Eating Out: Food and Sex, Cannibalism and Prostitution: An Analysis of Sex and Eating as Parallel Methods of Consumption in Film

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Eating Out
Food and Sex, Cannibalism and Prostitution: An Analysis of Sex and Eating as Parallel Methods
of Consumption in Film

By

Rose Jimenez
After a sex-starved Jim is told that third base feels a lot like ‘warm apple pie,’ he comes home to the now-eroticized treat sitting on his kitchen counter. He sticks a tentative finger in, and unable to resist the freshly baked treat’s temptation, proceeds to dive junk-first into his mother’s warm pie. (So wrong! So very wrong!)—Shanté Cosme on American Pie

Figure 1: Jim fingers the still-warm pie

From the big, fat, floppy cold cut in Sofia Coppola’s The Virgin Suicides (1999) to the whipped cream underwear in Brian Robbins’ Varsity Blues (1999), to coitus with a pastry in Paul Weitz’s American Pie (1999)¹, food and sex always seem to be categorized together, paralleled, or used to describe one another. Their mutual framing has become a norm in film. Jim’s disembodied hands in the American Pie series are a device used throughout the series as a symbol for his exploration and sexual awakening (see Figure 1), representing the adolescent’s search for a sexual identity through self-exploration.

It seems this connection between food and sex is so innate, so engrained as a colloquial staple, it often dodges academic analysis. Little has been written on the subject, and there are more insightful tidbits amongst on-line articles like “The 10 Sexiest Food Scenes in Movies” from complex.com, whose sole purpose is to get people to have to watch an advertisement between sections of the opinion piece than in academic writing. Criterion, a company whose video distribution collection is considered to be the finest offering has only one thing to say in their article, Food on Film: “food captured on-screen can have a particularly seductive appeal.” So what is it about food that is so seductive? Shanté Cosme from Complex Media thinks,

Food is inherently sexy. Maybe it’s the sheer number of phalically-shaped foods that sparked the sexualized connection for us, or maybe it’s just because eating is an overwhelming experience of the senses that can only be found in one other place—between the sheets (or wherever you like to get down).

The visceral feelings caused by both eating and having sex are very much the same. Viscera are those internal organs in the main cavities of the body—the intestines, the esophagus, the tongue. An astonishing number of films, from ultra mainstream to ultra underground make allusions between food and sex, whether using food as a metaphor for sex or paralleling food and sex.

¹ 1999 was an excellent year for teen movies.


Pork Butt

Danny Lee and Herman Yau’s *The Eight Immortals Restaurant: The Untold Story* (1993) gives new meaning to the term “rump roast.” A Hong Kong Category III film, the title refers to the name of the restaurant (deriving from multiple Chinese mythologies referring to “eight immortals”) and, ironically, the eight members of a family murdered by the film’s protagonist, Wong Chi Hang. Though *The Eight Immortals Restaurant* has somewhat of an unorthodox narrative structure: its shot composition and dialogue make it more than just a “crime thriller” or “gross-out comedy.” It is those things but it is also a well-expressed film. Wong Chi Hang rapes and murders multiple people, and serves up their corpses in pork buns. The grotesque images and sounds of relish as the police eat those pork buns are erotically charged. A subplot follows the only female police officer investigating this case as she struggles with her identity as a woman. The theme of the human posterior plays a huge role in both plots of this film.

Figure 2: Wong prepares to butcher the waiter’s body

Like any good chef, Wong Chi Hang properly debones his meat before feeding it into the grinder. After the discovery of the limbs of his previous victims, which he discarded in plastic bags in the bays between Hong Kong and Macao, Wong takes a different approach to discarding the body of his insubordinate waiter, and so he makes him into barbeque pork buns. The first instance of the buttocks in the film occurs here. In this medium/close-up shot (see Figure 2), the butt takes up most of the frame, on a diagonal, and shares the screen with a limb, helping the audience to decipher that this is, indeed a butt. The leg offers context in a situation where the entire body cannot be seen at once. Wong spans it with a butcher knife before slicing a cheek off. The butt is violently objectified and humorously sexualized when it is finally transformed into food.
There is a lot less humor, however, in the scene in which Wong rapes his cashier before killing her. At first exposing only her rump, he binds her hands and leaves her blouse and shoes on. Wong is a murderer and a rapist at the same time. With inextinguishable rage, he desecrates the body in two ways at once. The person’s body cannot be sacred to him if the person is not sacred, and his waiter and cashier have been bringing him more grief than anything. When the bound cashier tries to shuffle away from him, he throws and breaks ceramics in her path. There are two threats to her body, both compromising her existence as human and threatening to expose her as meat. He scalds her hands in boiling water, literally cooking her alive before he sexually consumes her. Her death is finalized when he penetrates her with chopsticks—eating utensils—and destroys her sexual organs. She ultimately dies from vaginal blood loss.

