it is with this in mind, that he encourages the incorporation of perfume, poetry and music, and tactile sensation of stroking damask, velvet, and sandpaper. It is this interaction of the senses that allows for a deeper investigation into how we come to know but also a deeper understanding of what each sense organ senses. Inevitably, this experience turns synesthetic as the diner begins to understand how their senses work individually but also in relation to and in harmony with the others. It is with this mentality that the Futurists held a “tactile dinner party” that required wearing pajamas, the “banishment of knives and forks” and would sometimes require the guests to bury “their faces in a large plate containing raw and cooked vegetables.” Ultimately, the goal of Futurist cuisine was to strive “for a reassessment of the body’s global involvement in the operation of the senses” and of how this reassessment could allude to symbolic and cultural values in the form of the edible. While many of the recipes in the Futurist Cookbook are jokes, and do not lend themselves well to actual cooking, there are a select group of recipes that are functional and occasionally appeal to traditional cuisine. For example, the “Rice Oranges” recipe is a traditional dish made with leftover Risotto alla Milanese, a saffron risotto, where risotto balls are filled with

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104 Ibid. p. 77.
106 Ibid. p. 104.
cheese. Though Marinetti includes some sort of meat, the preparation, and even the name of the dish, “arancini” in Italian, is the same. The simple overlap between the synesthetic practices of Futurist cuisine and traditional Italian dishes suggests a deeper similarity between their *Aerofood* and the food that they experience vernacularly. In exposing some of the genealogy associated with Futurist cooking, a connection is more easily formed between the food of the *Futurist Cookbook* and contemporary experiences with food. While the Italian Futurists were working within a tradition that incorporated cross modal sensory experience, there are more contemporary applications of these ideas that relate to the position of food as art.

Though synesthesia is understood as a scientific exploration rather than a cultural one, even scientists working in the field recognize the capacity of cross modality in sense experience to enhance perception 108.

As current investigations continue in the realm of synesthesia, Dr. Jamie Ward, one of the leading experts on synesthesia, establishes the connection between senses. Specifically, Dr. Ward considers the advantages of synesthetic perception and the connection with memory. In considering memory generally, it seems as though using all senses, or acknowledging the interaction between the senses, can aid in memorization 109. To a certain degree, this representation of sense experience ties back to the Empedoclean model of using all of the senses, without placing one higher than another 110. By using all of our senses, by allowing them to interact and blend, we are better able to perceive that which is around us. With this in mind, and considering the arguments against food as a high art form, it is reasonable to rebut with the

109 Ibid. p. 118.
understanding that in using all senses, as opposed to just sight, a diner creates a more cemented understanding of the dish as compared to a viewer of a work of art. We need only refer back to Marcel Proust’s encounter with the Madeleine to recognize the power of synesthetic engagement of multiple senses simultaneously. By engaging vision, smell, and taste together in his childhood in Combray, Proust was able to recall a precise moment in time by again engaging the sense of taste and smell simultaneously. In the most conventionally understood manner, each individual who has the capacity to taste and smell, according to some researchers, participates in a universal form of synesthesia. Ward even references Heston Blumenthal, a three-Michelin-starred chef, who has found that “carrots can be made to ‘taste’ crunchier if the sound of the bite is recorded and amplified with headphones.” The communication between the senses creates a fuller experience that in a certain fashion, yields a deeper, more fundamental knowledge of the object itself.

It is this interaction and this fundamental knowledge yielded by the senses that alludes in part to an extrapolation of the Wagnerian vision of a Gesamtkunstwerk, a total artwork, which engages multiple senses simultaneously. Though Wagner ultimately failed in his efforts to create a work of Gesamtkunstwerk, the principle of combining multiple forms of art to create one is to be noted. Especially in connection with the synesthetic quality of the medium, food appears as a true and presentable form of the total artwork as it combines all of the senses and uses each respective sense to enhance the others. Wagner attempted to create a work of art that

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112 Ibid. p.54.
combined speech, music, and gesture. In this same way, a dish individually, and a meal as a whole experience, engages sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch, in a harmonious union of sensation. In a similar fashion, Günter Berghaus considers the idea that “Futurist cuisine was a paratheatrical art that extended the experiments in breaking down the barriers between art and life.” Although the connection between food, art, synesthesia and the total work of art should not be isolated, it is a reasonable connection that aids in understanding a historical precedent for the acceptance of a cross modal, cross-medium experience of art.

Relatedly, the idea of the interaction of the senses and synesthesia, manifests in Pre-Columbian Mesoamerican culture. Although there was still a sense of the dominance of the eye, considering the Nahua emphasis of the eye as “our total leader”, the overlapping and interaction of the senses emphasized a more egalitarian conception of the senses. In the Nahua form of writing, the viewer would see the image and upon identifying the characteristics of the glyph, the viewer would understand the presence of either sound or smell. As it appears, Pre-Columbian Mesoamerican considerations of the senses emphasized and encouraged their overlapping, much as did the Futurists, as opposed to the Aristotelian separation and limitation. In yet another fashion distinct from Western aesthetic tradition “all the senses were equated with the act of knowledgeable perception, leading in turn to judgment.” While it is a stretch to consider specific ideas of the senses and of judgment as they exist within the Western

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conception, it is important to recognize how intimately bound perception is to the cultural context. Considering some cross-cultural analysis connects this view of the senses as somehow connected to the Western art and aesthetic tradition. In the case of these Mesoamerican cultures, the synesthesia was encouraged and necessary to yield a true experience of the images. In the same manner, cross modal sensory experience as it exists in consumption of food provides a similar depth of understanding by engaging all of the senses to provide one, holistic experience.

Aristotle and Kant work towards the primacy of sight in relation to the other senses in that it is distanced from the physical and is therefore the most objective of senses. Though this model stands strong after thousands of years, this unnecessary valorization of sight denies the fact that none of the senses are necessarily objective. Considering Wittgenstein’s musings on color theory, specifically in his Remarks on Colour, he considers how sight, and color can be a socially constructed issue or, at very least, is connected with “language-games” as opposed to that which the individual actually sees. He recounts a thought experiment:

“Imagine a tribe of colour-blind people…They would not have the same colour concepts as we do. For even assuming they speak, e.g. English, and thus have all the English colour words, they would still use them differently than we do and would learn their use differently.”  

