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Food & Words

The Culinary and the Alimentary as Critical Tools

Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, The Sea*, Thomas Bernhard's *Holzfällen* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Henriette Heise, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

Date:

Abstract

Food is a material substance, eating a vital every-day physical need. However, food is at the same time a cultural substance and an ingredient of narratives. The present study explores the potential of the culinary and alimentary aspects of food, located in the realms of both the physical and cultural, as tool for critical analysis. In three case studies, this thesis shows that the culinary and alimentary can provide new insights into literary texts. Murdoch's *The Sea, The Sea* (1978), Bernhard's *Holzfällen* (1984) and Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) are part of the literary canon, yet food in these novels has never been read systematically or considered in relation to the concepts of artistic and cultural production implicitly problematized by the culinary and alimentary aspects of the texts. This study sets out to show that food is an excellent critical tool in relation to concepts of art and narration, which it implicitly destabilizes and questions. The study is divided into four chapters, from which a comparative conclusion is drawn. Chapter 1 locates food within literature by presenting its varied conventional uses in fiction and sets up the theoretical framework of the subsequent literary analysis. A selection of relevant theories of or involving food is outlined in this part. These theories look at food from the angles of anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis and philosophy. These are used as critical lenses in the textual analyses of the subsequent three chapters. Chapters 2 to 4 provide critical analyses of the three novels, beginning with *The Sea, The Sea*, in which food is least structurally central, continuing with *Holzfällen,* which is structured around a meal, and ending with *Midnight's Children*, wherein the narrator consciously aligns food with narrative, cooking with narration and listening/ reading with eating. The case studies reveal new insights about the chosen texts, as well as illustrating that food is an excellent, often overlooked critical tool for exploring questions of art and narration.

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Introduction

Food is an every-day substance of physical necessity and the most common, most socially acceptable daily source of physical pleasure. Yet it has also cultural value and culinary and extra-culinary signifying potential. It is a material object, which becomes part of the eater's body. Yet it is at the same time a cultural object carrying connotations. As it transcends the conceptual borders between the material and the cultural, food destabilises conventional concepts of art and culture. Yet it is at the same time necessary sustenance for cultural production; indeed, the term 'culture', Latin *cultura*, etymologically originates in the cultivation of lands and plants.[1] Physical sustenance is the basis of all cultural production:

> Only with their living bodies pumping blood and digesting food can people speak, write poems, formulate ideals, and make history. Intellectuals and ideologues tend to forget that. But that doesn't mean that ideals are pointless, or that only digestion matters. People need meaning in their lives as much as they need food. They need the connection between meaning and food.[2]

Simultaneously material and cultural, food is an excellent lens with which to explore concepts and fruits of artistic-cultural production.[3]

Food is and has always been of daily importance to all humans and it is not surprising that it has also always been a staple ingredient of narratives of all kind, from the Biblical fall from grace, which aligns the beginning of human hi*story* (sic) with the consumption of an apple, to the folk tales collected by the Brothers Grimm right up to contemporary literature. When narrative involves culinary and alimentary signifiers, it can have particularly powerful effects: 'when the novel deals with food, a culinary sign, it adds richness to richness, it superimposes its own system of signs and meanings onto

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[1] *The Oxford English Dictionary: Second Edition*, ed. by J. A. Simpsons and E. S. C. Weiner, 20 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), iv, p. 121.

[2] Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, 'Food and Freedom in *The Flounder*', *Political Theory*, 12 (1984), 467-90 (p. 484).

[3] If used as a general term such as in this context, 'food' denotes activities such as eating and cooking as well as table manners and items of food. The study's use of the terms 'artistic production' and 'cultural production' depends on the subject of discussion. In the context of Murdoch's work, which does not question the existence of art and elevates cooking to the level of art, using the term 'artistic production' in reference to both narration and cooking is justified. 'Cultural production' is used as an inclusive term in other contexts in which the existence of art is questionable and in which what may be perceived as art melts with other practices, presented as more generally cultural. Rushdie's novel, for instance, presents art as more closely linked to cultural practices (such as cooking). Where both attitudes toward art/ culture need to be expressed, a combination of the terms is used (artistic-cultural).

the signifying system, variously codified, of cooking'.[4] Language, lingua, tongue – the mouth is locus of both eating and narration. Food is thus a particularly good instrument with which to explore literary narration.

The present study has two interlinked objectives: on the one hand, it explores the possibilities of food as critical tool of literary analysis in three case studies – Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, The Sea* (1978), Thomas Bernhard's *Holzfällen: Eine Erregung* (1984; published in English as *Cutting Timber*, 1988, and *Woodcutters*, 2010) and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981).[5] The exploration is directed specifically at the relation of food to cultural-artistic production, in particular narration. While doing so, the present study on the other hand offers new insights into the three texts under scrutiny, uncovering, among numerous other aspects of the respective texts, their implicit problematisation of narration and artistic-cultural production.

The study is divided into four chapters and then draws a comparative conclusion. The first chapter has two sections. It initially presents the varied conventional uses of food in fiction at the example of a broad spectrum of texts from different times, cultures, geographies, languages and of different genres. The section forms the basis of the later argument that the three texts under scrutiny in this study go beyond the conventional uses of food in fiction. The second, larger section of the first chapter offers a theoretical framework for the literary analysis of the three case studies. A selection of relevant theories of or involving food are outlined in this part and address the relation of food to narration and cultural production. The section includes approaches which consider food as cultural artefact and theories which address the relation of this cultural artefact to the material, the symbolic and the unconscious. Abraham, Barthes, Bourdieu, Fischler, Freud, Kristeva, Lacan, Lévi-Strauss and Mauss view food and food behaviour from the angles of anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis and philosophy through structuralist and poststructuralist lenses. Most of those named above are famous representatives of their field of study. This thesis, however, frequently alludes to their less familiar concepts. Thus, Freudian theory is approached through Freud's student Abraham, who shifted the focus from genital libido to oral libido and some of the most central concepts for this study are those developed by the little known socio-anthropologist Claude Fischler. It will be shown that food can be approached from a

[4] Gian-Paolo Biasin, *Flavors of Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 3.
[5] Iris Murdoch, *The Sea, The Sea* (London: Vintage, 1999 [1978]); Thomas Bernhard, *Holzfällen: Eine Erregung* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1984); *Cutting Timber: An Irritation*, trans. by Ewald Osers (London: Quartet, 1988), *Woodcutters*, trans. by David McLintock (London/ New York: Vintage International, 2010); Salman Rushdie, *Midnight´s Children* (London: Vintage, 1995 [1981]).

structuralist perspective, but also operates in ways described in poststructuralism and psychoanalytic theory, which build on structuralist ideas. None of these theoretical approaches covers the full scope of aspects of food in fiction. Together, however, the theories aid a reading of the complex and multi-faceted connotations of food in narration and its relationship to artistic-cultural production in the three texts.

The theories outlined in the first chapter are drawn upon as relevant in the three text-based chapters, illustrating the great critical potential of food. Each chapter offers an in-depth critical analysis of one of the texts and the culinary and alimentary aspects within it. The analysis in each case enters the texts through the culinary, bringing to light this often implicit system of signification, which operates under the surface of the narrative and has been largely overlooked by critics.

The Sea, The Sea, *Holzfällen* and *Midnight's Children* reflect their origin in times which have seen the development of food into an ever more complex and versatile system of signification: according to Barthes and a range of sociologists and anthropologists, the signifying system of food has gained in importance during the second half of the twentieth century which has led to a modern 'polysemia' of food.[6] The novels are furthermore characterized by being widely considered canonical.[7] The study shows that these major works address major issues concerning art and narration – by means of an inconspicuous and overlooked instrument. Yet contrary to what may initially appear banal, food is a powerful tool. The many ways in which it signifies indirectly have not been studied in depth even in these canonical texts. Its covert mode of signification increases its impact, because food thus works unobserved. The hidden connotations of food render the alimentary and the culinary a pivotal instrument for the analysis of the way in which the novels implicitly address the problematic conditions of artistic-cultural production. That all three texts are autodiegetic narratives is of central relevance to this study. In this narrative form, the narrator-protagonist is simultaneously also cook and eater, providing a structural relation between the alimentary and narration. Drawing on intertexts which can be read to make explicit those connotations

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[6] Roland Barthes, 'Toward a Psychosociology of Food Consumption', [translator unnamed] in Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (eds), *Food and Culture: A Reader* (London/ New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 20-7 (p. 33). Claude Fischler makes the same observation: he argues that incorporation has become a more and more complex system due to the increasing options that modern consumers face: Fischler, 'Food, Self and Identity', *Social Science Information*, 27 (1988), 275-92.

[7] Marcel Reich-Ranicki includes *Holzfällen* in his canon of German literature: *Der Kanon: Die deutsche Literatur: 5 Bände* (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel, 2006). The fact that *The Sea, The Sea* and *Midnight's Children* received the Booker Prize, with the latter winning the Booker of Bookers twice, may be seen as sign of their entry into the canon.

of food, cooking and consumption which are only implicit in the primary texts, the study presents through the culinary and the alimentary the implicit connotations of food, problematizing in each text in distinct ways the conditions and limitations of narration and artistic-cultural production.

The second chapter argues that in Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, The Sea* the culinary-alimentary and ethics are inextricably linked via the narrator's food behaviour. The protagonist's culinary development is shown to correspond to a moral development. In three stages, the protagonist's existentialist view of self and world is implicitly first presented, subsequently problematized and finally the culinary-alimentary in the novel suggests what Murdoch calls a 'road to goodness', on which the protagonist may transcend existentialist views and move toward Murdoch's moral ideal. The stages are manifest in the narrator's food behaviour and thus the link between ethics and the culinary is established. Since in Murdoch's moral philosophy an individual's ethics are the basis of their artistic production, food behaviour implicitly reflects on artistic production. In other words, food and art are linked in the novel via ethics and the chapter shows that food behaviour in *The Sea, The Sea* implicitly presents a moral-artistic discourse.

The subject of the third chapter is Thomas Bernhard's *Holzfällen,* which is structured around a dinner and thus more explicitly structured around food than Murdoch's novel. The novel presents the conditions of artistic existence and artistic-cultural production through the social and material mechanisms of the culinary. This study argues that the novel explores through food and motifs of consumption and symbolic cannibalism the co-implication of the artist in social structures which are simultaneously a prerequisite (in terms of nourishment) and an obstacle to artistic production. It furthermore unravels the novel's implicit presentation, through processes of consumption, of the derivativeness of art and the impossibility of pure innovation. It is shown that in *Holzfällen,* the culinary sign has particularly strongly ideologically and politically loaded connotations. The chapter offers a new reading of the nameless narrator's rage as it argues that it originates in the power relationship of obligation into which the artist enters as he accepts society's nourishment, which both facilitates and impedes the creation of art.

The fourth chapter analyses the connotations of food in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children,* arguing that the novel implicitly explores the process of narration and the creation of meaning through the culinary and the alimentary. It is shown that the novel does this first and foremost by having the narrator explicitly align narration with

cooking, reading and listening with eating and the narrative as a whole with a particular foodstuff: chutney. The study presents chutney as a postmodern substance. Its central characteristics are that it evades definition, is subject to continued transformation, raises appetites that remain unsatisfiable and transcends and questions dichotomies. Chutney thus denies control, stable, singular identity and stability of signification and meaning, setting against these multiplicity and hybridity of authorship and continued transformation of signification. The chapter shows that food production brings authorship into question, as well as offering a new reading of the female cooks in *Midnight's Children*, who are shown to be marginalised, but not marginal, cultural agents. It is argued that food and its related activities present in *Midnight's Children* the simultaneity of narrative desire and dissatisfaction.

The three chapters of textual analysis are arranged in order of the narrators' consciousness of the connotative potential of food. Murdoch's narrator is entirely unaware of the underlying connotations of food for his narrative; Bernhard's narrator implies but does not address directly the implications of the dinner for his art; in contrast to both, the narrator of Rushdie's novel explicitly and consciously relates food to narrative, cooking to narration and eating to listening or reading. Interestingly, the analysis shows that even in Rushdie's text, in which the narrator is partly aware of the connotations of food, the culinary and alimentary says more and goes further than the narrator intends to. In other words, even the narrator who consciously constructs the relation between narrative and food item is not entirely aware of the many connotations which partly seem to support but also undermine his narrative project. If food is used more consciously by the narrator of *Midnight's Children* than in the other two texts, it nevertheless continues to undermine the narrative project, because food, so the study argues, is never only one thing but always simultaneously other, contradicting things. This renders food a particularly good tool with which to approach twentieth century self-reflexive literature, which has largely abandoned absolutes and now often mixes a knowing undermining of absolutes with an enduring yearning desire from them. This ambiguous co-existence of desire and its rejection, of need for stable meaning and form and their impossibility is expressed in the three novels' uses of food, especially in the co-existence of hunger and dissatisfaction.

Closing with a comparative study of the relations of food and artistic-cultural production in the three novels, this study combines in-depth critical analysis with a comparative approach. This last section collects the insights which the readings of each individual text through food have yielded, setting these into relation to one another. The

particular focus of this section is the impact of food in the novels on specific aspects of the ideals of artistic-cultural production expressed in the three texts: issues of control, questions of artistic integrity and problems of form and meaning. These are major problems of literature and art (specifically in postmodern times), as they question and problematize the very concepts of literature and art and their production.[8]

The present study seeks to redress the reductive conception of food as every-day substance used in fiction to signify ostensible realism or as occasional literary device. Approaching the case studies from a variety of theoretical angles related to food, the study illustrates that food can present, question and destabilise concepts of artistic production and artistic ideals while at the same time presenting art and artistic production as ambiguous concepts, which are simultaneously desired and highly problematic. In other words, the study shows that food implicitly relates to major problems of literature and art, specifically in postmodern times. Bringing out new aspects of the three novels, the study hopes to help establish the culinary more firmly among the instruments of literary critical analysis and to illustrate its great critical potential as it addresses fundamental concepts of artistic-cultural production and narration.

[8] The humour of the three novels is closely related to the culinary and alimentary within the texts as well as their representations of the producers of art. However, the topic of humour could not have been included in a meaningful way in a study of this size, which aims at a combination of a close reading with a comparative approach.

1 Food in fiction and theory

1.1 Food in fiction

The following overview of some of the many uses of food in fiction functions as an illustration of the versatility and extensive usage of the motif in literature across centuries, cultures and genres. Many of the examples are reflected in the aspects of the culinary with which the various theories of or involving food, discussed subsequently, engage. It is also the backdrop against which the study shows that food in the three texts goes beyond its conscious use as literary device.[9]

As literary device, food can function in the construction and deconstruction of time and space. During the course of Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (1924; *The Magic Mountain*), the protagonist is drawn into the world of the sanatorium located in a remote area of the Swiss Alps and loses touch with everyday reality. The time of the outside world dissolves in his perception. This development is marked by meals becoming the only indication of the time of day while feasts mark the time of year.[10] Food in fiction furthermore creates spaces of social function. Kitchen, dining room and restaurant are pivotal locations of social interaction. Such is the case in the realist novel *Le Père Goriot* (1834-1835; *Father Goriot*) by Honoré de Balzac.[11] From kitchen and dining room to the physical space of the body: food and all activities related to it are used to (re)construct the body within a literary work. James Joyce describes in *Ulysses* (1918-1920) the entire digestive process from ingestion to excretion.[12]

Food frequently functions as plot device, bringing together characters and providing occasion for interaction, speech, exchange and argument. In Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), where the dinner, in Jones's words, is a 'marketplace[...] of social capital', the social and literary function of the dining room coincide.[13] Eating as a fundamental human activity, by contrast, is particularly vivid in fiction dealing with hunger, for example Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), Ben Okri's *The*

[9] The literary texts mentioned in this section function exclusively as examples for the various uses of food in fiction. The section is not intended to exhaust the topic of food in these texts.
[10] Thomas Mann, *Der Zauberberg* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2002); Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, trans. by John E. Woods (New York/ London: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005).
[11] Honoré de Balzac, *Le père Goriot* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000); Balzac, *Père Goriot*, trans by A. J. Krailsheimer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[12] James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[13] Martin Jones, *Feast: Why Humans Share Food* (Oxford/ New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 217; Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London: Arcturus, 2009).

Famished Road (1991) and Mohamed El-Bisatie's جوع (2007; *Hunger*).[14] Hunger is presented as threatening cultural, social and human values when people are forced to – or culturally even less acceptable: choose to – eat what their culture prohibits, for instance human flesh is eaten voluntarily in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988) and out of necessity in *Child 44* (2008).[15] In Knut Hamsun's novel *Sult* (1888-1890; *Hunger*), filled with desires of all kinds, the reader observes the parallelism and intricate relation of the book's title and main occupation, hunger, with desire.

The connotative function of food in fiction frequently facilitates characterisation.[16] Religion, gender, social status and ethnicity, for example, can be expressed through the food a character enjoys, refuses to eat or displays indifference to. In her novel *White Teeth* (2000), Zadie Smith inverts the expectation of ethnic characterisation through food: characters of different cultural backgrounds eat at one table.[17] The 'local' is common ground on which heterogeneous cultural, ethnical and religious heritage melts to produce hybrid identities. Furthermore, food frequently turns into metaphor, metonym or symbol. The rejected meal in Franz Kafka's *Ein Hungerkünstler* (1922; *A Hunger Artist*) can, among other interpretations, be read as representing the analogical rejection of the artist to sacrifice his art to the demands of society.[18] The Eucharist can be regarded as one of the oldest occasions of a metonymical use of food.[19]

In fiction, food is frequently related to themes such as power and control, social status, the nature/ culture dichotomy, memory, care, affection and desire, transformation and danger. With regard to power relations, food is used to convey authority and subordination, particularly in the kind of children's literature that takes a traditional view of the adult-child relationship. In Roald Dahl's *Matilda* (1988), this view is inverted when the headmistress Miss Trunchbull forces the schoolboy Bruce Bogtrotter to eat an entire cake – food is here not given as reward but forced onto the child as powerful punishment.[20] More conventionally pedagogical, the biblical story of Eve and

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[14] John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (York/ New York: Spark Publications, 2003); Ben Okri, *The Famished Road* (London: Vintage, 1991); Knut Hamsun, *Sult* (København: Gyldendal, 1962); Hamsun, *Hunger*, trans. by Sverre Lyngstad (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2001); Mohamed El-Bisatie, جوع (Cairo: Akhbar Al Youm, 2007); El-Bisatie, *Hunger* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2008).

[15] Tom Rob Smith, *Child 44* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2008); Thomas Harris, *The Silence of the Lambs* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988).

[16] Biasin, *Flavors of Modernity*, p. 15.

[17] Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (London: Penguin, 2007).

[18] Franz Kafka, 'Ein Hungerkünstler', in Kafka, *Ein Hungerkünstler: vier Geschichten* (Berlin: Die Schmiede, 1924), pp. 35-89; Kafka, 'A Hunger Artist', in Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other* Stories, trans. by Michael Hofmann (London: Penguin, 2007), pp. 252-63.

[19] In Catholicism it is of course not considered metonymical.

[20] Roald Dahl, *Matilda* (London: Cape, 1988).

the apple addresses issues of authority, while also introducing aspects of rebellion and subversion: Eve does not eat the apple because she is hungry. Her consumption of the apple represents rebellion and disrespect for an authority – an action which is severely punished.[21] As in the story of Eve, the connection between food and power in literature is often highly gendered. In his novel *Der Butt* (1977; *The Flounder*), Günter Grass juxtaposes the gendered activities of consumption and production and, on this basis, relates the history of the world as a struggle for power fought between female cooks and male consumers and narrators.[22]

Food in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989) addresses questions of social inclusion and exclusion: the narrator, butler Stevens, regards it as his duty not only to exclude himself from the dinner he is serving but to create the illusion of absence and non-existence.[23] In Muriel Barbery's *L'élégance du hérisson* (2006; *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*), class distinctions are represented and subverted through the pleasure of food: a concierge is expected to eat cabbage and in order to hide her improperly educated palate and mind, the protagonist artificially produces cabbage smells.[24] While Barbery's heroine eats alone to hide dishes that do not match her social position, feasts are elsewhere used as a display of status. The metonymical link between the riches of a feast and the riches of the host is exploited in Mann's *Buddenbrooks* (1901) for a characterisation of the family, marking their social decline.[25] Food is also often used to represent the painful extremes on either side of the scale of social status and financial power: through the juxtaposition of hungry scarcity and gluttonous excess, John Dos Passos shows in *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) how consumerism drives a gap between those who can and those who cannot afford to survive in the Big Apple.[26]

Literary fiction exploits connections between food and the difference between nature and culture. In Maurice Sendak's children's classic *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963), the adventure begins when Max is sent to bed without dinner, because he behaved like a 'wild thing'. The story ends when Max returns from the 'wild': dinner smells facilitate his return.[27] In the attempt to install a sense of civilization in the

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[21] *The Bible*, Genesis 3.
[22] Günter Grass, *Der Butt: Roman* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1977); Grass, *The Flounder*, trans by Ralph Manheim (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979).
[23] Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day* (London: Faber, 1989).
[24] Muriel Barbery, *L'élégance du hérisson* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006); Barbery, *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*, trans. by Alison Anderson (London: Gallic, 2008).
[25] Thomas Mann, *Buddenbrooks: Verfall einer Familie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2002); Mann, *Buddenbrooks: the Decline of a Family*, trans. by H.T. Lowe-Porter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).
[26] John Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer* (London: Penguin, 2000).
[27] Maurice Sendak, *Where the Wild Things Are* (London: Bodley Head, 2001).

wilderness, the eponymous protagonist of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) builds a kitchen and cellar, even a dining-room. This backdrop clashes with his dinners of boiled turtle and turtle's eggs.[28] Grass's *Die Rättin* (1986; *The Rat*) makes use of food for the dissolution of the constructed nature/ culture opposition: as the rat begins to acquire culinary knowledge, the difference between human and animal disintegrates.[29]

Smell and taste are possibly the senses most closely connected to memory. Marcel Proust uses this connection in *Du côté de chez Swann* (1913; *Swann's Way*), the first part of *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927; *In Search of Lost Time*).[30] This novel about memory hinges on what is known as the *madeleine* episode in which the protagonist involuntarily returns to times past as he eats this small cake. Memories of this kind often relate to the use of food – in fiction and extra-textual – as a symbol of parental love and caring affection. Mrs Ramsay in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) epitomises the cliché of the female provider of food and affection.[31] Nourishment is often perceived as intricately linked to love and a feeling of safety. Yet food can also be dangerous. The threat of potentially poisonous food necessitates mutual trust between hosts and their guests. This aspect is central in Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* (first printed in 1623) where the trustful first dinner is juxtaposed with the farce of the final feast in which Timon refuses to provide for those who betrayed him.[32]

The physiological and psychological relation between food and sexuality is frequently used in literary texts. The Marquis de Sade's *Les 120 journées de Sodome* (1785; *120 Days of Sodom*) includes countless combinations of sex and alimentary orality. Its protagonists consume all possible bodily substances and their combinations, from excrement and vomit to vaginal fluids and semen to heighten the sexual experience.[33] By contrast, the Tunisian author Habib Selmi uses food in روائح ماري كلير

[28] Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe: Written by Himself* (London: Penguin, 2002).
[29] Günter Grass, *Die Rättin* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1986); Grass, *The Rat*, trans. by Ralph Manheim (London: Secker and Warburg, 1987).
[30] Marcel Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann* (Paris: Larousse/ VUEF, 2002); Proust, *In Search of Lost Time I: Swann's Way*, trans. by C. K. Scott Moncrieff and D. J. Enright (London: Vintage, 2005); Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1987); Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. by C. K. Scott Moncrieff (London: Chatto and Windus, 1941).
[31] Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[32] William Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens* (London: Penguin, 2005).
[33] Marquis de Sade, *Les 120 journées de Sodome ou L'école du libertinage* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1975); Sade, *The 120 Days of Sodom and Other Writings*, trans. by Austryn Wainhouse and Richard Seaver (London: Arrow, 1990).

(2007; *The Scents of Marie-Claire*) as a substitute for explicitly sexual scenes.[34] In *Como agua para chocolate* (1989; *Like Water for Chocolate*) by Laura Esquivel, sexual desire is heightened through the protagonist's use of food, with which she puts spells on people and induces magic transformations.[35]

The theme of change and metamorphosis brought about by ingestion is common especially in children's literature. One of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) is her magical growing and shrinking according to which mushroom, slice of cake or potion she consumes.[36] These scenes emphasize the impossibility to predict the effects of food. Foodstuff that is made taboo can therefore be both alluringly mysterious and revolting. In Tawfiq Al-Hakim's *يوميات نائب في الأرياف* (1937; *Maze of Justice: Diary of a Country Prosecutor*), disgust is induced by the unknown. The protagonist of this Egyptian novel experiences disgust and alienation when eating with the peasants: their food trespasses the borders of his gastronomic culture.[37]

This section has outlined the many ways in which food serves as a literary device in fiction across geography, genres and times. It also functions in these ways in the three novels analysed in the present study. Here, however, food transcends its consciously controlled usage: in *The Sea, The Sea*, *Holzfällen* and *Midnight's Children*, instances of food and food behaviour are not only discrete literary devices but belong to a culinary system which supports yet also questions the narrator's narrative aims.[38] In order to achieve a reading of the connotations of food in these texts, however, it is necessary to address it from a multiplicity of angles. For food in literature signifies in anthropological, sociological, psychological, political and cultural contexts. The following outlines the most important theories from both structuralist and poststructuralist angles in order to facilitate the analysis of the complex ways in which food is set in relation to artistic-cultural production in the three novels.

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[34] Habib Selmi, *روائح ماري كلير* (Beirut: Dar El-Adab, 2007); Selmi, *The Scents of Marie-Claire*, trans. by Fadwa Al Qasem (London: Arabia, 2010).
[35] Laura Esquivel, *Como agua para chocolate: novela de entregas mensuales con recetas, amores y remedios caseros* (Mexico City: Planeta, 1989); Esquivel, *Like Water for Chocolate*, trans. by Carol Christensen and Thomas Christensen (London: Black Swan, 1993).
[36] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (London: Puffin, 2008).
[37] Tawfiq Al-Hakim, *يوميات نائب في الأرياف* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Adab, 1937); Al-Hakim, *Maze of Justice: Diary of a Country Prosecutor*, trans. by Abba Eban (London: Saqi, 1989).
[38] Food behaviour refers to human food choice, preparation, presentation and consumption.

1.2 Theoretical approaches to the meanings of food

The theoretical views on or related to food outlined in this chapter aim to explain the problematic phenomenon of food and its signifying capacities. None of them, however, can individually account for the connotations of food, eating and cooking expressed in *The Sea, The Sea*, *Holzfällen* and *Midnight's Children*. An interdisciplinary approach, drawing on different theories as appropriate, is needed in order to be able to offer a literary analysis of some of the complex meanings of food within these texts. Each of these theories becomes a useful instrument in the subsequent literary analysis of the multi-facetted and often contradictory roles of food and their relation to cultural production in the three novels.

The chapter begins with an outline of how Claude Lévi-Strauss's views of food behaviour, based on Saussurean linguistics, define the choice and preparation of food as a signifying system; in other words, food behaviour, for Lévi-Strauss, is a language of arbitrary, relational and constitutive culinary signs. This theory suggests that the culinary sign within a literary text can be read as constitutive of an additional level of signification. These narratives are, Roland Barthes goes on to point out, often ideologically loaded. Considerations of structuralism lead to a focus on the connotations of the conceptual nature/ culture opposition, highlighted particularly in Lévi-Strauss's structuralist approach to food. Yet while food behaviour is often used to justify the differentiation between nature and culture (as in definitions which set eating into the natural realm and cooking into the cultural), what transpires is that it does not neatly fit into either category.

Discussed in the following are furthermore approaches which perceive food as cultural artefact, such as theories of the gift as applied to food and dinner invitations (Marcel Mauss and Lévi-Strauss) and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of distinction, which figures culinary culture as social and symbolic capital. The focal point of these theories is the power relationships which come into existence through food behaviour, remaining mostly unnoticed by the parties involved. The relation of what is perceived as the natural aspects of food behaviour and its cultural counterparts is addressed in the theories of Sigmund Freud and his students. While Freudian psychoanalysis posits the possibility of control over mental processes, Lacanian psychoanalysis, which sees the unstable unconscious and unsatisfiable, uncontrollable lack as basis of human behaviour, takes the opposite position. Both psychoanalytic approaches provide a direct link between mental aspects, food behaviour and cultural production.

Poststructuralist perspectives on food suggest that food and food behaviour do not fit structuralist binary oppositions such as the nature/ culture dichotomy. Feminist analyses of the concepts of femininity and masculinity as based on the arbitrary signifying system of food are a case in point. Additionally, Julia Kristeva's focus on the body brings to the fore the psycho-physiological process of abjection, triggered precisely by the ability of food to transgress fundamental binary oppositions. Finally, the lesser-known theories by the socio-anthropologist Claude Fischler support but also qualify the reading of food in the light of abjection. His main contribution, discussed here, is his description of the ambivalence of the eater to the item of food and the process of eating.

1.2.1 Structuralism: the culinary sign

This section explores the main contribution of Saussurean linguistics as applied to food by Claude Lévi-Strauss, namely that it offers a connection between food and food behaviour to narrative: identifying food as signifying system means to acknowledge the potential of food and food behaviour to create an underlying, often implicit culinary narrative within a literary text. Considering the culinary as a language has further implications for its study: it will be shown that this view renders the culinary sign arbitrary, relational and constitutive. As part of a signifying system, Barthes reads the culinary sign as ideologically loaded. These theories emphasise that food cannot simply be equalled to nutrition: structuralist theories on the signifying system of food stress the often hidden *meanings* of food.

In a 1915-lecture, published posthumously as *Course in General Linguistics*, Ferdinand de Saussure describes the fundamentals of linguistic systems.[39] He makes a vital distinction between *langue*, language, a socially defined and essential object, a code, and *parole*, speech, the individual act for which the speaker uses the rules and patterns provided by language. Saussure describes the linguistic sign (which he defines as the relation between signifier and signified) as arbitrary. This is for instance proven by the existence of different languages (both *pomme* and *apple* can refer successfully to the same signified). The arbitrariness of the sign has further implications: according to Saussure, it renders the sign both relational and constitutive.[40] Signs are relational in

[39] Ferdinand de Saussure, 'Course in General Linguistics', trans. by Wade Baskin, in Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (ed.), *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 59-71.
[40] Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (Manchester/ New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 41-3.

that their meaning exists in the difference to the signs surrounding them. Tablespoon, teaspoon, dessert spoon, egg spoon, soup spoon - the signification of each of these words depends on its position in a paradigmatic chain, the components of which are related in function and meaning.[41] The signification of these items exists in negative relation to the others: it is all they are not. Binary oppositions, a pillar of structuralism, illustrate this. The second implication of the arbitrariness of the sign, it being constitutive, concerns the sign's supposed relation to reality. According to the insights of structuralism, language does not have substance, words do not stand for pre-existing concepts. Humans structure the world through language and rather than mirroring an objectifiable reality, language is constitutive of reality.

'Qui dit homme, dit langage' – 'whoever says "Man", says "Language"'.[42] Beginning with the idea, proposed in Saussure's semiology, that the structure of language is applicable to other signifying systems, the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss applies the principles of structural linguistics in other fields.[43] Cooking, Lévi-Strauss claims, is one of the most fundamental cultural signifying systems:

> It would seem that the methodological principle which inspires such distinctions [as identified by structuralism] is transposable to other domains, notably that of cooking which, it has never been sufficiently emphasized, is with language a truly universal form of human activity: if there is no society without a language, nor is there any which does not cook in some manner.[44]

Based on post-Saussurean developments in structural linguistics (Roman Jakobson's vowel and consonant triangles), Lévi-Strauss creates the culinary triangle.[45] It represents signs in a system based on oppositional relations. The culinary triangle is a visualisation of the most basic culinary categorisations of activities of food preparation, used as signifiers. For example, Lévi-Strauss discusses a common distinction between the roasted and the boiled. The distinction, according to the anthropologist, is based on the structural opposition of the natural and the cultural, roasting being defined as a natural

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[41] Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 42.
[42] Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (Paris: Plon, 1955), p. 421; *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. by John Russell (New York: Criterion, 1961), p. 389.
[43] 'Linguistics is only a part of the general science of semiology; the laws discovered by semiology will be applicable to linguistics, and the latter will circumscribe a well-defined area within the mass of anthropological facts': Saussure, 'General Linguistics', p. 60.
[44] Lévi-Strauss, 'The Culinary Triangle', trans. by Doreen and John Weightman, in Counihan and Esterik (eds), *Food and Culture*, pp. 28-35 (p. 28).
[45] Roman Jakobson, *Fundamentals of Language* ('S-Gravenhage: Mouton, 1956).

transformation of the raw while boiling is seen as its cultural transformation.[46] During the course of his analysis, Lévi-Strauss finds more signifying elements, turning the original triangle into a tetrahedron and opening it for the inclusion of further categories that cultures invest with meaning. Inspired by structural linguistics, Lévi-Strauss presents the attribution of signification within a culinary system as arbitrary, its differentiating processes as relational and the result of its usage as constitutive of reality. Proof of the arbitrariness of the culinary sign is, as with language, the existence of different cuisines. Lévi-Strauss argues that the culinary sign is, however, so fundamental to a culture that its members often perceive it as natural and react to other practices with incredulity and disgust. According to Saussure, 'arbitrary and differential are two correlative qualities'.[47] With the culinary triangle, Lévi-Strauss visualises the relationality of culinary signs; it is an illustration of the belief that each culinary category exists in relation to the others.

Having discussed the arbitrariness and relationality of the culinary sign, Lévi-Strauss builds on Saussure further, describing its constitutive characteristics. He argues that all cultures work with the same culinary signifying system but attach different meanings to individual 'gustemes'.[48] Lévi-Strauss illustrates this in his analysis of the opposition between roasting and boiling: no part of the food is lost to the fire when boiling it, while roasting is accompanied by loss. According to Lévi-Strauss, this leads to 'differences in appraisal of the boiled and the roasted'.[49] The differentiations in meaning are seen as 'dependent on the democratic or aristocratic perspective of the group'.[50] Lévi-Strauss concludes that cultures with a history of a more democratic character and weakly marked social classes attribute positive associations to boiling while strongly class-oriented cultures dismiss it.[51] In this view, the same sign system underlies different outcomes of its usage. Lévi-Strauss thus differentiates between a culinary *langue* and an individual's or a particular culture's culinary *parole*. The culinary triangle is seen as an abstract structure into which each culture inserts

[46] They are so opposed 'literally, because boiling requires the use of a receptacle, a cultural object; symbolically, in as much as culture is a mediation of the relations between man and the world, and boiling demands a mediation (by water) of the relation between food and fire which is absent in roasting': Lévi-Strauss, 'Triangle', p. 29.
[47] Saussure, 'General Linguistics', p. 68.
[48] Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963).
[49] Lévi-Strauss, 'Triangle', p. 39.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Lévi-Strauss does not explain how this difference in appraisal between the roasted and the boiled relates to his analysis of the former as natural and the latter as cultural transformation, which has been discussed above.

meanings by its alimentary practice. The categories of cooked, raw and rotted exist, but their realization as well as the meaning attributed to them differ.[52] According to Lévi-Strauss, this accounts for the universality of culinary signifiers used by cultures as well as for the differences in the meaning each culture attaches to them. For an analysis of the signifying system of food within literary texts, this means in particular that the culinary sign needs to be set into context with the signifying system as a whole and the signs surrounding it.

The culinary triangle has been described as speculative.[53] While the model is supposed to be universally applicable, critics point out that there are obvious culinary differences between cultures. This latter criticism is, it can be argued, a misunderstanding of the model: Lévi-Strauss distinguishes between a universal *langue* and a culture-specific *parole*. He believes that the binary structures that form the culinary triangle are universal. Cultural differences stem from variations in the particular signification attributed to items within the culinary signifying system. In contrast to its underlying structure, the sign develops historically.[54] Despite this criticism, Lévi-Strauss's theory of food behaviour as a signifying system and of the importance of the conceptual opposition between nature and culture remains centrally relevant to the study of food: since Lévi-Strauss, studies on food behaviour across disciplines are based on the perception of cuisines as signifying systems.[55] This study illustrates that the culinary sign is also a vital interpretative tool in literary analysis.

Applying Saussurean linguistics to other cultural phenomena, Lévi-Strauss's contemporary Roland Barthes focuses on discourses which constitute the 'falsely obvious', identifying it in cultural myths.[56] These are, according to Barthes, based on underlying structures which become ideological tools.[57] In his ideological critique, *Mythologies*, Barthes reflects on the myths of French daily life and demonstrates 'how

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[52] Ibid, p. 29.

[53] See for instance Jack Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine and Class: A Study in Comparative Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Mary Douglas, *Implicit Meanings* (London: Routledge, 1999); Stephen Mennell, Anne Murcott and Anneke van Otterloo (eds), *The Sociology of Food and Eating: Eating, Diet and Culture*, (London: Sage, 1992), p. 9.

[54] Mennell and others share the present reading of Lévi-Strauss (Mennell and others, *Sociology of Food*, p. 9), while Horigan describes empirical criticism of Lévi-Strauss as beside the point: Stephen Horigan, *Nature and Culture in Western Discourses* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 41.

[55] Examples are Mary Douglas in the field of social-anthropology, Bob Ashley and others in cultural studies, Gian-Paolo Biasin in literature, Roland Barthes in semiology, David Bell and Gill Valentine in food geographies, Martin Jones in archaeology: Bob Ashley, Joanne Hollows, Steve Jones and Ben Taylor, *Food and Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 2004); Biasin, *Flavors*; Bell and Valentine, *Consuming Geographies: We Are Where We Eat* (London/ New York: Routledge, 1997); Jones, *Feast.*

[56] Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers (New York: Noonday, 1972), p. 10.

[57] Ibid.

apparently natural or common-sense meanings attach themselves to objects and practices'.[58] Barthes attempts to demystify the myths by revealing them as evolving historically rather than being natural givens.[59] Analysing everyday uses of sign systems that are taken for granted and not recognised as arbitrary and constitutive, Barthes unveils these structures to show their ideological functions. This argument is of special relevance in the present study: being widely perceived as natural givens makes 'gustemes' a particularly powerful ideological tool – they operate unobserved.[60]

Barthes points out that 'everything [...] can be a myth' and, like Lévi-Strauss, he identifies culinary objects and practices as myth.[61] In 'Steak and Chips' and 'Wine and Milk', Barthes discusses the relationship between items of French cuisine and national identity.[62] According to him, the signifier is constitutive of the self-perception of a nation. Barthes describes steak and wine as 'basic elements' – signifying elements – of Frenchness, 'nationalized even more than socialized' and sees chips – French fries – as 'the alimentary sign of Frenchness'.[63] Barthes also addresses the role of food in the construction of social identity. According to Bob Ashley et al., Barthes acknowledges 'that each class eats a steak that condenses that class's sense of itself'.[64] (Simultaneously, however, steak, chips and wine are also shown to transcend class and certain nationalist connotations.) He furthermore notes that the vital human activity of eating and preparing food has gained in meaning: once the nutritional need is satisfied, the item of food becomes a sign.[65] He therefore believes that modernity is characterised by a '"polysemia" of food'.[66] While this may be true to many social classes in Barthes's France, he seems to overlook that modern industrialised and capitalist societies have not eradicated hunger. Furthermore, there is no reason why hunger, which increases the existential importance of items of food, should not also be able to lead to the attachment of a multiplicity of meanings to culinary signs. What he describes as culinary polysemia is more likely to result from changing conditions of food consumption.[67] By uncovering

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[58] Ashley and others, *Food and Cultural Studies*, p. 5.
[59] Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 108.
[60] Lévi-Strauss on gustemes in *Structural Anthropology*, p. 85-7.
[61] Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 108.
[62] Barthes, 'Steak and Chips', in *Mythologies*, pp. 62-4; Barthes, 'Wine and Milk', in *Mythologies*, pp. 58-61. Other essays engaging with the ideological powers of food are Barthes, 'Operation Margarine', in *Mythologies*, pp. 40-2 and Barthes, 'Ornamental Cookery', in *Mythologies*, pp. 78-80.
[63] Barthes, 'Steak and Chips', p. 63; p. 64.
[64] Ashley and others, *Food and Cultural Studies*, p. 7. This view is central to Bourdieu's theory of distinction, discussed below.
[65] Barthes, 'Psychosociology'.
[66] Ibid, p. 33.
[67] See Claude Fischler's theories.

connotations that are perceived as self-evident and natural, Barthes presents the significant yet hidden ideological role of food. Stephen Mennell criticises Barthes's approach for a lack of systematic analysis and for the personal rather than scientific perspective on history.[68] While Barthes indeed does not deliver a complete 'grammar of food', his central contribution is the identification of the ideological uses of food.[69]

Aspects of Saussure's semiology are applied to food by Lévi-Strauss and Barthes in ways that suggest that food behaviour is a language, within which meaning is arbitrarily attached to culinary signs. Consequently, this meaning exists only in relation to other signs. This renders the culinary sign constitutive of what is perceived as a reality but which is in fact constructed, bringing about what Barthes calls 'falsely obvious' myths.[70] The structuralist approach is of relevance in the literary analysis of food because it provides the basis for viewing an item of food or a particular culinary practice not only as individually meaningful but as part of a system of signification. It provides the theoretical basis for reading food as a culinary narrative. According to structuralism, this system of signification is related to other systems, but may function independently of them. This means that, within literary texts, the culinary sign may signify in addition and even in opposition to a narrator's discourse. As illustrated by the analysis offered below, the culinary and the alimentary can thus be used as a critical tool with which to reach levels of the text which the narrator's discourse may conceal.

1.2.2 Concepts of nature and culture

As illustrated above, structuralism highlights the role of binary oppositions in signifying systems of all kinds. The differentiation between culture and nature is particularly central, because it is widely used: the proposition of cultural behaviour as uniquely human practice has been the basis of the entire field of anthropology and what is perceived as culture is the central interest of all human sciences.[71] The opposition of culture and nature is also at the heart of the culinary sign as described by Lévi-Strauss: it forms the basis of the culinary triangle and is thus seen as constitutive of all culinary signs. In structuralist terms, culture is defined in opposition to nature. (Poststructuralism would later assert that, as they are defined in opposition to one another, neither culture

[68] Mennell, *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp. 11-2.
[69] Alan Beardsworth and Teresa Keil, *Sociology on the Menu: An Invitation to the Study of Food and Society* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 64.
[70] Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 10.
[71] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 4.

nor nature can be said to be independent of its opposite.) In structuralism, culture is defined as that which is not common to all humans, has to be learnt and depends on social life and its collective norms. This renders nature as necessary and absolute while culture is arbitrary. Yet, as the following shows, such distinctions are highly questionable.

'"Nature" is the idea through which people conceptualise what is "other" to them';[72] and by conceptualising the other, they conceptualise their own identity. The function of the nature/ culture opposition is that of human self-definition. According to Horigan, the opposition is symptomatic of a certain 'desire to draw a circle around the human' and Soper finds that[73]

> In its commonest and most fundamental sense, the term "nature" refers to everything which is not human and distinguished from the work of humanity. Thus, "nature" is opposed to culture, to history, to convention, to what is artificially worked or produced, in short, to everything which is defining of the order of humanity.[74]

This makes, the nature/ culture division highly compelling. Yet while the opposition appears to fit much human behaviour, there are various fields which the binary opposition cannot cover satisfactorily.[75] These are located on the border between the concepts of culture and nature, such as food behaviour.

Food and food behaviour are on the one hand tools with which to fortify the sense of a distinction between nature and culture. According to Counihan, 'humans construct their relationship to nature through their foodways', and cooking as well as the use of cutlery are regarded as ways to create a distance to the aspects of food and eating regarded as natural.[76] On the other hand, food and its related activities are a threat to the differentiation, because they belong to both fields, to what is perceived as cultural and what is regarded as its opposite. While the need to eat is seen as basic drive, food choice is considered cultural. In fact, however, eating takes a critical position right in the middle of the two opposed concepts, bringing the validity of the opposition into

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[72] Kate Soper, *What is Nature?* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 15-6.
[73] Horigan, *Nature and Culture*, p. 105.
[74] Soper, *Nature*, p. 15.
[75] Jones points out that some activities are more biological (for example keeping warm), some more social (for example going to the Opera), but some cannot be put into the one or the other category. The sharing of food, for example, is the 'intimate interconnection between social person and biological organism': Jones, *Feast*, p. 11.
[76] Carole Counihan, *The Anthropology of Food and Body* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 24.

question: it is both a physical-material and a socio-cultural activity.[77] Food moves between the concepts of nature to culture. Nowhere is this characteristic more apparent than in the activity of the cook who is perceived as inducing the transition of food from natural to cultural.[78] The art of cooking is here seen as moving the need to eat and raw food into the cultural realm. It is thus perceived as cultural activity, based on natural materials. Yet the final product is not only a cultural artefact. Cooked food remains subject to the natural laws governing its decomposition through rotting or digestion. Food and food behaviour therefore simultaneously seemingly support the nature/ culture opposition and threaten it, because they step over the ostensible borders between the concepts.

The next section discusses approaches to food and food behaviour as cultural artefact and practice. These are first Marcel Mauss's concept of the gift and its application, suggested by Lévi-Strauss, to food. Second is Pierre Bourdieu's theory of taste, which has as its subject the role of food in social distinction. While these theories focus on what is perceived as the cultural aspects of food and food behaviour, it will be shown later that Freudian psychoanalysis presents natural processes as underlying all cultural practice.

1.2.3 Food as gift and tool of social distinction

Marcel Mauss's theory of the gift is an account of the power relations and obligations related to a cultural practice which is falsely perceived as spontaneous, voluntary and disinterested. Lévi-Strauss suggests in the essay 'The Principle of Reciprocity' that the dinner invitation must be regarded as a gift.[79] Thus, the following section applies Mauss's theories of the gift to the gift of food. What transpires is that many consequences of gift exchange are heightened when the gift is food.