This scene (see Figure 3) is framed much like the butchering: the butt is the center focal point of the shot, with other body parts on the horizon to give it context. It is simultaneously sexualized and the subject of brutal violence. This backside is consumed twice: once sexually, and once as food.

Bo is the sole female officer working on this murder case. Her name is a play on the Chinese word for bun. She is often teased for her masculine style of dress as compared to the prostitutes her boss, Officer Lee, often brings to the precinct. When she comes to work in a new feminine outfit, she is immediately framed like Wong’s victims. This is not indicative of her impending victimhood, however. She is finally being viewed as female (and therefore as consumable). Ironically, Officer Lee condemns her for looking like a prostitute. This common shot, therefore, is not just a
way to denote victims in the film, but to frame those people viewed solely as consumable objects.

The body in *The Eight Immortals Restaurant* (also known as *Bunman*) is repeatedly dismembered both diagnostically and cinematically (with extradiagnostic use of the camera). In instances where there is impending bodily harm, whether it is about to be dismembered or simply gazed upon (consumed by the eyes), the entirety of the body is taken out of view and only the rump is displayed. In the same way the buttocks is objectified, dismembered, defiled, or butchered in the plot, it is objectified and taken apart from the body by the camera.

“Worth Tasting”: Eating the Woman as Metaphor

When Bo comes in with her new look, (see Figure 4) her coworkers quite literally drool over her. They note that there’s something different about her and say she “smells good, too!” and she is “worth tasting!” The metaphor of eating as sexual innuendo is a major element of these films. Food-related sexual innuendos are an obvious wink-wink in this movie, meant to be blatantly ironic, cringe-worthy puns. However, more than just humorous writing, these are clichéd colloquialisms highlighted by the film’s visual metaphor.

Later in the film Wong threatens to rape his boss’ wife. A close-up shot shows the back of Wong’s head as he embraces her in what appears to be a stolen kiss. When he turns around, we see he has ripped off a large chunk of her cheek with his teeth. Sexy cannibalism, though gory in this particular context, is not just found in moments of horror, but is also in scenes where people eat sensually before a night together in bed. Cannibalism, prostitution, rape, and butchering are all methods of splintering the body. The single body is broken into multiple faceless marketable parts, whether by the camera or by a character, allowing for its subsequent consumption. Rape and cannibalism are equal in this particular film, framed as a fetish of breaking bodies down into parts by mastication.

The metaphorical eating of the woman happens repeatedly in Michael Glawogger’s *Whores’ Glory* (2011), a portrait of sex workers in the cities of Bangkok, Faridpur, and Reynosa. It is a documentary shown from an observer’s perspective. The camera is in the middle of the action. The film includes some seemingly unmediated long shots and is
punctuated by several talking heads. Documentary film, though it often markets itself as unbiased, unplanned, and intended to document real life, always has an agenda and is marked by narrative devices often exhibited in fictional novelization.

*Whores’ Glory* uses common narrative frameworks of sex as food to shape “an examination of the lives, needs, troubles and hopes of prostitutes in Thailand, Bangladesh, and Mexico,” (IMDb). In prostitution, the body is commoditized and, as with cannibalism, broken down into marketable parts. Sex is a literal method of consumption and commerce. A Thai prostitute discusses her personal choice to work instead of getting married to a man of limited means: “without money neither love nor lovers last.” To survive, the prostitutes sell their bodies as forms of meat so they have money to pay for food and shelter. If they did not splinter themselves into commodified and uncommodified halves, they would die. In similar fashion in Gaspar Noé’s 1998 film *I Stand Alone*, a horsemeat butcher uses the last of his money to hire a prostitute. Sex and food are on even playing ground in the world of brothels. One cannot exist if the other cannot because an *economy* exists between them. Food and sex framed as parallel forms of nourishment and comfort in these works.