Though this thought experiment of a color-blind tribe does not specifically reference cross modal sensory experience, it does allude to the imprecision associated with sight. More importantly,

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120 Ibid. p. 4e.
throughout *Remarks* Wittgenstein questions the infallibility of sight and how language, in part, defines how an individual sees. He considers how it is that people, even functioning within the same language, are able to verify what they each individually understand to be true. In unpacking his contemplations of vision and color, Wittgenstein exposes an uncertainty with the system within which he operates. As such, I suggest that Wittgenstein approaches vision in this manner as a means of attempting to consider a system that moves beyond isolated sense experience.

While Wittgenstein’s ideas on color are purposeful in a critique of vision as understood by Aristotle, the idea is furthered when considering mistaken enjoyment of food\textsuperscript{121} or when considering differentiations in how the individual experiences taste and smell. Wittgenstein’s question provides a basis for a discussion of the fallibility of vision in conjunction with discussing how the problems of taste and smell are not limited to just these senses.

Synesthetic experience as it exists in food, questions the boundaries set by a restrictive system based on an archaic hierarchy. Unavoidably, cross modal sense experience forces upon the experiencer the idea that each of the senses can be used to gain a more developed understanding of the work itself. In considering these issues it is necessary to acknowledge the spaces in which we experience both the conventional art and the work of food as art. If, for example, the museum is the institution in which an individual experiences art, the amount of control is limited. The fact of the matter is that isolated sense experience is a tremendously difficult environment to create and maintain. Whether it is the perfume of a woman passing or the footsteps of a security guard pacing the gallery, these factors are uncontrollable, yet still have an impact upon the experiencing of the work. Consider viewing a work as a woman, wearing a pungent perfume, passes. How does an overpowering smell effect the perception of the work?

Though some of these factors undoubtedly carry over to a restaurant, an institution in which an individual can experience food as art, the intentional control of each of the senses is elevated to a higher degree than in the museum. While there are still uncontrollable variables, dishes presented to a diner are composed in a manner that consciously appeals to all five senses; the work exists as a complete work engaging all the senses and leaving little to chance or to environmental infiltration. Dress codes, no cell phone policies, perfume restrictions, can all conceivably be broken, yet, the amount of intended control in the restaurant is far more significant in contextualizing the work than in the case of the museum.

Conclusion

Synesthetic perception of works of art allows for a deeper, more fundamental knowledge of that object. Though this type of perception goes against a long-standing tradition of an isolation of the senses, I suggest that this model presents one of the most compelling cases for the idea of food as art as the medium consciously and intentionally interacts with each sense simultaneously. Although cross modal sensory experience is one of the foundations of food as art, a discussion of semiotics, in conjunction with that of cross modal sensory experience, explores the meaning in food.

Semiotics and Food

While art history appears to be somewhat self-sustaining, it seems that there are always additional tools, possibly other autotelic disciplines, which can enhance and deepen the field. Often times, these tools, these disciplines, are written off for having their own problems or for
appealing to a non-art historical framework. Ultimately, this appears as the case for semiotics and art history. Though the relationship could be a dynamic and progressive one, the institution of art history seems hesitant to accept the potential for the contiguity of these disciplines because of the linguistic foundations of semiotics. It is with this understanding of both systems that it becomes necessary to consider the possibility of a more purposive, coherent relationship between these fields. Ultimately, I suggest that in the case of food and cooking as a high art form, semiotics is a purposeful tool that provides some insight into the idea of food with meaning. Inevitably, a semiotic discussion of food and its associated meaning lends itself well to a development of food as art.

Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce were two of the most significant fathers and developers of the system today referred to as semiotics. Though both may be considered “fathers of semiotics” their individual methods of approaching the topic were significantly different. For the purpose of discussion in this paper, it is the work of Ferdinand de Saussure that is most relevant. His version of semiotics was set upon a foundation of linguistics and considered his form in terms of the “sign as a fixed and static entity, with each signifier stitched to its stable signified” 122. For example, the word “Snoopy”, and is associated phonemes, communicate, by agreed-upon convention, the idea of Charlie Brown’s beagle. In conjunction with this idea, however, Saussure also recognized that there is an arbitrary connection between these two things, the signifier and the signified. He considers the fact that the word “S-N-O-O-P-Y” has no indelible connection with that which it represents, the idea of the dog Snoopy 123.


Eventually, both Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida take Saussurean semiotics and develop it in ways that lend well to a discussion of food as art.

Beginning with Barthes interpretation of Saussure, he investigates the presence of sign systems in everything. This expansion resulted in an exploration of the operation of signs in fashion, food, automotives, and furnishings\textsuperscript{124}. To quote a passage from Barthes’ “Semantics of the Object”:

\begin{quote}
\ldots a pen necessarily parades a certain sense of wealth, of simplicity, of seriousness, of whimsicality, etc.; the plates we eat on always have a meaning, as well, and when they do not, when they feign to have none, then precisely they end up having the meaning of having no meaning. Consequently, there is no object which escapes meaning\textsuperscript{125}
\end{quote}

The application of semiotics to the field of food art allows for a pointed discussion that counters arguments against the meaninglessness of food alluded to in arguments against it as an art. In alluding to food as art, Roland Barthes is, to a certain degree, in conversation with Pierre Bourdieu. As Bourdieu considers the legitimation of an art, he insists upon the “elaboration of an artistic language” which accompanies “the emergence of the field of production”\textsuperscript{126}. Along these lines, Barthes recognizes that “substances, techniques of preparations, habits, all become part of

\begin{footnotes}
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a system of differences in signification”. Ultimately, it is these substances and techniques of preparations within the realm of food that develop the language and the vocabulary associated with the “artworld” that is food. Whether discussing traditional techniques such as braising or sautéing and conventional ingredients like foie gras, or in discussing progressive techniques like liquid nitrogen freezing and unconventional ingredients like tobacco, Barthes’ contemplations allude to the linguistic development of which Bourdieu speaks.

More specifically on the note of food art, Barthes notes that it is not in the monetary cost that the signification of the food substance is created, it is in the “level of its preparation and use”. The idea presented here represents a rebuttal to Korsmeyer’s concern that all food would be considered art while simultaneously considering, in an abstracted form, the idea of disinterested pleasure as referenced by Kant in his Critique of Judgement. In making this statement, it appears as though Barthes recognizes that food can be, and is, used in a number of different ways apart from nutrition. It seems appropriate here to consider an aphorism from Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin’s seminal Physiology of Taste where he states, “Animals feed, man eats; wise men alone know how to eat”. With Brillat-Savarin’s statement in mind, there are times when man exists as animal and must eat, other times where man eats without knowing how to eat, and finally times where the man is wise, and where he understands how to eat, how to separate himself from consumption purely for nourishment. It is here that the art of cooking and idea of food art

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manifests. I do not contest the argument that vernacular consumables are often for nourishment and is difficult, in these cases, to be the object of disinterested contemplation; however, if man eats for another purpose, apart from nourishment, if man knows how to eat, he can maintain the necessary distance to fully understand the signified in the signifiers of the meal.