Mauss's theory of the gift relies on the one hand on the early observations by the philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson and on the other hand on the findings of the

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[77] Alois Wierlacher, 'Einleitung', in Alois Wierlacher, Gerhard Neumann and Hans Jürgen Teuteberg (eds), *Kulturthema Essen: Ansichten und Problemfelder* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993), pp. 1-21 (p. 2).
[78] 'Cooking is a process whereby the raw materials given by nature are transformed into culture. The nature/ culture opposition thus underpins some of the dominant conventions for representing food': Ashley and others, *Food and Cultural Studies*, p. 40. Cooking has been described as transferring material from nature to culture (Claude Fischler: 'Food, Self and Identity', *Social Science Information*, 27 (1988), 275-92, p. 284) and as transformation of our nature into culture: Edmund Leach, *Lévi-Strauss* (London: Fontana Press, 1970), p. 34.
[79] Lévi-Strauss, 'The Principle of Reciprocity', in Lewis A. Coser and Bernard Rosenberg, *Sociological Theory: A Book of Readings* (London/ New York: Macmillan, 1964), pp. 74-84 (p. 76).

anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski.[80] Mauss's work is followed by Lévi-Strauss, whose main contribution is the suggestion that food and dinner invitations should be analysed as gifts.[81] To Mauss, gift exchange is an obligatory transfer – he renounces the idea of the disinterested 'pure gift' of which Malinowski speaks.[82] Gift transfer is crucially a gift exchange and as such governed by the principle of reciprocity. It leads to mutual moral (commonly hidden) obligation between giver and receiver and creates and recreates power relationships. Mauss's description of gift exchanges can be summarised as '(1) the obligatory transfer of (2) inalienable objects or services between (3) related and mutually obligated transactors'.[83] The gift of food with its special characteristics – it is being incorporated into the receiver, it is an every-day commodity and eating is a necessary activity – takes a central role in these processes. All of this implies that an invitation to dinner is a complex social procedure, resulting in the creation of power relationships.

According to Mauss, the gift bears the giver's concept of their personal identity.[84] Through the gift, the giver thus imposes himself on the receiver. Furthermore, accepting a gift, according to Schwartz, means to accept the giver's ideas as to what one's values, desires and needs are; in other words, it means to accept the giver's ideas as to who one is. To reject a gift equals the rejection of an identity.[85] Gift exchange also establishes group boundaries, as 'those to whom we give gifts are in some way different from those to whom no token of regard is given'.[86] Thus, gifts create and reinforce a particular relationship between giver and receiver. The complexity of this relationship increases if the gift is food. First, its qualities, chosen by the giver, literally become part of the receiver. Second, as the food is shared, its qualities are taken in by both giver and receiver, making them, in a small aspect of their bodies, literally the same. Furthermore, the gift of food can, in contrast to other gifts, not be discarded without resulting in the receiver's exclusion from the social group: the shared meal reinforces membership in

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[80] Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Gift', in Emerson, *Essays and Lectures*, pp. 533-555; Bronisław Malinowski, 'Kula: the Circulating Exchange of Valuables in the Archipelagoes of Eastern New Guinea', *Man,* 20, (1920), 97-105; Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. by Ian Cunnison (London: Cohen & West, 1966).
[81] Lévi-Strauss, 'Principle', p. 76.
[82] Mauss, *The Gift*, p. 1; p. 71.
[83] James Carrier, 'Gifts, Commodities, and Social Relations: A Maussian View of Exchange', *Sociological Forum*, 6 (1991), 119-36 (p. 122).
[84] Mauss, *The Gift*, p. 10. This aspect is related to Bourdieu's theory of social distinction in which objects are used to create and consolidate an individual's social status and identity.
[85] Barry Schwartz, 'The Social Psychology of the Gift', *The American Journal of Sociology*, 73 (1967), 1-11 (pp. 2-3).
[86] Ibid, p. 5.

the group and, conversely, the refusal to share a given meal results in the individual's exclusion from the group.[87]

In his observations on gifts, Ralph Waldo Emerson acknowledges that giving and receiving are problematic activities: 'it is a very onerous business, this of being served, and the debtor naturally wishes to give you a slap'. [88] The problems resulting from an exchange of gifts are, according to theorists of the gift, related to the hidden obligation created in each act of giving. Following Emerson, Mauss points out that the exchange is far from free and that disinterested giving is an illusion: 'in theory such gifts are voluntary but in fact they are given and repaid under obligation'.[89] Mauss distinguishes three obligations: to give, to receive and to return gifts.[90] The gift helps create and recreate social relations. The receiver's aggression towards the giver, which Emerson describes, is related to the power relationship which any gift creates or consolidates. According to Mauss, 'to give is to show one's superiority, to show that one is something more and higher […]. To accept without returning or repaying more is to face subordination, to become a client and subservient'.[91] Mauss speaks of the giver's magical hold over the recipient.[92] He points to the social and, in Germanic languages, etymological relation between present and poison.[93] He fails, however, to make the link to the special status of the gift of food. With the ability to force a certain concept of personal identity on the receiver and even to poison, the gift of food is particularly problematic.

The theories of reciprocity as applied to the culinary emphasize the cultural and social aspects of the culinary sign. Pierre Bourdieu also pays special attention to its cultural aspects: he regards all cultural practice, food behaviour included, as a tool of social distinction. Bourdieu's materialist perspective concentrates on the ways in which objects relate to the social identity of their owner, since 'taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier'.[94] In Bourdieu's research, in which he pays attention alongside fashion, interior design, music, film and literature to food tastes, class structures are found to be closely connected to culture. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*

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[87] Jones, *Feast*, p. 8.
[88] Emerson, 'Gifts', p. 537.
[89] Mauss, *The Gift*, p. 1.
[90] Ibid, p. 10.
[91] Ibid, p. 72.
[92] Ibid, p. 10.
[93] Ibid, p. 62.
[94] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. by Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 2010), p. xxix.

demonstrates how taste is far from being individual free choice. According to Bourdieu, it is instead developed within a social structure in which members of certain social groups distinguish themselves from others. Taste is seen as an arbitrary construct with symbolic importance to social identity. Bourdieu's work stresses that taste does not express social identity, but produces it.[95]

Bourdieu's materialist perspective sees culture as capital, as social asset.[96] According to Bourdieu, cultural capital is the main tool of the construction and reproduction of social class and social identity. While taste may appear natural and intrinsic, Bourdieu emphasises that it is an arbitrary construct and a language of power. (The latter point reflects what has been said before in the context of food as gift, which is also a tool in the construction of power relationships.) Meaning is assigned to specific choices of taste and opposed with meanings assigned to contrasting choices. In addition to the construction of social class, cultural capital has, according to Bourdieu, a second objective, namely the reproduction of social class. Choice and taste are functions of what Bourdieu calls the 'habitus', an individual's system of thought, perception and judgement, which is acquired and arbitrary rather than, as often perceived, naturally given.

Bourdieu sees distinction as a daily routine, materialising in everyday manifestations of taste. Food behaviour is particularly powerful, because it originates in the primary taste of oral consumption and has to be attended to daily. According to Bourdieu, the main characteristic of the food behaviour of individuals of a certain social class is its opposition to the food behaviour of other social classes. He argues that the financial conditions of the Bourgeoisie engender 'tastes […] for freedom', which appreciate what is distant from physical needs. The working class, by contrast, develops 'tastes of necessity', tastes for the functional, that originate in material and physical needs.[97] According to Bourdieu, food choices and food preparation relate primarily to this distinction between luxury and necessity.

In Bourdieu's concept of class distinction by culture, food behaviour is central not least because of its unavoidability and daily occurrence. However, Bourdieu considers food behaviour within the structure of culture, analysing its social function as language of power in the context of the class struggle. Focussing on what is perceived as the

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[95] Ashley and others, *Food and Cultural Studies*, p. 67.
[96] For a reading of Bourdieu's concept of social and cultural capital see Robert Moore, 'Capital', in Michael Grenfell (ed.), Bourdieu*: Key Concepts* (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), pp. 101-17.
[97] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 173.

cultural aspects of food and food behaviour, the theory of distinction as well as theories of the gift do not take into account the connotations of the process of incorporation, of the mouth as erogenous zone and the sensual pleasures and simultaneous threats of eating.[98] These theories do not attempt to set what is perceived as cultural into relation with what is commonly seen as the natural aspects of the culinary. Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis engage with this relation, suggesting that the ostensibly cultural is always based in its supposed opposite.

1.2.4 Psychoanalytic theory

Some behaviour related to food has frequently been described as instinctive, such as eating and hunger, while other activities related to food such as cooking are commonly considered cultural, as shown above. But what about the relation between these aspects, between the drives (eating and hunger) on the on hand and what is perceived as cultural production (such as cooking and oral narrative) on the other? This section engages with psychoanalytic concepts such as the pleasure principle, seen as responsible for sublimation, which, according to Freudian psychoanalysis, underlies all cultural production. As drive energy is channelled into cultural production through sublimation, the section looks in particular at Freudian drive theory and the position of the oral within it. What transpires is that the Freudian view presents a possible relation between what is perceived as natural and what is perceived as cultural food behaviour as well as between the drives and (oral) narrative. The section also addresses the relation of food and sex via orality. It provides an account of theories of the oral libidinal stage, which describe it as autoerotic or cannibalistic. In contrast to Freudian psychoanalysis, Lacanian theory postulates the inherent uncontrollability of the mental apparatus, which is structured like a language, thus arbitrary, relational and unstable. In this respect, Lacan's theories contrast Freud's, which posit the ego as controlling mechanism. Lacan's concept of lack will illustrate this difference from Freudian theory, because it excludes the possibility of control. It furthermore relates the experience of hunger to desire via the severance from the breast.

Freudian psychoanalysis divides the mind into unconscious id, conscious, controlling ego and moralising super-ego. All human behaviour, according to this theory, can be explained by regarding the conflicts and interactions between those three

[98] Not all eating is incorporation as not all parts of the food consumed are incorporated into the eater's body. The term is throughout used to refer to Fischler's theory of incorporation.

parts of the self. These forces within the self are subject to various principles, the one with highest priority being the pleasure principle.[99] This principle answers to the needs of the most fundamental drive, Eros, consisting of the oral (of particular interest to the present study), anal and the phallic or (as post-Freudian term) the genital. Freud describes the principle as follows:

> The governing purpose obeyed by these primary processes [that is those of the id] is easy to recognize; it is described as […] pleasure principle. These processes strive towards gaining pleasure; psychical activity draws back from any event which might arouse unpleasure. (Here we have repression.)[100]

According to Freud, the centrality of the pleasure principle to the psychic apparatus then lies in its total control over the id drives.

The existence of other people, of society, usually prohibits the unrestricted satisfaction of the basic drives. The ego negotiates between the displeasure inflicted on an individual who does not subordinate drive satisfaction to the needs of society and the displeasure resulting from a lack of drive satisfaction. To this end the ego employs the mediating reality principle. This principle facilitates the comparison of social reality with the needs of the drives in order to find an adequate way of satisfying the drive. In this way, the temporarily repressed drives can finally be satisfied within the cultural limitations of society. The concept of the pleasure principle as the basis of the human psyche renders human behaviour fundamentally hedonistic. The ego's delay and repression of drive satisfaction according to the demands of the super-ego may, however, veil the underlying, primary need of the id to respond to the pleasure principle.

Drive theory, the 'Triebtheorie', is the cornerstone of the psychoanalytical understanding of the mental apparatus: according to Freud, 'all mental occurrences must be regarded as built on the basis of an interplay of the forces of the elementary instincts'.[101] Freud describes the drives as

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[99] Freud, *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (Wien: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1923), p. 6.
[100] Freud, 'Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1973), Volume XII , pp. 218-26 (p. 219).
[101] Freud, 'Two Encyclopedia Articles', in *Standard Edition*, vol. XVIII, pp. 235-59 (p. 255).

> [the] concept on the frontier between the mental and the somatic, as the physical representative of the stimuli originating from within the organism and reaching the mind, as a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body.[102]

Thus, the drives connect the mental and the physical. The striving for satisfaction originates in the drives and they are inextricably linked to and fully controlled by the pleasure principle and generate a certain energy. A central characteristic of this energy is its ability to attach itself freely to various objects.[103] This is the basis for the processes of sublimaton.

According to Freudian psychoanalysis, Eros has more effective ways of circumventing death, which is the aim of the life instinct, than procreation alone.[104] Reading Freud, Ulrich Irion believes that through the process of sublimation, the sex drive is responsible for cultural products which can achieve ostensible immortality: 'the works of Eros in the fields of art, politics and understanding provide "fame, immortal for all time" and children who are "fairer and more immortal" than those whom physical procreation can ever produce'.[105] According to Freudian psychoanalysis, cultural production comes into existence through the sublimation of basic drives, such as the oral. The theory thus offers a connection between the oral drive and cultural practices related to it, such as cooking and (oral) narrative.

According to Freud, the *raison d'être* of sublimation is the following: 'the task here is that of shifting the instinctual aims in such a way that they cannot come up against frustration from the external world'.[106] Sublimation occurs as a result of the pleasure principle: displeasure is caused by the id-drives, which remain unsatisfied under the influence of a moralising, prohibiting super-ego. This displeasure is met with defence and avoidance strategies such as sublimation.[107] Sublimation is a strategy to achieve the aims of the pleasure principle while considering the reality principle. The aim is to facilitate the functioning of the individual within the social system while at the same time avoiding displeasure. A definition of the process can therefore simply be 'the

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[102] Freud, 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes', in *Standard Edition*, vol. XIV, pp. 121-2.
[103] Eveline List, *Psychoanalyse: Geschichte, Theorien, Anwendungen* (Wien: Facultas, 2009), p. 71.
[104] Ulrich Irion, *Eros und Thanatos in der Moderne: Nietzsche und Freud als Vollender eines anti-christlichen Grundzugs im europäischen Denken* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1992), p. 40.
[105] Irion, *Eros*, p. 40 (my translation).
[106] Freud, 'Civilization and its Discontents', in *Standard Edition*, vol. XXI, p. 79.
[107] List provides a comprehensive overview of the defence mechanisms described in Freudian psychoanalysis: List, *Psychoanalyse*, p. 91.

resolution of psychic conflict', a conflict of the id's drives and the pleasure principle with the reality of the outside world and its incorporated values.[108]

So far, it has been shown how sublimation comes into existence as mediator between id-drives and the demands of the super-ego. Yet how does Freud explain his belief that the sublimation of the human drives is the basis of cultural production which would include cooking and narration?[109] Drive energy, as mentioned above, can be attached to various objects.[110] This applicability of drive energy onto other fields, gives the drive its cultural value:[111] the sublimated energy can be transferred and used for cultural production. 'Sublimation, then, is the process that makes possible the extension of instinctual interest away from the primary objects of desire to cultural activities'.[112] Thus in Freud's theory, cultural activities and artistic production are a defence mechanism against counter-social id-drives. Freud's definition of sublimation highlights the relation between what is being sublimated and its sublimate: 'This capacity to exchange its originally sexual aim for another one, which is no longer sexual but which is psychically related to the first aim, is called the capacity for *sublimation*.'[113] As it responds to the oral drive, cooking is a likely sublimate for oral libido and eating, which both originate in the oral drive. Following Freudian psychoanalysis, one could therefore read cultural activities such as cooking and narration as products of drive sublimation. Initially, however, a closer look at the view of Freudian psychoanalysis on the oral drive is needed.

In Freudian psychoanalysis, the oral is the primary drive.[114] It is central to the psychoanalytic concept of Eros. The relation of eating and sexuality via orality is present in common linguistic use. Peter Farb and George J. Armelagos observe the usage of vocabulary from the field of cuisine to describe sexual practices.[115] Others

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[108] Gad Horowitz, *Repression: Basic and Surplus Repression in Psychoanalytic Theory: Freud, Reich, and Marcuse* (Toronto/ Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1977), p. 37; p. 33.
[109] This point has been described by Herbert Marcuse, *Triebstruktur und Gesellschaft: Ein philosophischer Beitrag zu Sigmund Freud* (Frankfurt Main: Suhrkamp, 1965), p. 9 and in Irion, *Eros,* p. 158.
[110] Freud, 'Libidotheorie', p. 230.
[111] Freud, 'Die "kulturelle" Sexualmoral und die moderne Nervosität', in *Gesammelte Werke*, VII, pp.143-67 (p. 150).
[112] Horowitz, 'Repression', p. 36.
[113] Freud, '"Civilized" Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness', in *Standard Edition*, vol. IX, p. 187.
[114] Freud, 'Negation', in *Standard Edition*, vol. XIX, pp. 234-9 (p. 237).
[115] Peter Farb and George J. Armelagos in *Consuming Passions: The Anthropology of Eating* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), p. 85.

point to the metaphorical importance of food behaviour alongside sexuality.[116] The biological foundation for this connection lies in the nervous system, where eating and sexual activity are linked emotionally.[117] Farb and Armelagos point out that the same particularly sensitive nerve structure is found in the human sexual organs and in the mouth.[118] Eating can furthermore induce the same physiological reactions as an orgasm.[119] The role of eating and coitus to life and growth and their ability to cross body boundaries link the activities further.

Freud's writings focus on genital libido, but Maud Ellmann believes that his work already implies that it is in fact the earliest pre-genital stage, the oral, which is at the basis of all human behaviour. She argues this point on the basis that in Freud's theory of libido development 'sexual desire originates in the satisfaction of the need for nourishment'.[120] The work of Freud's student Karl Abraham underlines Ellmann's reading:[121] His theories on the stages of libidinal development take into account the great importance of the oral stage and develop further the relation between oral libido, food behaviour and sexuality. Abraham illustrates the ongoing importance of the oral libidinal stage in adult sexuality and food behaviour.[122] According to Abraham, the individual undergoes three stages of libido development, at the end of which stands object libido: the oral, followed by the anal and the genital stage. In this view, the oral is the earliest libidinal stage. Abraham describes that in this stage, food intake and eroticism are perceived as one. (This observation strengthens the theory of a psychological relation between food intake and sexuality.) Object libido being developed in later stages, the libido in the oral stages is not directed at an object.

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[116] Carole Counihan, *Food and Body*, p. 62; Maggie Kilgour, *From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

[117] This aspect is addressed in the following publications: Counihan, *Food and Body*, Robin Fox, 'Food and Eating: An Anthropological Perspective', *Social Issues Research Centre* (2003), <http://www.sirc.org/publik/food_and_eating_0.html> [accessed 27 January 2010] and Farb and Armelagos, *Consuming Passions*.

[118] Ibid, p. 87.

[119] Ibid, p. 88.

[120] Maud Ellmann, *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing and Imprisonment* (London: Virago, 1993), p. 36.

[121] See especially Abraham's essays 'Versuch einer Entwicklungsgeschichte der Libido', in *Psychoanalytische Studien zur Charakterbildung und andere Schriften* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1969), pp. 113-83 and 'Untersuchungen über die früheste prägenitale Entwicklungsstufe der Libido', in *Psychoanalytische Studien*, pp. 84-112. Before Freud and Abraham, the pediatrician S. Lindner related finger sucking to masturbation. This inspired Freud's theory of the oral libidinal stage ('Das Saugen an den Fingern, Lippen etc. bei den Kindern (Ludeln): Eine Studie', in *Jahrbuch für Kinderheilkunde und physische Erziehung*, 14 (1879), pp. 68–91) and his work on finger sucking and autoeroticism, which already implies the importance of the oral stage, subsequently analysed by Abraham: 'Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie', in *Gesammelte Werke*, V, pp. 33-145.

[122] Abraham, 'Prägenitale Libido', p. 88.

Instead, following Abraham, it is autoerotic.[123] Neurotics who have regressed to this stage or have never achieved further stages of libido development lack object libido. Abraham observes that such patients develop what he calls a refusal of social interaction.[124] Autoeroticism appears to be central to human relationships with food: while a meal can be shared, the sensual experience of food is individual and can be enjoyed independently of others. According to Abraham, psychological tensions related to the oral stage often result from its autoerotic characteristic, as it is likely to clash with the individual's other needs. Abraham outlines the process that this tension triggers: individuals attempt to resolve the tension through compromises, yet autoeroticism continues to dictate the conditions for this. Abraham's theories thus suggest a reading of culinary pleasures as having autoerotic connotations. Furthermore, food-related behaviour can, following his analysis of the oral stage, be viewed as compensatory activity for needs originating in the oral stage.

Abraham later argues for a division of the oral stage into two phases: an earlier phase of the sucking drive of incorporation, followed by a phase of the oral-sadistic drive, also called cannibalistic.[125] The oral as sucking is the initial, pre-ambivalent phase in which the breast is not yet perceived as outside and other. When the child begins to differentiate between self and other, the individual's libido reaches the oral-sadistic, cannibalistic stage. As the breast, which was previously not distinguishable from the self, is now understood as external to the self, the child develops the urge for the incorporation of the desired object. Freud says: 'the sexual *aim* consists in the incorporation of the object'.[126] According to psychoanalytical theory it is in this latter stage that the individual enters a phase of ambivalence towards the object of desire.[127]

The present discussion of Freudian psychoanalysis has shown that the oral drive and oral libido are here considered as central also to the adult mental apparatus. The oral is seen as highly sexualised; this includes a close link between sexuality and food intake. Furthermore, oral libido has both autoerotic and cannibalistic tendencies. In the context of Freudian psychoanalysis, food behaviour originates in the pre-verbal. Within literary texts, food behaviour therefore attains an exclusive function, because it is able to express what language cannot: aspects of the non-verbal. Furthermore, Freudian

[123] Ibid, p. 85.
[124] Ibid,.
[125] Freud, 'Drei Abhandlungen'.
[126] Freud, 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality', in *Standard Edition*, vol. VII, p. 198.
[127] It is not entirely clear how Abraham can argue for the oral stage preceding object libido when the object plays an important role in the cannibalistic phase of oral libido.

psychoanalysis allows an interpretation of activities related to the oral drive as connection between the biological and mental system. Freudian psychoanalysis furthermore links food behaviour and sexuality to literature via the oral, a locale of all three. Finally, the similarity between Freud's talking cure and literary analysis underlines the connection of mental processes to (oral) narrative.

Apart from criticism of a scientific and methodological kind, Freudian psychoanalysis has been attacked on political grounds.[128] Especially in its view of the sexual development of women, Freudian psychoanalysis is highly misogynistic, patriarchal and phallocentric.[129] The main criticism of the psychoanalytic view on food and eating in particular is its reduction to the sex drive. Criticism of the drives as basis of the entire mental apparatus focus on the reductionism inherent in a theory in which emotions are a function of sexuality.[130] Interaction with the oral is not always sexualised, cooking and other cultured food behaviour not only *Ersatzhandlung*, compensation activity.

Jacques Lacan built on Freud's theories. Freud regards the ego as central, controlling power and modern western societies highlight the idea of 'cogito ergo sum'. According to Lacan, by contrast, the self has no essence but is located in the unthinkable unconscious which, after Saussure's view of language, is constituted of relative, uncontrollable, unreliable linguistic building blocks. He believes that 'the unconscious is structured like a language'.[131] Lacan sees the unconscious as the foundation of the self and the origin of human behaviour. In contrast to Déscartes's Cogito, Lacan sees subjectivity as: 'I am where I think not', that is in the unconscious.[132] As it is based on language, the unconscious can be regarded as closely related to the fundamental, every-day signifying system of food.

In his essay 'The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious', Lacan outlines the parallels between the unconscious and Saussure's findings. He concludes that the

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[128] Popper notes that the theory of the unconscious, which is the basis of the assignment of metaphoric sexual value to food, is not falsifiable and thus unscientific: Karl Popper, 'Science: Conjectures and Refutations', in Patrick Grim (ed.), *Philosophy of Science and the Occult*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), pp. 104-10.

[129] Freud imputes penis envy in 'Drei Abhandlungen'.

[130] Thomas Kornbichler, *Freud: Ein bürgerlicher Revolutionär: Seine Gedankenwelt und ihr Einfluss bis heute* (Stuttgart: Kruez, 2006), p. 57; Storr, p. 34. On the criticism of a demonization of sexuality see Claus Buddeberg and Lutz Götzmann, 'Kritik und Kritik der Kritik der "Drei Abhandlungen" von Freud', in Martin Dannecker and Agnes Katzenbach (eds), *100 Jahre Freuds "Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie": Aktualität und Anspruch* (Gießen: Psychosozial Verlag, 2005), pp. 51-5.

[131] Jaques Lacan, *The Seminar: Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York/ London: Norton, 1998), p. 20.

[132] Jacques Lacan, 'The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud', in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock/ Routledge, 1977), pp. 161-97 (p. 183).

unconscious expresses itself using linguistic means. If the unconscious is structured like a language, this suggests that stable, independent identity is impossible, because meaning comes into being only within a network of constantly changing relations. From his perspective, the self is seen as an 'assemblage of signifiers clustering around a proper name'.[133] In this context, language and signifying systems such as that of food take on new significance as main tool in the construction of a quasi-identity, this 'assemblage of signifiers'. As 'signifiers relate only to one another, […] language is detached from external reality' and so is any sense of self and its literary representation by means of relational signifying systems such as food.[134] Lacan's theories mean a shift away from the possibility of some control as expressed in Freudian theory. A central Lacanian concept that illustrates this difference in outlook between Freud and Lacan is lack. The concept derives from Lacan's model of individual development and, as it expresses itself as desire or hunger, stands in direct relation to food and eating.

Lacan figures three phases of individual development: the Real, the Imaginary Order and the Symbolic Order.[135] Prior to individuation, the child exists in a perceived unity with the mother. The child experiences no lack, because the object that satisfies the need and the self are not yet perceived as dichotomous. In the Imaginary Order, the individual develops a concept of self and otherness. The original loss of unity originates in this stage. This irretrievable loss of unity (a unity that, from birth onwards, only ever existed in the infant's perception) results in entry into the Symbolic Order, where lack becomes a structural concept. Seeking to avoid the experience of lack, the individual wants to reinstate the unity and completeness originally perceived. This results in the never-ending desire to merge with the Other. Based on Lacan's observation that language expresses lack, as signifiers refer to an object in its absence, Slavoj Žižek points out that 'through fantasy, we learn how to desire':[136] the idea is that, with the help of language, an individual may conjure up desired objects which are absent or non-existent, thus ostensibly appeasing the perception of lack. In Lacan's model, the dissociation from nature – the withdrawal of the nourishing breast – results in perpetual desire, leading to the creation of culture. Food behaviour is an excellent medium with which to represent Lacanian lack: first, because lack begins with the severance from the

[133] Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 108.
[134] Ibid, p. 107.
[135] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar: Book III: The Psychoses, 1955-56*, trans. by Russell Grigg (London: Routledge, 1993); Lacan describes and uses the concept of lack especially in *Le séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre 4, La relation d'objet : 1956-1957* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1994).
[136] Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (London/ Cambridge (Massachusetts): MIT Press, 1991), p. 6.

nourishing breast. Thus, physicality and hunger are inscribed in it. Second, because eating is a constantly recurring need that cannot be finally overcome, which sets it in parallel with Lacan's view of lack as unavoidable, unsatisfiable and necessary part of the human condition.

The psychoanalytic theories outlined here provide multi-facetted perspectives on the relation of food behaviour to cultural production and specifically narration. While Mauss's, Lévi-Strauss's and Bourdieu's theories focus on what is perceived as the cultural aspects of food within society, the psychoanalytic theories laid out here stress their origin in what is commonly conceived of as natural. These are the oral drive and the oral libidinal stage. The theory of sublimation offers a link between food behaviour and narration via orality as well as a view on the relation between food behaviour and sexuality. Lacan's theory of lack suggests that the basis of cultural practices lies in breastfeeding and the process of weaning, which are activities related to eating and nourishment that are commonly perceived as natural.

1.2.5 Poststructuralist perspectives on the culinary

Structuralism's binary oppositions such as that of nature and culture help conceptualise food and its related activities, but food behaviour and narrative cannot be reduced to dichotomies. Lévi-Strauss's and Barthes's views of scientifically analysable, objectifiable signifying systems and Freud's talking cure, which posits a stable signifying system, are put into question by poststructuralist views. These draw the consequences from Saussure's description of the sign as constitutive, according to which signs do not refer to an outward reality but merely to other signs.[137] This rejection of the possibility of the existence of objectivity undermines binary oppositions, resonating with Jacques Derrida's poststructuralist view that: 'there is nothing outside of the text'.[138] Derrida argues that, since one cannot position oneself outside of culture, it is impossible to examine it free from its structures. (Rather than

[137] Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 84.

[138] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 158. Derrida's criticism of structuralism arguably brought the movement to an end and introduced deconstruction and poststructuralism: Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', in Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London/ New York: Routledge, 1978), pp. 351-70.

aiming at transcending culture, this thesis enters it through representations of food behaviour.)

If the structuralist perspective invites the literary analysis of food by defining it as signifying system, poststructuralist views offer perspectives of the ability of food and its related activities to destabilize the borders between nature and culture, inside and outside, self and other, body and mind and of female and male social roles. The theories of food and gender outlined below suggest that the binary opposition of woman/ man often relies on the signifying system of food and is, as all opposites, a construct and easily destabilized. A view on the relationship of gender, especially concepts of the relationship between women and nourishment, highlights the social relevance of constructs of binary opposites while at the same time showing these as less straightforward as commonly perceived. Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection goes further than pointing out constructed binaries. She argues that substances, concepts and people which transgress the perceived borders of binary oppositions are experienced as threatening to the degree of causing nausea. Thus, the central characteristic of Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection is that it does not respect such conceptual borders and questions binary opposition. Finally, the widely overlooked theories of Claude Fischler of incorporation and the omnivore's paradox present the contradictions, ambivalences and ambiguities in the human relationship to food. These theories supplement the occasionally reductionist tendencies of structuralism.

Feminist theory has identified food behaviour as an important aspect of gender formation, which is thus based on an arbitrary and unstable signifying system. With this realisation, poststructuralism presents the constructedness of the binary opposition of man/ woman by means of signifying systems.[139] Hélène Cixous regards the story of Eve as representative of the subjection of female oral pleasure (the desire for the apple) to abstract patriarchal rule (God's prohibition).[140] This connection implies a role of food in the construction of (particularly female) gendered identity. Counihan and Esterik bring together in their anthology *Food and Culture* several articles prominently concerned

[139] Kristeva envisages a future in which the man/ woman dichotomy will 'be understood as belonging to *metaphysics*. What can "identity," even "sexual identity," mean' in a new theoretical scientific space where the very notion of identity is challenged?': Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', in Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (eds), *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 197-217 (pp. 214-15).

[140] Hélène Cixous, 'The Author in Truth', in Deborah Jenson (ed.), *Hélène Cixous: Coming to Writing" and Other Essays*, trans. by Sarah Cornell (London: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 132-82.

with the cultural construction of gendered identity through food behaviour.[141] The role of food provision is indeed frequently associated with women. Not only the breastfeeding of the infant, but the process of food preparation is often seen to define a woman. While this traditional view might be changing in some cultures, food behaviour continues to be highly gendered, as later analysis will show.

Questions of the agents in the production, consumption and distribution of food frequently lead to the social constructs of gender roles. The power relationships that have formed around kitchen and stove are highly complex and cannot be described as relationships of male oppression only. In fact, women's often obligatory domestic role is not only restrictive and disempowering but has also been used for empowerment. The kitchen is a potential locale of female authority;[142] cookbooks are a potential medium for women's self-expression.[143] Thus cooking, seen as narrative, is regarded as a medium of self-expression of otherwise voiceless women. Some critics extend the discussion of power and address gender politics and the sexual ideology of food and diet.[144] Anna Freud concentrates on the physiologically as well as psychologically indispensable activity of breastfeeding and the importance of women's culinary work for the preservation of culture is illustrated by Helen Barolini.[145] The domestic role is thus regarded by critics as both limiting and, within a limited sphere, empowering. The marginalisation of women into the kitchen goes hand in hand with their limitation to the body: both are commonly traced to women's ability to breastfeed, which represents a connection between nourishment and physicality specific to the female body. The body

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[141] For instance Anna Meigs, 'Food as a Cultural Construction', in Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, *Food and Culture: A Reader* (London/ New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 95-106; Marjorie Devault, 'Conflict and Deference', in Counihan and Esterik, *Food and Culture*, pp. 180-200; Emily Massara, 'Que Gordita', in Counihan and Esterik, *Food and Culture*, pp. 251-5; Marvalene H. Hughes, 'Soul, Black Women, and Food', in Counihan and Esterik, *Food and Culture*, pp. 272-80.

[142] Tamar Heller and Patricia Moran, *Scenes of the Apple: Food and the Female Body in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Women's Writing* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), p. 3; Julika Griem, 'A Room of One's Own? Contested Culinary and Filmic Space in "The Scent of Green Papaya", "Eat Drink Man Woman", and "Tampopo"', in Tobias Döring, Markus Heide and Susanne Mühleisen, *Eating Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Food* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 2003), pp. 241-54.

[143] Heller and Moran, *Scenes of the Apple*, pp. 6-7.

[144] Anna S. Meigs, 'Food Rules and the Traditional Sexual Ideology', in Deane W. Curtin and Lisa M. Heldke, *Cooking, Eating, Thinking: Transformative Philosophies of Food* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 109-18; Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (London/ New York: Continuum, 1999).

[145] Anna Freud, 'The Psychoanalytic Study of Infantile Feeding Disturbances', in Counihan and Esterik, *Food and Culture*, pp. 107-16; Helen Barolini, 'Appetite Lost, Appetite Found: Horace's Torte, Vegetables Gardiniera', in Arlene Voski Avakian (ed.), *Through the Kitchen Window: Women writers Explore the Intimate Meanings of Food and Cooking* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), pp. 228-37.

still makes for a large part of the construct of female identity: women continue to be associated with the body while the mental and cultural is still often attributed to men.[146]

Julia Kristeva addresses this issue, arguing that bodily functions indeed precede mental processes: Kristeva believes that Lacan's view of the linguistic as basic underlying structure of unconscious processes fails to explain certain pre- and nonverbal experiences. She insists on a view that includes the physical realities of the body in considerations of the mental apparatus.[147] While in Lacan's mirror-stage the body becomes a symbol, a signifier, Kristeva points out that without the body, there would be no reflection in the mirror, nothing to which to attach signification.[148] The pre-symbolic non-verbality of the abject challenges Lacan's views: Kristeva argues on the basis of the abject that human behavioural processes are at the same time biological and pre-symbolic.[149] She also describes the close relation of abject and food at the example of food loathing:

> 'Food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection. When the eyes see or the lips touch that skin on the surface of milk/ harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail paring, I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire. Along with sight/clouding dizziness, nausea makes me balk at that milk cream'.[150]

According to Kristeva, the abject is neither subject nor object;[151] it is neither conscious nor unconscious but instead threatens such distinctions. The horror that an experience of abjection triggers lies in the dissolution of the subject's borders caused by the abject which leads to the dissolution of the subject itself. Based on the relativity of meaning, the subject/ object duality is at the heart of identity formation: 'how can I be without borders?'.[152] If the subject has no outside, no borders, it has no identity. Kristeva

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[146] The publications by Sceats and Lupton illuminate this aspect from the perspective of cultural studies and literary criticism respectively: Sarah Sceats, *Food, Consumption and the Body in Contemporary Women's Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Deborah Lupton, *Food, Body and Self* (London: Sage, 1996).

[147] Shuli Barzilai, 'Borders of Language: Kristeva's Critique of Lacan', *PMLA*, 106 (1991), 294-305 (p. 296).

[148] Kelly Oliver, 'Kristeva's Imaginary Father and the Crisis in the Paternal Function', *Diacritics*, 21 (1991), 43- 63 (p. 45).

[149] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 3.

[150] Ibid, pp. 2-3.

[151] Ibid, p. 1.

[152] Ibid, p. 4.

suggests that the main characteristic of the abject is precisely this problematic crossing of borders: abjection is what 'disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite'.[153] In its indefinable position in-between, the abject shakes the very foundations of meaning and 'draws me toward the place where meaning collapses'.[154] To Kristeva, the abject is such a strong reaction precisely because it touches the core of an individual's being – their sense of self – and argues that the borders that define an individual are mere illusion.

The abject is the liminal, 'the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite'.[155] These terms describe also food and Kristeva sees food loathing as 'perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection'.[156] We understand that the dead body is a clear instant of the dissolution of the subject/ object opposition. This is as much the case with the process of eating. 'The scandal [...] consists in the infiltration of the [...] "clean and proper body" – an infiltration that reveals the body's laboriously achieved identity as brittle and deceptive'.[157] This description of abjection shows how the penetration of the body dissolves the very concept of physical identity. Food, which infiltrates and crosses the border between inside and outside, clearly has great potential to be abject. A central difference is that decaying bodies can be (and are) labelled abject and can be partly avoided (hospitals, old-people's homes, cemeteries serve this purpose); food cannot. The physical necessity to eat installs it as a daily challenge. Kristeva's theory of abjection addresses strategies with which the mind deals with such challenges. In her view, art functions as a way to 'purify' the abject, it is the 'catharsis par excellence'.[158] Art is thus seen as a reaction to the repression of the abject, a view which reminds of Freud's idea of sublimation as representing the cultural value of the drives.[159]

> For abjection, when all is said and done, is the other facet of religious, moral, and ideological codes [in other words culture] on which rest the sleep of individuals and the breathing spells of societies. Such codes are

[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid, p. 2.
[155] Ibid, p. 4.
[156] Ibid, p. 2.
[157] Winfried Menninghaus, *Disgust: The Theory and History of a Strong Sensation*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Joel Golb (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), p. 373.
[158] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 17.
[159] Freud, 'Sexualmoral', p. 150.

> abjection's purification and repression. But the return of their repressed make up our 'apocalypse'.[160]

Within the arts, Kristeva sees literature as particularly involved with the consequences of abjection:

> On close inspection, all literature is probably a version of the apocalypse that seems to me rooted [...] on the fragile border (borderline cases) where identities (subject/object, etc.) do not exist or only barely so – double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject.[161]

Kristeva's view of most literature as a recounting of the problem of fragile borders, constant change and the impossibility of unity of identity is related to the special attention literature gives to character. This point, however, has also been made about Lacan's view of the self and is not particular to Kristeva. What she adds is the reintroduction, after Lacan, of the pre-symbolic and non-verbal, of the physical: 'the theory of abjection relates yet again – as Freud's narrative of disgust did before – the biological anatomy of the body directly to psychoanalysis and cultural theory'.[162]

The present outline of Kristeva's theories as applied to food emphasizes the negative aspects of the experience of food. The theories of Claude Fischler, however, stress that food is both threat *and* desire. The oeuvre of the socio-anthropologist offers detailed analyses of how humans engage with food.[163] Some of his concepts will be presented in the following and the later analysis will illustrate their usefulness for literary criticism. Fischler describes incorporation as a process which consists in the crossing of boundaries, not only of inside and outside but also of object and subject. Fischler also sees incorporation as the basis of individual as well as social and cultural

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[160] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 209.
[161] Ibid, p. 207.
[162] Menninghaus, *Disgust*, p. 387.
[163] Fischler's book length publications on how humans engage with food include: *L'homme et la Table* (Paris: École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1990); *L'homnivore: le goût, la cuisine et le corps* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1990); *Du Vin* (Paris, Odile Jacob, 1999). Claude Fischler and Estelle Masson, *Manger: Français, Européens et Américains face à l'alimentation,* with Estelle Masson (Paris, Odile Jacob, 2008). Essays, some of which published in English, are: 'Gastro-nomie et gastro-anomie', *Communications*, 31 (1979), 189-210; 'Food Habits, Social Change and the Nature/ Culture Dilemma', *Social Science Information,* 19 (1980), 937-53; 'Le ketchup et la pilule – nourritures futuristes et imaginaire contemporain', *Prospective et santé,* 25 (1983), 110-19; 'Learned versus "Spontaneous" Dietetics: French Mothers' Views of what Children Should Eat', *Social Science Information*, 25 (1986), 945–65; 'OCNI: objects comestibles non identifiés', in Élie Théofilakis (ed.), *Moderne, et après? Les immatériaux* (Paris: Autrement, 1985), pp. 80-6; 'Food, Self and Identity', *Social Science Information*, 27 (1988), 275-92.

identity: as the consumer incorporates the properties of what they eat, it literally becomes part of them. At the same time, the eater is being incorporated into a group, because the food they choose is particular to their culture or social class. (This resonates with Bourdieu's theory of distinction, whereby dominant and dominated are distinguished by the food they choose.) With the process of incorporation, the eater's personal and socio-cultural identity is thus threatened from the inside as well as from the outside.[164] Fischler underlines that, depending on the food that is being consumed, this can have threatening as well as pleasurable consequences.

Fischler expands on the ambiguity of food in his writing on the omnivores' paradox.[165] Paul Rozin describes the omnivore's experience of culinary neophilia (the inclination to test novel foodstuff) and neophobia (a fear of new items of food as they might be harmful).[166] According to Fischler, omnivores necessarily experience this mixture of attraction and repulsion as their diet is based on the adjustment to varying, available foodstuff. The ambivalence lies in the possibility of pleasure (for example a positively perceived taste or the sensation of satiety) as well as of gustatory displeasure (such as nausea). While food assures the continuation of life, it can also introduce illness and lead to death. (It in any case necessitates the death of the consumed organism.) Incorporation is pleasure, but also risk and danger: it often results in unpredictable changes to body and mind and the penetration of the edible object is a loss of integrity.

Fischler argues that 'because we are omnivores, incorporation is an act laden with meaning'.[167] Reflecting Barthes's earlier description of modernity as characterised by a '"polysemia" of food', Fischler furthermore regards the act of incorporation as becoming more and more problematic for the individual in modern western societies.[168] He identifies a 'disturbance of modern identity', which he traces to changing conditions of consumption.[169] According to him, consumers' ambivalence to the consumed product has increased, because modern food production alienates the consumer from the product. Not only do modern consumers no longer know the precise origin of the

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[164] Fischler, 'Identity', p. 280-1.
[165] The concept of the 'omnivore's paradox' was originally introduced by Paul Rozin: Fischler, 'Identity', pp. 277-9; Rozin: 'The Selection of Foods by Rats, Humans and other Animals', *Advances in the Study of Behavior*, 6 (1976), 21–76.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Fischler, 'Identity', p. 277.
[168] Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 33
[169] Fischler, 'Identity', p. 288. The relation of modern food consumption and ostensible changes in individual self-perception is also discussed in John Germov and Lauren Williams, *A Sociology of Food and Nutrition: The Social Appetite* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

products, they often no longer know what constitutes them. New foods are constantly being introduced into the market and the question also arises as to which foods to incorporate in order to be incorporated into the socio-cultural group one wishes to identify with.[170] 'Are we in danger of losing control of ourselves through what we eat?'.[171] Incorporation, according to this view, has become more complex and is more than ever a threat to concepts of identity. Fischler also addresses the modern reaction to this threat. He sees a lot of modern food behaviour (excessive food labelling; cooking elevated to an art form) as attempts to reinstate identity within the ostensible polysemia that, according to Barthes, characterizes modernity.[172] Fischler's theories enrich the consideration of food in literature, as what is frequently reduced to an every-day necessity is by him presented as bound up with complex ambiguities. The protagonists of the three novels discussed in this thesis demand a reading in the light of Fischler's theories, as they are authors and simultaneously eaters, engaging in the problematic as well as pleasurable process of incorporation.

1.2.6 Conclusion

The theoretical views on or applicable to food outlined in this first chapter open readings of representations of food within the three fictional texts to a multiplicity of perspectives. Identifying food as signifying system, structuralism crucially links the culinary and alimentary to narration: food and food behaviour can itself be regarded as a kind of narrative. Running within a literary text parallel to the narrator's words, it can thus support but also contradict, question and ridicule the narrator's projects. Lévi-Strauss's application of Saussurean linguistics to food emphasizes the necessity to read and interpret the culinary and the alimentary not just as literary device with limited potential. It suggests instead that beneath the 'falsely obvious', as Barthes calls it, lies an entire system of signification, which is often ideologically loaded.[173]

Binary oppositions are at the heart of structuralist theories. Their division of the natural and the cultural is particularly relevant for two reasons. First, one of its main aims is no less than the definition of humanity. Second, Lévi-Strauss identifies the conceptual distinction as underlying the culinary sign. Yet while eating and cooking

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[170] For details on changes in food production and distribution that have great impact on modern identity construction see Fischler, 'Gastro-nomie', 'Le ketchup' and 'OCNI'.
[171] Fischler, 'Identity', p. 290.
[172] Barthes, 'Psychosociology', p. 33. Fischler, 'Identity', p. 290 and 291.
[173] Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 10.

would, within Lévi-Strauss's theory, be identified as belonging to the natural and cultural realms respectively, food and food behaviour are, in final analysis, characterised by their position between the cultural and natural or within the interlinked categories. From this can be concluded that food is both ostensible tool and threat to this crucial binary opposition. This threat to concepts of culture renders the culinary and alimentary crucial in considerations of the texts' representations of artistic-cultural production. As Kristeva and Fischler show, food and food behaviour also question many other essential binaries, such as body/ mind, inside/ outside, subject/ object and man/ woman. Binary opposites such as these, however, are the foundation of meaning, which food thus destabilises. The analysis will explore how this destabilization of meaning affects the narration of the novels' narrators.

The chapter has addressed food within Mauss's and Lévi-Strauss's theories of reciprocity and Bourdieu's theory of distinction. Here, food is seen as cultural artefact and food behaviour cultural practice. Mauss's and Lévi-Strauss's theories of reciprocity show that exchanges of this kind are a passing over of the giver's qualities to the receiver. This aspect is heightened when the gift is food, because its qualities literally become part of the receiver and, if the meal is shared, will be part of both giver and receiver. The gift of food furthermore leads to obligation on the part of the receiver and constructs or reinforces a power relationship between the involved parties. The connotations of power are also heightened when the gift is food, because of its existential importance as nourishing substance. The relation of food choice and power is also addressed within Bourdieu's theory of taste, in which food taste functions as tool of social distinction.

Where Bourdieu does not focus on the material characteristics of food, Freudian psychoanalytic theory relates the cultural to what is conceived of as its natural origins, namely the drives. Of these, the oral drive and the oral libidinal stage have been identified as primary. Abraham and Freud describe the oral as autoerotic and cannibalistic. Applied to food and food behaviour, this extends the common perception of food consumption simply as sustenance or, in the context of commensality, as expression of other-directed loving nourishment or friendly communality in the shared meal. Freudian psychoanalytic theory furthermore introduces Eros as central aspect into things related to orality, thus into both food and (oral) narrative. Freudian theory furthermore links physicality to mental processes and both to cultural production via sublimation. It has been shown that this theory posits the controllability of id-drives by channelling their energy into cultural production. Lacan's theories, based on the idea

that the unconscious is structured like a language, negate views of controllability. Instead, he posits his concept of unsatisfiable and uncontrollable lack as underlying all human behaviour; a lack which frequently finds expression in desire and hunger.

Poststructuralist perspectives crucially offer insights into the characteristic of food behaviour to break up dichotomies and thus reject constructed binary opposites. This opens readings of the culinary sign in literary texts, which is in structuralism closed down to fit binary opposites, to multi-facetted interpretations. Thus, in the context of gender it has been shown that women's marginalisation into the domestic role is both restricting and, within the limited sphere of the kitchen, empowering. After all, food is a powerful physical and cultural tool, as it is both nourishment and narrative and gives an individual power over those it nourishes and can serve self-expression. The misogynistic marginalisation of women into the kitchen has been related to their reduction to the body, seen as female sphere and as secondary to the mind: both, as later analysis will illustrate, are often justified by the natural fact that women's bodies can nourish while men's cannot.