*Figure 5: Thai Women on display behind glass*

Framing commonly used for both food and sex in fiction presents prostitution as a method of cannibalism in *Whores’ Glory*. Women in Thailand sit, lit brightly on different levels of platforms behind glass, waiting to be picked like fish on ice at the market, while the owners of the brothel make recommendations (“the one in the pink dress is fresh!”) and customers haggle for the best deal they can get, (see Figure 5). Alterity in the form of the gender-based other (which helps perpetuate heteronormativity) is a key factor fueling this economy. Men can view hiring prostitutes less cannibalistically, and therefore as a less transgressive act, if the
prostitutes are women. Women are referred to repeatedly as fish and meat, making it easier for the audience to understand them as meat-based objects instead of viewing them as human beings. A conversation between Thai Johns (men soliciting escorts) opens up a dialogue on women as consumable objects and consumable objects in relation to women. These ideals resonate throughout other scenes in the film:

Thai Man 1\textsuperscript{2}: Your wife was pretty and you loved her once. Just having dinner with her was pure bliss. But now we have them day in and day out. And you know why? It’s because they have us in their pockets.

Thai Man 2: What I like is the variety.
Thai Man 3: They even smell different.
Thai Man 2: But to me my wife is still number 1.
Thai Man 4: Don’t mention my wife to me. She is a cold fish now. But it still hurts when she cheats on me. Why go out for hamburger when you can have steak at home? Sometimes you really just want a burger.

The next scene shows a man telling his friends why he could not possibly have a girl today, although his friends nag him that it is only charitable to hire these women: “I’m low on money and I still have to eat dinner.”

This is not a problem for the wealthy men in the film, who feast at a table surrounded with both food and women at their disposal. A dozen women sit at the table like so many plates. The brothel owner’s hand is raised in the air to present rooms like he presented women behind the glass (compare Figures 5 and 6). The women are plated in this scene. Their sex is categorized as meat, and what are genitals but meat—“muscles of animals, and muscles are nothing but wet protein tissues,” (Smil).

Robert Singer likens the morgue in Costa-Garvas’ Missing (1982) to the butcher counter as a spectacle in his essay Eat Me: Naturalism and Meat: “a fixed point in space and time; the human spectacle is processed in the naturalist narrative, like meat prepared meat in a butcher’s shop,” (9). The brothel is a butcher shop. The prostitute is a major component in this naturalist narrative as she is simultaneously alive and dead. She offers the emotional detachment of eating the chop of an animal whose face you have never seen and the intimate touch of living human being.

\textsuperscript{2} Unfortunately, almost no people in Whores’ Glory are named. Most quotes are from somewhat anonymous people on screen, and therefore they must be described reductively.
The Bangladeshi men in Whores’ Glory spend hours beating the scales off of fish, nicking their fingers in the process, fish guts intermingling with their own fresh blood. These men “fuck in [their] spare time, then go home. After [they] eat [they] go back [to the brothel] again.” The fishmongers claim that their sexual appetites are insatiable and they must make a trip to the brothel daily, if not twice a day. There are so many shots of workers’ meal breaks in this film that it seems almost as if these Johns and house bunnies are at all times either eating, fucking, or butchering something to sell to someone else (in the case of the sex workers, they constantly groom their own bodies to make a better sale).

Grooming is a prominent theme in the Bangladeshi portion of the documentary. There is crosscutting between the sex workers plucking their eyebrows and the butchers scaling their fish. They are at all times consuming or preparing to consume. The barber has a daily brothel break, too. “I go there to relieve myself,” he says, as if he is going to the bathroom.

The prostitutes discuss food as a tool of their trade. “Eat my pussy” is a request they will never make. To allow a man to perform cunnilingus on her is to disgrace that tool: “Men don’t realize how we sacrifice our sense of shame for money,” a teenage prostitute says, “Six hundred takas allows fucking twice in one hour. Some penises need time to get hard again. You have to drink or eat with them before the second time. You can’t just push a button to make them hard.” Meat is presented as a cyclical resource in this film. Food (meat) is fuel for sex (meat) and sex is fuel for the workingman’s motivation to get up in the morning. Sex is a form of work. Work is fuel to obtain money. And money is needed to buy food. “In the cyclic world of naturalist meat production and consumption, nothing ends. Only the grinding process is maintained, and the trope remains,” (Singer).