Barthes acknowledgement of the sign systems that manifest in the form of food, cooking, and representations thereof, allow for a semiotic development of the meaningfulness of food and cooking in the context of art.

Though Jacques Derrida does not speak directly to the idea of food as a potential object for semiotic interpretation, his understanding of semiotics applies directly to the concept of the meal as a continuous experience.

In his interpretation and furthering of the Saussurean practice of semiotics, Derrida, instead of seeing the signifier as stitched to signified, considers the idea of meaning making as one shifts from signifier to signifier. He understood that the process of sign making and meaning making cannot come from a signified “fixed by the internal operations of a synchronic system; rather, meaning [arises] exactly from the movement from one sign or signifier to the next” 131. This approach acknowledges that the idea of semiotics, the idea of signs, sign making, and reception, is not based on a stagnating relationship between signifier and signified, it is dynamic and changing. When considering the continuity of a meal, maybe most specifically in the case of fixed menus or tasting menus, each dish builds upon the previous as a means of creating the meal as a whole experience. In this way, the idea of the meal appeals to a Derridian mentality of movement from one signifier to the next as the diner moves from one course to the next

ultimately creating a meaningful experience. As a complement to Barthes’ interpretation and application of semiotics to food, where Barthes can be applied to a single dish or component of a dish, Derrida can be applied to the meal holistically. Even on a foundational level of food and progression through a meal, the movement through the meal provides signs that are meaningful as the diner moves from course to course. For example, each course requires the setting of new flatware; the placement of the flatware serves as a sign, a vignette, calling attention to the transition from one signifier to the next. This theatrical element to a fine dining meal forces the diner to acknowledge these framing elements and to consider how one signifier dish moves to yet another signifier. Relatedly, for the versed diner, looking at the presented utensils as signs allows for an element of anticipatory prediction as to that which is to be signified in the subsequent course. A simple example of this comes in the placement of a serrated knife. Quite obviously, the serrated knife is a sign as to the next course being meat-focused. This idea translates to flavor profiles as well in that often, there is a transition dish meant to cleanse the palate between savory and sweet courses. The dish exists in a liminal space between savory and sweet that creates the understood meaning of transitioning between these flavor profiles.

Though Derrida does not speak specifically to the idea of food as art, his interpretation of Saussurean semiotics is applicable and appropriate in considering the meal as a means of moving from one signifier to the next.

**Conclusion**

In considering the possibility of sign systems in everything, I suggest the semiotics can provide the necessary interpretive techniques for unpacking food art and the meal as meaningful

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132 Ibid.
artistic events. While semiotics is intimately connected with the linguistic tradition, I believe that it is a tool relevant to explorations in food art.
A Recipe for Art

The cookbook as historiographical document

Though Elizabeth Telfer suggests that the cookbook is not an adequate record of the creation of a work of art by a chef, she denies obvious comparisons that justify interpreting the cookbook as a historical document that can be studied. When considering the cookbook in relation to other forms of documentation as they relate to artworks, it is evident that it exists as a document that allows a work of food art to be studied across generations. Specifically, comparing the cookbook to Sol LeWitt’s idea of artist and draftsman, I hope to establish the legitimacy of the cookbook as a part of historiographical and art historical tradition.

Specifically, Sol LeWitt’s works dealing with the relationship between artist and draftsman relate directly to the issue of the dichotomy between chef and cook, and chef and home user. LeWitt’s work creates a distinction between the artist, who is a creator of the idea, and the draftsman, who brings the idea of the artist into the physical realm. Looking at one example of this type of work, LeWitt writes instructions on how the “draftsmen” should complete a wall drawing. To a certain degree, it is the written document that is the work of art in the sense that it is the representation of the idea of the artist, it is from the source of the idea. The work that a viewer can experience in the physical realm is just a re-presentation of that original idea. As such, if the idea of a dish is the work of art and is communicated to draftspeople through the instructive form of the cookbook, it is possible that food, cooking, the meal, and the cookbook all fall within the domain of conceptual arts. In any case, the user of the cookbook

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ultimately creates a form of the original idea, a draft of the work of art. While I do not aim to put cooking, food, or experience of the meal within yet another restrictive framework of categorization generally, comparison to an existing form of art is relevant in discussing the merit of food as art.

Though each of these respective examples falls within a different time and a different context, the examples are relevantly similar in a manner that is unavoidable. In considering the progression of art and of food, accepted forms of art overlap with obstacles confronting food as art. Ultimately, these cases acknowledge some of the declared problems with food as art, and, nonetheless, combat effectively the associated arguments.
Eating Art

Recalling culinary history and eating food art in America’s top restaurants

Throughout this section of the paper I introduce a brief culinary history as it relates to food art as juxtaposed with my experiences at each of four restaurants. While each restaurant provided a unique experience, I will first discuss the restaurants individually, then consider food art holistically as represented by the restaurants as a collective body. In exploring both the individual characteristics of the restaurants and how they operate as whole in relation to food art, I hope to encourage the understanding that the medium of food art simultaneously appeals to art historical and aesthetics tradition while also transcending existing boundaries.

Culinary History

While critics would like to separate food art completely from the history of the arts as a collective whole, it is clear that food art preparation developed in a similar vein to the liberal arts we know today. With this in mind, it is important to consider the history of food art as a integral portion of both understanding its exclusion but more importantly, why it should be accepted.

In dealing with culinary history, it is the beginning of the 19th century, with Antonin Careme and Auguste Escoffier, that marks the beginning of modern cooking as we know it. At this point in history, Careme and Escoffier made a decided shift against the heavy spices of medieval cooking towards the composition of the dish using lighter, more subtle herbs. With this significant shift against the traditional cooking of their past, Careme and Escoffier attempt to

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consider the meal as a form of representation of the modern era, similar to the developments attempted by the Italian Futurists. These two chefs inevitably aided in yet another shift, away from the banquet, towards single dishes. While the banquet was the meal of tradition, the dish existed as a controllable form of representation of the chef to all guests, whereas in banquet form, the location of the diner would often dictate the food consumed. While this may appear to be an insignificant development, I suggest that this is actually a development alluding to the internally recognized food art of culinary France. By replacing banquets with dishes, the chef has more control over the experience of the diner than he would have had otherwise. Ultimately, the drive for innovation and creativity within the field alludes to a broader understanding what we today understand to be the genius/madman that is the artist.