Kristeva's theory of abjection picks up another aspect of the view of bodies: she aims to instate the body as central in considerations of mental processes. Her theory of abjection suggests the potential of food to be abject. Kristeva also provides a link between food and the abject to artistic production, which she regards as a way of dealing with the problem of abjection. Fischler's theories supplement this view, explaining that food is both threat and desire.

Addressing food in literature from multiple perspectives – structuralist and poststructuralist views from the fields of social anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis, feminist theory and philosophy – this study aims to avoid the closing down of the reading of food within literary texts. Instead, the idea is to provide a range of tools to draw on as appropriate to offer interpretations of food as a complex signifying system. The application of these theories to the literary texts will illustrate the great critical potential of the culinary and alimentary. Furthermore, this chapter's focus on issues related to the connection of the culinary and alimentary to artistic-cultural production prepares the subsequent literary analysis: the latter has as its focal point the connotations of food in the texts and their relation to the novels' representations of processes and conditions of artistic-cultural production.

2 Iris Murdoch: *The Sea, The Sea*

In this study of Iris Murdoch's novel *The Sea, The* Sea, I argue that the protagonist's food behaviour and its development relate to a Murdochian ethical discourse and, via ethics, implicitly address artistic production. Murdoch was both philosopher and writer of fiction and critics are still largely preoccupied with the relationship of the two fields of her oeuvre. The present study argues that food in *The Sea, The Sea* expresses the novel's implicit examination of early Sartrean existentialism, which is set in relation to Murdoch's ethical views and concepts. At no point is the moral argument of the novel addressed directly. Instead, it is implicit in the protagonist's culinary behaviour and discourse and the development of these through three distinct stages. In her philosophical writing Murdoch aligns virtue and goodness with the need for food and the study explores this link between ethics and food.[174] Food in *The Sea, The Sea* implicitly presents problems of the solipsistic existentialist system and indicates a road toward the ideal expressed in Murdoch's philosophical works.[175] As Murdoch's concept of 'good art' is bound up with ethical concerns, food opens the novel for a reading of the ethics of art within it.[176]

Murdoch's novel takes existentialist concepts (such as solipsism and the view of inter-subjective relationships as highly conflictual) as starting point. In three stages of culinary development, the novel implicitly presents the protagonist's existentialist view of the self and the world, problematizes this view and suggests what she describes as a road to goodness that moves beyond existentialism toward Murdoch's moral concepts of unselfing and attention to the Other. While analysing all three stages of the protagonist's culinary development, particular attention is drawn to the first stage, because it outlines what Murdoch regards as the starting point of each individual's path to goodness (self-centred selfishness). As it does this at the example of culinary art, it connects the moral to artistic production and its role in the consolation of the existentialist individual.

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[174] Murdoch, 'Existentialists and Mystics', in Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature, ed. by Peter Conradi* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), pp. 221-34 (p. 233).
[175] The term 'solipsism' is frequently used by critics of Murdoch. For a detailed analysis of solipsism in Murdoch's work see Stephanie Colsman, *Komik und Solipsismus im Romanwerk (1954 - 1995) von Iris Murdoch*, Studien zur anglistischen Literatur- und Sprachwissenschaft, 11 (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2000).
[176] The terms 'good art' and 'bad art' are Murdoch's and therefore used in parenthesis throughout. She discusses them for instance in 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts', in *Existentialists and Mystics*, pp. 363-85.

The chapter traces through the culinary the relationship between existentialism, fear, illusions of power and control and artistic production. Freudian theory, Kristeva's thoughts on abjection and Bourdieusian distinction help open the text to a reading of these complex issues and reveal multi-facetted aspects of the moral argument of the novel which rests on the culinary. The intertexts *The Tempest* and a lesser-known Sartrean short story address the need of control and illuminate problems of fear and disgust, which Murdoch's protagonist's narrative actively conceals.[177] The reading reveals that the protagonist uses culinary art as protection and consolation for aspects of the human condition (contingency, mortality), which are already inscribed in food. It is argued that in the text food is used in ways which reflect what Fischler has described as the ambivalence toward food to express a deep ambivalence toward art and artistic production.

2.1 *The Sea, The Sea* within Murdoch's oeuvre

A philosopher and prolific writer, Iris Murdoch wrote numerous philosophical studies, six plays and twenty-six novels, of which *The Sea, The Sea* (1978) won the Booker Prize in the year of its publication. Critics have been concerned with the relation between Murdoch's fiction and philosophy, while the author herself refused to be categorized as philosophical novelist.[178] Murdoch is certainly not an author of philosophical novels in the style of Sartre's *La Nausée* (1938; *Nausea*).[179] Yet if philosophical issues are not explicitly discussed in her novels, they nevertheless feature centrally. What distinguishes her work from philosophical novels is precisely the implicit position of her philosophy, the fact that philosophical issues are not directly addressed but implicit in the novels. Wolfe argues that Murdoch 'does not openly discuss philosophical ideas in her fiction. When her characters consider problems in

[177] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (London: Harper Press, 2011). Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Nourritures', in Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka (eds), *Oeuvres Romanesques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), pp. 2127-9; Sartre, 'Foods', trans. by Richard C. McCleary, in Sartre, *Selected Prose: The Writings of Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. by Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), pp. 60-3.

[178] Barbara Stevens Heusel identifies the discourse of Murdoch as philosophical novelist or not as one of the three major strands of Murdoch criticism: *Iris Murdoch's Paradoxical Novels: Thirty Years of Critical Reception* (Woodbridge: Camden House, 2001).

[179] Murdoch describes *La Nausée* as philosophical novel and distances herself as author from the genre: Bryan Magee, 'Philosophy and Dialogue: Dialogue with Iris Murdoch' in Magee, *Talking Philosophy: Dialogues with 15 Leading Philosophers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 229-50 (p. 243). Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Nausée: Roman* (Paris: Gallimart, 1938); Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. by Robert Baldwick (London: Penguin, 1963).

ethics and morals, the problems are never presented as abstract doctrine.'[180] Food in *The Sea, The Sea* functions in this way. Murdoch's moral concepts are manifest in the protagonist's food behaviour, implicitly problematizing what is posited as the human condition. In *The Sea, The Sea,* food and food behaviour provide a means of indirectly addressing philosophical issues. In an interview, Murdoch expresses her view that philosophy means 'looking at things which one takes for granted and suddenly seeing that they are very, very odd indeed'.[181] The present reading approaches *The Sea, The Sea* in this way: food in this novel has so far largely been taken for granted by critics as a stylistic device for characterization, yet it has more complex implications as additional signifying system within its protagonist's first person narrative. It is here representative of, as Barthes expresses it, the 'falsely obvious', of that which appears natural, but is in fact highly meaningful.[182]

Following from her ethical concerns, a major theme in Murdoch's novels is, as Stevens Heusel points out, characters' search for a path to goodness and the role that philosophers and artists have in this quest.[183] According to Conradi, this thematic thread begins with her first novel *Under the Net* (1954).[184] He describes it as expressing an interest in the attempt 'to get beyond the duality of self and world'.[185] More than twenty years later, Murdoch uses in *The Sea, The Sea* the processes related to food to explore this problem of a perceived duality, which to her is an ethical issue: eating questions the duality of inside and outside, of self and world, because food crosses these conceptual borders.

The figure of good in Murdoch's fiction frequently represents the moral ideals outlined in her philosophical works. Murdoch's fiction abounds with such figures, yet the fact that they are marginal indicates that the moral ideal which they represent is not the main interest of Murdoch's work.[186] What her novels are concerned with is instead the individual path to what Murdoch regards as goodness, not the ideal of goodness

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[180] Peter Wolfe, *The Disciplined Heart: Iris Murdoch and Her Novels* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1966), p. 6.
[181] This quotation is from the videorecording of the interview. The transcription renders it differently: 'Philosophy involves seeing the absolute oddity of what is familiar and trying to formulate really probing questions about it', Bryan Magee, 'Dialogue with Murdoch', p. 234. Barthes's *Mythologies* follows the same idea as it offers analyses of the 'falsely obvious' as ideologically loaded: Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers (New York: Noonday, 1972), p. 10.
[182] Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 10.
[183] Stevens Heusel, *Critical Reception*, p. 81.
[184] Murdoch, *Under the Net* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1954).
[185] Peter Conradi, *The Saint and the Artist* (London: Harper Collins, 2001), p. 47.
[186] This has also been observed by Dipple: *Work for the Spirit,* p. 34. It is also expressed in Murdoch's observation that good people, in real life, tend to remain in the background: 'God', p. 52.

itself. The present study therefore explores the ethical development of the protagonist Charles Arrowby, which is manifest in his food behaviour.

In his study of the themes of power, egoism and their potential for destruction in Murdoch's seven first-person-narratives, Steven Cohan illustrates Murdoch's concern with these themes.[187] They indicate Murdoch's problems with Sartrean existentialism (which she describes as the 'prevalent […] way of looking at the world'):[188] its view of the individual as unchangeably solipsistic ultimately did not convince Murdoch, who was looking for a moral philosophy and therefore eventually turned away from existentialism.[189]

A further thematic thread of Murdoch's fiction, identified by many critics, relates art to her philosophical concerns, continuing the 'ancient quarrel … between art and truth'.[190] Many of her texts implicitly entail a problematisation of art, asking about its role in achieving goodness and taking an ambivalent position towards it. Murdoch's fiction often both agrees and disagrees with the Platonic view of the arts as counterproductive to goodness. On the one hand, literature certainly has to Murdoch a moral component.[191] Yet on the other hand, her work also implies 'the distortion and the provisionality of art'.[192] The form-giving of art is often presented as inadequate and helpless self-consolation, commonly followed by 'the breaking in of the real world on the crafted form'.[193] The most problematic aspect of what Dipple here calls the 'real world' is, according to Murdoch, its contingency, which is 'a key term in Iris Murdoch's moral universe'.[194] Art (which, according to her, creates form and meaning where there is none) is frequently presented as opposed to the contingent chaos and formlessness of the an ostensible real world. In this way, Murdoch's fiction implicitly problematizes the form-giving of art.[195] As a consequence of this struggle with the goodness or not of artistic production, Murdoch's fictional depiction of artists is often negative, at best suspicious.[196] An exception is Murdoch's treatment of Shakespeare: his work is a rare

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[187] Steven Cohan, 'From Subtext to Dream Text: The Brutal Egoism of Iris Murdoch's Male Narrators', *Women and Literature*, 2 (1982), 222-42.
[188] Murdoch, 'Existentialists and Mystics', p. 226.
[189] For criticism of existentialism see especially Murdoch's 1970 essay 'Existentialists and Mystics'.
[190] Stevens Heusel, *Critical Reception,* p. 80.
[191] This is common census in Murdoch criticism: Stevens Heusel, *Critical Reception*, p. 14.
[192] Ibid, p. 80.
[193] Elisabeth Dipple, *Work for the Spirit* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 277.
[194] Peter Conradi, 'Iris Murdoch and the Sea', *Etudes Britanniques Contemporaines,* 4 (1994) <http://ebc.chez-alice.fr/ebc41.html> [accessed 21 May 2010]), p. 2.
[195] The term 'art' is in the present study used to include literature.
[196] This has also been observed by Conradi (*Saint and Artist*, p. 19) and Dipple (*Work for the Spirit*, p. 5). Examples in addition to Charles Arrowby in *The Sea, The Sea* are Bradley Pearson in *The Black Prince*

example of what Murdoch calls 'good art'.[197] The 'Shakespearean interest' is a recurring element in Murdoch's fiction and intertextual connections between Murdoch's fictional oeuvre and Shakespeare's work have been described by many critics.[198] Lindsey Tucker, for instance, convincingly relates the intertextual relationship between *The Sea, The Sea* and Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to Murdoch's moral philosophy.[199] The present study shows that food and food behaviour in *The Sea, The Sea* directly relate to the ethical concerns presented in Murdoch's work.

The implicit moral argument of *The Sea, The Sea* traces by means of food the self-deception of protagonist and narrator Charles Arrowby. The retired theatre director, actor and playwright is in his sixties and has decided to withdraw from the vibrant London scene. He has moved to Shruff End, a lonely, wind-blown place somewhere on the English coast. Here he attempts to find himself, to produce some sense of identity by reflecting on his life. To this end he begins writing an autobiography/ diary/ memoir, a first-person-narrative the genre of which is never quite clear. Soon, people Charles knows from London begin to appear and it becomes clear that leaving London has not resulted in Charles's leaving behind issues of power and control, which he ostensibly intends to abjure. In addition to these unexpected visits comes a disruptive event, typical of Murdoch's fiction, which upsets Charles's apparently controlled life and brings it into crisis: Charles meets his childhood love Hartley, who lives in the nearby village with her husband Ben. She is now an old, passionless woman whose sole aim is to keep the house for dog and husband. Yet Charles sees in her an angel of love, connected to him by some eternal internal bond and waiting to be rescued by him. Yet Hartley pleads with him to leave her in peace. As part of what he sees as his plan to free Hartley, he kidnaps her and locks her up in a windowless room at Shruff End. The extreme discrepancy between Charles's self-perception and the reality of the world outside himself finally becomes obvious even to Charles. At the end of the novel, Charles's

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(London: Chatto & Windus, 1973) and Edmund Narraway in *The Italian Girl* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964).

[197] Murdoch, 'Good over Other Concepts'.

[198] Richard Todd, *Iris Murdoch: The Shakespearian Interest* (London: Vision, 1979); Dipple, *Work for the Spirit*; Conradi, *Saint and Artist*; Antonia Susan Byatt, *Degrees of Freedom: The Early Novels of Iris Murdoch* (London: Vintage, 1994); Gabriele Griffin, *The Influence of the Writings of Simone Weil on the Fiction of Iris Murdoch* (San Francisco: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993); Stevens Heusel, *Critical Reception*; Elena Andonova-Kalapsazova, 'Practicing Magic from the Margins: Rearticulations of Prospero's Magic in John Fowles's *The Magus*, Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, The Sea*, and John Banville's *Ghosts*', *Trans: Internet-Zeitschrift Für Kulturwissenschaften*, 16 (2006) <http://www.inst.at/trans/16Nr/05_6/andonova-kalapsazova16.htm> [accessed 8 March 2012].

[199] Lindsey Tucker, 'Released from Bands: Iris Murdoch's Two Prosperos in "*The Sea, The Sea*"', *Contemporary Literature*, 27.3 (1986), 378-95.

dramatic tempest of emotions, his urge for power and control, calms. While Charles spends great parts of his self-narrative establishing himself as centre of the world, at the end he begins to accept that he is a normal human, faced – as everyone else – with what the novel posits as the conditions of human existence. All of these events are accompanied by Charles's obsession with food and the development of his relationship to food and cooking in three stages traces a moral development.

2.2 Food in *The Sea, The Sea* – a literature survey

Criticism engaging with Murdoch's fiction commonly reduces food in *The Sea, The Sea* to a narrative device. Dipple, Conradi and Angela Downing regard it as a means of characterization, yet they do not make use of the opportunity that this insight offers to read Charles's personal change in the light of his food behaviour.[200] A.S. Byatt, too, reads Charles's culinary obsession as characterisation. She believes that it defines him as a person who pays great attention to detail.[201] The problem with this reductive reading is that it qualifies Charles as a figure of good within Murdoch's moral philosophy.[202] This reading is at odds with the critical consensus that Charles's ethical starting point is opposed to Murdoch's ethical ideals.[203]

So far, discussions of power and egoism in Murdoch's fiction, such as Cohan's study of her male narrators, have not noted the important role of food behaviour and cooking played in this context.[204] This study shows that *The Sea, The Sea* picks up from *The Tempest* the central theme of power and control. Noticeably, critics of the play have described food as central motif.[205] Yet critics who compare novel and play have not made the link between the theme of power and control to the presence of food and the culinary in both texts.[206] The comparison between Murdoch's protagonist in the first phase of the novel and Shakespeare's Prospero and Caliban through theories of food and the oral suggests Freudian sublimation. Set against Murdoch's moral philosophy, this reading illuminates in detail the complex ways in which Charles's mind-set is presented as ethically problematic in Murdoch's novel.

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[200] Dipple, *Work for the Spirit*; Conradi, *Saint and Artist*; Angela Downing, 'Recursive Premodifications as Literary Device in Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, The Sea*', *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, 10 (1985), 65-80.
[201] Byatt, *Degrees*, pp. 281-2.
[202] Compare Murdoch, 'Good Over Other Concepts', pp. 363-85.
[203] In which way this is the case is detailed below.
[204] Steven Cohan, 'From Subtext to Dream Text: The Brutal Egoism of Iris Murdoch's Male Narrators', *Women and Literature*, 2 (1982), 222-42.
[205] Susanne Skubal, *Word of Mouth: Food and Fiction after Freud* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 53-4.
[206] Tucker, 'Released'.

Conradi, among others, identifies contingency as central theme in the *The Sea, The Sea*. However, his argument is based entirely on the centrality of the sea as symbol of contingency.[207] Critics who highlight the importance of the theme overlook the role that food plays in establishing and exploring it. Fischler's theories of incorporation and the omnivore's paradox offer a way of considering the unique position of food, eating and cooking to represent both the contingency of the human condition as well as attempts of dealing with it: food in the novel is in this study read as ambiguously both representative of the individual's fear of contingency and of his attempt to deal with it by imposing form by means of art.

The only specifically food-related study of *The Sea, The Sea* is an article by Anna Maria Tomczak entitled 'Simplicity and Solitude by the Sea?: Food in Iris Murdoch's Novel *The Sea, The Sea*'.[208] The guiding question is one of literary anthropology: 'how much [Charles's] choices and preferences identify him as an individual and to what extent […] they put him in the category of middle-aged middle class rich white Englishmen living in Britain in the 1970s'.[209] The conclusion of Tomczak's study is that the protagonist does not entirely fit the descriptions of food behaviour common to people with his social background.[210] Since Charles's concoctions are primarily and most obviously characterised by eccentricity and are unusual, often disgusting combinations, Tomczak does not provide new insights. This may be due to the fact that the starting point of her study is limiting: her initial question suggests the possibility of an individual's taste being unrelated to and independent of their surrounding culture and society. This initial question stands unsupported against Bourdieu's analysis of the function of food in distinction. The present study asks instead about the particular relation between Charles, his self-perception and self-presentation and the world around him. This relation can then be related to a reading in the light of Murdoch's moral philosophy and offers new insights into the protagonist's moral development. Yet development is not considered by Tomczak, who fails to take into account the centrality of change in Charles's food behaviour and moral outlook. Furthermore, Tomczak reduces food to a literary device and limits it to three functions.[211] According to her,

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[207] Conradi, 'Murdoch and the Sea'.
[208] Anna Maria Tomczak, 'Simplicity and Solitude by the Sea? – Food in Iris Murdoch's Novel *The Sea, The Sea*', in Wojciech Kalaga and Tadeusz Rachwal (eds), *Viands, Wines and Spirits: Nourishment and (In)Digestion in the Culture of Literacy: Essays in Cultural Practice* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Slaskiego, 2003), pp. 119-29.
[209] Ibid, p. 122.
[210] Ibid, p. 128.
[211] Ibid, p. 120.

food is a means by which to 'decode' the protagonist:[212] his food comments supposedly 'reveal his personality traits without any doubt'.[213] Applying simplifying categories, Tomczak disposes of the discrepancies, breaks, paradoxes and changes in Charles's use of food.[214] These, in contrast to her view, shed considerable doubt on his self-perception and self-presentation. Her approach leads to occasionally absurd analysis: Charles's 'liberal use of the tin-opener' does not fit into Tomczak's interpretation of him as an eater who aims at a return to nature and naturalness. Tomczak believes that 'the explanation can be quite simple. Charles has no fridge'.[215] This illustrates that Tomczak offers explanation rather than interpretation and she misses the opportunity for a reading of the novel's protagonist's moral dilemma, manifest in his culinary development.

Other critics mentioning food in *The Sea, The Sea* appear to have fallen into the trap of what Barthes describes as the 'falsely obvious':[216] they tend to reduce food and food behaviour in *The Sea, The Sea* to a device for characterization. This superficial treatment of food in this novel, however, can lead to misleading interpretations (as shown at the example of Byatt's reading of the protagonist). Overlooking that food and food behaviour offer links between power, control, fear and artistic production in *The Sea, The Sea*, critics are not alive to the novel's culinary exposition of an ethical position on art and the processes of its production. Critics have also overlooked the close relation of food in *The Sea, The Sea* to Murdoch's critique of existentialism, which, as the following section argues, is implicit in Charles's food behaviour and its development.

2.3 The protagonist's culinary development

Food in *The Sea, The Sea* carries the core elements of the moral narrative without the need to explicitly point them out. The role of food changes and develops in three distinct stages, representing moral developments in the protagonist. In the first stage of Charles's development, which ends with the encounter with Hartley, Charles's relation to food is particularly prominent.[217] Here, Charles presents himself as artist in the kitchen, in full control of food. His relationship with food and cooking appears to be

[212] This is Tomczak's term: Tomczak, 'Simplicity', p. 124.
[213] Ibid, p. 124.
[214] Ibid, p. 122, 123. Tomczak also does not integrate food behaviour into an interpretation of the novel as a whole.
[215] Ibid, p. 126.
[216] Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 10.
[217] This section ends on TS 110. The division described here does not correspond to Charles's arbitrary chapters but originates in the development of his food behaviour.

stable, as does his concept of himself in the world. Meals and cooking structure Charles's days and his writing: 'it is after lunch and I shall now describe the house.' (TS 7); 'I am writing this after dinner' (TS 53); 'I have now had lunch' (TS 16); 'It is after tea' (TS 75). These quotations show on the one hand how, at this stage, food and cooking are bound to time.[218] On the other hand, they imply a link between cooking and writing as the former precedes the latter, facilitating it by nourishment.

The first passage on food and cooking is a few pages into the novel. It is highly detailed and spans more than three pages. Charles starts with a meticulous discussion of the meal he has just finished. It becomes clear that eating is not a means to satisfy hunger (which it is, as will be shown, in later stages of Charles's alimentary and culinary development). Instead, hunger is a tool to increase the pleasure of eating, aiding a cerebral hedonism: 'one ought to bless every day which brings with it […] the precious gift of hunger' (TS 7). Rather than a nutritional substance for the sustenance of bodily functions, Charles separates eating from the body, elevating it to the level of learning and thought: 'of course reading and thinking are important but, my God, food is important too' (TS 7). Charles's language implies that cooking is a philosophy and form of art: he speaks of himself as an 'enlightened eater' (TS 25) as opposed to children who 'cannot *understand* food' (TS 25; italics mine): in this stage, the culinary is not physical but cerebral. He cooks with 'gastronomic intelligence' (TS 8) which supposedly allows him to achieve 'absolute truth' (TS 87), as which he describes his personal taste. 'Inspired simplicity', according to him, is 'the essence of good eating' (TS 7). Simplicity is also the aim of philosophical thought as the simpler theory is commonly regarded as superior. The protagonist regards cooking as highly creative act, explicitly describing it as a form of art (TS 9).[219]

Charles had planned to conserve his philosophy and art of cooking in book form as the as yet unwritten '*Charles Arrowby Four Minute Cookbook*' (TS 8). His friends react with 'amused condescension' (TS 8) and the reader soon understands: Charles's concoctions are eccentric, occasionally to the point of nausea. He suggests, among other combinations, coley with curry powder, tomato ketchup and mustard (TS 53). Such combinations make the reader suspicious of his credibility. Nevertheless, Charles's language is that of a prescriptive, dogmatic and patronising cook. His recipes are

[218] Indicating time by meals is a standard literary device and as such discussed in the first chapter of this study.
[219] The comic effect of the paradoxical relation between the kinds of dishes Charles thus elevates is not to be misunderstood as the narrator's humour: Charles takes cooking very seriously and is not inclined to joke about it.

peppered with advice for the reader and his dogmas concern the preparation but also the consumption of food: 'bananas should be cut, *never* mashed' (TS 7) and 'cook fast, eat slowly' (TS 7). Charles frequently uses the imperative and the modal verbs 'should', 'ought to' and 'must' prevail.[220] In his culinary discourse, Charles makes inflationary use of 'always', 'of course' and 'never', the latter two appear ten times within the space of only two pages (TS 7-8) and italicisation adds extra emphasis. Charles's dogmatism is accompanied by a strict hierarchy of ingredients: 'the apricot is the king of fruit' (TS 16) and 'basil is of course the king of herbs' (TS 27). This implies a need to structure and order, also present in what he stages as culinary tactics: 'certain items (such as anchovy paste, liver, sausages, fish) [...] hold as it were strategic positions in my diet' (TS 10). The vagueness of the remark (he does not specify what this supposed strategy entails) clashes with its claim to strategic precision. In addition to such contradictions, Charles's position is destabilized by the comic aspect of his gastronomic writing. The egocentric assumption that the reader must be interested in what he has just eaten, where he obtained the ingredients, how he prepared them, why he prepared them in this particular way, how often he usually eats the dish, how one ought to eat it and so on, has a comic effect.

In the first stage, Charles's relation to food, cooking and eating is self-centred. It goes against common associations of cooking that might regard it as other-directed act of love. In glaring opposition to the widely acknowledged social functions of eating, outlined for instance in Farb and Armelagos, Charles holds the opinion that 'food is best eaten […] alone' (TS 9-10).[221] The solitary preparation of meals prevails; Charles insists on preparing his dishes himself and consuming them alone; detailed food descriptions are absent when Charles eats with friends; company while eating is presented by Charles as enforced distraction (TS 7 and 9). The opposition between eating and social activities goes as far as mutual exclusion: when Charles's ex-lover Rosina unexpectedly arrives at Shruff End, Charles, although very hungry, '[can]not eat or drink in her presence' (TS 103).

Charles stresses in his culinary descriptions the process of creative form-giving and of investing an object with meaning. To him, his dishes are the products of an 'inspired' mind (TS 8). However, the often nauseating products of what he describes as his culinary art undermine Charles's attempts, underlining the continued formlessness of

[220] Modals: TS 7; 10; 25; 87; 154; 182. Other examples of the use of imperatives: TS 55; 70.
[221] Farb and Armelagos, *Consuming Passions*.

the objects he insists to try to invest with form. Later analysis shows that the detailed culinary passages in the first stage of Charles's culinary development reflect his concept of himself in the world and his relationship to the Other. The comic effects (unintended by Charles) point to problems with this ethics, problems which surface in the crisis.

The second stage of culinary development, triggered by the encounter with Hartley, stands in opposition to but is also a logical consequence of the protagonist's original food behaviour and the moral outlook it reflects. Charles's relationship with food shifts from an obsessively controlled art and philosophy of cooking to an uncontrolled intake of nutrition. The loss of control in relation to food first shows as he is overwhelmed by emotions and thus unable to eat: having seen Hartley, 'eating, drinking, were equally impossible' (TS 111). From then on, his control over food and cooking fluctuates and gradually dissolves. The language used to refer to food reflects the disruption of Charles's concept of himself. Charles mentions food and eating regularly. However, the previous, detailed prescriptive descriptions of food preparation are abandoned. This stage is, in opposition to the preceding part, marked by an absence of precise and prescient planning: 'There was no fresh food as of course I had once more omitted to shop' (TS 210). The dogma of the preceding passages is absent. Previously, by principle Charles has not had breakfast, he never specifies why (TS 87); now, hunger drives him to give up this dogma: 'I breakfasted, since I was so hungry, on tea and toast and the remainder of the olives' (TS 147-148). For the first time, Charles admits the relation of food to physicality. Hunger takes over control and makes him consume what he would otherwise have disdained: 'I was feeling hungry, so I ate a […] horrible pork pie' (TS 142). Beardsworth and Keil describe hunger as a natural, physiological phenomenon, which here overrules what Charles perceives and describes as highly cultured culinary art.[222] In the second stage, uncontrollable hunger and emotions replace what Charles had presented as a rational and controlled cuisine. The way in which hunger is satisfied is less and less important: 'by now of course I took no interest in their food and very little in my own' (TS 331). Eating turns into a mechanical convention, 'I ate sufficiently, not with appetite but out of a sense of duty' (TS 417). It is food and eating – the alimentary – now rather than the culinary, the necessity of eating and nutrition rather than the art of cooking, which prevail. Elaborate discussions of a philosophical kind do not return. Where there was an abundance of prescriptive and patronising language in the first stage, the approach is now strictly descriptive. Long, discursive passages in which the

[222] Beardsworth and Keil, *Menu*, p. 56.

preparation of meals is discussed in great detail in the first part are exchanged for brief, unspecific remarks, often merely stating that something, anything, had been consumed: 'at lunch time I ate sufficiently' (TS 417). Furthermore, food no longer functions as time marker and structuring device of Charles's controlled days: 'from ten thirty in the morning onwards, I had to have regular treats and snacks all day long' (TS 240). The relation between time and food, so important in the first stage of Charles' culinary development, is perceived as meaningless protocol: 'It was nearly time for lunch, if such conventions still existed' (TS 330).

The relation between the culinary and the social changes in the second stage and becomes more prominent. Noticeably, Charles's food obsession is absent from his obsessive relation to Hartley. The two characters frequently offer each other food, but each time Charles points out that it is not consumed (TS 277; 285; 340; 421). When more and more visitors arrive at Shruff End, Charles gives up the preparation of food. The appearance of guests at Shruff End brings the social aspect to the table, which Charles so harshly refuses earlier. In contrast to the first part of the novel, Charles now lets go of his control over cooking. Instead, he lets Gilbert 'cook in a style which was a compromise between his own and mine' (TS 242). Finally, he allows 'Lizzie [to do] the cooking. We lived on pasta and cheese' (TS 389). Charles compromises what has previously been a dogmatic food philosophy. As Charles notices, it is now 'impossible to return to the ordinary feasts and festivals of human life, the meals to which people look forward and which they enjoy. We all, except James, drank a lot.' (TS 389). Compared to an early aphorism of his that 'a serious eater is a moderate drinker' (TS 7), Charles proves here that he has given up his gastronomic self – he is a serious eater no longer. With the emergence of a social aspect, Charles's cooking stops, because, as previously outlined, the social and the culinary are still mutually exclusive to Charles. This changes at the end of the novel, thus indicating, as argued below, a moral change in the protagonist, reflecting Murdoch's critique of existentialism.

The description of the culinary moment in *The Sea, The Sea* has so far shown a development of distinct contrasts from controlled cooking to uncontrollable eating. The last pages of the novel contrast with both previous stages as they describe a calming of passions. Previously presented as mutually exclusive, the culinary and the social at the end of the novel fuse harmoniously. Charles goes out for dinner with friends and, rather

than on the food, comments in his diary on the conversation. This represents the crucial social function of eating: dinner as an occasion for speech and companionship.[223]

The present study shows that the novel's moral argument is manifest in the development of Charles's culinary behaviour. The relation between the first and second stage presents Charles's initial apparent controlled and stable position as fragile and unrealistic. The contrast marks a crisis of Charles's way of being. This finally develops into a new outlook, implied in Charles's food behaviour at the very end of the novel. Here, his relationship to food is neither obsessively controlling nor hungrily out of control but nondescript and calm. The previous need for power and control is absent. How this reflects Charles's ethics of being and in what way this is related to his artistic production is what this study is interested in.

2.4 The culinary path to goodness

In order to present the relation of food to ethics and art in the novel, some aspects of Murdoch's moral philosophy and their position to Sartrean existentialism need to be clarified. Following this, Charles's food behaviour in the first stage of his culinary-moral development is set in relation to Sartrean existentialism, which to Murdoch is the (a)moral starting point of every individual who sets out on the 'road' to goodness.[224] The section then shows that the novel sets its protagonist's moral-culinary starting point into question already in the first, solipsistic stage. Here, Charles bases his sense of identity on the culinary and thus on the fragile, most transient art form. In the second stage of Charles's culinary development, his existentialist world view falls into crisis. Finally, the protagonist's food behaviour in the third stage indicates that Charles approaches Murdoch's most fundamental ethical concepts and achieves minimal moral and personal change.

According to Murdoch, 'the analysis offered in Sartre's *L'Etre et le Néant* may increase self-knowledge, lead to a starting point – but not indicate a road'.[225] In contrast to her view of Sartre, Murdoch is concerned with the development of a moral philosophy, or, to use her imagery, with describing a road to goodness. Goodness is to her the highest moral concept and exceeds love and good moral conduct in importance.[226] The two foci of Murdoch's moral philosophy are developed from the

[223] Jones, *Feast*.
[224] Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1987), p. 107.
[225] Ibid.
[226] Murdoch dedicates the essay 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts' to arguing this point.

thought of Plato and Simone Weil.[227] They consist first in giving up the perception of the centrality of oneself, the process of which Murdoch calls 'unselfing'. Second is the necessity of a clear vision of and realistic 'attention' to the Other.[228]

In Murdoch's moral philosophy, goodness means to accept and understand the separate existence of other people with needs and values of their own. 'True vision occasions right conduct' and the ability to direct attention away from oneself is love.[229] Within this system, the concept of 'unselfing' refers to the process of redirecting attention from oneself to the Other. It is a prerequisite for her concept of realism, on which 'attention' relies. Realism is in this context seen as 'unsentimental, detached, unselfish, objective' and clear vision and acceptance of other people.[230] Murdoch regards a realistic vision as one in which the individual has both 'acceptance and respect for the irreducible ambiguity of the Other'.[231] To achieve this, the individual has to pay 'attention' to the Other. Consequently, in Murdochian terms, existentialism is an unrealistic system, because it is solipsistic and does not acknowledge the possibility and importance of a clear vision and acceptance of others.[232] According to Murdoch, existentialism has instead resulted in the loss of 'a vision of reality separate of ourselves'.

An individual's natural starting point, according to Murdoch, is the solipsistic existentialist outlook, which is opposed to her ethical ideals. Rather than on the figure of good, Murdoch concentrates on what she perceives as normal individuals, entangled in their ego, and on their path to what she regards as goodness.[233] As Dipple points out,

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[227] Plato's *Republic* is of particular interest to Murdoch: *Republic*, trans. by Chris Emlyn-Jones (Oxford: Aris & Phillips 2006). For a detailed account of the relation between Weil's philosophy and Murdoch's thought see Griffin, *Influence*. She draws in particular on Weil's notebooks and her main two publications: *Gravity and Grace*, trans. by Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (London: Routledge, 2002); *The Notebooks of Simone Weil*, 2 vols, trans. by Arthur Wills (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976); *Waiting on God*, trans. by Emma Craufurd (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951). See also Guy Backus, *Iris Murdoch: The Novelist and Philosopher, The Philosopher as Novelist. 'The Unicorn' as a Philosophical Novel* (Bern: Lang, 1986). Plato's ideas underlie much of Murdoch's philosophical concepts and beliefs. In *The Fire and The Sun* she directly addresses Plato's relation to art which has shaped her own, however diverging, position towards it: Murdoch, *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. For more on Murdoch and Plato see Dipple, *Work for the Spirit*.

[228] Griffin addresses Murdoch's use of the term 'attention' and its roots in Weil's writing: Griffin, *Influence*, pp. 175-206. Weil discusses the concept in 'Attention and Will', in *Gravity and Grace*, pp. 116-22. What Murdoch calls 'unselfing' is related to Weil's concept of 'decreation': see especially Weil, 'The Self', in *Gravity and Grace*, pp. 26-31 and Weil, 'Decreation', in *Gravity and Grace*, pp. 32-9.

[229] Murdoch, 'On "God" and "Good"', in *Existentialists and Mystics*, pp. 337-62 (p. 153).

[230] Ibid, p. 353.

[231] Andonova-Kalapsazova, 'Magic', para. 13.

[232] Murdoch, 'God', pp. 340 and 343.

[233] Steven Cohan analyses this observation in detail in 'From Subtext to Dream Text: The Brutal Egoism of Iris Murdoch's Male Narrators', *Women and Literature*, 2 (1982), 222-42. This is especially the case in

Murdoch's protagonists are often 'trapped in selfhood'.[234] Nussbaum stresses that in her fiction, Murdoch 'has made us vividly aware of the many stratagems by which the ego wraps itself in a cosy self-serving fog that prevents egress to the reality of the other'.[235] Charles, too, threatens to loose himself in autobiographic 'cloud[s] of reflection' (TS 17) on his own person. In contrast with existentialism, Murdoch believes in the possibility to transcend this solipsistic state, which she regards as blind to the reality of the world and other people. Plato's image of the man in the cave, featuring in *The Sea, The Sea* (TS 79), is central here: the cave man has to go through a phase of considering the fire (which represents the self), before being able to leave the cave to see the immensity of the world around him and to finally look at the sun.[236] In order to achieve 'attention' and 'unselfing', the first, solipsistic stage needs to be overcome. The development away from what Murdoch perceives as natural starting point (self-centred and self-regarding solipsism) is manifest in the changes in Charles's food behaviour and pronouncements around food.

It has been suggested that existentialism is structurally incompatible with ethics.[237] While Sartre argues that existentialism allows for logical and moral judgement and leads to solidarity via the importance of the Other, the main perception of Sartrean existentialism of this stage is still that of a view in which the inter-subjective relationship is conflictual by definition.[238] In Sartrean existentialism, 'man cannot pass beyond human subjectivity'.[239] Murdoch agrees with the view that selfishness guides most individuals, yet in contrast to Sartrean existentialism, Murdoch holds that the focus on oneself can be overcome.[240] This is where she departs from existentialism, this is where ethics come in and this is why, as argued in the following, Charles's culinary development traces a moral path. The following section sets Charles's initial food behaviour in relation to Sartrean existentialism. It begins by showing that food taste is

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Murdoch's first person narratives *Under the Net, A Severed Head* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), *The Italian Girl, The Black Prince, A Word Child* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975) and *The Sea, The Sea.*

[234] Dipple, Work for the Spirit, p. 79.

[235] Martha C. Nussbaum, 'Love and Vision: Iris Murdoch on Eros and the Individual', in Maria Antonaccio, and William Schweiker (eds), *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*, (London/ Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 29-53.

[236] Murdoch, *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). Murdoch identifies the fire as symbolic of the self in *Sovereignty of Good* (London/ New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 98.

[237] Mary Warnock, 'Introduction', in Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. by Hazel Estella Barnes (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. xi-xxi (p. xx).

[238] Sartre brings forward this argument in *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* (Paris: Nagel, 1946); *Existentialism & Humanism*, trans. by Philip Mairet (London: Methuen, 2011).

[239] Ibid, p. 31.

[240] Murdoch, 'Good Over Other Concepts', p. 364.

well suited to express fundamental existentialist concepts and continues by exploring the precise ways in which existentialist concepts are implicitly represented in the first stages of Charles's relation to food and, through food, to the Other. Charles's initial food behaviour represents existentialist views of the individual's solipsism and of inter-subjective relationships as highly conflictual. Also reading the first stage of culinary development in the light of Bourdieusian distinction, the section outlines that Charles uses food as solipsistic narrative of the self in the attempt to achieve a sense of identity.

2.4.1 Food and existentialism

It is the stage of Sartrean existentialism until the mid-1940s (with Sartre's *L'Etre et le Néant* [1943] and *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* [1946] as key texts) alongside and against which food behaviour and Charles's moral outlook develop.[241] Neither Sartre nor Murdoch devote much attention to food in their philosophical writing. Yet taste is well suited to represent a central aspect of the existentialist perspective: Sartrean existentialism stresses that each individual perceives their values as universal and absolute while existentialism itself considers truth and absolutes as non-existent. The same, as Sartre points out, is the case with taste: 'If I like the taste of garlic, it seems irrational to me that other people can not like it'.[242] Yet despite this subjective perception, taste is fundamentally arbitrary. This relation can be observed in *The Sea, The Sea*. Here, Charles's prescriptive culinary language at the outset of the novel forecloses other options. At the same time, the novel underlines that his prescriptions are markedly arbitrary.[243] This connection between taste and the existentialist view of the individual's self-perception makes it a tool for the novel's implicit exploration and critique of the individual's existentialist self-perception and world view.

Sartre postulates the Cartesian Cogito as the 'absolute truth of consciousness' and basis of existentialism.[244] With this, Sartrean existentialism is a subjectivism.[245] While

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[241] Sartre pays relatively little attention to food in his philosophical writing (the incidents discussed here are exceptions). In his fiction, there is a more complex use of food, as George Bauer's essays and the later analysis of the little known Sartrean short story 'Nourritures' show: Bauer offers several studies on Sartre and food and has in this context unearthed 'Nourritures': George H. Bauer, 'Just Desserts', *Yale French Studies*, 68 (1985), 3-14; Bauer, 'Sartre and the "Sugars" of History', *L'Esprit Créateur*, xv (1975), 377-86; Bauer, 'Sartre's Homo/ Textuality: Eating/ The Other', in George Stambolian and Elaine Marks (eds), *Homosexualites and French Literature: Cultural Contexts/ Critical Texts* (Ithaca/ London: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 312-29.

[242] Sartre, *Being*, p. 635.

[243] Unjustified doctrines such as 'bananas should be cut, *never* mashed' (TS 8) invite the reader's questioning incredulity.

[244] Sartre, *Existentialism & Humanism*, p. 52.

[245] Sartre argues this point in *Existentialism & Humanism*.

existentialism knows no absolutes (all derives from the multiple perspectives of individuals), the individual nevertheless perceives their subjective perspective as 'absolute truth'.[246] (Sartre's example from the field of food taste above illustrates this.) The existentialist notion of subjectivity perceived as absolute corresponds to Charles's relation to food and cooking. He claims that his culinary views 'approximate absolute truths' (TS 87), while food is, literally, a matter of arbitrary taste. Despite the joking irony of this statement, Charles is clearly victim to illusions of the absolute truth of his personal views. The language of his food and cooking descriptions reflects this illusion. His prescriptive language presents a dogmatic approach to the preparation of food. Angela Downing shows that Charles uses evaluative adjectives in particular in connection with cooking.[247] In this way, he constructs hierarchies depending on his own preferences (as described above) and does away with the existence of other, equally legitimate tastes in order to protect his perception of the truth of his tastes.

Discussing the existentialist novel, Murdoch identifies a perceived self-centredness as the main characteristic of the existentialist hero.[248] Everything external is seen in relation to personal needs. Charles believes that 'nearly everything in the world is relevant to my situation' (TS 159) and solipsism is at the heart of Charles's relation to food and cooking in the first stage of his development. Communal meals are commonly perceived as a celebration of life, yet Charles's great pleasure in feasting on his own suggests instead a celebration of self. Existentialist solipsism is manifest in Charles's hedonistic relation to food in the first stage of his moral-culinary development. Murdoch does not discuss hedonism explicitly in her theoretical writing, yet a highly critical view of hedonism follows directly from her moral philosophy:[249] focussing all attempts on one's own pleasure, hedonistic behaviour disregards the Other and moral responsibility. Charles's 'intelligent hedonism' (TS 9) 'triumphs over a peevish baffled moral sense' (TS 10): his needs and desires are above moral considerations. Charles has 'lived in a hedonistic dream all [his] life' (TS 185), disregarding the existence of others' needs and values. He elevates his own pleasure to a universal principle. Howard Moss describes this attitude as follows: 'what one wants seems so obviously what the world

[246] Ibid, p. 52.
[247] Downing, 'Recursive Premodifications', p. 75.
[248] Murdoch, 'Existentialists'.
[249] Hedonism is here understood as the prominence of personal pleasure over other values.

ought to provide that shaping it to a desired end strikes [...] Charles as exactly what the world does want'.[250]

The subject's perception of the Other is central in both existentialism and in Murdoch's moral philosophy. 'Being-for-others' (être-pour-autrui) describes in Sartre the relationship of one individual, a conscious 'being-for-itself', to another 'being-for-itself', to 'the self which is not myself'.[251] On the basis of the subjectivism of the Cogito, the Other is an 'object of my thoughts'.[252] Yet the Other naturally regards the subject as an object, too.[253] The relationship is therefore highly conflictual, because the Other is

> the radical negation of my experience, since he is the one for whom I am not subject but object. Therefore as the subject of knowledge I strive to determine as object the subject who denies my character as subject and who himself determines me as object.[254]

Sartre further describes the relation to another individual as characterized either by the desire to assimilate or possess the Other.[255] In *The Sea, The Sea* the possessive and assimilative-cannibalistic desire for the Other is present in Charles's relationships. Conradi points out that Charles is characterized by an appetite and possessive hunger and for great parts of the novel, Charles himself describes the need to 'feed the healthy appetite of our wondrously necessary egos' (TS 493).[256] Particularly his obsession with Hartley is highly possessive and, as argued below, characterised by a desire to become one with her. As a consequence of the wish to incorporate, the individual develops a fear of being incorporated by the Other and Charles is indeed inexplicably scared when he sees open mouths and teeth.[257]

The problematic relationship with the Other has, according to Sartrean existentialism, yet another aspect. From the existentialist perspective, the individual sees itself as sole arbiter of its values. These are thus not anchored in a higher power but self-made, which renders them both vulnerable and not universal – they are not 'truths',

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[250] Howard Moss, 'Narrow Escapes: Iris Murdoch', *Grand Street*, 6 (1986), 228-40 (p. 228).
[251] *Being*, p. 254.
[252] Ibid, p. 253.
[253] Ibid, p. 256.
[254] Ibid, p. 252.
[255] Ibid, pp. 383-434.
[256] Conradi, *Saint and Artist*, p. 298.
[257] 'There is something strange and awful about the distorted open mouths of singers, especially women, the wet white teeth, the moist red interior' (TS 60). Dipple lists the occurrences of mouths and teeth, which Charles watches with horror: Dipple, *Work for the Spirit*, p. 278.

even if they are commonly perceived as such. Values produced by an external willing 'Other' compete with the individual's own values and pose a threat. Charles's description of himself as having had to 'browbeat the world as to accept me at my own valuation' (TS 156) represents this conflictual, competitive relationship of the individual to others. For these reasons, any relationship to other individuals is thus in existentialism unavoidably problematic. This is expressed in Sartre's dictum according to which 'l'enfer c'est les autres' – hell is other people.[258] Charles's culinary ideology implies this conflict: he decides to withdraw from society so that he may indulge in solitary culinary art and avoid company, which he perceives as disturbing 'distraction' (TS 8).