At one point in the film, a woman in the Bangladeshi brothel is beaten after being rude to a client and driving him away to another girl. She is sternly reminded that she should work because she is always...
guaranteed food. In accordance, however, the brothel’s cook is beaten also, if he does not have all the girls fed by 7:00 or 8:00 in the morning. “This is a fucking whorehouse, not a family dinner! Your honor has no place here…[and] we only eat when you work.” Eating is a mouth pleasure these girls never refuse.

Honor is a big deal in the Faridpur, Bangladesh brothels. In regard to giving oral sex, the women refuse to do this, too, unless they are starving: “no, my mouth is holy. It recites the Suras of the Qur’an.” It is a disgrace to them to pray\(^3\) with a defiled mouth. The sexual dynamic between men and women in American films that take place in this particular part of the world is often framed as cannibalism. *Aladdin* (1992) takes place in pre-Islamic Saudi Arabia and the film’s namesake character famously belts out “got eat to live, got to steal to eat, otherwise we’d get along!” (of course, he says this right after escaping the grasp of a rather large woman that admits that she still thinks “he’s rather tasty.”) In a similar fashion, a teenage boy in *Whores’ Glory* explains that the brothels are an absolute necessity, because they would “have to” otherwise go out and rape someone. Sexual intercourse is treated like it is as important for survival as eating, to the extent that someone must steal it in order to survive.

\[\bullet\bullet\bullet\]

**Antiseptic**

![Figure 7: Bangladeshi woman cleanses/cooks her feet](image)

The sex workers filmed in Mexico are aestheticized differently than those in Thailand and Bangladesh. There is never a shot of them cleaning. Even Wong Chi Hang urinates on his hands as antiseptic in *The Eight Immortals Restaurant*. The women filmed in Bangladesh use fire to cleanse the air and the entryways, and to sanitize their beds and carpets. The Bangladeshi women also run their feet over fire in a cleansing fashion, but are essentially cooking themselves, making them better fit to be consumed (see Figure 7). This shot is similar to the buttocks shots in *The Eight Immortals Restaurant* in that it also breaks the body down into pieces. Only the legs and feet are seen.

\(^3\) Freudian Slip: “pray” was at first misspelled, “prey.”
The prostitutes in Mexico are presented with fewer regulations: simply opening their room door in their district to indicate they are open for business. They seem to be working on their own terms, and spend a lot of time consorting with male patrons and female strippers in local bars. This also allows them to have more agency to allow their clients a wider exploration of their body. Blowjobs are far from out of the question: they are the least expensive service offered.

Young Mexican men coming to visit give their reasons for pursuing a prostitute despite the relationships they are in:

Mexican Man 1: Sometimes I pay to watch them masturbate.
Mexican Man 2: They let you finger them.
Mexican Man 3: I like to eat their pussies. Steak and fries gets boring if you eat it daily.

Although the women they marry are generally described as the perfect women, many men in this film use the metaphor of being bored of certain foods to justify their need for a prostitute.

The Mexican portion of the film also includes the only sex act shown in the entire film. Documentary may be framed, but a large appeal of this may be the potential opportunity to see unsimulated sex, and an unsimulated interaction with a prostitute. Even eating is often simulated in film. Several behind-the-scenes looks at movies or commercials show actors spitting out their food between takes or simply playing around with what’s on the plate in a scene, cleverly masking that the consumption is simulated. Actors in a film do not have sex, but lie in a bed and mash their parts together. A documentary about sex tantalizes an audience by presenting a set-up seen in pornography through a sophisticated medium, satisfying the audience’s hunger for both taboo thrills and worldly, artistically framed information.

These women refer to themselves as food. Puntissima, literally named the ultimate whore, and one of the few named people in the entire documentary, explains how she earned this prestigious title. She had as many as forty Johns a day. She shakes her bare breasts for the camera. She has dubbed them “Chocolate and Vanilla.” She likens the male sex fluids not to meat, but to dairy products (products of manipulating meat). She thinks blowjobs are disgusting because they remind her of dairy products: “You think you’re getting fresh baby milk. Or yogurt. But some guys gave a mouthful of
sour cream. One guy squirted chunks of cheese!” Milk is drawn from the penis using the same method used to extract milk from the udder of a cow. Extensive use of parallel action and crosscutting, quickly switching back and forth between brothels and food production, instill a deep connection between the two elements.