In part, I believe that the inclusion of food preparation and consumption within the Encyclopédie alludes to the development of food art, but at the same time, the representation of food within this context also leaves something to be gained. Specifically, the discussion revolves around the gourmand who “only knows how to ingest.” Though there are other developments related to food preparation and consumption, it is this mentality related to food that ignores the possibility of a conscious form of eating. As Ferguson considers Pierre Larousse, there were “no negative connotations for the gastronome, who ‘loves, [and]…knows how to appreciate good food.’” It seems as though it is in part the dominance of the former interpretation, and specifically its connection to gluttony that allows for the dismissal of the art. Even still, Careme participated in a tradition of sculpture and representation of food that appealed to a semi-architectural framework. While Careme pushed for the development of the culinary arts as both

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135 Ibid. p. 609.
136 Ibid. p. 608.
science and art, inevitably, the distinction of mechanical art did not encompass that which he had in mind.

Quite obviously, referring back to the development of Futurist Cooking, it is clear that they have taken some notes from the previous culinary innovators Careme and Escoffier as a means of furthering their own development. While I will not repeat the development of Futurist Cooking, the Futurists did develop in a similar fashion as that in early 19th century France in terms of reintroducing the meal to the diner. Though it appears that there have been efforts to include food in the realm of high art, it is relegated to the mechanical arts, again, in part to Hugo of St. Victor and Leonardo’s *paragone* arguments and hierarchizing that resulted.

Though a brief history of the culinary tradition and innovation mainly found in France, I suggest that this project is in part participating in a longstanding tradition of attempting to include cooking within the realm of high art. It is imperative to consider this form of artistic and creative expression in the context of its own art history as a means of recognizing its roots and to what system it must catch up.

*Restaurant experience*

Within this work, I have attempted, through theoretical and philosophical texts, to create an understanding of the artistic merit of food, cooking, and the meal. While this method is certainly a part of the development of food as art, unavoidably, the meal is a form of art that must be experienced first hand. With this in mind, I selected and visited four of America’s top restaurants to analyze how experiencing the food operates as art in these restaurants. I visited Blackbird, wd-50, Blue Hill at Stone Barns, and Alinea for my research. Blackbird and Alinea are located in Chicago, Illinois while wd-50 and Blue Hill at Stone Barnes are located in
Manhattan and Terrytown, New York respectively. Though the process of selection may appear to be arbitrary, each of the four restaurants has, at the helm, a chef with international recognition through the Michelin Guide. While the Michelin Guide is not completely representative of the global culinary climate, two of these restaurants were also listed in the 2010 S. Pelligrino “World’s 50 Best Restaurants”\(^\text{137}\). To be sure, the restaurants were selected; I chose these restaurants because the food and experience they create fall within a context of an artistic tradition that appeals to a vision for food art. As a means of maintaining consistency, I ordered the tasting menu at each of the four restaurants. Though the number of courses and length of experience differed from one restaurant to the next, the tasting menu represents a vision of the chef for a continuous and harmonious eating experience. Relatedly, I will not discuss each individual dish of the restaurant experiences but rather use dishes as representative of thematic or artistic developments within the meal. Undoubtedly, this type of research differs from objective or formal analysis of painting, sculpture, or any other form of accepted art; even still, I attempt to practice a Nietzschean form of analysis by setting aside pro’s and con’s while still acknowledging my intimate connection with each meal.

**Blackbird**

Blackbird is a restaurant located in Chicago, Illinois and is part of the restaurant group of Michelin Starred chef Paul Kahan. While the restaurant draws upon the flavors of global cuisine, Chef Kahan and Chef David T. Posey focus on locally sourced ingredients combined with techniques of the modern culinary world\(^\text{138}\). Throughout the experience, music played in the


background and the ambiance reflected a lively demographic placed in a contemporary designed restaurant. The tasting menu consisted of 11 courses, eight of which were savory, one of which was a cleansing course, and two of which were sweet courses. While the ambiance of the restaurant did allude to the development of the meal and the type of food served, the menu exists as an internally sustaining experience that developed thematically during the course of the evening.

One of the most significant thematic elements of the meal involved dealing specifically with juxtaposition. Though the idea of spatially contiguous juxtaposition may be a relatively simple idea, within the context of a dish and a meal, there are multiple layers that exist that make this a unique experience. As Foucault notes, “we are in the epoch of simultaneity…the epoch of juxtaposition…of the side by side,” and this was the experience of the meal at Blackbird. There were a number of dishes that displayed juxtaposition, however, the one dish that embodied most specifically the idea of juxtaposition was the “Sturgeon Belly. The “Sturgeon Belly” dish, the first of the 11, was a broad exploration of juxtaposition. The belly, a soft piece of fish, topped with candied caraway allowed for a bite to be simultaneously soft and crunchy. Most importantly, the presence of apple on the plate suggests a more purposive use of the candied caraway as a textural element as the sweetness of the apple already developed the sweet side of the dish. Though caraway seeds are inherently firm, the candying process was done specifically for the purpose of the emphasizing the textural difference between the fish belly and the seeds.

While the course was small, a two bite dish, the dish stood as a structurally sound investigation.

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in how ingredients operate together and in relation to one another. The dish additionally functioned in a specifically synesthetic manner as it appealed, in a pointed fashion, directly to each of the senses. Most obviously, the diner experiences the taste and visuality of the dish, at the same time, however, she feels the textural experience of the fish and the caraway, hears the crunch of the candied seeds, and completes the taste experience with an olfactory experience. Each of these sensory experiences enhances the understanding of the other sensations: sight and hearing inform texture, smell informs taste, and vise versa, forming a complex web of sensation.

Another important investigation throughout the meal involved intratextuality within the context of the meal. The idea of intratextuality is rooted in meaning developing as ideas within one environment communicate. In this case, the relationship developed between “Sablefish” and “Foie Gras” and “Short Rib” and “Chocolate Ganache” easily displays the connections that developed within the meal. Looking at “Sablefish”, it makes use of “shrimp braised onions” while “Foie Gras” uses shrimp salt. The connection created between the dishes aids in allowing the diner to understand and interpret the ingredient and the versatility of its use. A similar discussion in conjured with the dynamic formed between “Short Rib” and “Chocolate Ganache” in that the fried preparation of the parsley root in “Short Rib” is mirrored by the same preparation of parsnip in “Chocolate Ganache”. Again, this serves as an investigation in the preconceived notions as to the placement of ingredients. The chef takes a single fried and salted preparation of root vegetables and places them in both savory and sweet courses. Inevitably, the diner is forced to reconsider what it means to be a savory ingredient and what it means to be a sweet ingredient, gaining the understanding that this is a contextualized and learned dimension of food. In what appears to be a conscious decision, the chef has created an environment within the meal that allows for the observant diner to reflect on what it means to eat, and what it means to
be a certain ingredient. In this sense, the meal exists as a means of transcending its physical constraints as it develops into a broader conversation about socialization and the influence of culture.