Charles initially rejects the idea of the existence of an independent Other with legitimate values, needs and desires of their own. This view comes into crisis when, in the second stage, the existentialist ego meets a contingent Other (Hartley). The novel presents what in Murdoch's view are the highly problematic, even dangerous consequences of Charles's solipsistic world view when it comes to the individual's relationship to the Other: Charles's attitude results in the abduction of a person he claims to love. Extending from Charles's culinary hedonism to his relationship to others, his personal pleasure continues to be perceived as universal aim: 'perhaps my selfish need of her [Hartley] was so great that I could not conceive of it not being satisfied' (TS 203). According to Sartrean existentialism, objects acquire meaning through the function they have in relation to the egocentric self: 'individual objects acquire significance for me in terms of their usefulness or their resistance to my projects […]. Consequently, objects do not appear to us merely as things but are spontaneously perceived in terms of their function'.[259] In *The Sea, The Sea,* objects, people and events are valued accordingly. Charles's friend Gilbert, for instance, is of value as long as he performs his culinary function: 'Gilbert remained essential of course. He cooked' (TS 297). When Hartley and James challenge the importance of happiness (hedonism and happiness are linked via pleasure) (TS 329; 334), Charles clarifies that he cannot 'think of anything that matters more' (TS 329). At this stage, Charles continues to believe in the centrality of hedonistic principles and the possibility of achieving satisfaction by striving for personal pleasure. Charles's inability to accept the existence and pay Murdochian 'attention' to other value systems, represented by distinct tastes, results in

[258] Sartre, *Huis Clos suivi de 'Les Mouches'* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), p. 93. 'Hell is ... other people!': Sartre, 'In Camera', trans. by Stuart Gilbert, in Sartre, *In Camera and Other Plays*, pp. 177-223 (p. 223).
[259] Paul Reed, *Sartre: La Nausée* (London: Grant & Cutler Ltd, 1987), p. 17.

his inability to nurture the woman he wants to possess. (Hartley without exception refuses his offers of food.) Charles has no vision of Hartley, is incapable of paying attention to her without considering first his solipsistic hedonism. At one point, Hartley rebuff's Charles's offer of food with the words: 'I don't like olives, I told you before' (TS 277). Charles's perception of his tastes as universal renders him incapable of accepting that her needs may differ from his. His solipsistic world view makes it impossible for him to nourish the Other.

The olive-scene also illustrates that Charles perceives Hartley and himself as one: he is the one who loves olives, not her, but he is incapable of making this distinction. Charles's desire to be one with Hartley has cannibalistic tendencies. Freudian psychoanalysis identifies the cannibalistic phase as the second stage of oral libidinal development. According to Abraham, once the desired object is perceived as external, the individual develops the urge to reinstate the original sense of unity. The individual then strives to make it a part of itself and the sexual aim now consists in the consumption of the object.[260] Charles indeed desires to incorporate Hartley into his own existence: 'I want us […] to establish ourselves together as one being, one being that ought never to have been divided' (TS 215). Charles takes possession of Hartley: 'you belong to me now' (TS 217) and 'you are mine now' (TS 227). His existentialist relation to food is in the second part transferred onto a relationship with another individual, the desire to consume is no longer directed at food but at the Other. Where his food behaviour previously represented his existentialist outlook, his relation to Hartley now represents Sartre's description of inter-subjective relationships as defined by the need to absorb and possess.[261] Inverted, Sartre's description of the process of eating describes Charles's relationship to Hartley: he appropriates her by destruction (Hartley: 'Don't you see you are working to destroy me'; TS 308). In the crisis, Charles's world view clashes with the reality of the Other and with the existence of other needs, values and desires. These make it impossible for Charles to appropriate Hartley without cannibalistically incorporating and 'destroy[ing]' (TS 308) her.

It has been shown that food taste can represent existentialist concepts and that existentialist subjectivism and solipsism are indeed implicit in Charles's food behaviour of the first stage of his culinary-moral development. This is continued in the second stage, in which the existentialist view of inter-subjective relationships as characterised

[260] Abraham, 'Prägenitale Libido', p. 87. Freud, 'Essays on Sexuality', p. 198.
[261] Sartre, *Being*, p. 252.

by the desire to possess or consume the Other is manifest in Charles's relationships and his fear of being consumed. The sense that 'hell is other people' leads to the desire to be independent and detached from others. Thus, rather than relying on the Other to 'realize […] the structures of [his] own being', Charles is instead presented to construct a sense of personal identity through food behaviour.[262] This aspect is explored in the following section.

2.4.2 Social identity through culinary art

Existentialism concludes from the Nietzschean rejection of the existence of a higher power that essence can no longer be regarded as previous to existence, since there is no plan that invests individuals with meaning. Rather, individuals tell their own story, producing a sense of meaning and essence. Cooking and food choice are an integral part of Charles's narrative of the self and in the first stage of his development his daily means to create form and meaning and 'achieve […] identity' (TS 13). The following relates Charles's existentialist outlook to Bourdieusian theory to show this.

Pointing in particular to the culinary, Sartre states that tastes are revelatory:

> Tastes do not remain irreducible givens; if one knows how to question them, they reveal to us the fundamental projects of the person. Down to even our alimentary preferences, they all have a meaning.[263]

Sartre here intersects with Lévi-Strauss's later description of food as signifying system. The quotation also suggests Barthes in that it presupposes that tastes are often taken for 'irreducible givens'. Barthes describes this phenomenon later as considering them as 'falsely obvious'.[264] Sartre here points out that this is distinctly not the case, that tastes, particularly the culinary, are highly meaningful. Yet what does the signifying system express? Sartre relates food choice to an individual's sense of identity: eating, according to him, 'reveals to me the being which I am going to make my flesh'.[265] This relies on the Sartrean concept of self, according to which 'man chooses himself'.[266] Bourdieu believes that 'taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier'.[267] A reading of Charles's

[262] Ibid, p. 246.
[263] Ibid, p. 635.
[264] Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 10.
[265] Ibid.
[266] Sartre, *Existentialism & Humanism*, p. 31.
[267] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. xxix.

behaviour in the light of Bourdieusian theory reveals Charles's distinction and the production of a sense of identity as well as his disregard for the arbitrariness of food.

Charles views his social origins as problematic. They are characterised by a lack of money (TS 24) and low social status: his father's job is unspecified, he worked in 'local government' (TS 23), his mother was 'a secretary on a farm' (TS 23). The main characteristic of Charles's relationship to his social background is that he compares: Charles's uncle Able, 'made a *more* "advantageous" marriage than my father' (TS 57; italics mine). Charles knows that his father 'was some sort of luckless failure before I knew what "failure" meant, before I knew anything about money, status, power, fame' (TS 23). Charles suffers under his perceived comparative lack of status and early on relates this to the culinary: 'I did not go to a restaurant until after I left school' (TS 27). Then, Charles did not have what Bourdieu would call the cultural capital to go to a restaurant.

Charles's cooking shows that he fashions himself, through the language of cooking, an Uncle Abel, a 'stylish [yet] ordinary average completely selfish person' (TS 59). The patronising culinary language demonstrates that he uses food for purposes of distinction: 'the sturdy honest persons to whom my [cook] book would be addressed', he states 'would not necessarily be able to make a light batter or even to know what it was' (TS 8). His cook book, so he claims, would be accessible to people from his parents' social class, the 'sturdy and honest persons', as he patronisingly describes his target audience. But the language he uses betrays this approach. In contrast to the claims of accessibility of his writing, his culinary language is highly exclusive. Charles omits quantities and his recipes presuppose a familiarity with the techniques of cooking. While being vague, the recipes demand precision. 'A light sprinkling of dry herbs' (TS 25) does not specify what is to be understood as 'light' or which herbs he is referring to. This exemplifies Charles's self-elevation above his audience: he omits precision of description while at the same time expecting precision of performance, belittling his audience, who is unable to follow. But Murdoch's readers, the readers of *The Sea, The Sea*, are not the readers Charles imagines. To them, his strategy of self-inflation by attempting to 'drug' and 'stupef[y]' (TS 33) his audience is betrayed by the fragility of the self, which he attempts to build from unreliable culinary building blocks.

Bourdieu describes how the 'new middle class' deals with the need to distinguish itself from both the old middle and working class: 'by transgressing established class boundaries in a spirit of fun and hedonism […], the new middle classes can distinguish themselves from both the restraint of the old middle classes and also from the working

classes'.[268] While Charles does not belong to this 'new middle class' (of 1960s France), he uses similar strategies in order to distinguish himself from both the conventional middle class and the working class (his parents being positioned between these): his dishes are a mixture of what Bourdieu describes as the 'taste of necessity' and the 'taste of liberty/ luxury'. The former favours the most filling food, the latter shifts emphasis to the manner and tends to use stylized forms to deny function.[269] Tinned food and liver reflect his parents' social background and Charles eats these items as they did. However, he stresses, by eating them, that he is in altogether different social circumstances: the decisive distinction and one which he emphasizes again and again is that Charles *chooses* to eat these items. The way in which Charles contextualises his food choices relates items, which in his parents' diet belonged to a 'taste of necessity', to a 'taste of liberty'. Charles eats lentil soup (TS 16) and baked potato with cream cheese (TS 70), but stresses choice and deliberate decisions, defining the items as pertaining to taste of liberty and luxury and distinguishing himself from the taste of necessity they belonged to in the social environment of his childhood. 'Well-made porridge with brown sugar and cream is a dish fit for a king' (TS 9). By adding luxurious ingredients (brown sugar, cream) to a commonplace dish (porridge), Charles simultaneously relates himself to and distances himself from his social origins. He frequently defends and explains his use of items of food originally associated with lower social standing: acknowledging how others view potatoes (as filling staple food), Charles stresses that his is a deliberate use of the potato for reasons of taste: 'potatoes are for me a treat dish, not a dull everyday chaperon' (TS 25). Defending his use of coley, Charles elevates it over cod and again presents it as choice: 'I bought some frozen coley (much better than cod) and hurried home' (TS 40). Buying 'deep-freeze kipper fillets (the poor man's smoked salmon)' (TS 24), Charles points out that, in his case, buying it has nothing to do with necessity: 'kipper fillets are arguably better than smoked salmon unless the latter is very good' (TS 25). A main function of Charles's culinary philosophy and culinary art is social distinction. According to Sartre, the process could be described as Charles 'choos[ing] himself'.[270] A reading of Bourdieu underlines the comparative aspect, namely that Charles in his diary presents himself in opposition to his parents, using food for purposes of distinction.

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[268] Ashley and others, *Food and Cultural Studies*, p. 70.
[269] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. xxix.
[270] Sartre, *Existentialism & Humanism*, p. 31.

The protagonist's culinary art is a tool in the attempt at a new self-definition by distinction. Narrative and cooking are Charles's tools to create form and meaning in order to create a sense of personal identity. In his food choice, Charles wishes to choose himself. Generally, however, Murdoch questions this self-perception of the 'man-God', who works from an 'imagined inflation of the self'.[271] This criticism is reflected in the way in which Charles's choice of self is presented in the novel. For relying on food choice as a basis of the self means to rely on a transient substance. Creating a sense of identity and sustaining it in this way is a Sisyphean task: the process is one of constant transformation through cooking and the metabolism and necessitates constant repetition. The eater indeed incorporates the properties of the food consumed. Consequently, food control could equal control over identity. However, absolute control over food is impossible, as it is impossible to regulate or know what becomes part of the body and what is excreted or even what each item contains precisely. Stability of identity is rejected by food and eating, and thus questioned. The novel instead suggests, in line with Murdoch's moral philosophy, that achieving stability of personal identity should not be the primary aim and gestures to the opposite movement, to attempts at 'unselfing' and 'attention'. These are present in Charles's food behaviour of the last stage of his moral-culinary development.

2.4.3 Food and moral change

How can the present reading regard the end of the novel, in which Charles's food behaviour becomes inclusive, as more than an interval until the next hedonistic oral obsession? After all, the novel points to events in the past when Charles got entangled in similar obsessions as that with Hartley (his obsessive-possessive relationships to the actresses Rosina and Clement, for instance), which imply the possibility of further repetitions. His self-reflections retain a tone of self-righteous egocentrism. This suggests that the novel does not present a sudden change in Charles's solipsistic world view. Can one still argue for a development toward what Murdoch describes as goodness? Charles reflects about goodness: 'can one change oneself? I doubt it. Or if there is any change it must be measured as the millionth part of a millimetre' (TS 501). This minute development is implicit in Charles's food behaviour.

On the last pages of the novel, Charles gives up his hedonism as daily principle and instead presents a relaxed indifference to what precisely is consumed. His needs move

[271] Murdoch, 'Good Over Other Concepts', p. 365 and 364.

into the background, which implies a move toward Murdoch's concept of 'unselfing'. The purpose of the dinners is no longer maximum sensual pleasure but, for the first time in the narrative, conversation and listening. This, in turn, implies Murdoch's idea of 'attention' to the Other, which can result from unselfing. While they were mutually exclusive in the first stage of development, conversation and consumption now go together: 'I eat and drink and gossip' (TS 482). Talk is no longer perceived as unwelcome distraction from sensual pleasure as dinners become an occasion for talk and jokes. In sharp contrast to the first stage, what is consumed is unmentioned and no longer analysed: the other person is the focus of interest. Meals are a means to an end – that of conversation and, for the first time, listening and 'attention' to the Other – they are no longer an end in themselves. Consider for example this passage:

> Yesterday I took my secretary Miss Kaufman, whom I may not have mentioned before, out to coffee and listened to a tale of woe about her aged mother. Then I took Rosemary Ashe to lunch at the pub and heard all about Sidney and Maybelle. Maybelle is twenty. Rosemary still hopes Sidney may recover. The children are loving Canada. Rosemary thinks they are too philosophical about the divorce. (TS 480)

Obsessive cuisine, representative of a greedy appropriation of the world, makes space for 'attention' to the Other, who is no longer exploited for hedonistic needs: Charles recounts another's pleasures and woes without setting them in relation to his personal needs and desires. The novel does not end with a perfect closure, in which the protagonist reaches a moral ideal. Instead, the development of Charles's food behaviour indicates the road of which Murdoch speaks, toward her moral concepts of 'unselfing' and 'attention' to the Other.

Existentialist concepts are what Murdoch regards as an individual's starting point. However, they contradict Murdoch's most fundamental moral concepts of 'unselfing' and 'attention' and, according to her, can and must be overcome. The novel consequently presents the starting point as highly problematic and has the individual fall into crisis in the second stage. The third stage of culinary development suggests a moral resolution without closure. Each step of this moral development is expressed in food behaviour and, as the analysis of the novel's ending has shown, only present here. The development of Charles's culinary behaviour thus traces an individual's moral behaviour from an existentialist starting point via the seemingly inevitable crisis to moral change. This section has related Charles's culinary development to Murdoch's

moral philosophy and fundamental existentialist concepts. The following section considers the fears which originate in these existentialist concepts, relating them to artistic production via the culinary.

2.5 Fear, the culinary and art

The following section considers the links between fear and the culinary on the one hand and fear and artistic production on the other.[272] A reading of the Sartrean short story 'Nourritures' (1970; 'Foods'), approached via the Kristevan theory of abjection, which it evokes, brings to the fore existentialist fears as well as techniques of hiding them by means of art. Sartre's short story, it will be shown, explicitly relates disgust (here seen as related to fear via abjection) and artistic production, a connection which is shown to underlie implicitly Charles's culinary behaviour.[273] Reading *The Sea, The Sea* in the light of 'Nourritures' suggests that Charles hides the meaningless sensual, organic physicality of life under a layer of form- and meaning-giving art. Yet as Charles uses cooking in this way, his greatest fears are already inscribed in this activity: cooking appears to create form and meaning but simultaneously undercuts them. Charles's fear of mortality and chaos is established both directly and indirectly in the novel and food represents these displeasures. The present reading suggests that contingency is simultaneously the protagonist's main fear and an innate characteristic of food and its related activities.

Sartre's three-page short story 'Nourritures' relates the arrival of its nameless narrator in Naples and his journey from the shining, clean, rich parts of the city to the poor, grubby side streets. Aspects of the story reverberate with what Kristeva later describes as the abject and it contains an observation similar to Kristeva's about the use of art as 'catharsis par excellence'.[274] These two elements are represented by Sartre's Naples of the poor, grubby side streets and the bourgeois Naples of the city's rich boulevards respectively.

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[272] Fear and disgust are connected via the theory of abjection. Within Murdoch's oeuvre, the connection between the fear of contingency and revulsion is already addressed by the protagonist of her debut novel *Under the Net*, who describes the moment when 'contingency reaches the point of nausea': *Under the Net*, p. 158.

[273] Disgust in Sartre is usually directed at the turgid physicality of existence and is not the same disgust as Kristevan abjection. Nevertheless, 'Nourritures' illustrates the relation between disgust and reality on the one hand and escape from disgust and art or artificiality on the other

[274] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 17.

According to Kristeva, the abject (and food as a possible abject), dissolves the subject/ object opposition, threatening the individual's separate identity.[275] In his reading of Kristevan abjection, Menninghaus speaks of the conceptually highly problematic 'infiltration of the [...] "clean and proper body"'. Food can thus be perceived as abject, as it questions the individual's independent, separate identity and reveals it as 'brittle and deceptive'.[276] In the poor Neapolitan backstreets, life is lived (and death is died) openly. Food, bodies, death and decay are as real as they are meaningless: they simply exist. Children play seemingly naturally amid organic life: 'they enjoyed their organic life with sensual indolence'.[277] Descriptions of the life in these quarters show a sensual involvement with food as people live surrounded by it and are part of it: 'surrounded by their foods – living scraps of meat, fish scales, obscene meats, fruits sliced open and soiled'.[278] This organic, food-induced borderlessness, which fascinates and disgusts the traveller, evokes Kristeva's description of abjection.

In Sartre's rich Naples, the individual's abjection on encountering borderlessness, which the process of eating represents, is hidden by turning food into *objects d'art*. Kristeva describes art as a means by which individuals attempt to, as she puts it, 'purify' the abject.[279] This reverberates with Sartre's presentation of the bourgeois Neapolitans: in the rich quarters, bodies are hidden physicality and items of food are literally works of art.[280] Seemingly not designed to be eaten but to be looked at, they remind the traveller of jewellery.[281] Bauer describes this hiding of physical realities behind artistic representations of what is abject: 'the surface of the style léché, Titian-inspired objets d'art like the vitrine and the glassy eyes of Neapolitans hide and bar human contact of eating and sexuality'.[282]

The disgusting, yet real state of the poor in Naples, which evokes abjection, is in this story presented as physical reality of the human condition. The reason for the traveller's fascination with it is precisely that he perceives it as unvarnished truth. The rich Neapolitans, by contrast, indulge in the artistic creation of an artificial world, in which food is from *papier mâché*. The story implies that their hiding of the

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[275] Ibid, p. 207.
[276] Menninghaus, *Disgust*, p. 373.
[277] 'Ils jouissaient avec une indolence sensuelle de leur vie organique': Sartre, 'Nourritures', p. 2128. 'Foods', p. 62.
[278] 'Entourés eux aussi de leurs nourritures, déchets vivants, écailles, trognons, viandes obscènes, fruits ouverts et souillés': Sartre, 'Nourritures', p. 2128. 'Foods', p. 62.
[279] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 17.
[280] Sartre, 'Nourritures', p. 2128.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Bauer, 'Just Desserts', p. 5.

borderlessness of eating and dying physical life by means of art is self-deception: the rich Neapolitan's clean world is presented as antiseptically clean and artificial.

Reading *The Sea, The Sea* alongside 'Nourritures' suggests that Charles's culinary art may also be read as surface, functioning as a cover of psychologically problematic physical processes. For in the physicality of food and the physical activity of eating are manifest great fears. In Charles's narrative, references to the physical experience of eating are markedly absent from the culinary discourses. Eating is an activity that can involve all senses: taste and smell as well vision and the sense of touch, even hearing. Charles, however, avoids direct reference to its sensual experience. He speaks for instance of 'very good rice pudding' (TS 53) yet what defines 'good', what colour, smell, texture, remains unmentioned. Unable to avoid eating, Charles avoids reference to the physical experience of food by setting his art (this includes both writing and cooking) against it.

Kristeva's theory of abjection presents the abject as highly problematic. Yet how does this compare to Murdoch's views on fear and what is the relation of fear to her views of existentialism? Kristeva's description of abjection does not map onto Murdoch's novel, but can inspire and enrich a reading of what in Murdoch's writing goes under the heading of contingency: the challenging of borders which the abject represents negates meaning, making it part of the contingent, which underlies Charles's food behaviour in *The Sea, The Sea*. Before addressing Charles's fear of chaos and mortality, the idea of a threat to the individual must be contextualised within Murdoch's moral philosophy.

Murdoch outlines how fear and displeasure originate in the existentialist focus on self: based on the Cogito, the existentialist subject perceives everything external as object and itself as the centre of the world. This world view is constantly challenged by the existence of Others with values and needs of their own. Thus, the fear of others originates in the perception of the centrality of self, from which results the perception of the Other as object. The result is Sartre's 'l'enfer c'est les autres' – hell is other people.[283] Murdoch believes that transcending the perception of the centrality of the self renders the realization and acceptance of the fact that other people exist as not to be feared: their existence no longer challenges the individual's world view and self-perception in the world.[284] It is the 'fat relentless ego' of existentialism to which

[283] Sartre, *Huis Clos*, p. 93.
[284] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and Beautiful Revisited', in *Existentialists and Mystics*, pp. 261-86 (p. 282).

Murdoch traces back the difficulty of achieving goodness.[285] It causes fear of the Other and distracts from the fact that it is really the focus on the self itself which creates displeasure: according to Murdoch, hell is not other people, hell is the self.

Fear is a central ingredient in *The Sea, The Sea*, underlying Charles's behaviour. As one character stresses, 'fear is fundamental, you dig down in human nature and what's at the bottom? Mean spiteful cruel self-regarding fear' (TS 160). We see here again that fear is regarded to originate in the ego: it is 'self-regarding' (TS 160). Fear is central in both the novel and Murdoch's moral system. Yet what is it that Charles fears and what is the role of food and cooking in this? Conradi suggests an answer to the first part of the question: 'one of the enemies of goodness lies in our deep fear and puritan horror at the contingent', synonymous with 'random chance and mortality'.[286] He goes on to describe it as a fear of all that 'threatens our sense of our supremacy within the scheme of things'.[287] In other words, a fear of all that threatens the solipsistic self-conception of the existentialist individual. Yet Murdoch regards contingency as the reality of the human condition: as the unchangeable, yet highly problematic condition under which individuals live, it is a central preoccupation of Murdoch's oeuvre. The problem is first addressed in Murdoch's debut novel, *Under the Net* (1954) in which the hero, Jake Donaghue, explains what he perceives as human predicament: 'I would be at pains to put my universe in order and set it ticking, when suddenly it would burst again into a mess of the same poor pieces'.[288] Thus, Donaghue 'hates contingency'.[289] (Note here that in Murdoch's novels there is usually an unexpected event which introduces contingency and commonly throws a main character into crisis. In *The Sea, The Sea* it is the encounter with Hartley.) The contingent is the chance-driven, that which constantly changes, yet the principle of which remains unchangeable – this is reminiscent of the sea in Murdoch's novel and her protagonist's failing attempts to tame it. Thus, the title of the novel highlights the centrality of contingency of which the sea is a symbol.[290]

The obvious sea symbolism of Murdoch's novel has distracted from the fact that the characteristics of the contingent are central to eating. As Fischler points out, the omnivore can never be entirely sure whether an item of food is nourishing or

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[285] Murdoch, 'God', p. 342.
[286] Conradi, 'Murdoch and the Sea', p.4.
[287] Ibid.
[288] Murdoch, *Under the Net*, p. 9.
[289] Ibid, p. 26.
[290] Conradi as well as Dipple identify the conceptual importance of the sea, which is more than a literary device to Conradi ('Murdoch and the Sea', p. 9), while Dipple speaks of sea-symbolism: *Work for the Spirit*, p. 280.

poisonous.[291] Incorporation is an ambiguous activity, which causes both pleasure and fear of death. Fischler speaks of the 'omnivore's paradox', a paradox which leads to a highly ambivalent relationship to food, all the more so in modern food production.[292] Beardsworth and Keil refute views that regard the ambivalence toward food as a contemporary phenomenon. They see it as intrinsic to the characteristics of the activity of eating.[293] Faced with the contingency of food but also its necessity, Charles applies cultural strategies: he attaches rules to food that are as dogmatic as they are arbitrary and turns the natural process of eating into the cultural activity of cooking. In other words he responds to fear by seeking to impose form on the contingent. The essence of food is transformation. Cooking, the ordered and controlled transformation of food, can be regarded as a tool in the attempt to limit the aspects of contingency within the uncontrollability of food and eating. In this view, cooking is a form-giving activity, which Charles uses to counteract threatening contingency.

Cooking is in *The Sea, The Sea* a controlled structuring activity – a narrative with which Charles gives form and meaning to what is formless and meaningless. The unusual combinations and cheap ingredients emphasise the arbitrary nature of Charles's cooking. They thus illustrate that he is creating form and meaning where there are none. Charles turns a contingent and abject natural need (eating) into a cultural, artistic activity that shows a high degree of philosophical abstraction and artistic control. Yet food simultaneously negates meaning: according to Kristeva, the abject 'draws me toward the place where meaning collapses'.[294] Cooking, with which Charles seems to create meaningful form, always already entails that which he attempts to escape from.

A key aspect of contingency is the transience of all things. For the individual, this translates as mortality. This is a particular problem in the existentialist world view: according to Murdoch, 'the acceptance of death' would equal 'an acceptance of our own nothingness'.[295] But since the existentialist individual perceives itself as only subject, the acceptance of its own nothingness becomes an existential fear. In *The Sea, The Sea*, the protagonist's fear of mortality (TS 49) is an imminent threat to Charles who is in his sixties and has recently retired. Nearing the end of his life and realising that he has so far left nothing (his work at the theatre was but a 'writing in water'; TS 2), Charles

[291] Fischler, 'Identity'.
[292] Claude Fischler, 'Food Habits, Social Change and the Nature/ Culture Dilemma', *Social Science Information*, 19 (1980), 937-53.
[293] Beardsworth and Keil, *Menu*.
[294] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 2.
[295] Murdoch, 'Good Over Other Concepts', p. 385.

develops an urgent 'desire for permanence' (TS 36). He 'cannot help hoping [for his art] to endure' (TS 2). Charles addresses his fear explicitly (TS 49) and wonders 'how long does fame endure' (TS 3), fearing that he, like everybody, will die and be forgotten. Unable to face the reality of his ultimate mortality, Charles avoids thoughts of it: he puts them in brackets before discarding them altogether: '(Shall I be cremated? Who will arrange it? Let me not think of death.)' (TS 75).

The relation between mortality and eating is, as so many things related to food, characterised by ambivalence: paradoxically, the activity of sustaining the body is also a daily reminder of its mortality. Skubal notices in her reading of a scene in *The Tempest* that eating is the 'first mortal identifier'.[296] This illustrates the link between eating and the transience of the physical body, in other words its mortality. Charles's food behaviour and the way in which he writes about it recreate the deeply ambivalent relationship of food and its related activities to the question of transience and mortality that Neuhaus describes so well: 'cooking and eating do not only embrace and represent transience, they also oppose it almost defiantly'.[297] The cookery book Charles proposes to write gives a necessary, daily transient activity, that of eating, a sense of permanence, as recipes presuppose the possibility of recreating a dish. Yet the suggested title of the cookery book, the '*Charles Arrowby Four Minute Cookbook*' (TS 8), already refers to the passing of time. Conradi puts his finger on the problem when he points out that cooking is the 'most temporal and disposable of art-forms'.[298] 'Disposable' may not be a well-chosen term, because the work of art is, rather than being disposed, incorporated and transformed. Transience and transformation, however, are certainly prominent in the art of cooking. In the first stage, Charles uses cooking and eating as markers of time. While he 'omit[s] the dates from this meditation' (TS 490), it has been shown above that culinary conventions here structure the narrative in terms of time. Food is used to represent time and its passing. Food and its related activities are inseparable from the temporary: when Charles perceives the annihilation of 'space and time' (TS 111), 'eating and drinking' (TS 111) become impossible. Charles's attempt to install permanence is contrasted with the characteristic of cooking as transient activity. In the process, food becomes representative of the passage of time. The ambivalenc of the

[296] Skubal, *Word of Mouth*, p. 53. When Miranda initially takes Ferdinand for a spirit, Prospero argues simply by saying that 'it eats' that Ferdinand is mortal: Shakespeare, *Tempest*, I. 2. 413.
[297] Volker Neuhaus, '…über Menschen als Tiere, die kochen können', in Volker Neuhaus and Anselm Weyer (eds), *Küchenzettel: Essen und Trinken im Werk Günter Grass* (Frankfurt a.M.: Lang, 2007), pp. 9-19 (p. 15).
[298] Conradi, *Saint and Artist*, p. 297.

piece of culinary art and its (im)permanence continues in the idea of eating it: the consumption of the piece of art (Charles always eats what he cooks) can be read as Charles's attempt to incorporate the permanence of the aesthetics he has inscribed into the artistic object (communicated as a kind of culinary philosophy). Yet the destruction that the consumption brings with it also makes it a brutal negation of the idea of permanence of art.

The section has related fear of contingency (suggesting to read abjection as a part of contingency) via the culinary to artistic production, suggesting that Charles's artistic production is a reaction to existentialist fears. The reading of 'Nourritures' in the light of abjection suggests that art, especially culinary art, is used to cover up the nauseating aspects of physical life. A close reading of Charles's food behaviour indicates that the same is the case here: art is in Naples's rich areas as well as in Charles's first stage of culinary development used in its function as 'catharsis par excellence'.[299]

According to Conradi, Murdoch's fiction is also concerned with the 'Romantic and the Buddhist, quest to get beyond the duality of self and world'.[300] Food is a substance which literally, daily trespasses the conceptual border between self and the world. The opposition between self and world, however, is needed for the individual's sense of a separate, personal identity. Kristeva suggests that the dissolution of the personal borders triggers abjection. The difference that suggests itself from the reading of Sartre's short story in relation to Murdoch's novel is that in Sartre, disgust is a fact of life and must be endured. Murdoch's novel presents the individual trying to fight the reality of the non-existence of borders, the non-existence of meaning and the omnipresence of contingency. While the novel thus presents these, like Sartre's narrative, as realities of the human condition, the text also suggests a way of dealing with them: if the dissolution of the self is a threat, Murdoch's implicit answer is that the individual must let go of the solipsistic world view, of the conceptual opposition between self and world. This is what the concept of 'unselfing' refers to in Murdoch. Murdoch suggests this in the culinary-moral resolution in the third stage, where Charles abjures hedonistic solipsism and instead uses commensality as occasion to pay 'attention' to the Other.

[299] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 17.
[300] Conradi, *Saint and Artist*, p. 47.

2.6 Sublimation and culinary art

In Sartre's 'Nourritures' and Murdoch's novel, art is used as protection against what the texts posit as reality of contingency and physical necessities. They veil and hide the physicality of the body and its need for nourishment: 'concealed their bodies under brightly coloured clothing'.[301] The physicality of food and eating is contained in glass cases. People 'were masking behind their alimentary goldsmith's shops' 'the truth about food'.[302] Such descriptions suggest Freudian theories of sublimation and repression. The present chapter offers a reading of Charles' culinary art in the light of Freudian theories. These are connected to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which as intertext illustrates more clearly the position and characteristics of the id (here read as represented by Caliban) in relation to food and hunger. What transpires is that the ostensible control of Prospero or the Freudian ego in the fashion of Sartre's rich Neapolitans is contrasted with Caliban or the return of the repressed id, which results in a loss of control over underlying drives.[303] The section argues that both Charles's fears and his strategies of dealing with them are expressed through food.

It has been shown that food and the processes it undergoes during its preparation are not as much under the cook's control as the cook might wish.[304] Yet Charles's relationship with food in the first stage of culinary development is characterised by a highly prescriptive need to control. Andonova-Kalapsazova shows that the need for power and control expressed in his culinary art and philosophy is a crucial connection between Murdoch's novel and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.[305] Charles stages himself as a Prospero – in fact, his last substantial role as an actor having been that of the Shakespearean mage (TS 50) – by choosing a similar setting, and likening himself to the powerful magician. At the beginning of the novel, Charles speaks of wanting to 'abjure magic' (TS 2), which is Prospero's proclaimed aim. He describes his directorial work at the theatre as 'an attack on mankind carried on by magic' (TS 33) and as a playwright, he has produced 'magical delusions' (TS 35). Now, Charles practices 'gastronomic mysticism' (TS 56). Other characters in the novel suggest that power and control are an

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[301] 'Cachaient leurs corps sous des vêtements clairs': Sartre, 'Nourritures', p. 2128. 'Foods', p. 61.
[302] 'Masquaient derrière leurs orfèvreries alimentaires': Sartre, 'Nourritures', p. 2128; 'Foods', p. 61.
[303] The present reading deviates from Freudian theory: while Charles's cultural activities suggest repression and sublimation, a part of Charles's reason for sublimation, which the present study suggests (dealing with the ambiguity of food: the contingency of eating), are not described by Freud, who sees sublimation as a way for the individual to be socially accepted by the group.
[304] See especially Fischler's theory of incorporation and the omnivore's paradox: Fischler, 'Identity'.
[305] Andonova-Kalapsazova, 'Magic'.

illusion (TS 434) and Charles creates this illusion by installing a dogmatic culinary philosophy that does not allow for other views. *The Tempest*'s 'chief qualification of power is its enactment of human limitations in the powerful'.[306] The failure of Charles's power, his failure to keep his oral needs under control by means of sublimation, also presents these limitations.

According to Freud, sublimation facilitates and leads to 'the extension of instinctual interest away from the primary objects of desire to cultural activities'.[307] Freud's definition of sublimation specifies that the sublimates are related to the original drive. This renders cooking a possible sublimate for eating, as it is aimed at the drive to eat. Sublimation leads to the production of art and Charles presents his cooking as such. The function of cooking in this culinary stage is not to sustain the mortal body but to sublimate and control drives that are otherwise out of Charles's control. These drives are described in Freudian theory as id-drives. In *The Tempest*, they are, as argued in the following, represented in Caliban so that Charles's struggle with his drives can be seen to reflect Prospero's struggle with Caliban.

Shakespeare's Caliban, his name almost an anagram of cannibal, is hungrily animalistic and uncivilised, 'the amoral, appetitive, suffering Self in all of us, ever in search of freedom to satisfy all its hungers – visceral, sexual, and emotional'.[308] The figure also carries characteristics of the id: Skubal summarises Freud's description of it as 'this thing, this craw, this hunger, this desire, this maw, this flesh, this mouth'.[309] One sees here very clearly the relation between the Caliban-id, uncontrollable contingency and hunger. As with the Freudian concept, which is an aspect of the mental apparatus, consisting of ego, id and super-ego, Caliban is not a separate figure in *The Sea, The Sea.* Rather, the physical and chaos-driven being can be identified as an integral repressed part of the protagonist. The play implies that the uncontrollable Caliban is part of Prospero, who admits: 'this thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine'.[310] Play and novel alike show that 'there is a Caliban in the best of men': Caliban is also a part of Charles, the part which in Freudian psychoanalysis would be called the id.[311] Within Murdoch's thought, control over the Caliban-id is impossible, because contingency is each

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[306] John D. Cox, *Shakespeare and the Dramaturgy of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 202.
[307] Horowitz, *Repression*, p. 36.
[308] Robert Egan, 'This Rough Magic: Perspectives of Art and Morality in *The Tempest*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 23 (1972), 171-82.
[309] Skubal, *Word of Mouth*, p. 54.
[310] Shakespeare, *Tempest*, IV. 1. 275-6.
[311] Egan, 'This Rough Magic', p. 176.

individual's 'essence of personality'.[312] In contrast to Freud, who believes in the possibility of control by sublimation, the crisis in *The Sea, The Sea* presents the impossibility of sustained control: contingency is not a repressible part of the self but an integral part of the individual's personality; it is pre-verbal and cannot be structured by means of the symbolic order.

With reference to *The Tempest* it has been noted that 'the mage is always in danger of falling victim to his demon' and 'must ensure that he […] keeps the Caliban within him in check'.[313] Charles fails to keep his Caliban under control: the development of Charles's food behaviour represents the development from a cultured, controlled Prospero to a wild, uncontrollable Caliban, following his drives: Charles describes his reaction to the unexpected encounter with Hartley as a letting loose of his demons (TS 492). Following the encounter, Charles changes from a dogmatic gastronome and culinary philosopher to somebody who hungrily eats straight out of a tin (TS 458). This drastic change suggests the psychological process of the return of the repressed, which has been described as follows: 'Under stress the autonomous ego functions and activities may be drawn back into conflict, resexualized, reaggressified, reinstinctualized, deneutralized, desublimated', resulting in the 'reactivation under stress of the original drives.[314] Read in this light, Charles's development is the 'desublimation' of the previously sublimated and controlled original oral drive. It is the function of the character Hartley to trigger the return of the repressed. The consequences of this contingent event render Charles's sublimation and artistic production unreliable. While in the first section, almost abstract culinary art and philosophy serve cerebral hedonism, the second section relates for the first time food and physicality via hunger. The art of cooking is abandoned in favour of the necessity of eating to sustain the contingent, living body. The appearance of hunger can in a Freudian reading be considered as a symptom of the protagonist's loss of control over the previously sublimated oral id-drives.

Reading food in *The Sea, The Sea* in the light of the Shakespearean intertext and Freudian theory has brought to the fore aspects of the novel which are implicit in its use of food. It has presented a possible reading of cooking in the first stage of Charles's culinary development as artistic sublimatory activity in the attempt to control a

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[312] Murdoch, 'Sublime', p. 285.
[313] Cosmo Corfield, 'Why Does Prospero Abjure His "Rough Magic"?', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 36.1 (1985), 31-48 (p. 35).
[314] Horowitz, *Repression*, p. 34.

threatening (because contingent) Caliban-id. It has also shown the novel's implicit presentation of the final impossibility of control: the repressed returns in the second stage of Charles's development. Yet Charles's artistic endeavours of cooking and writing are more than sublimation of the drive to consume and devour in the Freudian sense. The crisis after the encounter with Hartley, in which eating out of hunger prevails, is more than a return of the repressed. (It is for instance also, as argued above, a crisis of the existentialist self-perception.) A reading that relates Charles's food behaviour in its entirety to Freudian theory would be reductive. What a reading of Charles's food behaviour in the light of Freudian theory brings out clearly, however, is that the protagonist's fears drive him to produce art (cooking and narration). It thus suggests that food is at the basis not only of his fears but also of his reaction to his fears by means of artistic production.

2.7 Food, art and ethics

Whether it is seen from Murdoch's perspective of contingency, through the lens of Kristeva's description of art as 'catharsis par excellence', as Freudian id-ego conflict or Shakespearean Caliban-Prospero power relationship:[315] Charles's food behaviour transports a certain implication for artistic production. In each reading, Charles's art is based on self-regarding fear. It is thus unethical and qualifies as 'bad art' in Murdoch's sense.[316] As they stand against what the novel posits as the reality of the human condition, Charles's artistic endeavours are constantly attacked, undermined, questioned: 'Charles's striving towards form in his life and his art […] is broken into at several angles'.[317] It will be shown that the arbitrariness of Charles's culinary art is pivotal to this process.

Conradi sees the mutual irreconcilability of ethics and art to be at the centre of *The Sea, The Sea*. He argues that 'if the book has a project it is to distance and ironize the notion of aesthetic unity in life'.[318] The changes in the role of food in the novel – in other words the presence of food in Charles's writing – provides material to trace the irreconcilability of ethics and art, which has been a central concern of Murdoch's philosophical and fictional writing.[319]

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[315] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 17.
[316] Murdoch, 'Good Over Other Concepts', p. 372.
[317] Dipple, *Work for the Spirit*, p. 279.
[318] Conradi, *Saint and Artist*, p. 319.
[319] Ibid, p. 309. The concern is not new in Murdoch's writing: its presence in *The Sea, The Sea* echoes the view of author Jake Donaghue, protagonist and narrator in Murdoch's first novel, *Under the Net*, who

The ethical role of art is of particular interest in Murdoch's entire oeuvre, be it philosophical or fictional writing. *The Fire and The Sun* is Murdoch's reaction to Plato's rejection of the arts and their exclusion from his utopian *Republic*.[320] The problem of art originates in its relation to the realistic view which both philosophers regard as a prerequisite of goodness: Plato sees art as a form of self-consolation as it constructs a fantasy about the world which does not coincide with often harsh and painful reality. Murdoch's writing follows this view, relating artistic production to what she describes as the individual's need to 'constantly seek[…] consolation'.[321] Like Plato, Murdoch regards art as dangerous. Our sense of form, she argues, reflects a desire for consolation:[322] what she describes as the human 'tendency to conceal death and chance' results in 'the temptation to impose form [which] exist[s] in life as much as in art'.[323] According to this, an overindulgence in form is symptomatic of a misleading world view and produces self-consolatory art, 'the pleasing forms [which] gratify the human ego with consolation rather than truth'.[324] Thus, according to Murdoch's theoretical writing, most art is 'self-consoling fantasy'.[325] Dipple describes Charles's self-consolation through art. She believes that 'Charles in constructing his art form tries to hide from himself and his reader that he lives in a "rubble world", and his failures at concealment are often funny.'[326] ('Rubble world' here refers to a metaphor which Murdoch uses in interview to describe contingency.) As will be shown, the culinary in *The Sea, The Sea* suggests in line with Plato that art can be self-deceptive, self-consolatory escapism.

In reference to Sartre's *La Nausée*, also preoccupied with the contingent, Reed says that art represents the antidote (in Murdoch and Plato's terminology: consolation) to Sartre's protagonist's nausea.[327] (This also evokes Kristeva's view of art as 'catharsis

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believes that 'the present age [is] not one in which it [is] possible to write a novel': Murdoch, *Under the Net*, p. 21.

[320] Digressing from Plato, Murdoch believes in the possibility of good, that is ethical, art (she sees Shakespeare as representative). Murdoch's own work, however, is concerned with the struggle in artistic production between the contrary pull of attempts at form and the knowledge of contingency. Dipple goes as far to say that Murdoch's work struggles against the impossibility of art: Dipple, *Work for the Spirit*, p. 4.

[321] Murdoch, 'Good Over Other Concepts', p. 364.

[322] Murdoch, 'Against Dryness', p. 294.

[323] Murdoch, 'Good Over Other Concepts', p. 371. The latter quotation is from Conradi, *Saint and Artist*, p. 18.

[324] Maria Antonaccio, 'Form and Contingency in Iris Murdoch's Ethics', in Antonaccio and Schweiker, *Iris Murdoch*, pp. 110-37 (p. 121).

[325] Murdoch, 'Good Over Other Concepts', p. 370.

[326] Dipple, *Work for the Spirit*, p. 277.

[327] Reed, *Nausée*, p. 41.

par excellence'.)[328] It is art's ability to console which attracts also Murdoch's protagonist in *The Sea, The Sea*, who is faced with the threats of contingency or, depending on the reading, the Caliban-id. Charles seeks to use culinary art as tool of consolation. Noticeably, in the first part of the novel Charles struggles with the sea, which is with food representative of contingency in the novel: 'I went to the tower steps in the afternoon intending to swim but found to my annoyance that the rope which I had fixed to the banister had somehow become untied and floated away' (TS 27). After encounters with its uncontrollable wildness, Charles is downcast. Yet what is really interesting is his reaction to his feelings:

> Felt a little depressed but was cheered up by supper: spaghetti with a little butter and dried basil. (Basil is of course the king of herbs.) Then spring cabbage cooked slowly with dill. Boiled onions served with bran, herbs, soya oil and tomatoes, with one egg beaten in. With these, a slice or two of cold tinned corned beef. (Meat is really just an excuse for eating vegetables.) I drank a bottle of retsina in honour of the undeserving rope. (TS 27)

Based on dogmata, Charles carefully creates an (if not conventionally) structured menu: he aims to set form and meaning where the novel presents formlessness and meaninglessness. This is his answer to uncontrollable contingency the reality of which Charles will continue to ignore (many more attempts at taming the sea will follow).[329] The inability to control the contingent sea is met with consolatory strategies which, through form, create an impression of controllability. As reaction to the fear of contingency, Charles's culinary art qualifies as 'self-consoling fantasy'.[330] It is particularly problematic, because food itself is an object of contingency.

Despite the fact that much of Murdoch's philosophy is Platonic, she defends art against his view. Where to Plato all art is unrealistic self-consolation, Murdoch differentiates between 'good art' and 'bad art'.[331] 'Good art' can transcend the need for self-involved distraction from reality. According to Murdoch, a central purpose of what she regards as 'good art' is to reveal to the individual that 'other people exist'.[332] This would make it a tool to achieve Murdoch's moral ideal, which relies on a clear vision of the reality of other people. In this view, 'good art' is a means for achieving goodness.

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[328] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 17.
[329] The same process of an encounter with the uncontrollability of the sea triggering depression and followed by obsessive food preparation is found at TS 15-6.
[330] Murdoch, 'Good Over Other Concepts', p. 370.
[331] Murdoch, 'Good Over Other Concepts'.
[332] Murdoch, 'Sublime', p. 282.

Charles's culinary art, however, does the opposite. Rather than revealing that other people exist, rather than a tool with which to pay 'attention' to others, Charles's culinary art is designed to construct a sense of identity. Charles's culinary art is a narrative of the self and thus stands in opposition to Murdoch's 'unselfing' and to what she considers 'good art'.

The aesthetic distinction of 'good art' and 'bad art' in Murdoch's ethics is based on a moral judgement of the motives of the artist: is their art geared toward a realistic view of the Other or is their art a consolation for the reality of contingency which is threatening to the solipsist? The above analysis of Charles's food behaviour as set against Sartrean existentialism has presented the close relation between Charles's cooking and his (largely existentialist) moral outlook in the first stage of his development. Because of the view of the artist's personal ethics as underlying their entire artistic production, the novel's presentation – by means of the culinary – of Charles as deluded existentialist solipsist has consequences also for his writing: Charles's cooking exemplifies the artist's relationship to his art and his artistic motives.