Eat, Prey, Love: Eating and Sex as parallel forms of aggression

Much like the humans claim we love animals while we are constantly implementing new ways to torment farm animals into meat, men claim to love women yet systematically force them to exist only as the virgin, mother, bitch, or whore. The virgin is fresh meat and the mother provides first milk. The ideas of the bitch and whore are less amicable but also easily understandable. The bitch is like bland meat, consumed bitterly but necessary for nourishment, and the whore is like meat not unspoiled, easily consumed but far from ideal. The only of the four eligible for marriage are the virgin and the bitch, but all four are sexual victims in cinema.

Whereas sex and violence do not inherently occupy the same space in society, cinema has categorized those two things together in the audience’s mind. Of course, most pro-war states in the US are also the pro-abstinence states (with the highest teen pregnancy rates and highest obesity rates in the country.) Prostitution and cannibalism are parallel methods of consumption of the objectified human body. Films like Monster (2003) and Black Snake Moan (2006) refuse to show the so-called promiscuous female as anything but a victim of violence and present her promiscuity as a form of self-harm. Cannibals are presented at the highest level of human depravity.

In an academic paper by Elizabeth C. Hirschman and Barbara B. Stern from Rutger’s University, entitled Women As Commodities: Prostitution as Depicted in The Blue Angel, Pretty Baby, and Pretty Woman, they claim that even consuming a film about prostitution is consumption of the human being:

A prostitute is a sexual commodity, a bundle of product attributes whose primary role is to serve as an object or product consumed by men... Our present interest in motion pictures as vehicles of consumption ideology stems from this medium’s widely recognized impact as a socializing agent for consumers... The consumption of these cinematic images has a powerful effect on women’s-and-men’s-images of themselves, their roles, their place. Our intent has been to illustrate that as we consume media texts,
so also do they consume us, by shaping our views of who and what we are.

They argue that the innate virtue of the whore in film is that they are immaterial beings. They sell an immaterial commodity and are often only depicted as fighting to get by. Julia Roberts’ character in Pretty Woman (1990), for example, is satisfied by being able to pay rent and eat. However, her mouth is often used as a main character in the movie. She eats poorly and refuses to kiss her Johns. The character climax is when she learns how to eat “like a lady.” Throughout the film, the character Hirschman and Stern call “A Whore-With-A-Heart–of-Gold,” learns to look better while eating while simultaneously learning to have sex as an act of intimacy instead as an act of commerce. This is, of course, indicated by the fact that she finally kisses her John on the mouth at the end of the movie. The prostitutes in Whores’ Glory, however much they are edited, are real people. They have hopes and dreams beyond the Hollywood ideals of a husband, fancy kitchen, and car. They dream of respect, financial security, and freedom from fear. Some embrace their sex as a weapon of power, while others feel hopeless, and like there is nothing better out there for them.

Sex, the physical act, is a core thematic visual aesthetic in film. This aesthetic includes nudity and intercourse, and their respective variations and simulations. Cosme agrees that sex is a method of consumption, saying “some of cinema’s sexiest moments have used food as foreplay, or consuming an elaborate meal as a pre-cursor to being, ahem, consumed.” Sex and violence in film have been categorized together because their mutual themes of gratuitousness and indulgence attract the same kind of audience.

Sex and Violence as Forms of Transgression

When promotion casually or aggressively uses ratings, our way of looking at and thinking about the movie already begins to anticipate the film. For example, with an R rating, we might anticipate a movie featuring a degree of sex and violence.—Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White

Historically, cinematic sex and violence often wind up on the outskirts of the mainstream, and those films that are the most transgressive either remain unrated and out of mainstream theaters, or are given the most subversive ratings. This both hurts studios at the box office level and keeps their advertisements out of ordinary daily publications, (Corrigan 49). The Motion Picture Association of America’s (MPAA)
ratings might categorize films like these as R (persons under age seventeen must be accompanied by an adult) or NC-17 (persons under age seventeen not admitted). In Great Britain, films with these themes might earn an X rating (persons under age eighteen are not admitted). In the United States, these regulations at one point kept films depicting sex and violence in the grindhouse. Now these films are kept in the art cinema house. This does not inherently drive away an audience, however. People flock to sex and violence. Violence can be just an indulgent and exciting as sex. They are both gratuitous and carry the weight of guilt and the thrill of danger. To a certain audience, an R, X, or NC-17 rating can serve as a tempting promise for a titillating film.