Dining at Blackbird ultimately engages the diner as a continuous experience within which an individual can experience food art that develops variations on a theme.

**wd-50**

Wylie Dufresne and his restaurant wd-50 are consistently associated with the modern American culinary movement and with molecular gastronomy, a practice of cuisine focused on a cooperative interaction between science, technology, and cuisine. Though each of these terms has its associated loaded meanings, the food at wd-50 and the means in which it is presented are progressive and forward thinking in their representations. Inevitably, the food Chef Dufresne creates is based on breaking down preexisting ideas of what food should be.

While there are a number of different techniques for exploration and experimentation in the food and experience at wd-50, the food is ultimately about re-presentation. As Chef Dufresne states, “we take something very familiar and serve it in an unfamiliar way, but then we will take things unfamiliar and serve them in familiar ways” 141. This re-presentative method of approaching food allows the diner to investigate new flavors in easily accessible ways while also enjoying anew flavors with which they are familiar. Two dishes that exemplify the method of reintroduction of flavors and experience are “Everything Bagel” and “Cold Fried Chicken”. Though these two dishes fall into the category of flavors with which we are familiar, I suggest

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that they are elegant representations of Chef Dufresne’s message. In first considering the “Everything Bagel” 142, the components of a conventional experience of an everything bagel exist in the dish; the bagel, the salmon, and the cream cheese all appear on the plate. However, in the wd-50 rendition of this breakfast-time classic, there is an embedded critique of visuality as that which appears to be a solid, albeit miniature, everything bagel is actually ice cream. Similar twists arise upon realizing that the smoked salmon is in the form of threads and the cream cheese a sort of crispy chip. Again, in a similar manner as the recurrence of the root vegetable preparation at Blackbird, the experience of “Everything Bagel” as re-presented here forces a reconsideration of how an individual usually consumes bagel with smoked salmon and cream cheese. Here, Dufresne encourages the diner to, at least, ask, “Why do we eat bagels as we do? Why is it odd to experience a bagel flavored ice cream?” Though there may be no easy answer to these questions, the dish is positioned at the beginning of the menu for the purpose of instructing the diner the vision with which to approach the rest of the menu. It is through this movement between the signifiers of the courses that this course eventually verses the diner on how to confront “Cold Fried Chicken”.

Though “Cold Fried Chicken” is another dish with a familiar flavor profile, the means by which it is displayed alludes to a deeper understanding of Dadaist recontextualization and its effects on a work of art. In a similar fashion to the post-production mentality associated with Marcel Duchamp’s recontextualization of his urinal, “Fountain”, into the museum setting, Chef Dufresne operates informed of this history. “Cold Fried Chicken” is just that, a piece of fried chicken that, like a bucket of half eaten KFC reserved in the refrigerator for the appropriate time, is then eaten cold. The dish questions what quality, or what experience, of food is representative

of something that should be served in a restaurant. Just as Duchamp questions art, Dufresne questions restaurant food and food as art. Interestingly, however, Dufresne confronts his interrogation of food as art by incorporating the history of the experience of fried chicken within the dish. Buttermilk-ricotta takes place of mashed potatoes, caviar acts as a salty addition, the Tabasco an oft-used condiment, and fried chicken skin recalls the once crispy past of this now soft fried chicken. The dish exists as a deconstruction of memory as it contains all elements of that which was lost and gained in the refrigerator. In the end, the dish tasted exactly like previous experiences of cold fried chicken have tasted, but, the exploration of the history of product in this iteration allowed for a deeper understanding of subsequent experiences with both hot and cold fried chicken. Initially, the dish might insight frustration, but upon realizing the joke and the dish’s investigation into the purpose of the restaurant, the food it serves, and how it serves that food yields supplemental enjoyment on top of the flavor of the course.

Certainly, these two dishes are but a portion of the meal at wd-50, and the flavor profiles are familiar to most diners, however, these dishes are representative of an art form attempting to encourage reflection and analysis of the artworks presented.

*Blue Hill at Stone Barns*

Each of the restaurants has its respective characteristics that distinguish one from the next. Though this may be the case, the experience at Blue Hill at Stone Barns is uniquely rooted in the contiguity and continuity of place and food.

Thematically and structurally, the meal at Stone Barns reflected the idea of an indelible connection between that which arrived at the table and the farm just outside the windows of the dining room. In its own form, the restaurant, and the farm within which it resides, exists as a
“Happening” à la Allan Kaprow. The farm and restaurant have a fluid and dynamic relationship in which one informs the other, and the meal, necessarily, falls between and within this frame. The meal exists as a means of exploring the control of the farm that you see and the chef as post-production artist, interpreting the materials and reintroducing them to the diner.

From the beginning of the meal, Chef Barber establishes the fact that the diner has limited control over the meal that they receive. While the guest can inform the host of aversions or allergies, other than the choice of five courses or eight courses, the meal is left entirely up to the chef and the season. With this as a signifier throughout the rest of the meal, the diner understands the connection between the food they experience and the land. The most significant dishes that displayed this connection were the bountiful presentation of the offerings from the greenhouse. Though courses are often separated by the visual cue of changing of flatware, this first “course” did not use flatware, it required physical interaction with the foodstuffs, nor was it a single dish, it was a spread. The courses came one after another, with multiple portions sitting on the table at once. The greenhouse preparations were simply composed, adhering to a strictly minimalist representation of the natural product. The means in which the courses were presented alluded to the farm as a productive organism yielding a plethora of food. While each stage of this single course could have plated individually, the experience of a spread of food laid out before the diner creates an environment that reflects bountiful vision of the farm. One course within this set that embodied the experience most effectively was a simply prepared stalk of Brussels sprouts. The stalk is staked in a small bed of pins to hold it vertically and the course is served with a set of pruning sheers to clip off the sprouts. Blue Hill at Stone Barns creates an interesting

interaction with the diner by allowing the diner to fulfill the role of farmer and eater simultaneously. This engagement with the diner encourages a deeper knowledge and enjoyment of the farm, and, again, the diner draws the connection between that which they see through the window, and that which they experience on the plate.