The text implies that the present reading of Charles's culinary art as Murdoch's 'bad art' can be extended to his writing. Associating goodness with self-knowledge is a misunderstanding of goodness in Murdoch's sense since self-knowledge is centred on the ego rather than being outward-directed and other-oriented. In the image of the man in the cave, striving for knowledge of oneself equals considering the fire, which stands for the self. In *The Sea, The Sea*, James expresses this relation: 'we cannot just walk into the cavern and look around. Most of what we think we know about our minds is pseudo-knowledge. We are all such shocking poseurs, so good at inflating the importance of what we think we value' (TS 175). Attention to the self is counterproductive. In Murdoch's ethics, aspiring to self-knowledge means moving away from goodness: according to her, what is needed 'is an attachment to what lies outside the fantasy mechanism, and not a scrutiny of the mechanism itself'.[333] She therefore describes self-knowledge as delusory.[334] This aspect is present in both Charles's culinary obsession in the first stage and his attempt at autobiography. Following from Fischler's theory of incorporation, the urge to achieve self-knowledge can express itself in the urge to strictly regulate incorporation. Charles's precision and fussy eating habits are representative of what Murdoch's philosophy describes as the

[333] Murdoch, 'God', p. 355.
[334] Ibid.

false need for self-knowledge and the illusory concept of the possibility of self-definition and control. Charles indeed misunderstands goodness as connected to self-knowledge: he states to want to 'learn to be good' (TS 2) by focussing his attention entirely on the self and doing 'the deep thing, real analysis, real autobiography' (TS 175). Both Charles's writing and his culinary art are designed to achieve self-knowledge and control. They thus move into the opposite direction of Murdoch's moral path of 'unselfing' and 'attention' to the Other.

Like his culinary art, Charles's writing is self-regarding. As *auto*biography, it is focussed on the self. Charles's choice of genre is highly relevant here: autobiography, diary and memoir – also called self-writing – are uniquely suited to imply the self-centred solipsism of its producer. As autobiographic writer, Charles is simultaneously creator and product, narrator and protagonist of his narrative. He points out that he writes for his own and nobody else's benefit: 'I might now introduce myself – to myself, first and foremost, it occurs to me' (TS 3). Autobiography is the construction of an individual by him/herself, and has at its centre one consciousness which is at the same time that of author, narrator and character. His book is a fiction of the self (Charles eventually implies that he is writing a novel; TS 99). It is also a means of consolation, an attempt 'to steady and console [him]self by writing' (TS 157):

> Of course this chattering diary is a facade, the literary equivalent of the everyday smiling face which hides the inward ravages of jealousy, remorse, fear and the consciousness of irretrievable moral failure. Yet such pretences are not only consolations but may even be productive of a little ersatz courage. (TS 483)

The attempt at autobiography is the attempt to create form where there is only chaos: 'any story which we tell about ourselves consoles us since it imposes pattern upon something which might otherwise seem intolerably chancy and incomplete'.[335] Like his culinary art, Charles's life-writing is a strategy of self-deceiving consolation.

The novel presents the failure of Charles's use of art as strategy of consolation, implying that the failure originates in his art's disregard for contingency. 'Charles wishes to make his life into a whole art object […]; the necessary nature of the world will not allow him to succeed'.[336] The helplessness of Charles's urge for form is humorously exaggerated. 'Bananas should be cut, *never* mashed' (TS 8); prunes should

[335] Murdoch, 'Good Over Other Concepts', p. 371.
[336] Dipple, *Work for the Spirit*, p. 277.

be eaten with 'orange flower water, never cream' (TS 70); 'I had mixed feelings about ice cream until I realized that it must always be eaten with a cake or tart, never with fruit alone.' (TS 87). Such statements become laughable especially because they stress the arbitrariness of Charles's culinary dogmas. The dogmatic, patronising, unexplained 'never' provokes the question: why not? It is the uncompromising dogmatism which unveils more than anything the underlying helpless need for order of which it is symptomatic.

Charles's culinary art exemplifies the arbitrariness of art as expressed in Murdoch's non-fictional writing. His art is not only characterized by a helplessness, originating in Charles's misguided ethics. It also represents the great attraction of art's ostensible consoling effects. The helpless failure of art originates in the reality of contingency, to which artistic form is opposed and which it attempts to veil and console about. The difference between life and art, according to Murdoch, is form: 'art has got to have form, whereas life need not'.[337] For the sake of a realistic vision Murdoch therefore believes that 'contingency must be defended'.[338] At the end of the novel, Charles understands this:

> Life, unlike art, has an irritating way of bumping and limping on, undoing conversions, casting doubt on solutions, and generally illustrating the impossibility of living happily or virtuously ever after; so I thought I might continue the tale a little longer in the form once again of a diary though I suppose that, if this is a book, it will have to end, arbitrarily enough no doubt, in quite a short while. (TS 477)

Charles now accepts that what the novel presents as reality and art as he knows it are irreconcilable: 'human arrangements are nothing but loose ends and hazy reckoning, whatever art may otherwise pretend in order to console us' (TS 477). As a consequence of this understanding, Charles stops not only his solipsistic, philosophic-artistic approach to food and cooking: he finally also stops writing. His text ends when Charles understands that his art is incapable of consoling him about contingency.

Considering Charles's products and the process of their production in the light of Murdoch's views on art we find that it qualifies as 'bad', that is unethical, art. Both of his artistic endeavours set Charles, his needs and fears, at the centre. What he presents as art serves entirely egocentric functions. It seemingly consoles him about his greatest

[337] Murdoch, 'Sublime, p. 285
[338] Ibid.

fears when it installs ostensible permanence where death is looming and opposes chaos with transient form. His art is designed to protect him from contingency and creates an illusion of control. It negates what Murdoch's philosophy regards as the problematic truth of contingency and the impossibility of control that goes with it. What Charles is not aware of is that the characteristics of contingency are inherent in his tool of consolation, in cooking. It has been shown that cooking relates to both form and the contingent realities of the body. It is therefore very well suited to show the helplessness of attempts to console oneself by art. With cooking as representative of artistic production in this novel, the ambiguity of food and its related activities, which Fischler has described, affects all artistic production: the ambiguity of cooking implies the ambiguity of art. Murdoch addresses this intrinsic ambiguity when she describes how 'art invigorates us by a juxtaposition, almost an identification, of pointlessness and value'.[339] As in the transformation induced through cooking, 'all art disfigures life, misrepresents it' (TS 165). Reflecting the ambivalence of food and its related activities, the transformation induced by means of culinary art is on the one hand a disfiguring misrepresentation. On the other hand it attracts, because it consoles by means of form: the attraction of artistic production as presented in *The Sea, The Sea* is related to the hope of satisfaction and consolation, which food and its related activities entails, yet which they cannot finally achieve.[340]

2.8 Conclusion

Murdoch's work is preoccupied with the path to goodness and the role of philosophy and art within this. Yet in her fictional work, these philosophical preoccupations are not explicit. In *The Sea, The Sea*, instead, they are implicit in the protagonist's food behaviour. *The Sea, The Sea*, this study has shown, implicitly explores the relationship of art and ethics by means of the culinary, presenting its protagonist's moral development through the culinary and alimentary.

Previous underestimation of the role of food in the novel has led to critical misreadings and the overlooking of food as link between fear, illusions of power and control and artistic production. The present study has provided an analysis of precisely

[339] Murdoch, 'Good Over Other Concepts', p. 372.
[340] This has been shown in the above analysis of the novel in the light of Lacanian lack: it is a constant desire and hunger, which can, however, never be satisfied. Note that, because lack originates in the severance from the breast, activities related to food and the oral have a particularly great potential to be the focal point of an individual's necessarily failing attempt to appease lack.

this link. Initially, the first stage of Charles's culinary-moral development has been set alongside concepts of Sartrean existentialism. Both Murdoch's moral philosophy and *The Sea, The Sea* are positioned in relation to and against existentialism: the existentialist 'fat relentless ego' is the point of departure of Charles's moral-culinary development.[341] So are existentialist concepts such as solipsism and the conflictual character of inter-subjective relationships. Set in relation with Bourdieusian theory it has also been shown that Charles bases his sense of (social) identity on the culinary. With parts of Charles's sense of identity relying on food – a highly transient, unpredictable, constantly transforming substance –, stability of identity is put into question.

The novel's (culinary) moral argument moves on from and implicitly questions existentialist concepts. While presenting them as starting point, the novel suggests the necessity of embarking on a moral path and leaving solipsism and self-centredness behind in favour of 'unselfing' and 'attention'. The fact that the novel implicitly presents Charles's initial existentialist world view as problematic is entailed in the way Charles's seemingly controlled world crumbles in the second stage of Charles's development. Read in the light of Freudian theory, the second stage can be regarded as a return of the repressed, in which previously (namely in the first stage) sublimated id-drives come to the fore. Charles's hunger and implicitly cannibalistic desire for Hartley have been interpreted in this way. This Freudian reading of Charles's relationship to food/ the oral in the first and then in the second stage is supported and illustrated by the comparison with the Prospero-Caliban relationship, which also implies a return of the suppressed hungry, visceral Caliban.

Within Murdoch's fictional and philosophical system, what Freud describes as the return of the repressed is seen as an unavoidable fact of the human condition (contingency). The chapter has set particular emphasis on this fear. It has also shown that both Charles's fears and his attempts to react to them are expressed through food, rendering his attempts ambivalent and helplessly ineffective. 'Nourritures', read in the light of Kristevan abjection, makes explicit what is implicit in Charles's culinary behaviour: in its juxtaposition of the rich and poor Neapolitans, it shows that there are fears to be hidden away (the contingent physicality of being); it shows that these are hidden best beneath the 'catharsis par excellence':[342] art; and it shows that it is in

[341] Murdoch, 'God', p. 342.
[342] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 17.

culinary *objects d'art* that the rich Neapolitans and Charles hide the material contingency of being. Charles meets contingency with form. In Murdoch's words, he consoles himself by means of form, which qualifies Charles's art as what Murdoch calls 'bad art'. This is also the case as Charles's particular art forms – cooking and autobiography – are narratives of the self and thus opposed to Murdoch's moral concept of 'unselfing'. Since Charles's culinary art and his writing qualify as Murdoch's 'bad art' and since 'bad art' is seen as counterproductive to achieving goodness, Charles's cooking and narrative end when he begins his path to goodness on the very last pages of the novel. The analysis has shown that the first moves in the direction of Murdoch's moral ideal are implicit in Charles's culinary behaviour at the end of the novel and the way in which it contrasts with the previous two stages of moral-culinary development.

Charles's relationship to food in *The Sea, The Sea* resonates strikingly with what Fischler has described as the individual's ambivalent relationship to food. Cooking is the sphere where Charles believes to have found 'absolute truth' (TS 87). Yet his culinary philosophy is characterised by taste, which knows neither absolutes nor truth. (Instead, food is, as Lévi-Strauss has shown, an arbitrary signifying system.) The attempt to present his identity as stable and natural is negated by the tool Charles uses to construct this sense of identity: cooking is the most transient of art forms, is subject to ongoing transformation and thus incapable of producing stable forms. While Charles aims to produce lasting form and meaning in order to avoid the fact of his own mortality, physicality and with it transience are inscribed in the tool used as eating is aimed at sustaining the mortal body and culinary art is the most transient of arts. Using the signifying system of food, Charles's attempts to escape contingency by means of form (cooking) lead to transformation and the disintegration of form and meaning. Thus, while Charles creates a culinary philosophy and culinary art to fend off existential fears, food simultaneously represents these fears: contingency is always already part of Charles's art, because it is an aspect of the substance and activities related to food. Charles's tool of consolation entails the things he seeks consolation about. It thus represents the illusory double-sidedness of Murdoch's concept of art, divided into 'good art' and 'bad art': Charles's culinary art is characterized by the simultaneity of its attraction to the producer and its helplessness in the face of contingency. The arbitrariness of food here reflects the arbitrariness of art and artistic production, also expressed in Murdoch's concept of 'good art' as opposed to 'bad art'.

3 Thomas Bernhard: *Holzfällen*

In Thomas Bernhard's *Holzfällen: Eine Erregung* (1981), food and the social mechanism it triggers form the underlying structure on which the problematisation of artistic identity and production rests. The present reading of the novel is based on the role of food within it, leading directly to the problem of artistic identity and production and laying bare the relative helplessness of human existence and art of which the novel speaks. Food and consumption are at the centre of the novel: an 'artistic dinner' is the theme of the evening which the narrator describes, but the social mechanisms of food also characterise the relationship between a society and its institutions and the artist.[343] The function of food and eating as social signifiers render the meal an ideal setting for social observation. In the course of the novel, food not only betrays the social ambitions of the hosts and their guests but also the artistic ideals of the narrator: artistic integrity, food in the novel implies, is illusory.[344]

With his concept of art threatened by society and its mechanisms, the narrator attacks the society he works in and writes about. The processes of distinction with which they engage are a main point of attack. However, a closer look shows that the narrator engages in precisely these processes, using the same strategies and signifying systems – those of food and art. The intertextual relation of *Holzfällen* to Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann* (1913; *Swann's Way*) illuminates the processes of distinction as well as the presentation of the dinner as social play-acting and masquerade in which the narrator takes part.[345] Bourdieusian theories present the use of food as a signifying system of social capital. However, they do not offer critical purchase on the narrator's deep hatred and disgust toward the society he interacts with. Neither does Proust's Swann reflect this aspect of the narrator's relationship with society. Mauss's and Lévi-Strauss's thoughts on the economy of the gift, applied to food, add a perspective on the narrator's conflict as they reflect his ambiguous relationship with and his deep dependence on society as artist and individual. *Holzfällen* and other writings by

[343] Institutions of society are here understood to include governmental bodies such as the Austrian Kunstsenat, an institution whose members, selected Austrian artists, suggest the candidates for the Großen Österreichischen Staatspreis, the Austrian National Award.
[344] Görlich observes that Bernhard reflects in his late work on the conditions of artistic existence: Peter Görlich, 'Thomas Bernhard: *Holzfällen: Eine Erregung*', *Weimarer Beiträge: Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft, Ästhetik und Kulturwissenschaften*, 8 (1988), 1327-35 (p. 1329). Artistic integrity is here understood as the artist's sense of independence of society and its institutions, thus a sense of uncorruptedness in the attempt to represent in their art what the individual perceives as true or real.
[345] Proust, *Swann's Way*, p. 227.

Bernhard equate food intake to the consumption of ideology. A comparative section, relating *Holzfällen* to Henrik Ibsen's *Vildanden* (1884; *The Wild Duck*) suggests that the narrator's (part) acceptance of the gift of food renders his relationship with society not only as passive coercion but also active collaboration: the narrator partakes in the symbolic cannibalism enacted in the novel, which feeds his artistic production.[346] Theories of the gift suggest that, in this novel, artistic production has aspects of dependence and obligation via economic exchange. It thus intersects with the section that looks at food in the novel through Theodor Adorno's and Max Horkheimer's theory of the Culture Industry. The narrator's disgust and disillusionment with the reality of artistic production are deeply rooted in the processes described by Adorno and Horkheimer. *Holzfällen*, however, takes their theory to new ground: while they speak of the economic processes of the Culture Industry only in relation to popular, mass-produced culture, *Holzfällen* presents the same processes at work in what Adorno and Horkheimer call advanced or 'avant-garde art'.[347] The carnivorous mechanism of the city devours and incorporates artists only to spit out art that is always *re*-produced. This aspect of the present reading suggests that Bernhard's narrator struggles with what postmodernism and poststructuralism have figured as the unavoidable derivativeness of all art and the impossibility of innovation. Barthes suggests in *Mythologies* that the culinary sign is ideologically loaded and by doing so extends its scope of signification from the social to the political. I argue that the processes of nourishment and obligation, of cultural re-production and collaboration are projected in *Holzfällen* on Austrian politics and cultural politics past and present. The study of commensality in this novel suggests that the artist is collaborator and highly co-implicated ideologically, even as he harshly criticises the structures he is part of and incorporated in.

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[346] Henrik Ibsen, *Vildanden* **(**Oslo: Aschehoug, 2009); Ibsen, '*Vildanden*', trans. by James McFarlane, in Ibsen, *Enemy of the People, Vildanden, Rosmersholm* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 107-220.

[347] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 'Kulturindustrie: Aufklärung als Massenbetrug', in *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt a.M: Fischer, 1969), pp. 12-176 (p. 136); Adorno and Horkheimer, 'Culture Industry', in Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 94-136 (p. 101). Note that Adorno and Horkheimer avoid using the terms 'popular culture' and 'mass culture' in order to avoid suggesting that this culture arises from the masses.

3.1 *Holzfällen* within Bernhard's oeuvre[348]

Bernhard, regarded by many critics as one of the most important Austrian authors of the twentieth century, has achieved international acclaim.[349] Despite an early death, he left behind a major oeuvre composed of poetry, short fiction, novels and plays. A large number of themes and topics recur in almost all of these. Bernhard's work problematizes sickness, suicide and death:[350] 'Der Tod ist mein Thema, weil das Leben mein Thema ist. […] Das ganze Leben ist ja nichts anderes als der Tod'.[351] Suicide recurs alongside artistic production, because, as Bernhard's work implies, those who recognise the meaninglessness of human existence either kill themselves or escape into art.[352]

Another recurring theme and one for which Bernhard is probably best known is his literary critique of the mechanisms of society. The Austrian history of collaboration with the Nazis is present in numerous works;[353] most famously so in the play *Heldenplatz*, first staged to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the so-called

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[348] Detailed analysis is purposely excluded from this section. The general characteristics identified here are analysed further below as to their connection to the role of food in the novel.

[349] For views on various aspects of Bernhard's reception in Europe see Wolfram Bayer and Claude Porcell (eds), *Kontinent Bernhard: Zur Thomas-Bernhard-Rezeption in Europa* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1995) and Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler, 'Bernhard-Scheltreden: Um- und Abwege der Bernhard-Rezeption', in Alfred Pittertschatscher (ed.), *Literarisches Kolloquium Linz '84* (Linz: Adalbert Stifter-Institut des Landes Oberösterreich, 1985), pp. 89-112. For Bernhard reception in the Anglophone world see especially Gitta Honegger, 'Language speaks: Anglo-Bernhard: Thomas Bernhard in translation', in Mathias Konzett (ed.), *A Companion to the Works of Thomas Bernhard* (Woodbridge: Camden House, 2002), pp. 169-85 and the contribution of the David McLintock, 'Thomas Bernhard und der englischsprachige Übersetzer', in Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler (ed.), *Thomas Bernhard: Beiträge zur Fiktion der Postmoderne*: *Londoner Symposion* (Frankfurt a.M./ New York: Peter Lang, 1997), pp. 177-99.

[350] Examples from Bernhard's novels include all main works: Bernhard's first novel *Frost*, in Bernhard, *Thomas Bernhard: Die Romane*, ed. by Martin Huber and Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler (Frankfurt a.M: Suhrkamp, 2008 [1963], pp. 7-269, *Amras* (Frankfurt a.M: Insel, 1964), *Verstörung*, in Bernhard, *Die Romane* [1967], pp. 271-430, *Das Kalkwerk: Roman*, in Bernhard, *Die Romane* [1970], pp. 431-608, *Ja* (Frankfurt a.M: Suhrkamp, 1978), *Beton*, in Bernhard, *Die Romane* [1982], pp. 857-956, *Der Untergeher: Roman*, in Bernhard, *Die Romane*, [1983], pp. 957-1071, *Holzfällen* (1984) and finally *Alte Meister: Komödie*, in Bernhard, *Die Romane* [1985], pp. 1225-371 and *Auslöschung: Ein Zerfall* (in Bernhard, *Die Romane* [1986], pp. 1373-766), Bernhard's two last novels.

[351] 'Death is what I write about, because I write about life. […]. After all, life is nothing but death' (my translation): Thomas Bernhard, 'Zwei Reden', *Neues Forum*, 173 (1968), 347-9 (pp. 348-9). The omnipresence of death in Bernhard's work, as Pfabigan calls it, is widely acknowledged: Alfred Pfabigan, 'Der Platz von *Holzfällen* innerhalb der Ordnung des Gesamtwerks von Thomas Bernhard', *Études Germanistiques: Revue trimestrielle de la Société des Études Germanistiques*, 198 (1995), 161-73 (p. 162). Peter Kampits dedicates an article to what he describes as Bernhard's 'Generalthema', his constant topic: Kampits, 'Tod und Reflexion: Philosophische Bemerkungen zum Werk Thomas Bernhards', in Pittertschatscher (ed.), *Literarisches Kolloquium*, pp. 18-28 (p. 20).

[352] Gregor Hens, *Thomas Bernhards Trilogie der Künste* (Woodbridge: Camden House, 1999), p. 187.

[353] Thomas Cousineau frequently concludes a presence of representations of Nazism and Austrian collaboration: Thomas J. Cousineau, *Three-Part Inventions: The Novels of Thomas Bernhard* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 2008).

Anschluss in March 1938.[354] Be it Vienna itself or the Austrian capital as representative of a corrupt, consumerist, class-crazed community in which independent art has no room: Bernhard's oeuvre presents an unapologetic criticism of society.[355] Yet it is characterized by an ambivalent relationship with society. The author himself appears to have fluctuated between a deep hatred of and affection for his home country: on the one hand, Bernhard despised Austria and its society enough to impose a testamentary ban on the staging of his plays at Austrian theatres.[356] On the other hand, Bernhard lived and worked all his life in Austria and wrote almost exclusively about Austrian society. The divided relationship with society was mutual and is reflected by a reception characterized by extremes: Marcel Reich-Ranicki describes how to some, Bernhard's work is unbearable and revolting, to others unforgettable and ravishing.[357]

As a third thematic thread, Bernhard's work is also widely read as an attack on the conditions of artistic production. Many other themes can be related to this. Problems of independence, integrity and the recurring character of the social outcast, for example, relate to the production of art: true art is seen as possible only if the artist maintains personal integrity and does not cooperate with society and its institutions. Isolation and financial independence are presented as a prerequisite to the production of true art.[358]

Bernhard's work frequently caused scandals (Austrian media and politicians demanded a ban on *Heldenplatz* [1988]; *Holzfällen* was temporarily confiscated [1984]). The Austrian *enfant terrible* was denounced as *Nestbeschmutzer*, traitor of his home country. Many critics regard his writing as pessimistic and nihilistic. Reich-Ranicki speaks of the hopelessness of Bernhard's prose and Jens Tismar describes a disgust at existence and a fear of civilization present in all Bernhard's protagonists.[359] Other critics reject this view of Bernhard's work. Ruixiang Han argues in his analysis of

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[354] Thomas Bernhard, *Heldenplatz* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1988). *Heldenplatz*, trans. by Andrea Tierney and Meredith Oakes (London: Oberon, 2010).

[355] Charles Martin notes that some see Bernhard's critique as aimed at Austrian society while others believe that Bernhard's Austria is a symbol for contemporary Western societies: Charles W. Martin, *The Nihilism of Thomas Bernhard: The Portrayal of Existential and Social Problems in his Prose Works* (Amsterdam: Atlanta, 1995), p. 7.

[356] The ban has since been lifted by his half-brother and heir Peter Fabjan.

[357] Marcel Reich-Ranicki, *Entgegnung: Zur deutschen Literatur der siebziger Jahre* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1982), p. 266.

[358] Thus in *Der Untergeher*, the three pianists live in isolation, entirely undisturbed by worldly issues such as finances. Long also describes a connection between financial independence and artistic production and thought in *Das Kalkwerk*: Long, 'Ungleichzeitigkeiten', p. 200.

[359] Reich-Ranicki, 'Ein Wiener Bolero', in Reich-Ranicki, *Thomas Bernhard: Aufsätze und Reden* (Zürich: Ammann Verlag, 1990), pp. 72-83 (p. 72); Jens Tismar, 'Thomas Bernhards Erzählerfiguren', in Anneliese Botond (ed.), *Über Thomas Bernhard* **(**Frankfurt a.M: Suhrkamp, 1970), pp. 68-77 (pp. 75 and 76).

the comic in Bernhard's oeuvre that his prose aims at improvement.[360] In his reading of the novel, Peter Görlich agrees with this interpretation: according to him, *Holzfällen* represents the attempt to achieve the humanization of society.[361] The present reading considers the narrator's relationship to an appallingly cannibalistic yet simultaneously nourishing society of which he is part as fundamentally ambiguous.

Repetition is an important element in Bernhard's oeuvre. It is present at all levels of his writing and the recurring themes mentioned above are only one instance of this. Further idiosyncrasies are recurring characters (the solitary *Geistesmensch* is a common figure), recurring stylistic techniques (Bernhard favours the monologue in parataxis), as well as a repetitive vocabulary, with a high frequency of absolute statements ('immer', 'alle', 'vollkommen' and 'naturgemäß' are used throughout Bernhard's oeuvre).[362] Alfred Pfabigan, in a publication that argues for the independence of *Holzfällen* within Bernhard's work, observes that repetition has led to many critics regarding Bernhard's prose oeuvre as effectively one book.[363] However, Bernhard's repetitive narration also entails an aspect of development. Pfabigan shows in his comparative study on some of Bernhard's protagonists that, despite obvious similarities, they clearly undergo a development.[364] Bernhard's repetitions are 'dynamic rather than static because each return to a familiar ground carries a germ of novelty'.[365] It has also been observed that Bernhard's prose style is strongly influenced by theatre and music: Bernhard's prose is theatrical, his style musical (the latter is arguably related to his use of repetition).[366]

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[360] Ruixiang Han, *Der komische Aspekt in Bernhard Romanen* (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag, 1995), p. 11.

[361] Görlich, 'Holzfällen', p. 1329.

[362] The terms translate as 'always', 'all', 'completely', 'naturally' (my translation). *Das Geistige* can be understood as the realm of thought and the intellectual and has overtones of the spiritual. It's opposite is not only the material but also all things transient. Publications engaging in particular with this aspect of Bernhard's work are Oliver Jahraus, 'Von Saurau zu Murau: Die Konstitution des Subjekts als Geistesmenschen im Werk Thomas Bernhards', in Martin Huber and Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler (eds), *Wissenschaft als Finsternis? Jahrbuch der Thomas Bernhard-Privatstiftung in Kooperation mit dem Österreichischen Literaturarchiv* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2002), pp. 65-82 and Johannes F. G. Podszun, *Untersuchungen zum Prosawerk Thomas Bernhards: Die Studie und der Geistesmensch: Entwicklungstendenzen in der literarischen Verarbeitung eines Grundmotivs*, Gießener Arbeiten zur neueren deutschen Literatur und Literaturwissenschaft, 20 (Frankfurt a.M.: Lang, 1998). Examples are the narrators in *Ja* (1978) and *Beton* (1982), the three protagonists in *Der Untergeher* (1983) and the doctor in *Der Ignorant und der Wahnsinnige* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1972).

[363] Pfabigan, '*Holzfällen*'. p. 161. Hens notes that repetition has led critics to read Bernhard's work as full of redundancy and characterized by a lack of artistic development: Hens, *Trilogie der Künste*, p. 18.

[364] Pfabigan, '*Holzfällen*', p. 164.

[365] Jonathan Long, *The Novels of Thomas Bernhard: Form and its Function* (Woodbridge: Camden House, 2001), p. 139.

[366] The relation of Bernhard's work to music is well documented. See for a short overview Long's section on musical prose (*Novels of Bernhard*, pp. 11-15), for a detailed discussion for instance Liesbeth Bloemsaat-Voerknecht, *Thomas Bernhard und die Musik: Themenkomplex mit drei Fallstudien und einem musikthematischen Register* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006), Karl Solibakke's

Stylistically, an extensive use of culinary vocabulary and metaphors drawn from the field of taste, eating and cooking is noticeable throughout Bernhard's oeuvre.

It is in *Holzfällen* that the culinary is connected most closely to Bernhard's thematic interests such as social criticism and the conditions of artistic production.[367] His 1981 novel shares general characteristics of his oeuvre such as those outlined above, while developing them in a distinct way. The novel addresses the major recurring themes of his work, sometimes explicitly, such as death and artistic production. Other themes are addressed implicitly, such as the Austrian history of collaboration. Its parallels to music as well as its dramatic structure and the use of references to the theatre are noticeable.[368] While the *Geistesmensch*, according to Han, was previously presented in a tragic light, *Holzfällen* unveils the comic hypocrisy of what is caricatured as the artistic type – the bourgeois artist.[369]

Holzfällen is the breathless – and paragraphless – rant of a nameless narrator against the Viennese art scene in the form of an interior monologue. The narrative takes place at a dinner party given by the Auersbergers, once friends and patrons of the narrator, now writer. Seen as bourgeois pseudo-artists (H 56, CT 25), they represent everything the narrator hates. Twenty years before, the protagonist had gone into voluntary exile to escape precisely this kind of people. After his return from London, he runs into them and soon regrets having accepted their invitation to a 'künstlerisches Abendessen' (H 3), an 'artistic dinner' given in honour of a famous actor. The narrator is disgusted by the hosts, their guests and the food which he shares with them. The dinner is inadvertently a funeral feast (H 66; CT 30) for Joana, the actress, who recently committed suicide and was a mutual friend of the Auersberger couple, the other guests and the narrator. The day of the dinner coincides with her funeral. The narrator's monologue is highly ambiguous: it is characterised by his disgust of society and a simultaneous secret affection for human kind.

Geformte Zeit: Musik als Diskurs und Struktur bei Bachmann und Bernhard, Reihe Literaturwissenschaft, 514 (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005) and the collection of essays in Otto Kolleritsch (ed.), *Die Musik, das Leben und der Irrtum: Thomas Bernhard und die Musik* (Vienna: Universal-Edition , 2000). The presence of dramatic structures in Bernhard's prose oeuvre is discussed in Hens's *Trilogie der Künste* and Cousineau's section on *Holzfällen*, entitled 'All Vienna's a Stage in *Woodcutters*': Cousineau, Thomas J., *Three-Part Inventions*.

[367] Hilde Haider-Prengler offers an empirical description of food in Bernhard. Her section in *Der Mittagesser* is contextualised below: Hilde Haider-Prengler and Birgit Peter, *Der Mittagesser: Eine kulinarische Thomas-Bernhard-Lektüre* (Vienna/ Munich: Deuticke, 1999).

[368] Reich-Ranicki compares its structure to Ravel's *Bolero* ('Wiener Bolero'), Hens (*Trilogie der Künste*) and Cousineau (*Three-Part Inventions*) discuss *Holzfällen* in the light of theatrical references and structures.

[369] Han, *Der komische Aspekt*, p. 138.

The narrative spans one evening: the time the dinner at the Auersbergers' takes. However, this limited time span is expanded as the narrator's observations of the present situation lead via associations to memories of the past. These memories are of the far past, a decade beginning thirty years ago, in the early fifties, when the narrator entered the Viennese art scene, but also of the narrator's chance encounter with the Auersbergers a few days earlier, after not having seen them for twenty years. It is then that they invite him to the dinner. The narrator also remembers the morning before the dinner, with Joana's funeral in her home village Kilb. At the end of the novel, the narrator leaves the dinner and, walking through the night, develops an overwhelming urge to write about it: the circular novel ends by taking the reader back to its beginning. Its plot is minimal: *Holzfällen* focuses on character rather than on events. And rather than on individuals, it concentrates on relationships and their consequences. Almost the entire cast of characters in *Holzfällen* are artists and many art forms are represented, turning the dinner into an artistic-intellectual microcosm.

The narrator's relationships follow a pattern: his friends are usually at the same time patrons and lovers. After a phase of symbiotic mental, physical and artistic closeness with one of them, the narrator turns away in disgust; each time, he goes on to enter another relationship of comparable intensity. He describes these relationships as exploitative (H 221) and stresses that he owes his life and art to Vienna (which stands for Viennese society and in particular its art scene). In chronological order, the writer Jeannie Billroth, the Auersberger couple and Joana are those who have nourished him, facilitating his physical survival (H 216) as well as the development of what he calls his 'Kunstbegriff' (H 131-2), his artistic concept (CT 60).

Jeannie is a celebrated Austrian author who sells herself as Vienna's Virginia Woolf (H 55; CT 25) and '*Nachfolgerin und Übertrefferin* der Droste' (H 57).[370] Because she has won several prizes, Jeannie's work has achieved the status of what this community may consider legitimate culture.[371] This gives Jeannie a central role within the artistic circle. The narrator, however, accuses Jeannie of a lack of artistic integrity: from his perspective, she is fed by society and its institutions as she sells her art for governmental subsidies and produces what he calls 'Staatsanbiederungskunst' (H

[370] 'Direct successor and improver of Droste' (CT 26).

[371] In line with Bourdieu's use of the terms 'legitimate culture' and 'legitimate art' throughout *Distinction*, their use does not imply the existence of legitimacy or illegitimacy. Rather, the terms refer to cultural items that are concordantly considered as such. It is an arbitrary value judgement reflecting which cultural items most members of a particular community regard as of greater value than other cultural items: Bourdieu, *Distinction*.

252).[372] He further accuses her of a lack of originality: she supposedly produces chains of quotations (H 275). According to the narrator, Herr Auersberger does in the field of composition what Jeannie does in prose as he remains over-reliant on a previous source: Auersberger is 'in der Webernnachfolge steckengeblieben' (H 97) and, as composer, entirely defined by his predecessor.[373] His art is a 'Kopieren als Komponieren' (H 97):[374] 'keine drei Töne sind von ihm' (H 97).[375] With the composer Anton Webern, Bernhard chooses, as he does with Jeannie's Woolf and Droste-Hülshoff comparisons, a representative of what this community considers legitimate culture. At the same time, with the choice of composer the narrator presents an incestuous Viennese art scene, which ignores anything beyond its own culture, even city (Webern was also Viennese), narrowing the sources of artistic production which is already derivative. The narrator accuses Herr Auersberger of having wasted his talents in his quest for social status. Like Jeannie, he gives up all integrity and sacrifices art to society and the state: Auersberger is the 'stumpfsinnig gewordener *Gesellschafts-Kopist* als Webern-Nachfolger' (H 152).[376] The accusation is that they derive their sense of identity not from art but from social and governmental appreciation of their work – through being accepted as producers of legitimate art:

> Sie glauben, weil sie sich *einen Namen* gemacht haben und *viele Preise* bekommen haben und viele Bücher veröffentlicht und ihre Bilder an viele Museen verkauft haben und ihre Bücher in den besten Verlagshäusern veröffentlicht haben und ihre Bilder in den besten Museen untergebracht haben und daß ihnen dieser widerwärtige Staat alle nur möglichen Preise verliehen und alle nur möglichen Orden an ihre Brüste geheftet hat, daß sie etwas geworden sind, aber sie sind nichts geworden, dachte ich.' (H 94)[377]

Frau Auersberger's claim to be an artist is singing. Her musical talents, however, are secondary to her role as hostess. Rather than developing her art, she fashions herself as a *salonnière* of the artistic circle: she is the one who invites the narrator (H 18), entertains the guests when they have to wait (H 34), offers further helpings once the

[372] 'Literary currying-favour-with-the-state' (CT 116).
[373] He 'got stuck in the Webern succession' (CT 44).
[374] 'Copying by way of composing' (CT 44); 'derivative compositions' (W 55).
[375] 'Not three notes have come from him' (CT 44).
[376] 'Degenerate social imitator as a Webern successor' (CT 70).
[377] 'Because they've made a name for themselves and received *a lot of prizes* and published a lot of books and sold their pictures to a lot of museums and had their books published with the best publishing houses and lodged their pictures in the best museums, and because this disgusting state has awarded them all kinds of possible prizes and pinned all kinds of orders to their chests, they have become somebody, but they have not become anybody' (CT 43).

dinner is in full swing (H 190), brings wine when the guests have already had more than enough (H 245) and offers coffee in the early morning hours when people threaten to fall asleep (H 294). Her main art is that of hosting, her artwork the dinner and its overfed guests.

The narrator's relationship with Joana differs from all others. While it is at once artistic and sexual, she was a partner and companion to the narrator rather than a patron: alongside the aspiring actor and ballet dancer (H 42; 62), he practiced '*totale dramatische Kunst*' (H 63).[378] Joana's absence at the dinner is marked. The Auersbergers' dinner guests speak of nothing but Joana, her death and the funeral in the morning (H 33; 41), they are 'vom Selbstmord der Joana *beherrscht*, deren nachmittägliches Begräbnis war nicht spurlos an ihnen vorüber gegangen' (H 39).[379] Her presence is more than abstract: the novel's descriptions conjure up her dead body during the meals and the presentation of the meals implies, as argued below, symbolic cannibalism. Joana is the only character in *Holzfällen* who is not regarded as artistically or socially significant by the community: while the narrator saw great talent in her, she was not a success. She can therefore only be present in absence: if she was still alive, she would not have been invited to the 'artistic dinner'. The narrator has warm feelings towards Joana and she is the only one he does not brutally criticize. Nevertheless, his comments are not entirely positive. He describes her 'unstillbare Ruhmsucht' (H 139), her dreams of a 'Ballerinenkarriere an der Oper' and that she wanted to be 'eine gefeierte Burgschauspielerin' (H 62), implying that she too stopped being primarily interested in art and strove for social recognition.[380] She even changed her name to suit this purpose from the unassuming 'Elfriede Slukal' to the exotic 'Joana' (H 42). Her social endeavours, however, fail and Joana becomes an alcoholic and finally commits suicide. Noticeably, Joana's social ambitions are not criticised as harshly as the same behaviour in other characters. (The narrator presents her decision to socially adjust her name, for instance, as other-directed; H 42). Joana triggers the *memento mori*.[381] The character also serves as a reminder of the futility of all endeavours, artistic or social, of the 'power- and helplessness of artists and of humans in general' (my translation).[382]

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[378] 'Total dramatic art' (CT 29).
[379] 'They were *dominated* by the suicide of Joana, whose funeral that afternoon had not left them unmarked' (CT 18).
[380] 'Hunger for *fame'* (CT 63); Joana wanted a 'career as a ballerina at the Opera' and aspired to be a 'celebrated Burgtheater actress' (CT 28).
[381] Kampits, 'Tod und Reflexion', p. 21.
[382] 'Die Macht und die Hilflosigkeit der Künstler und überhaupt der Menschen' (H 133). This quotation is misleading: despite Bernhard's attention to detail, I believe it should read: 'Die Macht- und Hilflosigkeit'.

The guests at the dinner spend the first half of the novel waiting for the arrival of the Burgtheater actor, supposedly the star guest of the evening, whose entrance means that people may start to eat (H 174). At the entrance of the hyped guest, the narrator is asleep. This is characteristic of his attitude toward the dinner, as he stresses again and again his unconnectedness to the event whose nourishment he supposedly does not need. Falling asleep at the climactic moment of the evening appears almost strategic in his attempt to disconnect from the dinner party and subvert its mechanisms. The actor is the only major character the narrator does not know from decades ago, but the latter has strong (and entirely negative) opinions of Burgtheater actors in general. The actor's social position is reflected in the way people refer to him: he is an actor at the famous Burgtheater and by virtue of this title of high social-artistic status. The fact that only one guest has seen his performance in *Vildanden* is secondary: his title suffices. While Joana's death has turned the party, supposedly given in his honour, implicitly into a funeral feast, the Burgtheater actor still conducts the dinner: beginning, tempo, pauses, execution and finale depend on him. The narrator regards the actor as destroyer of art. He despises him for allowing the Auersberger couple to use him for their 'artistic dinner' at which famous artists (including the narrator himself) are social status symbols, nothing but 'Kulisse', backdrop (H 48; CT 22) to the Auersbergers' play of distinction. The narrator's ambiguous relationship to the evening party is reflected in his description of the Burgtheater actor, which is characterised initially by disgust and revulsion and later by identification.

The narrator's aggression and anger are the basis of the novel, his urge to write originates in a consuming rage. The description of his relationship to the main characters implies what he is most angry about, which is the corruption of art through the influence of society and its related institutions.[383] This influence reduces art to empty bourgeois forms, which are meaningless in so far as their significance is limited to social status and power. While the narrator expresses himself in absolutes, his judgemental observations are full of contradictions: he expresses at the same time hatred and affection for the city of Vienna and its people and frequently redirects accusations originally made against others onto himself. This behaviour, as will be shown, is

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'Power and helplessness' does not correspond with tone and content of *Holzfällen*, which with no word addresses the power of art but presents it as desperate route of escape. It is for these reasons that the sentence is here translated as if hyphenated.

[383] Pfabigan's analysis agrees with this view: Pfabigan, '*Holzfällen*', p. 172.

problematized by means of the food offered at the dinner and the nourishment accepted by the narrator from a society he despises.

3.2 Food in *Holzfällen* – a literature survey

Critics have noted the presence of food in Bernhard's oeuvre, identifying it as a trope. None, however, offer a reading of *Holzfällen* in the light of the different social mechanisms of food, which explore the problematic of the artist's co-implication in the society in which artistic production takes place and on which it depends.

Many critics are concerned with the relation between reality and fiction in *Holzfällen*, not least because of the libel suit that the novel triggered, resulting in a temporary removal of the book from Austrian bookshops.[384] The scandal that greeted the novel's appearance was based on ostensible parallels between its characters and prominent figures of the Austrian art world. The media attention of these parallels caused the text being widely regarded as a *roman à clef* and many subsequent literary considerations of the novel have focussed on the relation between reality and fiction. Martin's interpretation exemplifies that seeing *Holzfällen* as a *roman à clef* is reductionist. He regards *Holzfällen* as mere provocation, addressed at a certain group of people, an interpretation which results in Martin's discarding the novel as one of 'modest literary merit'. Such a judgement is supported neither by the novel's international acclaim nor by the reading proposed here:[385] looking at food in *Holzfällen* from a range of perspectives reveals the complexity of the work.

Of recurring interest to critics of *Holzfällen* are its intertexts. Chantal Thomas compares *Holzfällen* to Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann* but does not, however, note the relevance of the meals which Swann avoids sharing.[386] The connection to Ibsen's *Vildanden* inspired Thomas Cousineau to look at the structure of the novel as that of a three-act-play, yet does not offer a reading of the social interactions over dinner in the first act of Ibsen's play and those surrounding the meal at the centre of Bernhard's novel. Cousineau instead dedicates the title of *Three-Part Inventions: The Novels of*

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[384] For more on the scandal see the following three publications: Eva Schindlecker, '*Holzfällen: Eine Erregung*: Dokumentation eines österreichischen Literaturskandals', in Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler und Martin Huber (eds), *Statt Bernhard: Über Misanthropie im Werk Thomas Bernhards* (Vienna: Edition S, 1987), pp. 13-39, Alfred J. Noll, '*Holzfällen* vor dem Richter: Juristisches zu Bernhards Kunst und Lampersbergs Ehre', in Bayer and Porcell, *Kontinent Bernhard*, pp. 191-210, Edit Kovács, 'Autor und Leser als Richter: Forensische und rhetorische Lektüren zu Thomas Bernhards *Holzfällen*', *Germanistische Mitteilungen*, 60/61, 105-20.
[385] Martin, *Nihilism of Bernhard*, p. 182.
[386] Chantal Thomas, *Thomas Bernhard* (Paris: Seuil, 1990).

Thomas Bernhard, probably the most comprehensive work on Bernhard's prose oeuvre, to the triple structure. In his insightful analysis of the presence of other art forms in Bernhard's late novels, Gregor Hens argues that both the three-act-play and the musical trio underlie the structure of *Holzfällen*.[387] Noting the many triplets, critics do not seem to realize that this structure is inscribed in the initiating event: the dinner consists of three courses. While the meal is often identified as the connector between the novel and its intertexts, critics do not provide a reading of the role of food in their intertextual analysis.[388] But a comparison with the dinners of Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann* highlights the relation between art and hypocrisy as art is in the services of distinction. Relating Bernhard's novel to Ibsen's *Vildanden* aids a reading of the gift of food that explores artistic corruption and collaboration and the narrator's co-implication in both.

Hilde Haider-Prengler and Birgit Peter's *Der Mittagesser: Eine kulinarische Thomas-Bernhard-Lektüre* engages with food and drink in Bernhard. Here relevant is the first part of the publication, in which Haider-Prengler looks at eating, drinking and cooking in Bernhard's texts, in particular the plays. Making ample use of autobiographical material, the publication remains anecdotal. It is empirical rather than interpretive, consists of listings of occurrences of food and food metaphors but does not answer the obvious question of the consequences of food as source domain. Haider-Prengler offers a useful summary of the presence of food in Bernhard's oeuvre but does not critically engage with it.[389] Wolfgang Hackl's article comprises some general observations on food, which he regards as a motif. It may be that the small scale of the project means that Hackl cannot offer a comprehensive reading of food in the four plays under discussion.[390] Jan Süselbeck uses Bernhard's work for a comparison with the German author Arno Schmidt's and offers an interpretation of some aspects of food and drink in Bernhard. He points to the socio-cultural relevance of manners, regarded here as a means of veiling the individual's animalistic nature, and addresses the way food is used to represent the contrast of artistically productive mind and the destructive, eating

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[387] Hens's chapter on *Holzfällen* includes the long section 'Drama und Musik': *Trilogie der Künste*, pp. 100-20.

[388] Cousineau, *Three-Part Inventions*, p. 117; Thomas, *Bernhard*, p. 70; Sascha Kiefer, 'Arbeitessen: Kunst, Künstlertum und Kunstproduktion in Thomas Bernhards *Holzfällen*', *Literatur für Leser*, 23.3 (2000), 170-87 (p. 177).

[389] Haider-Pregler and Peter, *Der Mittagesser* is not a strictly academic publication: Haider-Prengler's chapters are followed by Birgit Peter's recipes and descriptions of restaurants and bars in Vienna frequented by Bernhard and his characters. The publication is primarily interested in a deciphering of the fictional work by applying autobiographical data.

[390] Wolfgang Hackl, 'Die Inszenierung des Mahls in den Dramen Thomas Bernhards', in Martin Huber, Bernhard Judex, Manfred Mittermayer and Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler (eds), *Thomas Bernhard Jahrbuch 2007/ 2008* (Vienna/ Cologne/ Weimar: Böhlau, 2009), pp. 103-17.

body. However, Süselbeck's comments remain unsystematic. To Süselbeck, food in Bernhard is foremost a narrative tool used to enrich a detailed, everyday realism.[391] An excellent, if very brief reading of the meal in *Holzfällen* is provided by Claudia Öhlschläger as part of her analysis of the autoerotic in the novel. Öhlschläger discusses the dinner in terms of the funeral feast. According to her, the symbolic cannibalistic consumption of the dead artist Joana fuels the narrator's artistic production.[392]

The readings mentioned here largely follow the conventional view of food as trope. They have used specific connotations of food to support a not food-related interpretation of the novel. However, rather than supporting or emphasising what the novel attempts to convey, the representation of the social mechanisms triggered by food and eating are a fundamental element of the novel's argument: they evoke the artist's social and institutional relationships, implicitly commenting on artistic production. Furthermore, criticism of *Holzfällen*, which has been obscured by biography, needs to return to the text.[393] Reading *Holzfällen* through its use of food is a way of doing this: rather than closing interpretation down to fit biographical facts, approaching it from various different perspectives of theories of food opens the reading to a wider range of interpretative possibilities. This reading can thus illuminate the ambiguous and complex relation between narrator-artist and society, in which the narrator is always already co-implicated in his own criticism and which problematizes cultural production and consumption as well as art in the services of distinction.