In Hong Kong, films like The Eight Immortals Restaurant are labeled as “Category III.” The Hong Kong motion picture rating system (in place since 1988) defines Category III as “no persons younger than eighteen years of age are permitted to rent, purchase, or watch this film in the cinema,” and it applies not only to films produced in Hong Kong, but any film distributed in Hong Kong.

Modern art films and films depicting sex were dubbed “degenerate art” and destroyed during the Nazi regime in Germany. Adolph Hitler, a failed art student, proclaimed, “It is not the mission of art to wallow in filth for filth’s sake, to paint the human being in a state of putrefaction, to draw cretins as symbols of motherhood, or to present deformed idiots as representatives of manly strength,” (Farago). The degenerate, or the artist with a pathological disorder like “perversion,” was deemed potentially contagious. Taking in art depicting sexual depravity or prostitution could pass the perverse illness onto the viewer.

The New French Extremity is a categorization of transgressive films like those by Noé made in the 1990’s and 2000’s. Although it covers a wide number of filmmakers and films with different subject matters, they all have a certain naturalist element about them. Tim Palmer of the University of North Carolina describes New French Extremism as “cinema of brutal intimacy,” (22) where sexual depravity is a type of psychosocial dysfunction. Says Palmer, 

*As an art form and professional practice, cinema thrives on its ability to induce forceful, vivid sensation—a tendency that is some cases is taken to extremes. Yet while the majority of the film world engages its viewers to convey satisfaction or gratification, there occasionally emerges an opposite tendency, aggressive and*
abrasive forms of cinema that seek a more confrontational experience. (22)

The sounds and sights of eating and having sex on screen create a fully encapsulating sensory experience in New French Extremism. Palmer qualifies what he calls “corporeal aesthetics.” These are aesthetics of or relating to the bodily aspects of the human rather than the emotional/spiritual parts of the human qualified by cinematic elements such as extreme close-ups and lingering static shots of abstracted wriggling body parts, sweating, goose bumps, naked skin, and hair. The accompanying sound is often that of heavy breathing and hushed tones, eerie, gothic, or romantic music and other typically pornographic sound.

Food can make all the difference between movies and pornography. Whores’ Glory, The Eight Immortals Restaurant, I Stand Alone, and even the American Pie series all utilize the corporeal aesthetic. The swirling of cheap beer and semen in a plastic cup in American Pie 2 (2001) is probably viewed as a pure gross-out element, but it is, effectively, almost beautiful. Whereas the sole purpose of pornography is to sexually arouse its audience, naturalist cinema often uses the theme of the sex act as a gateway to understanding the human as a total sum of several physical and emotional parts.

![Figure 8: A woman is spanked with a fish in Meat Beat](image)

Meat Beat (2014) by an anonymous group called The Death Collective is a short film that falls on a blurred line between art and pornography. A festive live-loop song is created in this short by beating various cuts of meat and fish against the body of a woman twerking in her underwear. The total removal of the emotional aspects of the human make it easy to cast Meat Beat off as pornography, but its naturalist elements are what make it a fully realized piece of cinema. The framing of the buttocks is undeniably similar to the framing of the buttocks in The Eight Immortals Restaurant. The humorous collision between dead and living animals forces a visceral connection between meat in its different stages of life. This is more than just a fetish piece.

But of course, public outcry ensued and The Death Collective was begged to offer A Vegetarian Option (2014) (see Figure 8b):
It seems people are less upset by the fact that a woman in being bombarded with food than the fact that that food is MEAT!\footnote{Parts of a dead animal, which is seemingly more important than the living human woman.}

Public outcry has long been an effective argument against artistic endeavors in cinema. After a switch to vertical control over film production in the United States in the 1920’s, the aspect of entertainment becomes valued over artistic endeavors. Throughout the 1930’s and 1940’s, when MGM and Fox are the fashionable studios, Hollywood-style invisible editing becomes a rule. The production code, known informally as the Hays code, enforced from 1934-1950 (where we locate what we call Classical Hollywood films) forces filmmakers to create for a universal audience. An element like lustful kissing becomes face mashing. Any element like nudity, drug trade, perversion, misogyny, domestic violence, premarital sex, interracial relationships, venereal disease, or childbirth becomes either totally absent or heavily veiled in the story line. Ne’er-do-wells must wind up dead or in jail, and the act of sex must be reinterpreted to a closing iris and subsequent fade-in to a fully dressed man smoking a cigarette.