Considering the repurposing of a barn as the dining room, it is obvious that the goal at Blue Hill is to transport the diner’s emotions to a place of growth and of bounty. Though simply locating a restaurant on a farm may be enough to create the experiential cues for a guest to understand the productivity of the land, engaging the diner in a space that is metonymic to the experience of purity and freshness enhances the experience of the location. These visual cues, coupled with the experience of the food allows for a deeper, I would suggest cross modal, sense experience where the smell and feel of the farm and the sight of the barn, informs the diner as to their interaction with the food on their table. Undoubtedly, Blue Hill attempts to encourage connections between vision and experience by carting raw ingredients to the table prior to presenting a course featuring a cooked form of that product. While the experience is unavoidably theatrical, it is in the same vein as what Bourdieu refers to as the transubstantiation that occurs in art. For Bourdieu, art exists as taking the ordinary and transforming it into something more. This is precisely the transformation, the transubstantiation, that the hosts at Blue Hill indicate as they present the raw ingredient and then its metamorphosed state. The connection formed between raw ingredient and final product incites a certain inspiration as to the creative process, or productive process, of the chef and nature working in conjunction with one another. To a certain degree, food at Blue Hill at Stone Barns reminds me of works by Andy Goldsworthy.

While Goldsworthy’s work is represented in the form of photography, both instances take raw, natural materials and repurpose them, transform them, into a final, transient creative product. As Martin Kemp states of Goldsworthy’s work “his collaborative works align man with other cooperative species such as the bee, the swallow, the bowerbird, and the ant\textsuperscript{146}. Ultimately, the meal at Blue Hill parallels Goldsworthy’s work in that in both instances, the diner or viewer comes to understand the cooperative effort between man and nature, between raw and cooked. However, the process which lies in between the farm and the table remains partially concealed and hidden. In considering the meal, and representation of experience, at Blue Hill at Stone Barns, it is not so distanced, in practice or in principle, from that of an accepted artist. It seems as though it is necessary to consider how the interaction between these similar, if not genealogically related, art forms reinforces the potency and validity of each respectively.

It is the intentional choices of Chef Dan Barber and the associated staff of Blue Hill at Stone Barns that exploit this dichotomy to yield a deeply meaningful, and foundationally artistic, experience.

\textit{Alinea}

The word “alinea”, a synonym for a pilcrow, is a symbol for indicating a new line or a new train of thought. Often, these symbols are used for distinguishing paragraphs from one another. With this in mind, Alinea is appropriately named as it focuses on new trains of thought within the realm of food, cooking, and the representation of the meal. Consistently, Alinea is rated as one of the top restaurants in the world and has recently received one of the most

impressive distinctions in the culinary world, three Michelin stars. Working within a strong culinary background at some of the top restaurants in the world, Chef Grant Achatz practices what he calls “Progressive American” cuisine in an attempt to push boundaries and ultimately create an engaging experience unlike that of any other restaurant. Without doubt, my meal at Alinea is not only one of the most foundationally artistic but also one of the must fundamentally beautiful experiences I have had to date. Considering the broad scope of innovation and creativity coming from this Chicago-based restaurant, it is clear that Alinea is a catalyst for the transformation of potential artistic energy into kinetic artistic experience.

Undoubtedly, the idea of the meal encompasses more than the food consumed during the meal; as such, and especially in the case of Alinea, the environment in which the food exists aids in the development of the art of the meal. In a section of his book Physiology of Taste, 18th century philosopher Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin considers the differentiation between the pleasures of the table and the pleasures of eating. He suggests that the pleasure of the table is a condition unique to man’s interactions with food; he indicates, “the pleasure of the table is a reflex sensation that arises from the various circumstances of facts, places, things, and persons present during the repast”. It is with this in mind that I approach the situational factors of Alinea. Upon entering an unmarked building, the guest walks down a lit hallway to stainless steel elevator doors that automatically part upon approaching. Upon walking through these doors, a signifier of the beginning of the experience, the diner is transported into a new world

apart from any physical location outside of the restaurant. After being received, a host guides the party to their table where they are seated and welcomed to the restaurant. During the course of being seated, I noticed that there was no music playing and all that a guest could hear were the sounds of the kitchen and the voices of fellow diners. While this may be a simple factor in the experience of a meal, I suggest that this choice intentionally forces the diner to engage on a more intimate and emotional level with their food and those around them. Furthermore, in other restaurant situations, music becomes distracting and overpowering as the patrons talk over background noise. The silence inevitably encourages and facilitates a productive interaction between guests throughout the meal that, with music, may have otherwise been impossible. These interactions extend beyond a conversation within a table to listening that occurs between tables: listening for cues indicating dishes to come, or reactions to dishes already experienced.

Even in the functional characteristics of the environment, Alinea composes meaning and depth that engages the diner. In considering the interaction between tables, it is, here, necessary to consider the anticipatory element that the restaurant lighting controls. In a way, the restaurant highlights each individual table. Though this is undoubtedly a functional and practical design feature, the lighting engages the diner in an experience of productive panopticism. The panoptic experience alluded to by Tony Bennett and Jeremy Bentham exists within the context of Alinea in the form of a collective experience. In similar fashion to the experience of the museum, guests watch each other experiencing food as they simultaneously anticipate courses in their future, and share in an emotional response while viewing the consumption of dishes the diner himself has already experienced. In this way, Alinea controls layer upon layer of emotional

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experience that enhances and builds upon preexisting emotions and narratives with which the diner enters the restaurant. In an email interview, co-owner Nick Kokonas notes that the experience, in some ways “depends more on the patron than on [Alinea]”\textsuperscript{150}. Though Kokonas’ statement is undoubtedly relevant, I suggest that within the environment of Alinea, the restaurant teaches diners the necessary semiotic codes, they provide them the necessary language, to allow for a consistently engaging and emotional experience. Considering that semiotic codes are not distributed evenly\textsuperscript{151}, approaching a work of art in another context can be daunting, and may result in no further emotional or intellectual development. However, when considering Alinea, the experience of the meal distributes the necessary semiotic codes evenly and consistently so as to create a comprehensible experience for the guest. In this way, I reflect upon Donald Preziosi’s interpretation of the art historical study as a tool to make the visible legible \textsuperscript{152}. In this way, the restaurant makes an experience they create accessible and legible for the patron visiting.