3.3 Items of food contextualised

In order to address the social implications of food in *Holzfällen*, special attention will be paid to both the particular items that are consumed and the specific context of their consumption. The first part of this section traces the instances of food and consumption in the three phases which the narrator refers to: the 1950s, from the moment he entered until the moment he left the nourishing Viennese art scene; a day in the 1980s, first in

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[391] Jan Süselbeck, '"Strategisch Saufen" und andere Angewohnheiten: Einige Nachträge zum Thema Essen und Trinken bei Arno Schmidt, unter besonderer Berücksichtigug Thomas Bernhards', in Huber and others (eds), *Jahrbuch 2004*, pp. 73-89 (p. 78).

[392] Claudia Öhlschläger, '"In den Wald gehen, tief in den Wald hinein": Autoerotische Phantasmen männlicher Autorschaft in Thomas Bernhards *Holzfällen: Eine Erregung*', in Annette Keck and Dietmar Schmidt (eds), *Auto(r)erotik: Gegenstandslose Liebe als literarisches Projekt* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1994), pp. 119-31.

[393] Görlich agrees with this view. He regards an autobiographical reading as fruitless endeavour. Rather than an autobiographical document, he regards *Holzfällen* as analysis of the relationship between artist and society: Görlich, 'Holzfällen', p. 1330. Kiefer points to the unusual style of the novel as first indicator of its constructedness and the novel's transcendence of the *roman à clef*: Kiefer, 'Arbeitsessen', p. 174.

the morning at the village Kilb with meals at the pub before and after Joana's funeral; then in the evening the 'artistic dinner' at the Auersbergers'.[394] The second part scrutinises the socio-cultural and political connotations of the individual items consumed.

During the course of the novel, the reader learns that the narrator has first arrived in Vienna thirty years previously, in the 1950s, as a young man in his early twenties.[395] His introduction into Viennese artistic circles is accompanied by a need for nourishment. The narrator arrives 'ohne einen Groschen' (H 216) and 'in höchster Not und schon fast am Verhungern' (H 216).[396] The city comes to his rescue as it provides physical nourishment, followed by intellectual-artistic nourishment: a Viennese philosopher saves him by administering first 'Milch, dann [ein] Abendessen und schließlich [die] Vermittlung an eine Schriftstellerin' (H 217).[397] The writer is Jeannie Billroth, one of Vienna's most prominent intellectuals and authors (H 217). It is through her that the narrator meets the Auersberger couple and Joana. The physical nourishment of milk and a meal is extended into intellectual nourishment as the narrator is introduced to the Viennese art scene who feed him culture: he regularly leaves Jeannie with his 'Kopf voller Weltliteratur' (H 219).[398] This initiation into the Viennese artistic and intellectual scene has the characteristics of a birth: the reader knows absolutely nothing of the narrator's life before he came to Vienna, just as if those twenty years never happened and he was only born in Vienna. Patronage overlaps with imagery of parenthood: milk is the narrator's first nourishment. He also describes an urge to come into the world, a 'Bedürfnis nach Welt' (H 130).[399] He subsequently surrounds himself with couples (Jeannie and her husband, the Auersbergers, Joana and her partner), which emphasises the idea of parenthood.[400]

After several years of obsessive contact with these people, the narrator successively makes his escape from what he perceives as dangerously cannibalistic society: 'Hätte ich mich der Jeannie nicht entzogen […], ich wäre unweigerlich von ihr verschlungen

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[394] For reasons of clarity, the survey of food in the novel is structured according to this reconstructed chronology, which the narrative itself does not follow.
[395] The publication date of *Holzfällen* is 1984, Bernhard was born in 1931, thus the biographical dates of the narrator and his author coincide, making a reading of the novel as a *roman à clef* particularly tempting.
[396] 'Without a single penny', in 'extremity and virtually on the point of starvation' (CT 99).
[397] 'First with a drop of milk, then with supper and finally by recommendation to an authoress' (CT 100).
[398] With his 'head full of world literature' (CT 100).
[399] 'Hunger for the world' (my translation).
[400] Martin describes the narrator's relationship to the Auersbergers as a parent-child-relationship: Martin, *Nihilism of Bernhard*, p. 180.

und also vernichtet worden' (H 218).[401] In the following quotation, the narrator describes Herr Auersberger's relationship to an nameless young man. Speaking of the latter in the third person, it is yet implied that he is in fact telling his own story: Herr Auersberger 'lud ihn nach Maria Zaal und in sein Bett ein, um ihn aufzufressen […] holte ihn von der Bahnstation ab […] und versuchte, ihn gleich am ersten Tag aufzufressen' (H 268-289).[402] It is the danger of being devoured by the people of the 'menschenfressende Großstadt Wien' (H 61), 'man-eating metropolis of Vienna' (CT 27) which drives the narrator to escape. Figurative cannibalism here also has strong sexual connotations, implying abuse.

On the same day as the 'artistic dinner', Joana's burial takes place at her home village Kilb and is preceded and followed by a meal at the village pub. Before the ceremony, the narrator shares a meal with Joana's childhood friend, the 'Gemischtwarenhändlerin' (H 67), the 'general shopkeeper' (CT 30), as she is always referred to, in the pub. They are joined by Joana's 'Lebensgefährte' (also mainly referred to with this title), Joana's partner, who orders the same meal: a goulash. The meal is unpleasantly accompanied by the tale of Joana's partner who relates to them the details of having had to pull Joana's body from a plastic bag to transfer it into a proper coffin. The shopkeeper and the narrator struggle to finish their meal. Two things physically connect the meal to Joana's dead body: the narrator points out that Joana's partner did not wash his hands before eating, despite the fact that he had just handled the corpse; and the goulash sauce, splashed across Joana's partner's white shirt front while he describes handling her dead body, triggers associations of a bloody scene. Through the occasion of their reunion (the funeral), the location (together with Joana, they used to be regulars at the village pub) and Joana's partner's physical contact with the corpse, the meal is not only linked to Joana's death but also directly to her dead body (H 68-9). These undertones of symbolic cannibalism of the artist are analysed in more detail below.

After the funeral, the narrator returns to the pub in the company of the remaining funeral guests. All others order the dish the narrator had before with Joana's friends while the narrator himself chooses something else, distinguishing himself from the group. Herr Auersberger is prominently present: with an outcry of disgust, '*ein*

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[401] 'If I had not withdrawn from Jeannie […] I would unquestionably have been gobbled up and hence destroyed by her' (CT 100).
[402] 'He would invite him to Maria Zaal and into his bed in order to gobble him up, […] collect him from the station and take him to his prepared room and […] try to gobble him up' (CT 123).

scheußliches Essen' (H 118), he purposefully ruins the meal for the others.[403] As most of the funeral guests will eat at the Auersbergers' later that day, the meal at the pub has a contrastive function: rejecting it, Herr Auersberger distances himself from what is supposedly inadequate food. By discarding it, he elevates not only himself but also the upcoming dinner. The meal at the village pub is technically the 'Leichenschmaus', funeral feast, for Joana. Yet the implied real funeral feast is the dinner at the Auersbergers where quasi-ceremonial consumption links in with both art and social aspects.

While food preparation is delegated to a cook who remains in the background, the Auersbergers carefully prepare the timing, cues, order and roles of their staged dinner. The cook is constantly anticipating the sign to serve the various courses (H 47; 179-80). The guests are made to wait for hours for the first cue, which is when the actor and guest of honour makes his 'entrance' (CT 12): 'bis [er] aufgetreten ist' (H 27) and the first course is served. When each course is finished, the guests anticipate the next (H 178; 179; 202; 211). The term 'künstlerisches Abendessen' is arguably the title which the Auersbergers chose for the play they stage that night. The title, which the narrator marks as their vocabulary rather than his, is misleading: the guests spend most of the evening not eating and the 'Abendessen' is delayed so much that it is really a 'Nachtmahl', a night meal, as which the narrator describes it (H 29). In this *mise en scène*, food is not what it appears to be.

In the first phase, or act, of the dinner, the narrator is sitting in a wing chair in a dark corner, observing, listening and consuming large amounts of expensive champagne (H 39). There is no indication that he is drinking it for its quality, but rather in order to numb himself so that he may survive the evening in the presence of people he despises (H 76). Just before the dinner begins, the narrator falls asleep and is woken by the hostess's call to table. The second act begins when the guests stagger to the dinner table. Halfway through the novel, the first course is finally served (H 176). The narrator rejects all food offered at the Auersbergers': in three out of four cases, he emphasises his refusal to even touch or to finish the dish. In the case of the main course, his negative judgement implies that he did not eat that up either (H 70; 178; 210; 186).[404] Not eating, the attempt to refuse incorporation has great interpretive potential, which is exploited below.

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[403] 'Frightful food!' (CT 53).

[404] A detailed analysis of the connotations of the items of food consumed or refused in *Holzfällen* follows below.

After the dessert is finished, the guests are again waiting for their cue (H 225). They finally receive it from the Burgtheater actor and move to the music room. They observe a certain order of appearance (H 240). When the Burgtheater actor is offended by another guest's remarks, he wants to leave the dinner. This coincides with the offer of coffee. Noticing the coffee being brought in, he changes his mind and sits down again: the coffee represents the social necessity of completing his performance and is used by Frau Auersberger to constrain her guest (H 294). The dinner appears as a performance, the hosts as powerful stage-directors, commanding their guests like puppets.

In *Holzfällen*, one of the worst judgements is that of a waste of one's artistic talent. The narrator accuses Herr Auersberger and Joana of what he regards as moral failure, which, in turn, implicitly originates from alcoholism. Speaking of Herr Auersberger, the narrator says: 'Aber er ist verkommen, hat alles in ihm, selbst das Musikalische, das ihm einmal das Höchste gewesen ist, mit den Jahren seiner krankhaften Trunksucht, verludern lassen' (H 38).[405] Whether alcoholism causes the waste of artistic talent or, as in the case of Joana (H 124), is a result of the social pressures which destroy the artist via alcoholism is not clear: in the example of alcoholism as in anything related to food or drink in *Holzfällen*, consumption and society are inseparably linked in a relation of mutual influence.

In order to fully understand this complex relation, the individual items on the various menus of *Holzfällen* need to be introduced and studied according to their socio-cultural connotations. What transpires is that the 'menu' of *Holzfällen* crosses nations, times and fashions, comprising disparate connotations, which can be read as a comment on the condition of the society which chooses to eat them. At the pub, two meals are consumed: the goulash that the narrator eats with Joana's friends, and the 'sausage with a lot of onions' (CT 53; H 116) which he orders when returning to the pub. Goulash originates from Hungary. Eaten in Vienna, it carries connotations of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It developed from a peasant meal in which all available ingredients are cooked together to form a high-calorie stew and it is still a typical pub meal in Austria, where meat is now its main ingredient. In the context of this novel, which ridicules aristocratic ambitions, it caricatures what remains of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy: nothing but a peasant's mishmash meal. This can be seen as a reason for

[405] 'But he had degenerated, over the years by his pathological alcoholism he had let everything, even his music which used to be the most important thing to him, go to pot' (CT 17).

Herr Auersberger, the 'Kronenkraxler' (H 146) or 'coronet chaser' (CT 67), to reject it. After the funeral, when everybody visits the pub, all others order the goulash the narrator had before, while he is the only one to choose sausage with onions (H 116). This meal consists mainly of sausage and raw onion, served with bread rolls. The raw and the cooked are, according to Lévi-Strauss, a fundamental opposition on which the signifying system of food is based. Containing both raw and cooked ingredients, the dish may be read as an implicit rejection of binary oppositions. This corresponds to the central opposition in *Holzfällen*, that of 'me' and 'them', which is indeed, as this chapter argues, destabilized through the mechanisms of food. The hearty meal is, like goulash, a staple at Austrian pubs. Yet it is important that it is *not* goulash: it is *not* the same dish the others have ordered. (This distinction is relevant despite the fact that it can also be considered natural for the narrator not to order the same dish twice.) As the only meal in the novel which the narrator does not share with others (in the sense that they eat the same dish), it is also the only meal which he finishes. The meal that defines him against the others is the only one he can stomach. The narrator's indifference to the bad breath which this meal 'with a lot of onions' will inevitably give him, illustrates what is not only a rejection of social exchange but a vengeful hatred geared towards people he despises (CT 53; H 116).

After the hearty meals at the pub, consumption continues at the Auersbergers'. The first item offered here stands in direct contrast with the pub meals: Japanese nibbles are handed in delicate china bowls. In the 1980s, Japanese nibbles are an exotic foodstuff, which makes them a suitable item for a sophisticated meal. In Japan, the context in which they are consumed is entirely opposite. Originally, rice crackers were made from old, stale rice cakes – in other words from left-overs. This means that, in Japan, serving them to dinner guests would be considered entirely inappropriate. The contradictory context of their consumption in *Holzfällen*, where they are used as markers of a cosmopolitan community, points to cultural displacement: while they here represent novelty, rice crackers in Japan are actually made from left-overs and not at all 'novel' in this sense. The way they are eaten also does not belong to the context of a highly cultured dinner: the physical distancing from the food, which cutlery affects, is absent. The process of eating the crackers is in the realm of the conceptually natural. This is also expressed by the term 'knabbern', to nibble, which the narrator repeats three times within just one sentence (H 47). The verb is associated with rodents rather than humans.

The discrepancy between the food's origin, its new context and the way it is eaten relates the dinner to postmodern pastiche.[406]

While Herr Auersberger discards the goulash at the pub (H 118), the first course of his dinner is not fundamentally different. Like the goulash, potato soup is a simple meal, often found on pub menus. Its main ingredient is a staple food of the working class.[407] Small sausages are often added. The origin of the meal as nutritious working-class dish stands in sharp contrast to the rest of the items on the menu at the Auersbergers'. Such simple foods may achieve a sense of the relaxed get-together that is often associated with the poor and described by Bourdieu as 'the generous and familiar – that is, both simple and free – relationship that is encouraged and symbolized by eating and drinking together, in a conviviality which sweeps away restraints and reticence'.[408] The narrator's judgement of the perversity of offering potato soup as first course in the early morning hours reflects the absurdity of the attempt at 'conviviality which sweeps away restraints': the dinner is in fact highly constrained, as everybody is forced to stay hungry for hours. The social connotations of potato soup, its nourishing character, contrast the intricate structure of the staged dinner, destabilizing it.

The main course, the Balaton zander, appears in this context as the more honest meal. It is a pricey fish, related in its geographical origin to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The fish is, as the hostess stresses, an 'echter Plattenseefogosch', 'was für ein Fogosch auch sonst' (H 181).[409] The term 'genuine' and the rhetorical question imply a specific knowledge of zander, its origins and quality. In addition to the price and origin of the fish, Frau Auersberger's talk thus creates further distinction. Her words presuppose a certain cultural-culinary knowledge (a *habitus* in Bourdieusian terms). The fish also carries connotations of nostalgia for nobility and the Habsburg empire: with the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1918, the Austrian gentry lost influence and importance – and Austria lost the Hungarian Lake Balaton. Frau Auersberger's urge to stress the origin of the fish emphasises her social origins in the minor landed gentry. The simplicity of the preceding course (potato soup) increases the social impact of status of Frau Auersberger's genuine Balaton zander.

When free and alive, the fish consumed as main dish shares central characteristics with the narrator. It has good vision even in dark and murky waters and excellent

[406] This reading accords with the etymological origin of 'pastiche', which is originally a dish composed of various different ingredients.
[407] Bourdieu assigns the potato to the working class, *Distinction*, p. 174.
[408] Bourdieu, *Distinction,* p. 175.
[409] 'Genuine Balaton zander, what else' (my translation).

hearing ('sehe ich alles, höre ich alles, entgeht mir nichts'; H 31).[410] Etymologically, its name is related to 'tooth' (from the Hungarian 'fogas'), which stresses that this is a dangerous predatory fish, reflecting the narrator's sharp criticism from which no one and 'nothing escapes' (CT 14). Three things follow from the analogy for the narrator's relationship with the surrounding society: first, it stresses ruthless hunting and sharp criticism; second, this very strength is diminished by the simple fact that the party eats the fish, reflecting the narrator's fears of being consumed; third, the narrator takes part in the consumption, rendering himself, his own sharp tongue, helplessly harmless.

An ingredient of the main dish, the caper, relates the meal intertextually to the Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament: the blossoms of the caper bush are known to open only for a very short time. They are therefore used in analogy with the brevity of human existence.[411] The caper is also considered an aphrodisiac. For the narrator's taste, the sauce contains far too many capers (H 186). As a reminder of death, the capers cause the narrator disgust and their aphrodisiac qualities may be an unwelcome reminder of his sexually exploitative relationship with Herr Auersberger when he was a young man.

The final course, the 'Mohr im Hemd', is an indulgent Austrian dessert consisting of a chocolate cake topped with cream and chocolate sauce. It is a heavy dish, the narrator regards it as too heavy, a judgement which reflects the weight of the dish's political connotations. In its colonial context, *Mohr* referred to slaves captured in Africa. It is evidently racist. The modifier 'im Hemd' describes the cream top, increasing the racist connotations as it metaphorically relates to the slaves' supposed original nakedness. None of the guests, apart from the narrator, seem to struggle with digesting these sugar-coated connotations of colonial racism (H 210).

Consisting of Japanese nibbles in extravagant china bowls accompanied by champagne, working class potato soup and anachronistically aristocratic zander, this ambiguous menu destabilizes modes of distinction of social class. It goes beyond Bourdieu's descriptions of the food choices made by working class, petite bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie.[412] What the hosts do not intend to parade in front of their guests is given away by this postmodern hodge-podge assembly of foodstuff, consumed by individuals whose social status, despite their attempt at presenting it otherwise, is

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[410] 'I can see everything, I can hear everything, nothing escapes me' (CT 14).
[411] Ecclesiastes 12.5.
[412] Bourdieu's observations are the result of fieldwork in 1960s France. It would therefore be futile to point out that individual items of food or social contexts of food behaviour diverge from Bourdieu's description, because this is to be expected. It is the social structures described by Bourdieu to which this chapter aims to compare food and food behaviour in Bernhard's novel.

heterogeneous and constructed. The incongruent menu, flashing associations with the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, is also representative of nostalgia for the perceived socio-political wholeness of the 'lost' Habsburg Empire in contrast to modern unavoidable fracturedness of place and social origin. Considering art in this light suggests that it likewise originates in heterogeneity and constructedness. However, this argument cannot stand on the socio-cultural and political connotations of the menu only. What textual proof is there of a parallel between the relation of food to the socio-political on the one hand and food to art on the other?

3.4 Food, art and the social

The observations made so far as to the presence of food in this novel have reverberations for the social relationships presented: they raise issues of nourishment, dependence, power and the individual's position within the community. Since this is an *artistic* dinner, the social consequences of commensality are simultaneously consequences for artistic existence (being an artist within society) and artistic production and the narrator's artistic ideals. But how does the novel establish a relation between the social and the artistic and why is this so distressing to the narrator?

The first part of this question consists of two aspects: first, the relation of the social and the artistic in the novel is based on the social function of the shared meal as described by sociologists and anthropologist of food.[413] According to the social anthropologist Mary Douglas, the message encoded in food behaviour lies precisely in the social relations that are being expressed through it.[414] Barthes points out that the development from nutritional substance to social signifier takes place when the nutritional need is satisfied, which is certainly the case in this Viennese circle.[415] The dinner is a social signifier. Now the second part of the relation between the social and the artistic emerges: the shared meal, a social signifier, is paired with the artistic in the novel's central, often repeated phrase 'künstlerisches Abendessen'. Han considers the phrase the axis around which the novel revolves.[416] The Auersberger's title of their play/ dinner party is repeated by the narrator almost eighty times and italicised throughout. Repetition and italicisation show that the narrator uses the Auersbergers phrase with sarcasm, even cynicism. Han believes that the sarcasm originates in the narrator's

[413] For the history and meaning of commensality see Jones's *Feast*.
[414] Douglas, *Implicit Meanings*, p. 231.
[415] Barthes, 'Psychosociology', p. 34.
[416] Han, *Der komische Aspekt*, p. 140.

perception of the phrase as a paradoxical linguistic combination of 'artistic' and 'dinner'.[417] The problem with the dinner is precisely its characteristic as social signifier. Underlying the phrase is the relation between artistic and the social, which distresses the narrator.

It has become clear that the phrase 'künstlerisches Abendessen' makes allies of art and society. Why is this relation so distressing to the narrator? In order to answer this question, it is important to understand the narrator's concept of art, which is split into bad art and true art. In the novel, most art is on the verge between the artistic and artificiality. The narrator's vocabulary reflects this: rather than 'Kunst' (art) the narrator uses the unusual term 'das Künstlerische' (the artistic). In German, 'künstlerisch' (artistic) is close to 'künstlich' (artificial). This connection is emphasized in a passage in which 'künstlerisch' and 'künstlich' appear as synonymous (H 107). Art, it seems, always runs the risk of being artificial. The art which escapes this is what the narrator perceives as true art which, he stresses, has meant and still means everything to him (H 90 and 91). Yet he does not provide much material for an interpretation of what he considers true art: he describes it as 'das Höchste' (H 95), the highest, the supreme, the peak, and leaves it at that. The superlative elevates it to a position towering above all else. In that it is higher than everything, it is isolated. The artist in Bernhard's oeuvre is commonly presented thinking and producing art in solitude and without interference of the outside world:[418] Tismar describes how the narrators in Bernhard's prose live and write in closed spaces, in cells of loneliness which are at the same time prison and refuge.[419] The *Geistesmensch* observes from a vantage point and remains distant. Yet the narrator only mentions 'das Höchste' (H 95) in passing.[420] The novel's real focus is artistic failure: the pseudo-, anti-, non-artists and artist-dummies surrounding the narrator (H 56; 30; 133; 100). Joana gives up art because of her lack of success, defined by society. She subsequently exploits what the narrator disgustedly describes as her

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[417] Ibid.

[418] Examples of social seclusion in Bernhard's oeuvre include *Amras, Ja, Beton, Der Untergeher*.

[419] Tismar, 'Bernhards Erzählerfiguren', p. 68. According to Süselbeck, the recurring motif of the tower in Bernhard represents the space and sphere of genius: Süselbeck, 'Strategisch Saufen', p. 84. Discussing Bernhard's characters at large, Tismar points out that the figures are characterised by a distance to the world, symbolised in tower-imagery: Tismar, 'Bernhards Erzählerfiguren', p. 70. In Bernhard's *Der Untergeher*, Glenn Gould achieves perfection in complete isolation and Bernhard himself lived and worked in isolation.

[420] The narrator does not specify what true art is. Both *Holzfällen* and *Der Untergeher* focus on the creative process leading to true art or to failure and do not engage with the specific characteristics of good or bad art; even in his publication on Bernhard and the arts, Hens is unable to define good art in Bernhard's sense.

'phänomenales Gesellschaftstalent' (H 135).[421] The characters in *Holzfällen* fail to achieve 'das Höchste' (H 95), because they do not look at life from an uninvolved distance and are instead deeply involved in social interaction from which they gain a sense of identity. The social and the artistic are, to the narrator, mutually exclusive. While Bernhard's protagonists are commonly presented in social seclusion, the narrator here finds himself in an intensely social situation: a dinner party. The social mechanism of the dinner and the 'universal human pursuit of status' are at the heart of the gathering, precluding the production of the narrator's ideal art.[422]

The narrator's aggressively ironic use of the phrase in italics can be read to express his rage at what he perceives as an oxymoronic paring of the functional-social and the artistic: 'und wie abgeschmackt es doch von den Auersbergerischen ist, ihr Abendessen [...] ein *künstlerisches Abendessen* zu nennen' (H 91).[423] The artistic is degraded to a mere prop of social self-construction within the frame of the staged three course meal and what the narrator considers truly artistic is sacrificed to social function. Referring to the other guests, he says: 'Jetzt sind sie alle nurmehr noch ein einziges *Kunstgesindel*, das mit Kunst und also mit künstlerisch eben nicht mehr gemeinsam hat, als das Abendessen der Eheleute Auersberger' (H 92).[424] The latter part of the quotation implies that the dinner guests' only connection to art is in taking part in the dinner – they are artists no longer, all is mere social play-acting.

In addition to the alignment of art and social in the novel's central phrase, the shared meal results in the artist's incorporation in the social community with which he shares food. Fischler's theory of incorporation holds that 'the absorption of a food incorporates the eater into a culinary system and therefore into the group which practises it'.[425] Commensality is seen to lead to an individual's integration into a social body. In the case of *Holzfällen*, this corresponds to integration into the artistic circle, which leads to the individual's recognition as artist. This recognition comes with the loss of integrity which any integration and subordination of an individual into a group necessitates. From this results the tension between the individual and his group identity,

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[421] 'Phenomenal social talent' (CT 61).
[422] Cousineau, *Three-Part Inventions*, p. 102. Pointing to the relationship of artistic values to economic circumstances, Long likewise acknowledges the importance of social status in Bernhard's work: Long, 'Ungleichzeitigkeiten', p. 205.
[423] 'How it was poor taste on the part of the Auersbergers to denote their dinner […] an *artistic dinner'* (CT 41).
[424] 'All they were now, the lot of them, was artistic scum that had no longer anything in common with the arts or matters artistic except just this dinner of the Auersberger couple' (CT 42).
[425] Fischler, 'Identity', pp. 280-1.

a tension which corresponds to the ambiguity experienced when sharing food, described by Fischler. The 'artistic dinner' therefore provokes the narrator's disgust on two levels: it posits a relation of art and the social and it leads to the artist's incorporation into a social group. It inscribes the social into artistic production.

The analysis has shown that it is the relation between the social and the artistic, inherent in the dinner, which enrages the narrator. His description of the artists present at the dinner as 'Kunstleichen' and 'Kunstleichname' (H 99-100), 'living artistic corpses' (CT 45), reflects the common representation in Bernhard of the social as dangerous to art. It also reflects Fischler's view of incorporation as including both pleasure and the danger. In this critique of meaningless pseudo-art, the term 'artistic dinner' represents the core criticism of the narrator: it is the influence of the social which turns the opportunity of art into pseudo-, even anti-art.

The dinner's preoccupation with the social is also present in its obsession with status and distinction and so is the relation of the social and the artistic: according to Bourdieu, both food and art are modes of distinction and they are used in *Holzfällen* for this purpose. The narrator sarcastically ridicules the relation. Yet as an offspring of this community, he nevertheless speaks the same language of Bourdieusian distinction, uses the same strategies of distinction (art and food) and partakes in the social play-acting. This aspect becomes visible through a very careful reading of his food behaviour. In order to bring it to the fore, first the hosts' and other guests' culinary behaviour will in the following be considered in relation to Bourdieusian theory.

The narrator portrays with much disgust the 'Gesellschaftsverrücktheit' (H 49), the 'social mania' (CT 22) of his hosts: 'im Grunde haben sie beide nichts im Kopf, als die Gesellschaft, ohne die sie nicht existieren können, immer die sogenannte bessere Gesellschaft, weil es zur besten nie reichte' (H 49).[426] The comparative in the latter part corresponds to processes of distinction: Bourdieu's theory stresses precisely the social importance of different tastes and choices in order to produce distinct social classes. For the construction and reinforcement of their distinction, the Auersbergers rely heavily on food and the dinner.

Bourdieu describes the aestheticization of practice, the prioritising of form over function, as integral part of the strategies of distinction. He includes specifically the aestheticization of the dinner: 'the opposition between […] substance (or function) and

[426] 'Basically neither of them had anything in their heads except society, without which they could not exist, invariably what was called better society since they could never quite make the best' (CT 22).

form, which is exposed in a particularly striking fashion in bourgeois ways of eating, is the basis of all aestheticization of practice and every aesthetic'.[427] This corresponds to the dinner, in which form often outranks function in importance:

> Die meisten […] knabberten an dem Gebäck, das die Auersberger in kleinen alten Herendschüsselchen in der ganzen Wohnung verteilt hatte, auch neben mir stand ein solches Herendschüsselchen, ich haßte aber schon immer alle Herendschüsselchen und auch alles Knabbern und knabberte nicht, habe nie eine Vorliebe für Bäckerei gehabt, schon gar nicht für Salzbäckerei und schon gar nicht für japanische Salzbäckerei. (H 47-8)[428]

Herend, a Hungarian company with a long tradition of producing porcelain for the European royal houses, is associated with the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. The 'coronet chasers' (CT 67; H 146) apply this strategic spreading of signs of aristocracy in order to reach their social ambition of high society. Yet the connotations of Empire relate the costly bowls back to the goulash consumed at the village pub, constructing a relation between what the Auersbergers try to distance themselves from, destabilizing the social image they try to create through their food choices. The narrator's repeated use of the diminutive 'Herendschüsselchen' ridicules the preciousness of the bowls.[429] The containers are social signifiers and outbid the nutritional value of their content: the nibbles are mere exotic entertainers, representing Bourdieu's description of form over function.

The glaring contrast between the bowls, rich in history and of aristocratic elegance, and their content, a brief contemporary fashion of Japanese nibbles, adds to the implied ridicule and further destabilizes the desired social signification. The social status of the Auersbergers is implicitly brought into question. This expression is strengthened when seeing the scene in the light of the previous analysis of the connotations of the Japanese nibbles: their consumption is out of (cultural) context. This relates to the accusation of artificiality (the distinction between 'künstlerisch' and 'künstlich' discussed above), which the narrator applies to the Auersbergers and their artistic-artificial community.

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[427] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 194.

[428] 'Most of them were smoking or [...] drinking champagne and nibbling on the crackers which the Auersberger woman had placed all around the flat in little old Herend bowls, beside me stood such a little Herend bowl, but I have always hated all little Herend bowls, as well as all nibbling, and so I didn't nibble, I never had any liking for crackers, even less for salted crackers and least of all for those Japanese salted crackers which during the past few years have also become fashionable at all receptions in Vienna' (my translation based on CT).

[429] Bourdieu's theories about food are here applied to receptacles.

The narrator implicitly questions the Auersberger's social pedigree, presenting them as impostors.

Bourdieu describes the bourgeois aestheticization of practice as 'all appearances, all […] fine words and empty gestures that "butter no parsnips" and are […] purely symbolic […]; sham, imitation, window-dressing'.[430] Both style and content of this description are reminiscent of the narrator's rant. He accuses the others of 'empty gestures', sees 'sham, imitation' in the evening's performance: 'Den Anschein haben sie sich immer gegeben, weil sie zu einem Wirklichen niemals befähigt gewesen sind […], alles an ihnen war und ist immer nur Anschein gewesen, selbst das Gesellschaftliche' (H 166; also 164).[431] The 'appearance' refers to a social masquerade that the Auersbergers set up and call an 'artistic dinner'. Again, there is the accusation of artificiality.[432]

Both food and art are cultural products and thus, according to Bourdieu, modes of distinction: on the one hand, 'the relation to food – *the* primary need and pleasure – is only one dimension of the bourgeois relation to the social world'; on the other hand, 'of all objects offered for consumers' choice, there are none more classifying than legitimate works of art'.[433] Bourdieu explicitly mentions food and art as modes of distinction: 'from the most legitimate areas such as painting or music to the most "personal" ones such as […] cookery'.[434] The literary representation of a dinner's function as mode of distinction reminds of the Verdurins' dinners in Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann* (1913). *Holzfällen* and *Du côté de chez Swann* both present the exclusivity of the circle that meets for dinner, this '"little nucleus," the "little group," the "little clan"'.[435] The texts highlight the shared meal and art as modes of distinction, of social in- and exclusion. Chantal Thomas points out that the Verdurins play the same 'pantomime d' "exhibition artistique"' as the Auersbergers and their guests.[436] The distinguishing function of art at the dinner parties has a central position in Proust's text, which uncovers, against the backdrop of the dinners, the hypocrisy of art appreciation: to Swann's interpretation of the much-loved musical theme, Mme Verdurin just replies

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[430] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 197.
[431] 'They always put on appearances because they were never capable of anything real […], everything about them was and always is nothing but appearances, even their social life' (CT 76).
[432] While Bourdieu himself discusses the anesthetization of food, he does not address performance as such, as done in what follows.
[433] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 194; 8.
[434] Ibid, p. 5.
[435] Proust, *Swann's Way*, p. 225.
[436] Thomas, *Bernhard*, p. 71.

that her circles do not welcome such analysis, that taking a piece seriously in this way is not their style.[437] At the Verdurins', art has an exclusively social function. In *Holzfällen* it is not artistic appreciation as in Proust and as described by Bourdieu, but rather the artists' own artistic profile and the greats they affiliate with. In Bourdieusian terms, the Auersbergers and their guests are producers of legitimate art and it is this status which legitimizes their membership of the artistic circle and their invitation to share the meal. An important aspect of the construction of their artistic persona is their affiliation with big names: they compare themselves to Webern, Woolf, Droste-Hülshoff, Stein, Moore. It is thus through their artistic production that guests at the dinner become a distinct group, distinguished from those not invited to share the distinctly 'artistic' dinner.

In Proust and even more so in Bernhard's novel, there is a strong aspect of artistic performativity as distinguishing function. The dinners share characteristics with the play: the diners of Proust's novel often wear costumes and masks and the dinners are commonly occasions for charades.[438] What is in Proust only hinted at is writ large in *Holzfällen* where the Auersbergers' dinner is itself a piece of performative art: the narrator speaks of the Auersbergers' as having 'gesellschaftlich in Szene gesetzt' (H 172), socially staged, the meal, all present are 'vorzügliche Theatermacher' (H 45), excellent play-actors and stage directors and the central figure of the dinner is an actor.[439] The dinner also has characteristics of a musical concert. The Burgtheater actor sets the pace: 'Löffelte der Burgschauspieler seine Suppe schnell, löffelten auch sie ihre Suppe schnell, löffelte er sie langsamer, löffelten auch sie sie langsamer und wie er aufgehört hatte, seine Suppe auszulöffeln, hatten auch sie ihre Suppe ausgelöffelt' (H 177-8).[440] *Holzfällen* presents distinction through the tool of food and art. As play or musical piece, as mode of distinction, the shared meal is no longer primarily nutritional but symbolic: all is representational, food is a prop, the guests are 'Künstlerattrappen' (H 100), artist-dummies, and 'Kulisse' (H 48), 'backdrop' (CT 22;), the long wait is part of the climactic structure of the play, centring on the arrival of the guest of honour. The 'members of the Auersberger circle have [...] made the transition from

[437] Proust, *Swann's Way*, p. 255.
[438] Proust, *Swann's Way,* p. 277.
[439] Cousineau speaks of *Holzfällen* as 'narrative drama' and 'theatrical novel': Cousineau, *Three-Part Inventions*, p. 123. Hens sees the narrator as audience and the Auersbergers and their guests as stage directors and play-actors: Hens, *Trilogie der Künste*, p. 96.
[440] 'When the Burgtheater actor spooned his soup quickly, they too spooned their soup quickly, was he spooning more slowly, they too were spooning more slowly, and when he finished spooning up his soup, they also finished spooning up their soup' (my translation).

"künstlerisch" to "künstlich"', because it is not art which they are interested in but distinction.[441]

The narrator aggressively attacks the social stagedness of the dinner. Everything 'artistic' about the dinner is a social tool and thus a function of society. This brushes against his conception of art, resulting in aggressive attacks. Yet the modes of socially positioning oneself used at the dinner and described so far are also part of his social interaction: the following outlines first that he uses the culinary to distinguish himself from the group; second, that he employs works of art for distinction; and third that he participates in the social play-acting of the dinner-drama.

Champagne in *Holzfällen* has been described in criticism as accessory and identifier of the social climber, something which ostensibly disgusts the narrator.[442] Yet he makes a point of communicating his knowledge of champagne: 'Es ist kein allererster Champagner […], den die Auersbergerischen an diesem Abend kredenzen, aber doch einer der drei, vier teuersten, dem Auftreten eines Burgschauspielers angemessen, wie sie denken mochten' (H 46).[443] He implies cultural capital by proving his command of the social significations of this particular drink. The narrator here gives away his need to distance himself from his past as a poor, starving young artist in the same way as Herr Auersberger tries to distance himself from his social origins (H 144). The narrator's refusal to eat up, which stands in opposition to the other guests' lapping up their food, and his falling asleep precisely when the dinner is about to begin, serve the same function: contrasting the other guests' eagerness to join the table, the narrator's display of disregard for and disinterest in the food offered produces distinction. This behaviour is parallel to that of Herr Auersberger who has 'solange ich ihn kenne, alle Speisen in allen Gasthäusern und Restaurants bekrittelt' (H 118).[444] The narrator, too, criticises and ridicules every single item of food or drink offered to him at the Auersbergers'. He also seeks to distance himself from the group through art appreciation. He describes his enjoyment of 'meinen Gogol oder [..] meinen Pascal oder […] meinen Montaigne' (H 320).[445] The thrice repeated 'mein' emphasises possession, with which he seeks to

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[441] Long, *Novels of Bernhard*, p 132. Cousineau's observation of theatrical metaphors as unveiling society's artistic hypocrisy in *Holzfällen* and *Auslöschung* is in line with this argument: Cousineau, *Three-Part Inventions,* p. 143.

[442] Haider-Prengler and Peter, *Mittagesser*, pp. 82-3; Süselbeck, 'Strategisch Saufen', p. 83.

[443] 'It was not the very best champagne […] that the Auersbergers were serving that evening but nevertheless one of the three or four most expensive ones, appropriate to the entrance of a Burgtheater actor, as they may have thought' (my translation based on CT).

[444] Who 'has invariably criticized all meals in all inns and restaurants, even the most superb ones' (CT 54; H118).

[445] 'My Gogol or my Pascal or my Montaigne' (CT 147).

create a separation between himself and the society surrounding him. The narrator uses the dinner to construct himself as true artist in opposition to the pseudo-artists surrounding him. Yet in doing this, he participates like they do in the social play-acting: 'Ich habe ihnen immer alles vorgespielt […]. Ich habe allen alles immer nur vorgespielt, ich habe mein ganzes Leben nur gespielt und *vor*gespielt' (H 105).[446] The narrator takes part in the social *mise en scène* with the aim of distinction. Despite his revulsion at the use of food and art as social tools, he shows that he, too, is a member of this community: he commands these social tools as well as they do and uses them in the same way in order to distance himself from the community. Yet it is this attempt at distancing and the strategies used which give away his fundamental integration. This parallels Bourdieu's description of how the dominant and dominated are co-implicated in the processes of distinction. It also corresponds to Fischler's identification of food choices as assertion of individuality at the same time as being subsumed into the group.

This double-sidedness of simultaneous distancing and belonging makes for a central difference between the protagonists of *Du côté de chez Swann* and *Holzfällen*: Swann does not react aggressively to his hosts while Bernhard's narrator attacks the stagedness of the dinner as anti- and pseudo-art. Swann does not need to aggressively distance himself, because there is no question of him being embraced into this society. Bernhard's narrator, however, is deeply co-implicated in the social functions of the dinner. In contrast to Bernhard's narrator, Swann commonly rejects the invitations to dinner.[447] It is Bernhard's narrator's dependence on and acceptance of the invitation to the dinner and the food offered there which renders his attitude to his hosts fundamentally different to that of Swann and creates the narrator's conflict and ambiguous relationship with society. The following section engages with the acceptance of the gift of food and the particulars of the social relationship which this occasions.

3.5 The gift of food

Sascha Kiefer reads the narrator's behaviour in *Holzfällen* as ungratefulness.[448] In passages such as the following, the narrator arguably admits to ingratitude: 'Wir saugen aus einem solchen Menschen jahrelang alles heraus und sagen aufeinmal, er, dieser

[446] 'I have always only acted to them […]. I have always only acted everything to everybody, all my life I have only played and *play-acted*' (my translation based on CT 48).
[447] Proust, *Swann's Way*, p. 261.
[448] Kiefer, 'Arbeitessen', p. 181.

Mensch, den wir beinahe zur Gänze ausgesaugt haben, sauge *uns* aus' (H 221).[449] Kiefer concludes that, despite their gift of pricey food and drink, the narrator experiences no sense of obligation to his hosts and is capable nevertheless of attacking them fiercely. Theories of the gift consider human behaviour in more profound ways than in terms of (in)gratitude. They relate apparently free social exchanges to the power relations that they constitute. With specific social implications of its own, food has a particular role in gift exchange.[450]

In order to analyse the role of the gift of food in *Holzfällen*, it is initially important to identify the gift exchange: who gives, who accepts and what is given? It is both food and thought which are Vienna's first nourishing gifts which turn the young narrator into an artist. When the narrator, not yet a writer, first moves to Vienna, he is without means and on the verge of starvation (H 216). A philosopher saves him by providing first milk, then a dinner and subsequently intellectual nourishment (H 217). He is fed with art by Jeannie, the Auersbergers and Joana. He stresses his 'Aufnahmebereitschaft', receptiveness, at Joana's *soirées* (H 132; CT 60). This term is related to his intellectual hunger (H 130; CT 59) in that it connotes a physical intake of substances, it is also reminiscent of eating. It is this process which turns the young man into an artist. Two young writers, present at the dinner, can be read as representing the narrator's early years in Vienna: 'aßen alles auf, was ihnen vorgesetzt worden ist' (H 265).[451] Eager for physical and cultural nourishment, he devoured whatever food and thought were set in front of him. The product of these remembered meals is the narrator himself – his social standing, his cultural-culinary knowledge (champagne as well as 'his' Pascal, Gogol, Montaigne), his entire intellectual mind-set and also his art: without this nourishment, he would not have become a writer. But the nourishment is not restricted to the far past. It is extended to the dinner at the Auersbergers': here, the product is the book that he subsequently writes. Without the 'artistic dinner', the book, which discusses nothing but the dinner party, could not have been produced. In other words: the narrator cannot create his art without the dinner. In past and present, the narrator's physical and artistic existence and production depend on nourishing parental hosts.

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[449] 'For years we suck such a person dry and suddenly we say that this person, whom we had been sucking dry over the years, was sucking us dry' (my translation based on CT 101).

[450] The gift of food in *Holzfällen* consists of two parts: on the one hand, the gift of the invitation to commensality, on the other hand the actual sharing of food. What qualifies these as gifts is primarily their apparently free distribution from one friend to another and the impossibility of rejection.

[451] 'They had polished off everything that had been put in front of them' (CT 122).

Following from the narrator's artistic dependence on nourishment, the offer and acceptance of the gift of food represent a process which establishes and consolidates a relationship of power and obligation. Mauss centrally discusses the power relationships resulting from gift exchange:

> Coming from one person, made or appropriated by him, being from him, [the object received as a gift] gives him power over the other who accepts it […]; the giver obtains power over the person who has participated in the feast and has taken in its substances […], the beneficiary who uses an object enchanted with the whole authority of the giver.[452]

The principle of reciprocity as a tool in the construction and consolidation of control over others is present throughout the Auersbergers' dinner. The authority of the hosts is first established by means of the long wait, which the couple forces on their guests. It is a demonstration of power as it shows that they can easily afford to torture their hungry guests, who expect an 'Abendessen' and get a 'Nachtmahl'.

According to Lévi-Strauss, the power of the giver originates in the obligation created by the gift given and accepted: the receiver is 'crush[ed] if possible under future obligations'.[453] This sense of obligation is present on many levels of the nourishing relationship between narrator and host, beginning with his acceptance of the invitation: 'alle ihre Einladungen sind schließlich immer Erpressungen gewesen' (H 171).[454] Frau Auersberger is described as forcing gifts onto the helpless receivers: she for instance keeps offering wine when nobody wants to drink more (H 245) and is quick to order her cook to serve further helpings (H 190). Her main aim appears to be to fill the guests with her food and drink as much as possible, to fill them even more than they would like. Read in the light of Mauss and Lévi-Strauss, this cramming of the guests creates obligation, according the giver with power over the receiver. This facilitates the guests' being 'vergewaltigt und ausgenützt und mißbraucht': 'sie waren eingeladen worden, um sich mißbrauchen zu lassen' (H 155-6).[455] Despite being self-reflexively aware of this, the narrator is no exception: like the others, he is obliged by virtue of the obligation

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[452] Mauss, 'Gift', pp. 29-30.
[453] Lévi-Strauss, 'Principle', p. 75. Lévi-Strauss also mentions the function of gift exchange for the construction of social status, which relates the Auersbergers' gift of food to the above analysis of the dinner as mode of distinction.
[454] 'All their invitations have ultimately always been acts of blackmail' (CT 78).
[455] 'Invited to let themselves be abused' (CT 71), the guests are 'ravished and exploited and abused' (CT 71).

carefully created by the hosts to stand witness to the Auersbergers' exhibitionism. As the guests eat and drink, their hosts' power increases.

Lévi-Strauss also points out that the giving of a dinner is 'something else than the mere satisfaction of physiological needs. One does not serve the daily menu when one gives a dinner party'.[456] He adds that 'there is much more in the exchange itself than in the things exchanged', in other words: in the context of the dinner party, social functions have primacy over alimentary functions.[457] With the rising importance of the social aspect, style becomes more central, both of food and of its presentation.[458] In their social mania, the social has absolute priority for the Auersbergers (H 49). Lévi-Strauss's idea that the gift usually does not have much consumption value is present in the narrator's language:[459] 'knabbern' suggests that the consumed food's function is entertainment rather than nutrition. The bowls in which these nibbles are served, however, are of central social importance (H 47). The primacy of the social over the alimentary is characteristic of the dinner party. It is also present in the narrator's description of his relationship to the Auersbergers when he was a young man:

> Sie hatten mich das erste Mal nicht nach Maria Zaal eingeladen, um mich, der ich auf sie einen [...] halbverhungerten Eindruck gemacht habe wahrscheinlich, in selbstloser Weise aufzupäppeln, sondern tatsächlich skupellos in ihre Maria Zaaler Falle gelockt, um ihnen ihre Ehehölle erträglich zu machen. (H 156)[460]

Their actual aim is not to nourish but to achieve the obligation that the gift of nourishment – food and intellectual thought – will produce in the starving young man.