Though Humphrey Bogart having a smoke on the balcony in Michael Curtiz’s *Casablanca* (1942) has become the epitomic example used to describe this Hollywood trick in film studies classes of all levels, the act of eating is also used to disguise sex in film and is perhaps far more effective. Julian Baggini, writer and founding editor of The Philosophers’ Magazine, analyzes food as a metaphor for sex in film in his piece, *Sex, Pies and Videotape: Food and Foreplay on Film*. He cites Tony Richardson’s *Tom Jones* (1963) as one of the most famous sex scenes in cinematic history: “Albert Finney and Joyce Redman share a wordless meal which becomes a kind of foreplay. They stare into each other’s eyes as they lustily strip meat off bones, swallow whole oysters and stuff juicy pears into their dripping mouths” before she grabs his hands and desperately sprints to the bedroom while humorous music plays. In Busby Berkley’s *The Gang’s All Here* (1943), sex icon Carmen Miranda sings,
The gentlemen, they want to make me say, ‘Si, si,’
But I don’t tell them that, I tell them, ‘Yes, sir-ee!’
And maybe that is why they come for dates to me,
The Lady in the Tutti-Frutti Hat! ...
Americanos tell me that my hat is high,
Because I will not take it off to kiss a guy;
But if I ever start to take it off, ay, ay!
I do that once for Johnny Smith
And he is very happy with
The lady in the tutti-frutti hat!

She suggestively dances and sings for a full seven minutes with giant bananas, implying that she really knows how to handle her fruit. Her chorus girls walk around with six-foot bananas protruding from their waistlines like fruity phalluses (see Figure 9). Although it did not directly violate the Hays code and its message totally undetectable to the average child, the song easily interpreted as being about a woman trying to get Americans to like her very tall hat, its almost obscene suggestiveness got it banned in many other countries, (Baggini).

Classical theorists like Joseph Campbell, American mythologist, have long explored methods of consumption other than food. Though he discusses sexual themes of the heroic genre as a major thrill for those seeking intellectual entertainment, likening their hunger for it to a starving person groveling for scraps, his ideas on the human need for the thrills of sex and food go deeper than a mere hunger. An introduction to the 2004 edition of his most famous work, The Hero with a Thousand Faces by Clarissa Pinkola Estes, Ph.D. explores the particular demand for sex, violence, and food in storytelling:

Sexual themes and other motifs of death, evil, and extinction...are also only one part of a larger universal rondo of stories, which includes themes of spirit overriding matter, of entropy, of glory in rebirth and more. Sex, death, and extinction stories are useful in order for the psyche to be taught about deeper life.

Entropy marks the gradual decline into chaos. Cinema has the unique capability of being able to express entropy with the camera as pen, using a combination of
images, sound, lighting, dialogue, *mise en scène*, and camera movement to paint a fantastical virtual reality for the audience.

Sex and Eating already produce full sensory experiences. They excite sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch. They directly affect viscera, achieving an almost extrasensory experience. Their elements are tightly linked and they are wildly accurate when used to describe one another.

The intertextuality of these film elements has a trickledown effect that makes the metaphor of food as sex both a film trope and a colloquial staple. It is often indulgent, compulsive, gratuitous, fantastical, and grotesque. Sex and food are often framed together or in the same fashion throughout a film. Eating is a metaphor for sex because sex is a form of indulgent consumption. Sex satisfies a hunger. Eating is an erotically charged act.

In these naturalist contexts, the body is merely meat instead of a vessel for human life.

Food and sex have explicitly been paralleled in film and universal rhetoric. Their cinematic frameworks are aesthetically analogous. This is a reflection of how sex is discussed in everyday life.

The purpose of the innuendo is to ease the conversation about a topic that otherwise causes discomfort or is otherwise difficult to understand. Conversely, the bombardment of these frameworks in media helps to engrain in our culture the idea of the physical body and the idea of personhood as mutually exclusive.  

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5 Whether or not this is true is something else entirely.
WORKS CITED


Palmer, Tim “Style and Sensation in the Contemporary French Cinema of the Body”, Journal of Film and Video, Fall 2006