More specifically within the environment, the staff participates in a meaningful manner that deserves attention in its contribution to the artistic merit of the experience. The staff in part parallels the interactive Happenings led by Allan Kaprow as he considers the idea that in these instances “the artist was the creator and director, initiating audiences into unique rites of the pieces” \textsuperscript{153}. Because of obvious physical and professional limitations, it is impossible for Chef Achatz to guide the diner through each course of the meal; as such, the artist’s responsibility of

\textsuperscript{150} Kokonas, Nick, and Ajay Dandavati. \textit{Email Correspondence}. 2010. Electronic.
initiating the guest is given to the servers to transmit to the audience/diner. By viewing the meal as connected to Kaprow’s Happenings, it is relevant to consider how the servers guide the diner through the meal, versing the guest in the necessary semiotic codes with which to approach the subsequent course. Though in an opposite yet relevant fashion, devoid of treacherousness, the staff at Alinea serves as a Virgil of sorts there to aid in the negotiation of the trail that lay ahead. Conceivably, without a staff well-versed in the emotional quality of the meal, meaningful portions of the meal would be overlooked, as the vocabulary for understanding would be limited or nonexistent. In these ways, the staff at Alinea stands again as an appropriate comparison to the art historical tradition to which Preziosi alludes, as they too make the meal, their art, legible.

Naturally, the food at Alinea is the most significant contributing factor in the artistic potency of meal. Even still, the means by which Chef Achatz presents the food can be categorized for further analysis; one of these categories is the use of surprise within the context of the meal. Though there are a number of the 22 courses that embody the intentional use of surprise, the three dishes that most effectively convey this message are “Apple”, “Rabbit”, and “Hot Potato”\footnote{Achatz, Grant, and Dave Beran. \textit{Alinea Menu, December 16, 2010.}, 2010. Print.}. The dish “Apple” is composed of a Granny Smith apple juice-filled horseradish white chocolate sphere, placed in a shot glass of celery juice. Upon taking back the full shot, involuntarily, the horseradish white chocolate sphere shatters thereby mixing the juices together while slowly melting in flavors of horseradish. Though the flavor profile of the dish is only composed of three main flavors, the experience of the dish as surprising lies in the physical aspect of the dish. The dish fundamentally questions the control that the diner has over her experience of eating. Because the sphere shatters with minimal pressure, the experience is as though the diner had no control over their process of consuming the dish beyond taking the shot.
and swallowing. Relatedly, the shock of a new flavor suddenly appearing in the middle of a bite is again a new experience that questions our experience of visuality and of our idea of control.

“Rabbit”, a three-tiered service piece containing, from top to bottom, rabbit parfait, rillettes, and consommé, takes advantage of the layering of the tiers to surprise the guest with the subsequent unveilings. Even as the service piece sits in front of the diner, the experience is controlled as the servers remove each tier. The second tier in specific hints at what lies beneath as the guest consumes the course and reveals vents in the bottom of the bowl. With steam rising through the vents, the guest understands that there is a hot liquid, presumably soup, in the final layer. While controlling the experience of surprise, Chef Achatz allows for the diner to engage emotionally with the excitement of unveiling the mysteries of the dish.

In final example of the use of surprise, the dish “Hot Potato” is one that explores thermal difference as a shocking and unique experience. The full experience of the dish is an orb of hot potato, a cube of butter, and a shaving of black truffle suspended by pin over a cold potato soup. The diner is instructed to pull the pin, releasing the suspended ingredients into the cold soup, and take down the contents of the paraffin wax bowl in one bite. This bite combines the sensation of hot (potato) and cold (potato) in a single bite, undoubtedly, a sensation infrequently happened upon in vernacular eating. Like many of the dishes at Alinea, this dish asks the guest in what other instances they experienced such a sensation. Ultimately, the dish explores sensation that does not occur intentionally in vernacular eating. With this in mind, the dish sustains itself by investigating a juxtaposition between vernacular sensation and sensation experienced in the form of food art. The bite in my mind, makes a certain reference to the impossible architectural

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structures of M.C. Escher. In both instances, the represented art experience is distanced from reality; however, in the created worlds of the respective artists, the unusual can exist.

Yet another significant thematic development in the meal relates to the game of trickery, of “trompe l’oleil”, meaning, “to trick the eye, recontextualized within the art of the meal. The two dishes that made use of this, in a similar fashion to the traditional application of the phrase within painting, were “Oyster Leaf” and “Bass”. Ultimately, in both occasions, the presentation of these dishes is deserving of an additional, new phrase “trompe de la langue”, “to trick the tongue”. First, considering “Oyster Leaf”, this dish was presented in the traditional fashion of an oyster on the half-shell, perched on a tower of rock salt. In the shell rest a single leaf topped with a mignonette sauce made with shallots. In this case, the disconnect between what the diner sees and that which he experiences creates meaning; upon consuming the dish, the flavor of the single leaf mimics exactly the experience of eating a raw oyster on the half-shell. The minced shallot from the mignonette sauce, a sauce traditional for topping oysters, imitates the occasional grit experienced when eating bivalve mollusks. The dish is in part, like “Everything Bagel” at wd-50, a critique on the disconnect between the senses that leads to this initial confusion. From this perspective, Chef Achatz speaks directly to the hierarchy of the senses established by Aristotle and perpetuated and reinforced by Kant in creating a dish with a signifier that confounds vision while appearing clear to the sense of taste. As such, the course reverts to an Empedoclean model of sense perception by suggesting an interpretation of signifier based on the sense that can most easily reach a correct conclusion. Simultaneously, even with some interaction between vision and taste, the dish still exists as a witty, and yet confusing bite, as both the eye and the tongue “anticipate” an entirely different flavor based on previous experiences of similar-looking leaves.
Though “Oyster Leaf” presents a shocking experience of trickery, “Bass” manages to further exploit the dual ideas of trompe l’oleil and trompe de la langue. While “Bass” operates in a similar vein as “Oyster Leaf”, the dish develops the idea further as Chef Achatz creates a monochromatic white dish. In an even deeper investigation in these themes, Achatz has developed the dish around flavors coming from things associated with dark coloring. For example, “Bass” makes use of the flavors of coffee, vanilla, tobacco, and pepper among others. Each of these ingredients is treated in a number of different ways. Upon being told the ingredients in the dish, the diner attempts at an archeological excavation of which substance equates to what flavor. Ultimately, the diner finds the game of hide-and-go-seek to be hopeless; each bite seems to carry an entirely different combination of flavors regardless of the attempt at precision fork spearing and scooping. After reflecting on the course, and with some further investigation, it is quite possible that the course did have distinct preparations of each individual ingredient. As some research indicates, the color of a foodstuff can greatly influence the experience of that item. In an experiment conducted by the University of Bordeaux in which 54 students were asked to note the aromas of a red wine and a white wine, the students, noted traditional adjectives associated and appropriate to the color of wine. Though this may seem irrelevant, the experiment was based on the fact that the red wine was the white wine, with added food coloring. Therefore, the students, all whom recognized aromas traditionally associated with red wines, had in fact created the aromas based on the visual cue of the color red. With this in mind, the monochromatic dish encourages the guest to attempt to distinguish between one ingredient and the next with the understanding that our senses have difficulty in attributing flavors to substances that have incorrect coloration. Without doubt, this dish requires a reflective