The narrator is obviously enmeshed in the power-relation developed by means of the principle of reciprocity. What he calls the 'auersbergerische Falle' (H 159) is precisely the use of the mechanism of the nourishing gift.[461] Having accepted their gifts of food on several occasions, he is 'ausgeliefert' (H 12), at their mercy. As a young man on the verge of starvation he could not refuse the offer of nourishment (H 216). Now,

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[456] Lévi-Strauss, 'Principle', pp. 77-8.
[457] Ibid, p. 79. Elsewhere in Lévi-Strauss's writing, the nutritional function of food is of course of fundamental importance, but he is here referring specifically to the context of the dinner party.
[458] Ibid, p. 77. The priority of form over substance and function, analogous to that of social over alimentary, has been discussed in the section on food and social status.
[459] Ibid, p. 77.
[460] 'The first time they invited me to Maria Zaal had not been to feed me up selflessly, who probably made a gone-to-seed and down-at-heel and half-starved impression on them, but they had actually lured me ruthlessly into their Maria Zaal trap so that I should make their matrimonial hell bearable' (CT 71).
[461] 'Auersberger trap' (CT 71).

his dependence consists in the fact that, if he refused, his work of art, the book *Holzfällen*, would not have come into existence. In the moment of weakness when the narrator accepts the invitation to the shared meal, his illusion of integrity and independence from the Viennese art scene is uncovered as illusory.[462] What Kiefer interprets as a lack of a sense of obligation is in fact the opposite. It is the narrator's aggressive reaction to a power relationship which renders him at the mercy of others. Accepting the gifts shows that his artistic production and his physical and artistic existence depend on outside nourishment. Dependence and obligation work on the narrator, so much so that they make him betray his rage and go against the disgust he expresses for the Auersbergers: at the end of the novel, he has an extended conversation with Frau Auersberger before giving her a farewell kiss on the forehead. The obligation created by the gift demands this behaviour despite his disgust. The narrator's self-betrayal as he fakes affection for Frau Auersberger is one of many returns for gifts of food and artistic nourishment. These relations represent again the tension between the assertion of individuality and the threat of being subsumed into the group, an ambivalence bound up in the incorporation of food.

Hatred of the giver has been said to result from the relationship of power and obligation that a gift creates and consolidates. As Emerson has it, 'all beneficiaries hate all Timons'.[463] He expands: 'we do not quite forgive a giver. The hand that feeds us is in some danger of being bitten. […] We sometimes hate the meat which we eat, because there seems something of degrading dependence in living by it'.[464] These observations are in line with Mauss's and Lévi-Strauss's theories and the view that the true gift, one which does not demand reciprocity, is in fact impossible. The narrator's aggression towards his hosts results from the dependence and obligation they put him under: 'Aber ich verachte sie und hasse sie [...]. Obwohl sie mich damals, vor dreißig Jahren, gerettet haben' (H 170) and even though they are hosting him this evening:[465] 'even though' here has in fact the effect of 'because'. With the gift being not any object but items of food, this ambiguous relationship also corresponds to Fischler's description of the simultaneity of pleasure and fear in incorporation.[466]

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[462] This point is also made by Nikolaus Langendorf in *Schimpfkunst: Die Bestimmung des Schreibens in Thomas Bernhards Prosawerk* (Frankfurt Main: Lang, 2001), p. 26.
[463] Emerson, 'Gifts', p. 537.
[464] Ibid, p. 536.
[465] 'But I despised them and I hated them, even though at the time, thirty years ago, they had made me well' (CT 78).
[466] Fischler, 'Identity'.

Why does his indebtedness not find expression in affection and gratitude? The gift threatens the artist's integrity, compromises his individual identity. Willi Huntemann believes that in the context of Bernhard's uncompromising artistic ethics which demands the artist to be entirely self-reliant and independently producing, a patronal relationship is equivalent of a possessive disregarding of artistic integrity.[467] The threat of incorporation into the group, which implies a loss of integrity, is a further reason for the narrator's hatred of the givers. Originating in Mauss, social theory regards the gift as part of the giver and their concept of their identity.[468] Fischler's theory of incorporation can expand this point: in the case of food, the gift is literally incorporated. As opposed to other types of gifts (whether in the form of presents or of help and care), the receiver assimilates the given food and it becomes a part of them. In other words, in *Holzfällen* the guests are asked to consume an aspect of the hosts, their concepts of themselves.[469] According to Fischler, the eater incorporates actively but is simultaneously being incorporated into a community.[470] Thus the narrator, assimilating aspects of the Auersbergers' concept of themselves, is at the same time incorporated into the group. The very etymology of the term 'integrity' defines the acceptance of gifts of food as compromising integrity as these gifts are a physical and psychological interference and intrusion of the giver into the receiver.[471]

Seeking to resist incorporation into the group, the narrator turns against those on whom he depends. As he cannot refuse their gifts, is under a social obligation and depends on them, his insults remain silent. He eats more slowly than the others or less than them in the attempt to minimise the social consequences of commensality. The denigrating of the quality of their food serves the same purpose: he finds the fashionable Japanese nibbles disgusting (H 47), is revolted by the main dish (H 186) and finds the 'Mohr im Hemd viel zu schwer' (H 210); everything is 'entweder zu warm oder zu kalt, zu süß oder zu sauer' (H 142).[472] By depreciating the gifts, the narrator attempts to undo the mechanisms triggered by the gift accepted and incorporated. However, as Reich-

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[467] Willi Huntemann, *Artistik und Rollenspiel: das System Thomas Bernhard* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1990), p. 52. The Auersberger couple regard their dinner as 'mäzenatisch' (H 171), patronal.
[468] Mauss, *The Gift*, p. 10.
[469] The way in which the Auersbergers produce their social identity via the dinner and its food has been discussed above.
[470] Fischler, 'Identity', pp. 279-82.
[471] The Oxford English Dictionary defines integrity as 'undivided or unbroken state; material wholeness, completeness, entirety': OED, vii, 1, p. 1066.
[472] The 'Shrouded Moor was much too heavy' (CT 97); dishes are 'either too warm or too cold, too sweet or too sour' (CT 65).

Ranicki points out, 'he may be repelled by society […], yet he depends on it' (my translation).[473]

The mechanisms of the gift of food are at work in the relationship between the narrator and the Auersbergers but also between artists and society and its institutions.[474] The cultural correlative of the Auersberger's food and the milk and meal with which the narrator is welcomed into the Viennese art scene is governmental financial aid and social acknowledgement of artists' work. The interested gift of food reflects the interested offer of financing and the emphasis of prizes that produce a domesticated, collaborating artist. When the narrator converses with Frau Auersberger and kisses her goodbye, this represents a sharp contrast to his earlier expressions of his hatred of the woman. This contrast is above interpreted in relation to the obligation created by the mechanisms of reciprocity. In a strikingly parallel scene, the narrator describes the writer Anna Schreker's behaviour when she accepts the 'sogenannten *Großen Österreichischen Staatspreis*' (H 257), 'the so-called *Great Austrian State Prize for Literature*' (CT 118): despite her previous rage against the Austrian Kunstsenat and its president (H 257) 'hat [sie] ihn, endlich ihren Preis in Händen, auch noch auf die Wange geküßt' (H 258).[475] In the first scene, the exchange is between individuals on the level of food given and conversation and kisses received. The narrator betrays his opinions because of the obligation under which his acceptance of the gift of food has put him. In the second scene, a writer betrays her convictions because of a socio-political obligation, resulting from governmental subsidies and social acknowledgement. In both cases, the gift of nutrition (in form of food or financing) is presented as corruptive to the individual and a country's art scene: both the narrator and the writer Schreker lose their integrity as they sell themselves to the Auersbergers and the state respectively.

Speaking of the authors Jeannie Billroth and Anna Schreker selling themselves, the narrator uses the same vocabulary as for his relationship with the Auersbergers (for instance 'unterworfen', subdued, 'verkauft', sold, in reference to himself, H 21, and to the writers, H 254). The narrator describes the artistic sellout to the state, the writers' betrayal of literature through their 'Anbiederung an den Staatsapparat' (H 253),

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[473] Reich-Ranicki, 'Wiener Bolero', p. 77.
[474] Long shares this reading, commenting on the artist-state relationship in *Holzfällen* as a representation of 'modern-day patronage': Long, *Novels of Bernhard*, p. 133.
[475] 'The Schreker woman, her prize at last in her hands, even kissed him on his cheek' (my translation based on CT 118).

literature as 'verabscheuungswürdige Staatsanbiederungskunst' (H 252).[476] The government's financial gifts (prizes and subsidies) are the origin of this behaviour and result in a tension between the positive, nourishing aspects of such prizes and the recognition that comes with them and the power relations they constitute and reinforce. *Holzfällen* presents how the prizes make art dependent and corrupt it: 'das österreichische Künstlertum ist ein gemeiner und verlogener Weg des Staatsopportunismus, der mit Stipendien und Preisen gepflastert und mit Orden und Ehrenzeichen tapeziert ist und der in einem Ehrengrab auf dem Zentralfriedhof endet' (H 259).[477] The narrator, too, sacrifices his ideal of artistic integrity for physical and artistic nourishment, betraying both his hosts and his beliefs.[478]

Theories of gift exchange which show that the act of giving is not disinterested and free are reflected in *Holzfällen*. While the social connection developing from nourishment is often expected to be positive, in *Holzfällen* the gift of food triggers mutual exploitation of receiver and giver, leading to hatred, disgust, betrayal and self-betrayal. The gift reminds of its etymological twin – poison. Obligation and dependence, triggered by gift exchange, render the artist's integrity an impossibility and independent artistic production an illusion, whether on the microcosmic level of social interaction or on the large scale of cultural policies. The offer and acceptance of the nourishing gift, the power relations bound up with it and the theories of incorporation related to it present the impossibility of the narrator's ideal of integrity in artistic production.

3.6 Commensality and collaboration

Food can be highly politically charged and the following section engages with the question in how far commensality is thus presented as political collaboration in this novel. Speaking of himself as a young man, the narrator says: 'und mich an nichts auf diesen Gesellschaften beteiligt habe, nur getrunken und gegessen […] habe' (H 267).[479] Yet, reflecting the ambiguity of incorporation, it is precisely his acceptance of commensality which defines his collaboration with the society he supposedly does not

[476] 'Currying of favour with the state apparatus' (CT 116); 'currying-favour-with-the-state' (CT 116) or 'ingratiating themselves with the state' (W 143).
[477] 'To be an artist in Austria is a vile and false road of state opportunism, a road paved with grants and prizes and wallpapered with medals and decorations that ends in an honorary grave on the Central Cemetery' (my translation based on CT 119).
[478] Note that both scenes include an analogy to the kiss of Judas. The narrator describes himself as traitor (H 76).
[479] 'And had participated in nothing at such social gatherings, just drunk and eaten' (CT 122).

belong to. The novel projects this theme of collaboration by commensality onto (cultural) politics. Honegger accordingly believes that 'the real scandalous impact of *Holzfällen* was [...] the suggestion that Austrian artists, by coveting state sponsorship, acquiesced in the continuation of cultural politics that had its ideological roots in the 1930s'.[480] The gift of state sponsorship is thus related to political collaboration, always among the worst implicit accusations in Bernhard's oeuvre. He was 'arguably the first to expose the shamelessness and hypocrisy of Austria's post-war politics', in which the Austrians refused to draw consequences from their collaboration with the National Socialists during the Holocaust and World War II.[481] Suzanne Hommel sees a link between Austria's history and Bernhard's style of writing: according to her, Bernhard's tone reflects the Nazis' shouting, such that his ranting becomes a form of a counter-shouting.[482]

The shift from commensality to collaboration implies an analogy between food and thought or ideology in *Holzfällen*. The ideological uses of food are addressed in *Mythologies*, in which Barthes shows that, while appearing natural, culinary signs are in fact ideologically loaded.[483] The culinary sign gains its particular power from the fact that it does not appear to be arbitrary and constructed but is taken by its users for natural. In this way, ideological connotations are both contained and hidden in food behaviour and items of food. In Bernhard's novel, thought and ideology are commonly absorbed through food or as if they were food. Haider-Prengler's examples illustrate the inseparability of thought from consumption and digestion in Bernhard. In the novel *Alte Meister*, academics enjoy the German philosophical stew and, as its central ingredient, have been hungrily spooning up Heidegger.[484] In Bernhard, sharing a meal always implies the unquestioned consumption of ideology. Bernhard's *dramolett* (mini-drama) *Der deutsche Mittagstisch* presents the relation more overtly than any of Bernhard's work:[485] its five small pages describe the eating of 'Nazi soup' (my translation), the

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[480] Honegger: Gitta Honegger, *Thomas Bernhard: The Making of an Austrian* (New Haven/ London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 245.
[481] Ibid, p. 53.
[482] Suzanne Hommel, 'Hurler avec Bernhard', in Pierre Chabert et Barbara Hutt (eds.), *Thomas Bernhard* (Paris: Minerve, 2002), pp. 227-8 (p. 227).
[483] See especially Barthes, 'Steak and Chips', 'Wine and Milk', 'Operation Margarine' and 'Ornamental Cookery'.
[484] Haider-Prengler, *Mittagesser*, 55-6.
[485] Bernhard, 'Der deutsche Mittagstisch', in Bernhard, *Der deutsche Mittagstisch: Dramolette* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1988), pp. 107-14. For more on Nazism in this and other short plays see Stefan Krammer, '"In jeder Suppe findet ihr die Nazis": Überlegungen zu Thomas Bernhards Kurzdramen', in Huber and others (eds), *Jahrbuch 2007/ 2008*, pp. 87-101.

hungry devouring of which represents a continued presence of Nazi ideology in post-war Germany.

> Frau Bernhard Mein lieber Mann
> hör mich an
> wir bekommen in ganz Deutschland
> keine Nudeln mehr
> nur noch Nazis
> ganz gleich wo wir Nudeln einkaufen
> es sind immer nur Nazis
> ganz gleich was für eine Nudelpackung
> wir aufmachen
> es quellen immer nur noch
> Nazis heraus
> und wenn wir das Ganze aufkochen
> quillt es fürchterlich über.[486]

All five generations of the family sitting around the table lap up the Nazi soup.[487] When Frau Bernhard hesitantly voices this unpleasant truth, her family strangle her. Bernhard himself is offspring of the generation of Austrians which collaborated with the Nazis and, in analogy to the Nazi heirs in *Der deutsche Mittagstisch*, was also fed this ideology (note that the family's surname is Bernhard). The same goes for the narrator of *Holzfällen* (who shares dates and other aspects of Bernhard's biography and its historical context). Sharing the meal while observing and criticising, he is at the same time eater and collaborator, a collaborative whistle-blower and Nazi offspring like Frau Bernhard. The relation of consumption and ideology is fundamental also in *Holzfällen*: literature is criticised using language reminiscent of that of restaurant critics when Wittgenstein is bought ready for consumption by the Auersberger couple (H 19). The Burgtheater actor exclaims on the topic of newspapers: 'Aber wir lesen sie alle Tage

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[486] Bernhard, 'Mittagstisch', p. 113.
Mrs Bernhard Dear husband
hear what I say
nowhere in Germany
can we get noodles
only Nazis
no matter where we buy noodles
it's always Nazis
no matter what noodle package
we open
spilling out of it are always only
Nazis
and when we bring the whole thing to the boil
it spills over terribly. (my translation)

[487] Bernhard, 'Mittagstisch', p. 113.

und fressen alles, das in ihnen steht, gierig in uns hinein […]. Von Kindheit an habe ich den österreichischen Zeitungsdreck in mich hineingefressen' (H 284-5).[488] With the dessert 'Mohr im Hemd' the guests consume connotations of colonial racism and the Burgtheater actor speaks of Austrian opportunism in terms of digestion: 'Der österreichische Magen ist ein guter Magen […], wenn ich bedenke, was für eine geschmacklose und gleichzeitig fürchterliche Geschichte sie im Laufe der Zeit in sich hineingefressen haben' (H 285).[489]

With the close relation of consumption and ideology, the acceptance of a shared meal always entails an aspect of collaborationism. Ibsen's *Vildanden* informs the reading of social mechanisms and collaborationism in Bernhard's novel. The play, first published exactly one hundred years before *Holzfällen*, is mentioned throughout the novel. The actor comes directly from the celebrated Burgtheater production of this play of which the narrator remembers:

> Ich erinnerte mich […] daß ein *alter Ekdal* in der *Wildente* auftritt, der einen Sohn, also den *jungen Ekdal*, hat, der Photograph ist. Und daß der erste Akt des Dramas im Hause eines Konsuls Werle spielt. Ekdals Atelier, der Dachboden, sagte ich mir und erinnerte mich nach und nach an das Stück. (H 67)[490]

The narrator here describes apparently minor aspects of the play. His description shows, however, how closely the play is connected to Bernhard's novel: the last sentence after the colon describes his recollection of the play as well as his gradual remembrance of the 1950s while sitting at the Auersbergers' in the 1980s. Furthermore, the narrator remembers the first act of the play, which centres, like his tale, on a dinner party.

In Ibsen's play, Gregers Werle returns after years of self-imposed exile at the request of his father Haakon Werle. He meets his old friend Hjalmar Ekdal and learns of the net of lies that his father has spun and with which he has been controlling Hjalmar's fate. Gregers decides to take it upon himself to confront Hjalmar about his life lies: that his wife Gina married him because Werle had to dispose of her after having made her pregnant; that his daughter Hedvig is in fact Werle's child; that, while Werle has

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[488] 'And yet we read them every day and greedily gobble up everything that's printed in them […]. From childhood on I have devoured that Austrian newspaper filth' (CT 131).
[489] 'The Austrian stomach is a good stomach […] when I consider what a distasteful and simultaneously terrible history they have devoured over the course of time' (CT 131).
[490] 'I remembered […] that an *old Ekdal*, appeared in *Vildanden*, who had a son, *young Ekdal*, who was a photographer. And that the first act of the play was set in the house of a Consul Werle. Ekdal's studio, the attic, I said to myself and was gradually recalling the play' (CT 30).

presented himself as Hjalmar's patron, he has indeed destroyed the Ekdal family – he was responsible for an illegal timber felling (*Holzfällen*) that Werle and Hjalmar's father had planned together. While Old Ekdal lost everything, condemning his family to poverty, Werle went on to become ever richer and more powerful. Gregers's plan ends in disaster: having learned the truth about Hedvig, Hjalmar turns away from her and her mother. Gregers encourages Hedvig to sacrifice the highly symbolic titular wild duck, which lives in the family's attic. Hedvig, however, decides to kill herself instead. Hjalmar now inevitably descends into alcoholism as his father has before him. In the first act, the curtain rises to the scene of a dinner party at the home of Haakon Werle, the wealthy industrialist and efficient businessman. Present are the two protagonists of the play, Gregers and his impoverished friend Hjalmar, who has been invited upon Gregers's request. Present are also Mrs Sörby, the housekeeper and mistress of Haakon Werle, and various guests.

Hens provides a detailed if not exhaustive list of parallels in structure and content with *Vildanden* from the spatial arrangements at the dinner party to the numbers mentioned in both texts through to the title of Bernhard's novel.[491] There are especially striking parallels in things related to commensality between novel and play.[492] Like the Auersbergers in Bernhard's novel, Haakon Werle and his housekeeper regularly invite friends and acquaintances to such grand occasions.[493] The guests stuff themselves with expensive food before retiring to the music room for coffee and liqueurs; in *Holzfällen*, the music room welcomes the guests after the meal in the dining room with coffee and wine. Such parallels have an accumulative function, which as a whole connect play and novel, bringing out certain themes and narrative strategies in *Holzfällen* stronger. So while the food consumed in *Vildanden* is not specified, the social implications of the dinner party reverberate in *Holzfällen*.

Distinction, its aspects of in- and exclusion, is in the first act of *Vildanden* clearly played out through food behaviour. Bourdieusian distinction and social in- and exclusion work through the drink that is being consumed: Hjalmar's inferior social status (he is poor and does not fit in the party of 'gentlemen' – Ibsen specifies in his list of characters 'a fat gentleman', 'a balding gentleman', 'a short-sighted gentleman', 'six

[491] Hens, *Trilogie der Künste*, p. 97-9.
[492] Kiefer notes that Werle's banquet corresponds to the dinner party at the Auersberger's: Kiefer, 'Arbeitsessen', p. 177.
[493] Ibsen, '*Vildanden*', p. 117.

other gentlemen', emphasising their social statue) is exposed by the fact that he knows little about wines:[494]

Werle	I can certainly vouch for the Tokay you had today, at any rate; it was one of the very finest vintages. Of course you must have seen that yourself.
The Fat Guest	Yes, it had a wonderfully delicate bouquet.
Hjalmar	*uncertainly* Does the vintage make any difference?
The Fat Guest	*laughing* By Heavens, that's good!
Werle	*smiling* There's obviously not much point in putting good wine in front of *you*.[495]

As shown above, distinction in *Holzfällen* is also played out through an expensive drink.[496] The implications, however, are reversed by Bernhard's narrator: rather than presenting himself as outsider by showing a comparative lack of knowledge, his compatible knowledge of champagne betrays him as one of them. The reversal of the implications of an otherwise parallel scene brings out more strongly that the narrator is very much part of the group and participates in the social play-acting.

In *Holzfällen* it is, by contrast with Ibsen's play, specifically artists who offer and consume the meal. Thus, the accusation of collaborationism is directed specifically at a collaborationist and opportunistic art scene, which answers to society's, even governmental needs: 'Künstlertum heißt in Österreich für die meisten, sich dem Staat, gleich welchem, gefügig zu machen und sich von ihm aushalten zu lassen lebenslänglich' (H 259).[497] 'Gleich welchem', no matter which state, refers to Austria's opportunist past. From the symbiosis of Austria's art scene with the governmental via its nourishment ('sich aushalten lassen', let themselves be supported) develops the 'Staatsopportunismus' (H 259), state opportunism, of the artists, including the narrator. Remember his statement about mutual exploitation: 'wir saugen aus einem solchen Menschen jahrelang alles heraus und sagen aufeinmal, er, dieser Mensch, den wir beinahe zur Gänze ausgesaugt haben, sauge *uns* aus' (H 221).[498] Unlike Frau Bernhard, the narrator is not killed: by contrast, he is the best example of Austrian artistic

[494] Ibid, p. 108.
[495] Ibid, p. 118.
[496] See the social connotations of the narrator's knowledge of champagne, as discussed above.
[497] 'To be an artist in Austria means for most of them to comply with the state, no matter which, and to let themselves be supported by it, for the rest of their lives' (CT 119).
[498] 'For years we suck such a person dry and suddenly we say that this person, whom we had been sucking dry over the years, was sucking us dry' (my translation based on CT 101).

opportunism as he suckles his patrons, simultaneously collaborating and emphasising that he ostensibly does not belong to the group.

By sharing the meal, Hjalmar and Bernhard's narrator affirm the powerful status of those portrayed as oppressors, and collaborate in their socio-political agenda. Accepting their gift of food, they accept a social relationship defined by the gift, making them the receivers and the other the generous giver. Furthermore, without an audience, the Auersbergers and Werles cannot distinguish themselves because there is no one to witness their show of distinction and affirm their social identity. An important difference between Hjalmar and Bernhard's narrator is that the latter does not consume what is set in front of him in an entirely unreflected way. By eating, but not eating up, the narrator is in the ambiguous position of being simultaneously critic and integrated part of the society he finds himself in. Addressing the close connection between food and politics, it has been shown that the consumption of food implies in *Holzfällen* the consumption of ideology. In this novel, commensality is a form of social as well as political complicity and collaboration; and one which the narrator both engages in and rejects.

3.7 Consumption and production

The narrator's co-implication in the social and political structures which he criticises includes his participation in the mechanisms of artistic consumption and production implied in the novel's use of food. This section argues that artistic production in the novel relates to economic mechanisms and mechanical re-production, to a degree reminiscent of what Adorno and Horkheimer describe as Culture Industry. Presenting the bourgeois art scene, the novel shows that no artistic production is exempted from these processes. While it evokes the Culture Industry, the novel thus goes beyond this theory, as Adorno and Horkheimer exclude what they call advanced or 'avant garde art' from the mechanisms of the Culture Industry.[499] It will be argued that *Holzfällen* presents artistic production as based on cannibalistic artistic consumption. This corresponds to the postmodern understanding of art as always intertextually derivative. Thus, all art (not only mass-produced art as Adorno and Horkheimer argue) is re-production – this includes the narrator's art. He is, in fact, co-implicated in the production of derivative art, of which his book stands as example.

[499] Adorno and Horkheimer distinguish between 'Kulturindustrie', Culture Industry, and its opposite, 'avancierte Kunst', advanced or 'avant garde art': Adorno and Horkheimer, 'Kulturindustrie', p. 136; 'Culture Industry', p. 101.

Food in *Holzfällen* describes a complex 'relationship between artistic production and economic circumstances'.[500] This corresponds to the economy of the gift where economic considerations are shown to be impacting artistic production and consumption. Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer's theory of the Culture Industry also speaks of the close relation between artistic production and the economy. The essay 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception' discusses the impact of the market economy on the production of art in which the artist is seen as caught in the exchange economy.[501] A focus is popular culture, the mass production of art and its consequences for society: Adorno and Horkheimer show the 'reduction of art to entertainment' (my translation);[502] art and culture are commodities, their function is trivialised to entertainment. The authors stress that the production of art and culture within this economic system leads to a dependence of cultural production (for example on companies, the government, etc.), an aspect noted in the discussion of the gift of food in *Holzfällen.* Adorno and Horkheimer describe the repetitive, derivative rather than innovative character of popular culture: entertainment, to which they see culture and art reduced, follows already existing structures. New ideas demand additional energy to digest them, which makes them uneconomic, thus they are repressed.[503] To achieve maximum efficiency, the capitalist system demands sameness, repetition and maximal re-production of cultural products.

Holzfällen, in contrast to Adorno and Horkheimer's theory of the Culture Industry, does not describe popular culture: instead, art and food are presented in a bourgeois context and staged as exclusive.[504] Reference is made, for instance, to twelve-tone-music, which has little mass-appeal, and while the menu is heterogeneous, many items are either expensive, exotic or both. The novel makes a point of presenting what must be regarded as the opposite of popular culture: *Holzfällen* attacks the producers of what Adorno and Horkheimer might call advanced or 'avant garde art', the product of what is

[500] Long, 'Ungleichzeitigkeiten', p. 204.
[501] Their questions had previously been addressed by Karl Marx and Walter Benjamin. Benjamin's *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (Frankfurt a.M: Suhrkamp, 2003) focuses in particular on the cultural impact of mass production.
[502] Dominik Sommer, 'Marktvermittelte Massenkunst: Der Anfang von Horkheimers und Adornos Kulturindustriethese in Tocquevilles Kunstdiagnose demokratischer Gesellschaften', *Berliner Journal für Soziologie*, 10 (2005), 25-36 (p. 26).
[503] Adorno and Horkheimer, 'Kulturindustrie', pp. 142 and 145.
[504] The bourgeois context is established structurally through the prevalence of bourgeois forms such as the novel and the theatre (the Burgtheater in particular is represented as theatre with pretensions).

supposedly high culture.[505] A reading of *Holzfällen* through the theory of the Culture Industry extends Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis to implicate also the elite of cultural production and consumption, presenting their behaviour as based on the same mechanisms. Such a reading shows that in the world portrayed by *Holzfällen*, no art is exempt from the mechanisms of the Culture Industry: it will be shown in the following that even advanced or 'avant garde art' is presented as fodder for a machine that re-produces what it consumes.[506]

In Bernhard's novel, art and artists are indeed presented as the artistic society's fodder and described in terms of consumption:[507] Vienna is 'die größte Kunstmühle der Welt, in welcher jahraus, jahrein die Künste und die Künstler zermahlen und zermalmt werden, ganz gleich, was für Künste, ganz gleich, was für Künstler, die Wiener Kunstmühle zermalmt sie in jedem Falle immer total' (H 280).[508] Works of art are discussed in the language of food preparation: 'Auf dem Burgtheater ist noch nie ein guter Nestroy gelungen' (H 201).[509] The combination of 'gelingen' with a proper name is reminiscent of restaurant or kitchen language, with the work of Nestroy as the dish. The Burgtheater actor reduces his art to a light snack, dishing it up for the entertainment of the dinner guests: 'Theateranekdoten [werden] aufgetischt' (H 216), theatre anecdotes are dished up. Adorno and Horkheimer's premise that the mechanisms of the Culture Industry lead to a trivialisation of art consumed as entertainment is reflected in both food and art in *Holzfällen*: the fashionable nibbles and champagne (H 47) are as much part of the entertainment programme as Herr Auersbergers' musical performance (H 37).

Not only art, also the artist is being ground up in the process of churning out art. Imagery of industrialised mass slaughter of talent abounds in descriptions of the city: the Viennese art scene is 'unersättlich' (H 134), insatiable; the audience's appetite has produced a 'menschenfressende Großstadt' (H 61). This 'man-eating metropolis' (CT 27) is a carnivorous, life-destroying machine. For its endless appetite, hundreds and thousands of young artists are bred in the country, imported to the city and killed in its

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[505] Adorno and Horkheimer distinguish between 'Kulturindustrie', Culture Industry, and its opposite, 'avancierte Kunst', advanced or 'avant garde art': Adorno and Horkheimer, 'Kulturindustrie', p. 136; 'Culture Industry', p. 101.

[506] Adorno and Horkheimer, 'Kulturindustrie', p. 136. 'Culture Industry', p. 101.

[507] Haider-Prengler shows that this is also the case in *Die Berühmten*: Haider-Prengler and Peter, *Mittagesser*, pp. 52-3. Bernhard, *Die Berühmten* (Frankfurt a.M: Suhrkamp, 1976).

[508] 'The biggest art crusher in the world, where year in year out the arts and the artists are ground down and crushed, no matter what arts, no matter what artists, the Vienna art crusher inescapably crushes them utterly' (CT 129).

[509] 'The Burgtheater has never managed to do a good Nestroy' (CT 91).

'Genievernichtungsmaschine' and 'Talentzertrümmerungsanstalt' (H 97), the 'machine for destroying geniuses', the 'talent-crushing institution' (CT 44): 'und sind in Wahrheit von Wien vernichtet und getötet worden, alle diese Genies und Talente, die alljährlich auf dem österreichischen Land zu Hunderten, wenn nicht zu Tausenden geboren werden' (H 98).[510] The mechanism of the devouring art mill or factory (H 280) leaves behind what the narrator sees with disgust at the dinner party: the remains of what used to be artistic talents. The sight of the unappetising leftovers of a carnivorous meal ('künstlerische Leichen' and 'Kunstleichname' (H 99); artistic corpses) 'war weniger traurig als unappetitlich' (H 100).[511]

At the dinner party, imagery of mechanised carnivorous consumption is exchanged for that of hunt and cannibalism.[512] This imagery, however, continues to imply a larger *system* of artistic production. When he first meets the Auersbergers, they lure him into a trap, the 'auersbergerische Falle' (H 159). Their bait is food and books: 'sie redeten etwas von [...] von köstlichen Mahlzeiten in ihrem Garten [...]. Von ihren gutausgestatteten Küchen und ihren vollen Kellern und von ihren zehntausendbändigen Bibliotheken' (H 158).[513] The hungry aspiring young artist walks into the trap of physical and intellectual nourishment. Thirty years later, he again gets caught in their 'Gesellschaftsfalle' (H 140-1), their social trap (in German, the term evokes the systematic nature of the trapping): 'Sie haben dich *von hinten angesprochen*, dachte ich, wahrscheinlich hatten sie dich schon eine Weile *von hinten beobachtet* und sich *hinter dir hergegangen in Beobachtung* und haben dich *im entscheidenden Moment blitzartig* angesprochen' (H 24).[514] Especially the italicised phrases 'von hinten', 'in Beobachtung' and 'blitzartig', give the impression of an attack by carnivorous predators, 'auf der Jagd nach Bekannt- oder Berühmtheiten' (H 45).[515] Herr Auersberger is indeed described as 'Schrifstellerverschlinger' (H 269), 'devourer of writers' (CT 123) and Jeannie Billroth would have swallowed the narrator whole (H 118) had he not escaped, fearing for his life (H 220). His friend Joana was not so lucky:

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[510] They 'had in reality been ruined and killed in Vienna, all these geniuses and talents who are born, year after year, in their hundreds, if not in their thousands, in the Austrian countryside' (CT 44).
[511] 'The sight had been not so much sad as it had been revolting' (CT 45).
[512] Lacking imagery of machinery and mass production, imagery of hunt and cannibalism evoke Adorno and Horkheimer's theory to a lesser degree. Since they represent individual aspects of the machinery described above, however, it is fruitful to consider them in this light.
[513] 'They said something […] of choice meals in their garden […]. Of their well-equipped kitchens and their well-stocked cellars and of their ten-thousand-volume libraries' (CT 72).
[514] 'They addressed you *from behind* […], probably they had been observing you *from behind* for quite a while and had *walked behind you, observing you,* and had *at the crucial moment suddenly* addressed you' (CT 11).
[515] 'Chasing the well-known and the famous' (CT 20).

'sie ist nach Wien und hat sich von Wien verschlingen lassen' (H 271).[516] As if it was an invitation to the funeral feast, the narrator is invited to the dinner on the day of Joana's death. He associates the dinner party with Joana's funeral feast:

> Es ist zwar als *künstlerisches Abendessen* für den Schauspieler gedacht [...], aber im Grunde ist es doch nichts anderes, als eine Art Requiem für die Joana; der Geruch des nachmittägigen Begräbnisses in Kilb war jetzt aufeinmal in der Gentzgasse, der Kilber Friedhofsgeruch hier in der Wohnung der Eheleute Auersberger. Im Grunde ist dieses sogenannte *künstlerische Abendessen* nichts anderes, als ein Leichenschmaus. (H 65-6)[517]

At the Auersbergers', the guests are still wearing their funeral clothes (H 33). The 'Nachtmahl' (H 141) is in fact a *Totenmahl*, a funeral feast. The dinner boasts imagery of ceremonious cannibalism (the fear of being eaten up, the descriptions of the man-eating metropolis; H 61).[518] The term 'Leichenschmaus' (H 66), literally corpse feast, implies mortuary cannibalism. Corpse, consumption and commensality are at the Auersbergers' connected to a degree that the dining room, explicitly this room, is compared to an 'Aufbahrungshalle' where the body is displayed (H 225). The connection between corpse and food is first established at the village pub, where Joana's partner brings the story of handling the body to the table, as if he was a butcher coming straight from work to the dinner table, blood still dripping from his hands and shirt (H 70). In contrast to his self-presentation of disengaged observer, the narrator is indeed the only one who partakes twice in the funeral feast, both eating the goulash at the pub and participating in the Auersberger's dinner.

The artists' symbolic cannibalistic consumption of another artist sheds light on the problem of artistic production. Öhlschläger argues that the symbolic consumption of the artist's body facilitates the eaters' artistic production: Joana's dead body is transformed into live matter – artists who produce more art.[519] Through consumption, material enters the artist's metabolism and subsequently becomes the material of another work, which

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[516] 'She had gone to Vienna and had allowed Vienna to devour her' (CT 124).
[517] 'This may have been intended as an *artistic dinner* for the actor […], but in fact it was nothing but a kind of requiem for Joana; the smell of the afternoon funeral in Kilb was suddenly in the Gentzgasse, the Kilb cemetery smell was here in the flat of the Auersberger couple. Essentially this so-called *artistic dinner* is nothing but a funeral feast' (CT 30).
[518] As 'the practice of eating the flesh of one's fellow-creatures' (OED, ii, p. 835), cannibalism is here metaphorically manifest as humans consume human flesh and also in the artists' eating their 'fellow-creatures' – other artists.
[519] Öhlschläger, 'Autoerotische Phantasmen'.

is therefore derivative. Artistic production depends on consumption. This corresponds to Adorno and Horkheimer's description of the Culture Industry where art is always *re*-produced. The narrator presents the others' art as such: Herr Auersberger has chosen Webern, Jeannie Virginia Woolf and Anna Schreker Marianne Moore and Gertrude Stein as material to be consumed and re-produced (H 252). Their patterns of consumption decide on the parameters of their artistic production. This renders their art cannibalistic re-production. Long reads *Holzfällen* as a critique of artistic repetitiveness.[520] Re-productive derivativeness is seen by the narrator as artistic stagnation, which is the end of art and the artist (as far as art is perceived, as the narrator does, as inseparable from inspiration and creation). Therefore he sees the individuals at the dinner as artistic corpses (H 100).[521] To the narrator, their products are pseudo-art (H 56), even anti-art (H 30), fabricated by a consumer-producer who is unable to innovate independently. Yet his own artistic production is not exempt from these mechanisms. Consuming with and alongside the group facilitates the narrator's prose production. The product of this digestive transformation is the book he writes following the consumption at the dinner party.[522] Thus the book stands witness to the narrator's participation in the symbolic feeding off another artist.[523]

In the image of the art mill is manifest the circularity of consumption and production as the drive mechanism of the wheels and the movement of the millstone convey mechanical circularity that destroys in order to nourish. The image implies consumption and the destruction it brings with it as necessary aspects of production: the wheat is ground and from it a product is derived; a product, which contains the very material originally fed into the mill. The mill destroys grain in order to produce a product designed for consumption.[524] The circularity of consumption and production renders pure innovation and novelty impossible. It has been argued that the narrator is co-implicated in these processes. Thus, even his own art fails to achieve his artistic ideals.

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[520] Long, *Novels of Bernhard*, p. 132.
[521] Long discusses the artistic stagnation of the Auersberger husband: Long, *Novels of Bernhard*, p. 132. Öhlschläger speaks of the narrator's thinking and writing dynamics, set into motion by the events surrounding the 'artistic dinner': Öhlschläger, 'Autoerotische Phantasmen'.
[522] Ibid, p. 124.
[523] Kiefer also believes that the narrator preys upon Joana and the dinner for his artistic purposes: Kiefer, 'Arbeitsessen', p. 184.
[524] Bread has far-reaching socio-cultural connotations. These are not addressed here, because bread is not mentioned in the novel. Including its socio-cultural connotations in the interpretation would mean to stretch the image of the art mill beyond credibility.

As the cultural elite participate in the circular mechanisms of consumption and production, Adorno and Horkheimer's consoling idea of the possibility of advanced or 'avant garde art' is suspended.[525] Bernhard's novel takes Adorno and Horkheimer's theory into postmodernism as it presents, through the circularity of consumption and production, all art (whether mass-produced or not) as derivative, intertextual in postmodern terms.[526] Attacking the cultural and artistic elite is not only an aggressive attack on people who Bernhard may have known. Presenting it in the light of the natural processes of consumption and production, the novel denies the existence of novelty in art, of art independent of its surroundings (autonomous and auratic art, as Adorno and Benjamin call it respectively).[527] The concept of re-production as the only possible mode of artistic production renders the narrator's ideal of 'das Höchste' impossible and his distinction from the other artists as invalid, as none of them may achieve anything but derivative art. The processes of re-production implicate the narrator's work: it, too, is based on consumption. The narrator's symbolic consumption of the artist friend Joana, his acceptance and consumption of the gift of food and the subsequent production of his book represent the cycle of consumption and artistic production. The protagonist's narrative is the product of his consumption and thus proof of the impossibility of artistic integrity and independent art.

3.8 Conclusion

The narrator's ideal of artistic production is based on independence and integrity, because only in this way can his ideal work of art, independent and full of integrity, come into existence. The social and physical mechanisms of food and nourishment are fundamentally opposed to this ideal in that their theme is not separateness and integrity but assimilation, dependence and incorporation into a society which prioritises power, social symbols and status before art. His artistic existence therefore manifests itself in countercultural resistance: the narrator bites the hand that feeds him and play-acts a rejection of the food it offers by simultaneous pushing the plate away and eating from it.

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[525] Adorno and Horkheimer, 'Kulturindustrie', p. 136; 'Culture Industry', p. 101.

[526] According to Kristeva's poststructuralist definition, since taken up by postmodern thought, 'any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another': Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue, and Novel', in Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 64-91 (p. 66).

[527] Adorno, *Ästhetische Schriften* (Frankfurt a.M: Suhrkamp, 1973); Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk*.

A reading of *Holzfällen* through food brings to light interpretations of the conditions of artistic production. In the light of Bourdieusian distinction, the narrator's food behaviour defines him against his will as part of the group that defines itself by strategies of social in- and exclusion. The Proustian intertext highlights distinction through food and art as well as the performativity of the dinner. Apart from the parallels between the texts' dinner scenes, reading *Holzfällen* alongside *Swann's Way* also emphasises what is a main difference between the protagonists, namely Bernhard's narrator's extreme rage. Bourdieu's theory does not offer a perspective on the narrator's deeply ambiguous relationship to the society with which he shares the use of food and art as signifying systems of social-artistic status. The analysis of food as gift and the implications of the narrator-artist's acceptance of it brings to light the aspect of social obligation of gift exchange and the resulting hatred of the hand that feeds. The dinner offered and accepted creates the simultaneity of revulsion and active participation. In parallel with Ibsen's *Vildanden,* commensality means an affirmation of the power of those who are perceived as oppressors. As incorporation and unquestioned acceptance of ideological content are aligned in *Holzfällen*, the guests' acceptance of both food and revolting conversation corresponds to what some perceive as the corruption of Austrian artists, turned political tools. Ibsen's figure Hjalmar is, despite participating in the dinner, socially excluded as the social implications of the dinner carve out his lower status. Bernhard's narrator, by contrast, is co-implicated: he not only accepts the gifts of food of the members of the art scene, but also, while attacking their social behaviour, uses their techniques of distinction. Thus, both the protagonist's criticism and collaborationism are enacted in commensality. Furthermore, just like those he despises, the narrator partakes in implicit symbolic cannibalism in order to gain from this consumption the material needed for subsequent artistic production. The mechanical processes of consumption and production, part of the Culture Industry described by Adorno and Horkheimer, in this novel do not stop before the artistic elite. Neither do they exclude the narrator's production, which is deeply co-implicated in the social mechanisms of which, as food in the novel implies, no artistic production is independent. Co-implication and ambiguity are the main characteristics of the individual artist's relationship to society in *Holzfällen.* This is why Fischler's theory of incorporation, which addresses in particular the ambivalence of eating and the individual's incorporation into the group, recurs throughout the chapter. The theory is of particular relevance to almost all aspects of food in the novel, because it addresses the

novel's central concern: the tension between the individual artist's need for social nourishment on the one hand and for integrity and independence on the other.

The consequences of the social mechanisms of food and eating threaten the narrator's ideal of art precisely because they are inalienable from his artistic existence: he comes into existence through nourishment, and so does his art. Consequently, he accepts the invitation to dinner, shares the meal and participates in the social processes that this exchange triggers. The product of the narrator's consumption is a self-reflexive narrative, which lays open its mode of production: physical and metaphysical nourishment produces the artist and facilitates his production of art. Production is always secondary to consumption; it is thus always re-production: 'was wir denken, ist *nach*gedacht'.[528] Seen as *re*-production and as following from consumption, the processes leading to production correspond to those of eating and excretion. Following the narrator's consumption and re-production is the readers' consumption of the novel, which results, according to poststructuralist thought, in an infinite weave of texts. The only partial closure in the novel, the only instance of an end of the metabolism, is the suicide: Joana no longer actively partakes in what may be called the metabolism of the Culture Industry. The processes, however, have not ceased, and Joana continues to passively take part in them. She has become material for the remaining consumers' art, for instance as ingredient to the narrator's narrative. The novel ends with the beginning of the writing process, which is simultaneously the beginning of consumption: the narrator consumes at the Auersbergers', the reader consumes the novel. The novel at the same time represents the product and narrates the process of the consumption and re-production within the social-artistic scenario in which all artistic production takes place.

The image of circularity and the narrator's co-implication in the mechanisms he strives to distinguish himself from imply a will to escape and the impossibility of doing so. In interview with Bernhard, André Müller addresses the question of escape, asking where one runs to. Bernhard replies that escape leads nowhere, as one runs away from something that one carries along: 'Aber die Frage ist doch: Wohin rennt man?'. 'Nirgendwohin. Man rennt von was weg, aber man nimmt das ja mit'.[529] In the processes of consumption and integration of the consumed, the conceptual outside and inside blur so that all accusation is simultaneously self-accusation: 'Was für lächerliche

[528] 'When we think, all we do is reflect' (my translation): Thomas Bernhard, 'Rede', in Anneliese Botond (ed.), *Über Thomas Bernhard* (Frankfurt a.M: Suhrkamp, 1970), pp. 7-8 (p. 8). This is in line with postmodernism, which regards all art as re-production.
[529] André Müller, *Im Gespräch mit Thomas Bernhard* (Weitra: Bibliothek der Provinz, 1992), p. 45.

und gemeine Menschen, dachte ich, auf dem Ohrensessel sitzend, und gleich darauf, was für ein gemeiner und lächerlicher Mensch ich selbst bin' (H 39).[530] The narrator's escape does not lead anywhere, because the dichotomies he establishes between him and the antagonistic Other are non-existent. What he runs from is as much outside as it is within him: 'Was wir fliehen, ist, wie wir wissen, in uns, was wir fürchten, ist in uns, was wir sind, ist in uns… etc …'.[531] As his art is the product of the digestion of social mechanism, there is no other place for him and his art than right between disgust at and affection for society and the self, stuck between the fear of food and its necessity. Art is no escape route, because it is bound up with the mechanisms that he strives to escape.

The narrator exists in a double bind, where the counter-cultural is always also cultural, the flight from it simultaneously a projection and affirmation of it. By defining himself and his art against it, the narrator simultaneously defines himself on basis of its structure and, while refusing to finish the food, he remains a dinner guest, incorporating and being incorporated, creating a painfully ambiguous relationship to the society surrounding him. Yet these are only the implications of the mechanisms of food to the narrator as individual. The implications of the ideologically loaded signifier of food, as which Barthes describes it, extend to Austrian (cultural) politics. In this context, Bernhard's novel and its use of food presents the artist as always already co-implicated in the system in which they produce and which nourishes them.

[530] 'What ridiculous and common people, I reflected sitting in the wing chair, and immediately afterwards: what a common and ridiculous person I am myself' (CT 17-8).
[531] 'What we run away from is, as we know, inside us, what we fear is inside, what we are is inside, and so on' (my translation). Thomas Bernhard, 'Der Wahrheit und dem Tod auf der Spur: Zwei Reden', *Neues Forum*, 173 (1968), 347-9 (p. 347).

4 Salman Rushdie: *Midnight's Children*

Salman Rushdie's 1981 novel *Midnight's Children* addresses a weave of themes between which its narrator, trying to cover everything, navigates: nation, (post)colonialism, politics, war, class, faith, religion, superstition. The novel is also about a troubled boy growing up, about his family relations and the relation between his life and Indian history. As Rushdie's narrator seeks to re-write the grand narrative of Indian independence into a narrative of collective memory, the novel also explores the process of narration in postmodern times and the impossibility of stable meaning. This is achieved primarily by aligning narration with cooking, reading and listening with eating and the narrative as a whole with a particular foodstuff: chutney. Chutney is a (postmodern) slippery substance, and quite literally so: it evades definition in terms of texture, content, colour and origin, raises appetites that it cannot satisfy and undercuts dichotomies. This evasive substance denies stable, singular identity and constancy of signification and meaning. While the novel self-consciously seeks to negotiate the implications of postmodern thought on narrative, it appears to be less self-reflexively aware of the multiple interpretations that its use of food, and this particular foodstuff, invites.