engagement that results in a deeper, more foundational understanding of how the senses operate in relation to one another. Similar to the traditional art representations of trompe l’oleil, Chef Achatz’s trickery of the senses yields a deeper interrogation of the accuracy and fallibility of the senses.

Inevitably, the control maintained throughout the meal at Alinea aids in yielding an intentional and fundamentally artistic experience of food art and the meal.

**Analysis**

Throughout the experiences at each of the restaurants, it became clear that, though unique, these restaurants could be categorized together in appealing to a mentality of food art. As mentioned previously, I suggest that the experience of the restaurant appeals to a contemporary interpretation of Aristotelian “common sense”. As Aristotle describes, the common sense is the place where all the special senses go to be judged. 158 With this in mind, I believe that in part, Aristotle recognized the participation of all of the senses in the practice of judgment and acquiring of knowledge. While the contemporary understanding does indicate an egalitarian form of the common sense, existing apart from the hierarchy, the ideas are not so distanced. Tracing these ideas back further, we can use the Empedoclean model at the same time in his encouragement of using the sense to which knowledge appears most clear. In each of the restaurants, recognized in this paper at Blackbird, the engagement of all senses simultaneously in an intentional fashion appears as unique to the experience of food art in a restaurant setting. In this manner, food art appeals to the tradition of Empedocles and Aristotle, but pushes the artistic boundaries further by incorporating each of the senses in a purposeful manner unique to food.

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Without a doubt, one of the areas most significantly different about the field of food art relates to the fact that the experiencer of the art must destroy the art in order to appreciate it. Within an art institution that praises the “object”, this is undoubtedly one of the characteristics most problematic with food art appealing to existing traditions. In the case of food art, this will always be a part of the experience, and the experience with necessarily be restricted to the individual. Quite obviously, this method of approaching art cannot appeal to a universal beautiful as it exists for Kant. However, with the development of relational aesthetics, Hayden White’s ideas of intersubjectivity come into mind as we progress towards an art system that engages the subject as participating in the artistic experience. While there are few forms of art that are physically destroyed in the act of experiencing them, this sort of artistic production allows for the further development and emphasis of intersubjectivity as opposed to disinterested objectivity.

In each restaurant, and in different ways in each, the chefs and staff manage to create an environment isolated from the outside world. While this is not necessarily a criteria for art, I believe that these created environments allow for a specific response to the food and a reflection of the experience. In considering some criteria fulfilled by each of the restaurants:

1. Intentional engagement of the senses beyond smell and taste.
2. Reference to ideas outside of the context of the dish and the restaurant.
3. Dishes that encourage thoughtful reflection outside of consumption specific to food.

In every restaurant these three criteria, as a small but significant portion to the idea of food art, were met. Ultimately, one foundational idea to consider in dealing with food art as opposed to vernacular eating is the purpose of consumption. While nourishment is necessary for survival, eating food that engages the senses, that is intellectually stimulating, and that is creatively

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159 White, Hayden. “The Fictions of Factual Representation,”. Grasping the World, 22-34
composed is not. Inevitably, the purpose of eating at these restaurants is not for nourishment of the body but rather a foundational nourishment of the artistic soul. A guest dines in these types of restaurants to experience the creativity and ingenuity of these chef/artists.

While contemporary philosophers and critics will maintain the subjectivity of the experience and the ties to biological needs, food art, like no other art form, pushes the boundaries of art encouraging a deeper engagement with the art object.

**Conclusion**

Each restaurant, with differing styles, approaches to cuisine, and menu length, manifests artistic representation in a manner unique and honest to these characteristics. Inevitably, formalist analysis is a non-functioning method of analysis in the context of food, and as such, the varying degree of content is based on the availability of material to be analyzed. Though there are certainly degrees of engagement with artistic tradition, each restaurant showed, to an undeniably significant degree, the open conversation they have with art. Coupling the described unpacking of food as art with synesthesia and semiotics provides further explorations as to the artistic merit of food and the meal.
A Final Bite

Concluding remarks on food as art

Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin famously said, in his *Physiology of Taste*, “Tell me what thou eatest, and I will tell thee what thou art” 160. Considering how foundational the experience of food is to the human species, it seems a tragic oversight to exclude food, cooking, and the meal from the ranks of high art. Although art historical tradition, namely that founded in the Aristotelian hierarchy of the senses and the Kantian notion of disinterested pleasure, has progressed, it is still a system rooted in texts that are continually decreasing in relevance. As Dewey notes, in the tradition of art and aesthetics, “prestige goes to those who use their minds without participation of the body and who act vicariously through the bodies and labor of others” 161. Obviously, in reference to the Kantian abstraction from the physical, Dewey considers the absurdities associated with such attempts at dissociated perception from life and existence. Inevitably, art is a part of the contemporary human condition and should not be isolated from life. By pushing these two groups together, a deeper understanding of both fields will develop. Regardless of the time, the place, or the subject, there is consistently a system, usually outdated, that restricts the advancement of knowledge and experience. In the case of food, this system manifests as an exclusive art historical tradition unwilling to interact with the everyday. Making a full circle, I return to Kant’s *What is Enlightenment?*, as he considers the trouble associated

with the cult of religion and its associated tutelage. In this sense, the art institution has become a religion, a cult that is unwilling to create, as Foucault would say, a “practical desanctification of space”. It is the shift towards the everyday, towards a contemporary secularization of an isolated art institution that will allow for an expanding of knowledge and experience. Recreating, restructuring, and fundamentally reconsidering the foundational infrastructure within the realm of art and aesthetics is a occupational necessity that comes with the infinite creativity of man; as such, such a shift is necessary so as to accept food, cooking, and meal into the realm of high art.

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Works Cited