The present study reads the substance, the production and consumption of chutney and narrative through a range of food-related approaches that go beyond and supplement postmodern theory, showing the novel's implicit presentation and problematisation of the conditions of narration. Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytical theories are drawn upon, suggesting that writing and cooking relate to an appetite that they cannot satisfy or control. It is shown that Rushdie's narrator strives to make his narrative universally accessible. Read through Bourdieusian theories of distinction, however, his language proves to be exclusive rather than universal. As the aspect of memory and a literal conservation of the past (in chutney jars) is central to the novel and its use of food, the relation of memory and chutney are explored in the light of the Proustian intertext *Du côté de chez Swann* (1913; *Swann's Way*). Reading the narrator Saleem's efforts through Lévi-Strauss's distinction between raw and cooked suggests that Saleem's self-presentation as sole cultural agent and narrator is highly questionable. The reading thus invites a consideration of the actual (female) producers of the chutney. Günter Grass's *Der Butt* (1977; *The Flounder*) aids the reading of the male-female narrator-cook relationships in *Midnight's Children* as implicitly commenting on

authorship. While Grass is confident about the possibility of narrative, which is in his novel not threatened by the gender-struggle, the female cooks in Saleem's tale and his representation of them reflects Saleem's struggle over narrative legitimisation and ownership over the narrative. The representation of these Other cultural agents intersects with Fischler's social anthropological analysis of the ambivalence of food. In this light, not only the narrator's relationship to Other cooks but also the narrative itself is characterised as problematic. It will be shown that food, its preparation and consumption present the simultaneity of narrative desire and dissatisfaction.

Following an introductory section outlining the relevant themes, stylistic devices and plot of *Midnight's Children*, the chapter begins by presenting the close relation between, even identity of, the narrative and chutney. (This section suggests that it is fruitful to discuss chutney and narrative as closely interconnected chutney-narrative.) Then, the characteristics of chutney are analysed to provide insights on the nature of the narrative. Subsequently, the production and claims to authorship by the multiple producers of the chutney-narrative are discussed. The analysis ends with a consideration of the conditions of its consumption.

4.1 *Midnight's Children* within Rushdie's oeuvre[532]

Salman Rushdie's career as a writer began with the publication of the novel *Grimus* in 1975.[533] His second novel and the object of the present chapter, *Midnight's Children* (1981), received international acclaim.[534] Since then, Rushdie has published nine novels, a collection of short stories and various non-fictional texts.[535] Today he is widely regarded as an author who has introduced new aspects to postmodern writing, and is arguably canonical. The postmodern label is partly due to the self-reflexive character of Rushdie's writing, in which narratives implicitly comment on the conditions of their production. What has yet to be analysed in full is how in *Midnight's*

[532] Analysis is deliberately excluded from this section, which functions as introductory groundwork to subsequent argumentation.
[533] Rushdie, *Grimus* (London: Gollancz 1975)
[534] It won the Booker Prize and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in the year of its publication and was awarded the Booker of Bookers twice (1993 and 2008).
[535] The novels are *Shame* (London: Cape, 1983), *The Satanic Verses* (London: Viking, 1988), *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990), *The Moor's Last Sigh* (London: Cape, 1995), *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (London: Cape, 1999), *Fury* (Londo: Cape, 2001), *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), *The Enchantress of Florence* (London: Cape, 2008), *Luka and the Fire of Life* (London: Cape, 2010). The collection of short stories is *East, West* (London: Cape, 1994). Rushdie's non-fictional work includes the collection of essays *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991) and the travel book *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey* (London: Picador, 1987).

Children, representations of food contribute to this. In the first instance, however, the novel is now positioned thematically and stylistically within Rushdie's oeuvre.

Rushdie's writing is commonly defined as postcolonial because of its ostensible thematic concern with the relation between the so-called East and West and the question of what and who defines them. Since *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie has been pivotal in postcolonial literary criticism. The construction of the nation is a central theme in criticism engaging with Rushdie's work. Timothy Brennan provides the most comprehensive analysis of this aspect.[536] Other publications study in particular the construction of national and cultural identity.[537] Discussions of historiography in the postcolonial context, the seizing and re-writing of history by the colonized, have also been a focus of criticism.[538] A central question here is the role of the colonizer in the narratives of the colonized, raising issues of authorship and authorial legitimisation.[539] These have become a battleground in Rushdie criticism, based on the argument that 'Rushdie-the-cosmopolitan' is no so-called 'authentic' Indian voice.[540] The interest in displacement and the cosmopolitan experience triggered the question of authorship in narratives of the nation: who is allowed to speak? Who is worthy of a voice and may represent and create a nation through narrative?[541] Approaching the novel from a new perspective, the present study suggests that these questions translate in *Midnight's Children*, where narration and cooking are aligned, into: who cooks? Rushdie's preoccupation with narrative voice reflects on his style and use of language: 'most commentaries agree that Rushdie undertakes the "chutnification" of English, or the

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[536] Brennan, Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation (London: Macmillan, 1989).

[537] Neil Ten Kortenaar, *Self, Nation, Text in Salman Rushdie's 'Midnight's Children'* (Montreal/ London/ Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004); Anuradha Dingwaney Needham, 'The Politics of Postcolonial Identity in Salman Rushdie', in Fletcher (ed.), *Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie* (Amsterdam/ Atlanta: Radopi, 1994), pp. 145-57; Michael Krieg, 'Hybrid Identities in the Novels of Salman Rushdie', <http://www.gradnet.de/papers/pomo99.papers/Krieg99.htm> [accessed 18 March 2012].

[538] Tim S. Gauthier, *Narrative Desire and Historical Reparations: A. S. Byatt, Ian McEwan, Salman Rushdie* (New York/ London: Routledge, 2006). Heike Hartung, too, looks at the tension between historiography and narrative: Heike Hartung, *Die dezentrale Geschichte: Historisches Erzählen und literarische Geschichte(n) bei Peter Ackroyd, Graham Swift und Salman Rushdie*, ed. by Heinz Bergner, Raimund Borgmeier, Bernhard Reitz, *SALS* 16 (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2002).

[539] Fawzia Afzal-Khan, Cultural Imperialism and the Indo-English Novel: Genre and Ideology in R. K. Narayan, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, and Salman Rushdie (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).

[540] John C. Hawley addresses the accusations raised against Rushdie and other Indian authors writing in English and, so the accusation, for an English audience: 'Can the Cosmopolitan Speak?: The Question of Indian Novelists' Authenticity' *South Asian Review* 24.2 (2003), 26-40.

[541] For a discussion of the problem of postcolonialism and novelistic authenticity see John C. Hawley, 'Can the Cosmopolitan Speak?: The Question of Indian Novelists' Authenticity', *South Asian Review*, 24.2 (2003), 26-40. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak discusses the question of voice in the postcolonial context: 'Can the Subaltern speak?, in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, (Basingstoke : Macmillan Education, 1988), pp. 271–313.

creation of a hybrid language to "de-colonize" English (Rushdie's own term) or disarm it through ironical use'.[542] In fact, Saleem's term 'chutnification' (MC 642) itself is an example of this: 'chutney' is a loan word, incorporated into English from Hindi and Urdu. Rushdie makes Saleem appropriate the term further by nominalizing it, following English morphology, via a presumed verb (to chutnify).[543] This linguistic mixture in which the term originates corresponds to postcolonial discourse which focuses on the relevance and effects of hybridity to cultural identity.

Rushdie's style has been identified as influenced by a range of European writers, such as François Rabelais, Laurence Sterne, Marcel Proust, Gabriel García Márquez and Günter Grass. The relations to Grass's oeuvre and Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–1927) are particularly relevant to the present study, as both texts make in very different ways use of food as signifying system. Critics of *Midnight's Children* have almost entirely focussed on *Die Blechtrommel* in considerations of the influence of Grass on Rushdie's novel.[544] Yet in his analysis of the relationship between Grass and Rushdie, Henrik Engel points out that *Der Butt* has been largely overlooked as a central intertext of *Midnight's Children*.[545] Rushdie has been described as heir to Grass's aesthetics and indebted to the magic realism of both García Márquez and Grass. His style may also be said to resemble magic realism because of its firm roots in Indian myth and the tradition of oral narrative. In both forms of writing, what a reader familiar with the European narrative tradition may conceive of as realistic ingredients are mixed with fantastic elements to create a representation not of reality but of an experience. In his *Glossary of Literary Terms*, the literary critic M. H. Abrams describes magic realism as comprising 'fantastic and dreamlike elements', elements also central to Middle Eastern and South Asian oral narrative.[546] The influences of oral narrative can be

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[542] Fletcher, M. D., 'Introduction: The Politics of Salman Rushdie's Fiction', in Fletcher (ed.), *Reading Rushdie*, pp. 1-22 (p. 3).

[543] This spelling of 'chutnification' follows Rushdie (MC 642). In criticism it is occasionally spelled 'chutneyfication'. The confusion is further evidence of the postmodern perception of the slipperiness of language.

[544] Grass, *Die Blechtrommel: Roman* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1959); *The Tin Drum*, trans. by Breon Mitchell (London: Vintage Classic, 2010).

[545] In his book on the relation between Günter Grass and English language literature, Henrik D. K. Engel discusses the mutual relation of the author and Rushdie and focuses in his argument in particular on the connection of *Die Blechtrommel* and *Midnight's Children:* Engel, *Die Prosa von Günter Grass in Beziehung zur englischsprachigen Literatur: Rezeption, Wirkungen und Rückwirkungen bei Salman Rushdie, John Irving, Bernhard Malamud u.a.* (Frankfurt a.M.: Lang, 1997). Gurnah describes *Tristram Shandy* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as well as *Die Blechtrommel* as intertexts: Abdulrazak Gurnah, 'Themes and Structures in *Midnight's Children*', in Grunah (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 91-108 (p. 91 and 99).

[546] Meyer Howard Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 7th edition (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1999), p. 196; *The Arabian Nights*, trans. by Husain Haddawy (London: Campbell, 1992).

observed in Rushdie's style which uses 'foreshadowing and flashback, digressions within digressions, and the competition/ complementarity of different stories […] to undermine linearity'.[547] Oral narrative links in with the orality of eating, a relation which invites a reading alongside the theories of Freudian psychoanalysis.

Midnight's Children evidences the influences of both the tradition of oral narrative and of magic realism. Similar to *The Arabian Nights*, to which the novel alludes, *Midnight's Children* constructs a frame narrative in which the narrator interacts with his audience.[548] The first sentence of the novel defines it as a fairy-tale – with an edge. It reads: 'I was born in the city of Bombay … once upon a time' (MC 3). Commonly, 'once upon a time' stands at the beginning of the first sentence of a tale. By adding it, as if an afterthought, Rushdie alludes to the narrative's connection to the oral tradition as well as creating a distance from it.[549] Relating the narrative to the Indian oral tradition, the novel refers to the 'Indian lust for allegory' (MC 127). Rushdie's writing is generally highly allegorical, while it simultaneously commonly exposes the limitations and inadequacies of its own allegories and metaphors.[550] Characteristically, metaphors are often taken literally; Rushdie's children's novel *Luka and the Fire of Life* (2010) is a particularly good example of this as its hero travels along the 'River of Time' to steal the 'Fire of Life' in order to prevent his father's looming death.[551] Techniques of oral narrative influence structure and style of *Midnight's Children*, but the narrative is composed of a variety of styles originating in a multiplicity of sources, including Indian myth (Rushdie evokes many characters from the Hindu pantheon), reportage, public speech, court evidence, school essay, film script, fantasy, satire, parody and allegory.[552] The eclectic list of stylistic, thematic and intertextual ingredients aligns the work with postmodernism, but also (as shown in more detail below), with the characteristics of chutney.

Midnight's Children's central 'living metaphor', that is one in which an abstract referent becomes an actual object, is chutney: the narrator posits a relationship between the chapters he is writing and the chutneys he is cooking to the point where chapters and

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[547] Fletcher, 'Politics of Rushdie', p. 13. Rushdie has described the inspiration drawn from the Indian tradition of oral narrative for the narrative techniques of *Midnight's Children*: Bill Ashcroft and others, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London/ New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 183-4.
[548] Some examples from across the novel are: MC 24; 35; 70; 153; 367; 496; 588.
[549] There are fourteen instances of the phrase 'once upon a time.
[550] Gurnah sees allegory as central device in *Midnight's Children*: Gurnah, 'Themes and Structures', p. 101.
[551] Rushdie, *Luka and the Fire of Life* (London: Cape, 2010).
[552] Gurnah, 'Themes and Structures', p. 106. Fletcher, *Reading Rushdie,* p. 13.

chutneys are presented as if they were the same. In how far they are and in how far they are not is a central concern of the present study as it examines narrative, its production and its consumption (reading/ listening) through the lens of food and food-related activities to show that the novel presents Saleem's ideal narrative as unachievable.

Midnight's Children is the fictional autobiography of Saleem Sinai and a re-writing of Indian history, to which his life is 'mysteriously handcuffed' (MC 4). With his claims of nation-wide validity, Saleem's re-inscription of Indian history is ostensibly an attempt to write a new master narrative. He does not produce for individuals but for mass consumption: his chutney is produced in a factory which exports all over the world. Re-writing Indian history is an offer of a new master narrative which he plans to 'unleash[…] upon the […] nation' (MC 643). In his attempt to create a new narrative of collective memory, to 're-write the whole history of [his] times' (MC 230), Saleem wants to address all India with his chutneys, which shall be 'unleashed upon the […] nation' (MC 643). Saleem hopes to create teleology and form to avoid meaninglessness. In 'desperate need for meaning', Saleem tells 'his own story to form his identity and give his life meaning'.[553] He states on the first pages: 'I must work fast […] if I am to end up meaning – yes, meaning – something. I admit it: above all things, I fear absurdity' (MC 4). The narrative is characterised by fear and urgency which originate in Saleem's state of decomposition: cracks are beginning to show all over his body (MC 42). Saleem's autobiography is embedded in a frame narrative in which Saleem addresses the circumstances of the production of his 'tale' (MC 74). It is in these metafictional comments that Saleem creates and reinforces the decisive relation between narrative and condiment.

Saleem's narrative is divided into three books which hold a total of thirty titled chapters, leaving the impression of a tightly organised and controlled narrative. Following the conventional structure of autobiography, Saleem's narrative begins with his grandparents' generation. While India is still firmly in British hands, Saleem's grandfather Aadam struggles with his personal position within what appears as the poles of East and West, tradition and progress. He loses his faith in the process and is 'knocked forever into that middle place, unable to worship a God in whose existence he could not wholly disbelieve' (MC 7). The instability of and dissatisfaction with place and identity is thus first felt by Saleem's grandfather and continues to make itself felt in

[553] Michael Reder, 'Re-writing History and Identity: The Reinventions of Myth, Epic, and Allegory in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*', in Booker (ed.), *Essays on Rushdie*, pp. 225-49 (p. 225).

Saleem's life: 'the hole in the centre of me […] was my inheritance from my grandfather' (MC 266). Neither chutney nor the many female nourishing figures in his life can fill these holes (MC 266). Just as there is for the India of *Midnight's Children*, there is confusion as to Saleem's pedigree. It transpires that he is an 'Anglo-Indian' whose 'name is not [his] own' (MC 158). Saleem is a mixture of all available sources: a British colonialist as biological father and the wife of a poor story-telling busker as biological mother, he is exchanged at birth and becomes the son of well-off Ahmed and Amina Sinai.

In Book Two, the postcolonial period begins. Saleem and a handful of other children grow up on the Methwold estate in Bombay. A shadow of British colonialism remains after the colonialist Methwold has departed as he sells the estate under the condition that certain colonial practices be observed. It is also in this part of the narrative that the Midnight's Children Conference is initiated: through his clogged-up nose, Saleem develops telepathic abilities that connect him to the surviving five hundred and eighty one children of midnight (out of a total of one thousand and one – one of numerous references to *The Arabian Nights*). He learns that each of them, born in the first hour after midnight of the day of Indian independence, has a special power. After an unsuccessful attempt to unite the children of midnight, Saleem loses his abilities to communicate with them as his parents decide to drain his nose, eliminating his telepathic powers. Book Two ends with Saleem losing all sense of identity: he loses his memory in the 1965 Indo-Pakistani war and is supposedly 'restored to innocence and purity' (MC 477) (concepts that in postmodern thought count as impossible grand narratives). If Book One closes with Saleem's birth, Book Two ends with his rebirth as 'the buddha' (MC 481), as which he perceives himself for a period.

Having lost his sense of identity, Saleem joins in Book Three the Pakistani army in the 1971 Indo-Pakistani war. The drainage of his nose has resulted in his developing an excellent sense of smell. In his metafictional comments, Saleem implies that it is partly his extraordinary olfactory organ which legitimises his assumption of the role of 'pickler-in-chief' (MC 459) of the narrative of Indian history: with such a nose he believes to be best qualified to choose the ingredients for the chutney-narrative of independent India. After having deserted, Saleem regains his memory and sense of identity. He returns to India where he marries Parvati-the-Witch, also a child of midnight. She is pregnant with the son of Saleem's arch-enemy Shiva. The baby is, in yet another confusion of paternity, named after Saleem: Aadam Sinai. With Aadam, a new generation is born to replace the children of midnight. Aadam is 'emergency-born'

(MC 594), a child of the period of Emergency Law, put in place by Indira Gandhi in 1975. With his birth, the midnight's children are at their end (MC 597). With the law come 'disillusion, venality, cynicism … the nearly-thirty-one-year-old myth of freedom is no longer what it was. New myths are needed; but that's none of my business' (MC 640), for Saleem has no future. The next generation 'will trample me underfoot […], reducing me to specks of voiceless dust' (MC 647). Because of the prospect of his extinction, Saleem's 'business' is the attempt to preserve the past and mould it into a totalizing chutney-narrative.

The factory Braganza Pickles provides the setting for Saleem's narrative and ostensible culinary production. At his return to Bombay, Saleem comes across one of his ayah Mary Pereira's chutneys which guides him to her pickle factory Braganza Pickles. He moves in and begins his narrative, engrossing himself, as he says, in the preservation of the past in pickles and pages (MC 630). It is here that Saleem indulges in his 'nocturnal scribblings – by day amongst the pickle vats, by night within these sheets' (MC 44). It is argued below that Saleem's involvement in the pickling process is, despite his claims, highly restricted. Compared to the factory worker's bottling, chopping, 'stirring vats like a whirlwind' (MC 142), Saleem's relative uninvolvedness gives more importance to the one job he does do: by means of his extraordinary sense of smell (MC 44; 643) Saleem chooses fruit for chutney production (MC 642). Saleem's participation consists in the selection of ingredients according to taste (the nose is a central organ in the perception of taste), an aspect which invites analysis according to Bourdieusian theory.

The cast of characters in *Midnight's Children* is large. The first main figure within Saleem's narrative is his grandfather Aadam. The first chapters of the novel narrate his encounter with his future wife Naseem, later known as Reverend Mother. The matriarch's powers over the family rely on her sovereignty over kitchen, pantry and dining table. She is one of the novel's many female nourishing figures. They are cooks, breastfeeding mothers or wet-nurses. Prominent among them in addition to Naseem are Amina, Saleem's (official rather than biological) mother and Saleem's ayah Mary Pereira, who later opens the pickle factory where Saleem cooks up his chutney-narrative. There is also Parvati-the-Witch, one of the three most powerful midnight's children, later Saleem's first wife. Shiva is the only other character contemporary to Saleem who is constantly relevant. If Saleem presents himself as arbiter of thought and ideals, his nemesis and alter-ego Shiva holds up the primacy of physicality. Yet Saleem's cooking and narrative cannot counter Shiva's potent physicality and his arch-

enemy ‘seize[s] his victory’ (MC 355) over Saleem when he makes Saleem’s wife Parvati-the-Witch pregnant and fathers children all over the country while Saleem remains impotent. These characters are figures of Saleem’s narrative. Padma is the only other character in the frame narrative and arguably the most important character after Saleem. A worker at Mary’s pickle factory, she spends her free time listening to Saleem’s tale. She is cook, would-be lover and audience in one. The large female cast of *Midnight’s Children* is entirely made up of cooks and wet-nurses and a recurring theme in Saleem’s ambiguous depiction of their art is ‘the impregnation of food with emotions’ (MC 459). The cooks’ dishes are ‘seasoned by dark emotions’ (MC 459) which ‘seep’ into the eater. There is a sense of manipulation in such descriptions of the impact of this food. Saleem, for instance, describes himself as being under ‘the influence […] of Alia’s food’ (MC 459).[554]

It is striking that the cast of *Midnight’s Children* consists of mainly female characters while the narrative voice is male. Critics of Rushdie have noted ambivalence if not misogyny in the representation of women in his work.[555] Samir Dayal puts this most clearly when he says that Rushdie is not a misogynist as Orwell was, ‘plain and simple’. However, that his representations of women can be categorised as a form of modern misogyny which, while attempting to further the cause of equality, in fact re-iterate male misogynist fears.[556] The debate about Rushdie’s misogyny tends to focus on *Shame*, but the topic is relevant here. Charu Verma describes *Midnight’s Children* as sexist and phallocentric.[557] Critics such as Teresa Heffernan, who discuss centrally the role of women in Rushdie’s novels, have so far overlooked the complex role of food in the portrayal of women and their socio-cultural roles.[558] Both the association of women with breastfeeding (the association of women with nature) as well as their association with cooking are classically misogynist tropes. Deszcz notes that Rushdie has frequently been accused of falling into the trap of ‘constructing his female characters

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[554] The following examples show that this affects all major female cooks: Reverend Mother (MC 190; 192); Mary Pereira (MC 190-1; 236); Amina (MC 218; 242); Alia (MC 260).

[555] See for example Ambreen Hai in ‘“Marching in From the Peripheries”: Rushdie’s Feminized Artistry and Ambivalent Feminism’, in Booker (ed.), *Essays Rushdie*, 16–49; Aijaz Ahmad, ‘Rushdie’s Shame: Postmodernism, Migrancy and Representation of Women’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 26 (1991), 1461-71; Inderpal Grewal, ‘Salman Rushdie: Marginality, Women, and *Shame*’, in Fletcher, *Reading Rushdie*, pp. 123-44; Justyna Deszcz, ‘Salman Rushdie's Attempt at a Feminist Fairytale Reconfiguration in *Shame*’, *Folklore*, 115 (2004), 27-44.

[556] Dayal, ‘The Liminalities of Nation and Gender: Salman Rushdi''s Shame’, *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 31 (1998), 39-62.

[557] Charu Verma, ‘Padma's Tragedy: A Feminist Deconstruction of Rushdie's *Midnight’s Children*’, in Sushila Singh (ed.), *Feminism and Recent Fiction in English* (New Delhi: Prestige, 1991), pp. 154-62.

[558] Teresa Heffernan, ‘Apocalyptic Narratives: The Nation in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight Children*’, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 46, Literature and Apocalypse (2000), 470-91.

according to typical misogynist myth'.[559] While this study does not set out to argue whether Rushdie himself is misogynist or not, it shows that his protagonist Saleem's presentation of women certainly is. It will be shown that women in *Midnight's Children* are cooks and cultural agents and that Saleem's clichéd presentation of them as natural nourishing figures serves the purpose of marginalising them in the attempt to minimise their impact on what he passes off as *his* cultural production.

4.2 Food in *Midnight's Children* – a literature survey

While critics frequently allude to the famous phrase 'chutnification of history' (MC 642) from *Midnight's Children*, none offers a comprehensive analysis of the socio-cultural implications of food in the novel. Sharmila Sen and Mita Banerjee pay attention to some aspects of food in relation to Rushdie's work.[560] However, function and meaning of food are here limited to specific fields, disregarding the many intersecting discourses that food evokes.

In *Eating India*, Sen looks for representations of an ostensible 'Indianness' in food in five works, one of them *Midnight's Children*.[561] Her thesis is that, during the colonial period, food of the subcontinent was in Europe often perceived as signifier of the so-called East and that postcolonial literature continues this discourse, using food to construct national identity.[562] According to Sen, each of her chosen texts is 'concerned with representing the culinary culture of a particular group in order to establish racial, ethnic, linguistic, and national specificity'.[563] This reading contradicts the most prominent attributes of chutney that deny such stable signification (see below). Sen restricts her reading of food in *Midnight's Children* to the frame narrative, reading *Midnight's Children* as a '(commodified) version of late-twentieth-century Indianness'.[564] She stresses that, parallel to the distorting process which fruit undergoes when cooked into a chutney, Saleem's chutney-narrative is but a version of Indian history and should not be considered 'authentic'. Authenticity is widely regarded as a

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[559] Deszcz, 'Rushdie's Attempt', p. 35.
[560] Sharmila Sen, *Eating India: Literary and Cultural Consumptions of the Subcontinent* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 2000); Mita Banerjee, *The Chutneyfication of History: Salman Rushdie, Michael Ondaatje, Bharati Mukherjee and the Postcolonial Debate* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2002).
[561]The other works discussed are George Francklin Atkinson, *'Curry & Rice' on Forty Plates Or: The Ingredients of Social Life at 'Our Station' in India* (London: W. Thacker & Co., 1911), David Dabydeen,*The Counting House* (London: Cape, 1996), Anita Desai, *In Custody* (London: Heinemann, 1984) and Ismail Merchant's film, *Muhafiz* (1994), based on Desai's novel.
[562] Sen, *Eating India*, p. 2.
[563] Ibid, p. 15.
[564] Ibid, p. 31.

highly problematic concept by poststructuralist and postmodern academics and while Sen puts it in inverted commas, she fails to define it within the context of her study or discuss the debate of authorship, ownership and voice that it is part of. We will see that the relation between narrative and chutnification that Saleem sets up goes further than questioning a supposed 'Indianness': it invites questions about narrative production, its producers and consumption.

In *The Chutneyfication of History: Salman Rushdie, Michael Ondaatje, Bharati Mukherjee and the Postcolonial Debate*, Banerjee chooses chutnification as battling ground for her politically motivated critique of postmodernism and its relation to postcolonialism. Her study considers the oeuvre of three authors, addressing each of their works in general terms while using chutnification for her specific political agenda.[565] Banerjee questions postmodernism, claiming that it unhinges any political position by conflating the binary oppositions necessary for upholding it. Banerjee believes that non-political postmodernism has had its day.[566] According to her, chutney qualifies as particularly fitting metaphor for a blending of postmodernism and postcolonialism as it can allegedly be used to express both postcolonial cultural identity and postmodern Otherness. This view is based on Banerjee's idea that '"exotic" food [is a] token of cultural difference'.[567] Such tokenism simultaneously risks the reduction of a culture to an item of food which Banerjee warns of.[568] Rather than discussing the multi-facetted connotations of food in the novel, Banerjee uses chutnification as convenient metaphor to illustrate her political agenda.

Sen and Banerjee look at aspects of food in *Midnight's Children* within a limited frame: that of considerations of 'Indianness' and the debate of the relationship between postcolonialism and postmodernism respectively. Moving away from this restrained focus, the present analysis considers the consequences of the novel's alignment of narrative with food from a multiplicity of perspectives. By drawing on a number of theoretical views on food such as those originating in psychoanalysis, structuralism, sociology and social anthropology, the present study articulates the implicit connotations of food in the novel. A comparison with the role of food in two of the

[565] Of the eight novels and one collection of short stories which comprised Rushdie's fictional oeuvre by the time of Banerjee's publication, she discusses the novels *Midnight's Children*, *Shame* (London: Cape, 1983), *The Satanic Verses* (London: Viking, 1988) and *The Moor's Last Sigh* (London: Cape, 1995).
[566] Banerjee, *Chutneyfication*, p. 24.
[567] Ibid, p. 9.
[568] Ibid, p. 33.

novel's intertexts also serves the purpose of elucidating the ways in which food implicitly comments on the process of narration.

4.3 The relation between narrative and chutney

Saleem posits a close relation, even identity, of food and narrative, cooking and narration, eating and reading/ listening. His construction of this relation is detailed here as it is fundamental to this chapter's exploration of the way in which food in *Midnight's Children* implicitly addresses narrative, its production and consumption.

Narrative and chutney are compared, occasionally even equated in Saleem's metafictional comments: 'my chutneys and kasaundies are, after all, connected to my nocturnal scribblings' (MC 44). The count of chutney jars on Saleem's shelves equals at any point the number of finished chapters (the implication is that Saleem writes/ narrates at the same speed as the reader/ audience reads/ listens) and the jars' labels are the titles of the chapters (MC 536; 643). At the end of the narrative, Saleem describes finishing it: 'tonight, by screwing the lid firmly on to a jar bearing the legend *Special Formula No 30: "Abracadabra"*, I reach the end of my long-winded autobiography; in words and pickles, I have immortalized my memories' (MC 642). Cooking and narration are both cultural activities, yet the connection between food preparation and writing in *Midnight's Children* is not limited to metaphor, by which one process is explained through another. Saleem even insists that he is 'not speaking metaphorically' (MC 278-9). His representations of the chutney-narrative link do not present its individual parts, but present them as the same object or substance. In his description of his work as cook and narrator, chapters and chutneys 'blend' into one another:

> My special blends, in which […] I am able to include memories, dreams, ideas, so that once they enter mass-production all who consume them will know what pepperpots achieved in Pakistan, or how it felt to be in the Sunderbans […]. Thirty jars stand upon a shelf. (MC 643)

'Movements performed by pepperpots' and 'In the Sunderbans' are two chapter titles; thirty is the number of chapters that Saleem has produced at this point of his narrative (it is also their total number). When Saleem speaks of mass production it is then not entirely clear if he is referring to that of his chutneys or of his narrative in book form (which is indeed still in mass production after having won the Booker several times).

In the same way as the process of narrative production and its product are linked to cooking and food, the consumption of the narrative is equated with eating. Saleem

frequently considers the digestibility of his products. Considering the audience's consumption of his narrative he wonders: does Padma 'swallow' the story (MC 69)? How much of his cooked-up narrative is the reader 'prepared to swallow' (MC 247)? How much material can they be left with to 'chew on' (MC 248)? Saleem combines references to consumption (to chew, swallow, digest) with an indication of the question of reliability: to swallow used in the sense of suspending disbelief. Presented in terms of eating, the consumption of Saleem's narrative can also be considered in terms of the characteristics of incorporation described by Fischler. On the one hand the ambivalences of pleasure and threat, on the other hand the impossibility of knowing which parts of the food remain in and which are excreted by the body and the uncontrollability of the way in which they affect body and mind.[569]

The analogous presentation of narrative and chutney exemplifies the stylistic idiosyncrasy of Rushdie's work of giving the abstract (fictitious) physicality. However, Saleem's insistence on the interchangeability of chutneys and chapters, his 'pickled chapters' (MC 642), suggests something more than a stylistic device. If they are also food, Saleem's chapters can be read in the light of the characteristics of food, the processes by which it is produced and the conditions of its consumption. Aligning his narrative with food means its alignment with a substance that is a physical object as well as a socio-cultural sign, an aspect which Saleem appears to be unaware of. The 'cooking up of a story', which his chutney metaphor implies, relates what Saleem passes off as preservative historiography to invention, lie, fictitiousness and unreliability, questioning his endeavour and implicitly questioning, too, the possibility of stable meaning. The chutney-narrative relation, which Saleem sets up, invites its reading through sociological and psychoanalytical theories that are implicated in Saleem's metaphor. What a reading of theories such as those of Freud and Lacan, Lévi-Strauss, Bourdieu and Fischler add to an analysis of *Midnight's Children* and the relation of food to narrative goes beyond Saleem's original aim of preserving history. Instead, it implicitly addresses the particular paradoxes and uncertainties involved in narration. Fischler in particular has described humans' ambivalent and ambiguous relationship to food, an ambivalence which in *Midnight's Children* reflects on narration.[570] Narrative, like chutney, is not at all straightforward.

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[569] Fischler, 'Identity'.
[570] Ibid.

4.4 Characteristics of chutney

What are the characteristics of the particular item of food that Saleem aligns with his cultural production? By addressing this question, connotations of the chutney are explored, connotations which Saleem appears to be unaware of. The most distinct characteristic of chutney is its relative indefinability due to its incalculable hybridity.[571] The texture of this condiment, commonly associated with India and South Asia at large, may vary from coarsely chopped preserve to smooth sauce. Even the colour of 'green chutney' is disputed. Saleem, Mary and his uncle Hanif discuss it at some length: '"Not the dark one", I say […] "No no no", Mary babbles, "light green, baba. Just like you like." And, "Pale green!" Hanif is bellowing, "My God, green like grasshoppers!"' (MC 333). A chutney may be made of sundry ingredients which go through long cooking cycles in vats. The process turns raw food, aligned according to Lévi-Strauss with the natural, into a cultural product.[572] When consumed, it enters into natural transformation (digestion). Chutney and its ingredients thus cross and re-cross the conceptual borders of natural and cultural. The condiment may contain everything from 'fruit, vegetables [to] fish' (MC 643) and be flavoured with 'turmeric and cumin', 'fenugreek' and 'cardamom', 'garlic, garam masala, stick cinnamon, coriander, ginger' (MC 644). The mixture garam masala itself comprises a large number of spices. The condiment therefore represents 'mélange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that', reflecting the processes by which 'newness enters the world'.[573] While this is true to any dish, due to the number of possible combinations and the varying quality of ingredients (ripeness, for instance) the attempt at reproducing a particular chutney is obviously impossible. Chutneys are beyond fragmentation, because the heterogeneous mass does not even have distinct fragments. Condiments are by definition an accompaniment to a main dish for the purpose of adding flavour and stimulating appetite, yet chutney is not a complete dish by itself: paradoxically, while it stimulates appetite, it cannot satisfy hunger. The phrase 'to get oneself into a pickle' represents the ambiguity of the condiment, which is simultaneously delicious and problematic, in Fischler's analysis even more than that: great parts of it cannot be known and the unknown can be fatal to the omnivore.[574]

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[571] Banerjee describes it as the 'epitome of hybridity': *Chutneyfication*, p. 32.
[572] Note that not all chutneys are cooked. Saleem, however, stresses the cooking process that all of his chutneys undergo. See for instance MC 290-1; 643.
[573] Rushdie about *The Satanic Verses* in Krieg, 'Hybrid Identities', para. 36.
[574] In the OED, 'pickle' is, in addition to the preserved substances, 'a condition or situation, usually disagreeable; a sorry plight or predicament': OED, xi, 'pickle', 4., p. 775.

In addition to the substance's indefinability, inherent versatility, different people understand different things by 'chutney'. The condiment is commonly associated with India but evades definition even within the subcontinent. Chutney recipes differ hugely from one part of the country to the other, among different religious groups and from one cook to another. In certain regions, for instance, one distinguishes between chutney and preserve. In others and also in Rushdie's novel, the two are considered synonymous. The association of the condiment with India or South Asia is misleading, for it has famously travelled the world and is now well-known to British consumers as well as around the world. Mary Pereira points out that 'the whole world' wants to eat her pickles, 'even in England they eat' (MC 640). However, the product that goes by the name of chutney in Britain may differ from its South Asian counterparts. What is known as *chatni* in the Hindi and Urdu contexts can be cooked as preserve to keep for as long as a year, but is often freshly-made for immediate consumption. In the British context, the term refers almost exclusively to preserved condiments. Furthermore, Indian products sold on the British market usually follow recipes that appeal to British rather than Indian palates. They are often sweet rather than intensely hot or salty as those consumed on the Subcontinent. British cuisine distinguishes between preserves, which are sweet, and pickles which are salty, sour, etc., while Indian cuisine does not know this distinction and sweet and sour or salty are not mutually exclusive. With chutneys, English imports linguistically and Britain materially (import of chutney and recipes) from the subcontinent. In coining the term 'chutnification' (MC 642), Rushdie makes Saleem take this appropriation further.

The analysis of chutney's multiple and variable characteristics illustrates the statement made above of the relation between chutney and the postmodern aesthetics of the novel: the inherent heterogeneity of chutney relates to pastiche and the mixture of genres, registers and textual references common to postmodernism and characteristic of *Midnight's Children*.[575] In Saleem's narrative, things fuse, melt, transform and refuse to stay separate and in their allocated place: 'the different parts of my somewhat complicated life refuse, with a wholly unreasonable obstinacy, to stay neatly in their separate compartments' (MC 259). This quotation relates to both the characteristics of postmodern aesthetics and those of chutney. Banerjee additionally points out that the way in which chutney de-hierarchizes by fusing 'mutually incompatible elements'

[575] Banerjee observes the relation of chutney to postmodern thought: *Chutneyfication*, p. 21.

'complies with the postmodernism prohibition of master narratives'.[576] The condiment knows no hierarchies: 'any shaking of the chutney glass can change' the order of its ingredients.[577] Yet in his ambition to address the nation and to re-write Indian history, Saleem's narrative at the same time strives to be a master narrative itself. Saleem's narrative aim is contradicted by the characteristics of chutney.

Filling jars with chutney can be seen as an attempt to counter the uncontrollable formlessness of the substance. Uncontained, chutney is an indefinable, heterogeneous substance neither solid nor liquid. It knows no duality. Once it is jarred, however, the container superimposes its qualities over those of its content. Chutney is now countable, can be named and has a uniform outline. Saleem makes a point of this by repeatedly counting the filled jars on his shelves and attaching labels to them: 'twenty-six pickle-jars stand gravely on a shelf; twenty-six special blends, each with its identifying label, neatly inscribed with familiar phrases' (MC 536). There is an aspect of consolation in the labelling with 'familiar phrases'. Put in jars, chutney is also transportable and thus marketable around the world. Through the jar, the amalgam becomes a countable – if not fully accountable – entity and with his 'thirty jars and a jar', Saleem hopes to give 'shape and form – that is to say meaning' (MC 644). Banerjee, however, points out that the jars are labelled, but not numbered and can be reshuffled at any moment.[578] Furthermore, even labelled jars have different connotations depending on the context in which they are opened and consumed. Filled in jars, chutney remains open to infinite interpretations. Saleem's attempt to give meaning and form is related to discord and being out of harmony via the verb 'to jar'.[579] This reflects Saleem's great fear of 'absurdity' (MC 4), originally a term denoting a lack of harmony, a being out of tune.[580] The failure to provide harmonious stability of form and meaning is already inscribed in the containers.

Cooking on its own does not preserve. It is the jar that, seemingly, answers to Saleem's hopes of conserving the past. Yet another use of the verb 'to jar' is in reference to the ticking of a clock.[581] The passing of time of which this sound speaks contradicts Saleem's attempts to save memory from the 'corruption of the clocks' (MC 44). 'Pickles transmogrify in time, both the fictional ones and the real ones in our

[576] Ibid.
[577] Ibid, p. 148.
[578] Banerjee, *Chutneyfication*, p. 186.
[579] OED, viii, 'jar', II.11., p. 193.
[580] OED, i, 'absurdity', 1., p. 57.
[581] OED, viii, 'jar', I.2., p. 193.

kitchen cupboards'.[582] Even cooked and jarred, chutneys change over time, the process of rotting is merely delayed. Chutney will inevitably change in taste, texture, colour, becoming new as it ages. Furthermore, are the tightly closed jars not meant to be opened by a consumer, thus exposed to processes of uncontrollable transformation by accelerated rotting or incorporation and digestion by the consumer?

To Saleem, chutney represents the hope for recreating reality, which he is presented as associating with completeness. Saleem reads the fact that chutney may consist of almost anything as that it is capable of containing everything: all of India (MC 642), its 'four hundred million five hundred six' (MC 647) inhabitants or even 'the world' (MC 145). Yet, as Kortenaar points out, the meaning of Rushdie's novel 'does not lie in all that it can contain but in all that escapes its control'.[583] Saleem's idea of chutney – and by parallel of the narrative – as representing completeness and as possible container of the world is juxtaposed with postmodern imagery of leakage, spillage, of the pouring of emotions and memories into and out of people, of the continuing transformation even of chutney in jars.[584] The jars cannot counteract these processes, but their existence, Saleem's containing of the chutneys, his numbering and labelling speak of the need of narrative and meaning, which is rejected.

Chutney in *Midnight's Children* is much more than, as Sen has it, a tool to establish the culturally Other and 'concerned with representing the culinary culture of a particular group in order to establish racial, ethnic, linguistic, and national specificity'.[585] Indefinable, crossing conceptual (sweet and salty; culture and nature; etc.), linguistic (chutnification) and national (India, Britain, etc.) borders, non-hierarchical, uncountable, hybrid, prone to leakage and continued transformation by maturing within the jar and incorporation, chutney is an uncontrollable substance that even containers fail to contain and which contradicts Saleem's endeavour in many ways. So why does he choose it? Saleem is unaware of the multiple implications of chutney outlined so far. He chooses it for a different and specific characteristic: based on his personal experience of chutney, it becomes in his mind an ostensible representative of the possibility of containing experience. Saleem's attempt reflects Proust's narrator's experience of food and memory in *Du côté de chez Swann*. Saleem's particular experience is described in a central scene: in the same way as Proust's narrator, Saleem

[582] Sen, *Eating India*, p. 110.
[583] Kortenaar, *Self, Nation, Text*, p. 256.
[584] There are more than sixty figurative uses of the verbs to 'leak', to 'seep', to 'pour' and to 'spill'.
[585] Sen, *Eating India*, p. 15.

tastes a chutney and feels as if transported back in time to his childhood when he used to eat it. He discerns in this particular chutney the 'power of bringing back the past' (MC 637):

> The taste of the chutney was more than just an echo of that long-ago taste – it was the old taste itself, the very same, with the power of bringing back the past as it if had never been away. In a frenzy of excitement, I grabbed the blind waitress by the arm. (MC 637)

In Proust's famous 'madeleine episode' from the first volume of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, eating a madeleine similarly triggers remembrance.[586] Gilroy points out that 'the memory of the senses' is in Proust involuntary memory.[587] Proust's episode affirms the belief in the possibility to involuntarily retrieve memory from the unconscious by way of sensual experience and to express it through writing. Saleem draws on Proust's narrator's experience and concludes that a preservation of the past must be possible. Yet while Proust's narrator experiences the madeleine and the memories it carries involuntarily, Saleem attempts to consciously recreate and preserve the past. Yet in spite of its narrator's aims, *Midnight's Children* problematizes this idea: as a postmodern novel, it chooses the chutney as Saleem's tool in the attempt to contain the past. This tool already entails the failure of Saleem's attempt, because chutney is characterised by continued transformation rather than the possibility of conservation.

The relation between Saleem, whose endeavour to create a narrative of collective memory fails, and Proust's novel, which presents the possibility of writing encapsulating experience and memory, is parodied in the difference in choice of item of food: Proust's clearly-defined madeleine and Saleem's slippery chutney differ on almost every level. Where the petite madeleine is defined by its shape ('moulded in the fluted valve of a scallop shell'), the other has neither stable texture nor colour.[588] Where one consists of a limited number of ingredients and gives limited scope for creativity, the other may contain a multiplicity of ingredients and is open to innovation. Where one is countable, the other is not (unless jarred). Where one is sweet, the other can be sweet, sour, salty, or all of these. The madeleine is an item in itself, chutney is a condiment. Rather than using food and the senses to illustrate the possibility of reliving the past,

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[586] Proust, *Swann's Way,* pp. 51-5.
[587] James P. Gilroy, 'Food, Cooking, and Eating in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 33 (1987), 98-109 (p. 100-1).
[588] Proust, *Swann's Way*, p. 51.

chutney questions the possibility of preserving in the form of food or narrative in order to create a collective memory.

The relation that Saleem establishes between his narrative and chutney is complex and goes beyond his intentions and control. The substance combines imagery of postmodern aesthetics (slipperiness, leakage, seeping, mélange, a condition beyond fragmentation) and postcolonialism (hybridity) as well as characteristics belonging to poststructuralist thought (arbitrariness, uncontrollability, crossing of ostensible boundaries). His aims of meaning, form, control and authorship in narration – is it enough to say that the chutney metaphor challenges these? Moving on from a consideration of the chutney-narrative substance into its production will continue to address this question.

4.5 The conditions of production of chutney and the narrative

Having established the main connotations of chutney and problematized Saleem's alignment of narrative with chutney, the question arises of the conditions of production bound up with the metaphor. First, the section argues on the basis of different theories of psychoanalysis that food production in *Midnight's Children* destabilizes Saleem's idea of narrative control and stable meaning. In the Freudian view, cultural production represents the possibility of control and psychological satisfaction by means of sublimation; in contrast to this, Lacanian analysis of lack offers a perspective on the uncontrollable leakage and uncontainable shapelessness of Saleem's chutney-narrative.[589] A further central aspect in Saleem's creative production is language. In his attempt to produce a narrative of collective memory, Saleem chooses the language of food in order to reach a large audience. Yet this signifying system is also a language of Bourdieusian distinction and exclusion. The reading will show that Saleem is at the factory surprisingly excluded from involvement in the cultural realm of cooking. If Saleem is not the (only) cook of the chutneys, the question arises of the producers of the chutney-narrative, a question addressed in the section subsequent to this, concerned with Saleem's representation of the producers.

Saleem's narrative aims and the way in which chutney thwarts them are fundamental to the narration of *Midnight's Children* and testimony to the fundamental role food plays within it. Saleem narrates because of a 'desperate need for meaning' (MC 230). Yet as he relates his narrative closely to food production, does it also entail

[589] See the section on psychoanalytic theory in the first chapter of this thesis.

what Fischler describes as the ambiguous experience of the incorporation of food which always contains both, aspects of pleasure and fear?[590] The novel implies this: Saleem sees in the condiment the possibility of preservation, of constructing meaning and giving form; this ideal of stable form and meaning, however, stands in harsh contrast to chutney, a heterogeneous, indefinable, constantly changing mass. 'Impurity, intermingling, transformation, mongrelisation, mélange, hotchpotch, pastiche, palimpsest' are terms to describe the chutney. Michael Krieg uses them to describe Rushdie's postmodern style.[591] Krieg's terms imply the possibility of their opposite (describing impurity implies the existence of purity), reflecting at the same time a desire for unity, wholeness, completion, Saleem's desires which cannot be satisfied. The contrast between Saleem's intentions and the obstacles and dissatisfactions inherent in his attempt invite the reading against Freudian theories of ego control and the Lacanian rejection of the possibility of control and satisfaction.

Freudian psychoanalysis assigns cultural production to the ego whose function it is to subjugate the drives of the id. The belief in cultural control is reflected in Saleem's self-presentation having achieved 'mastery of the multiple gifts of cookery and language' (MC 44). Suggesting control, he organises his narrative neatly into thirty chapters and three books which correspond to labelled chutney jars. 'The fate of my nation', according to him, is 'in my hands' and he supposedly controls the narrative 'as the moon controls the tides' (MC 193). Evasively slippery, chutney undermines these claims of control.

In Freudian drive theory, cultural production is the result of the sublimation of the basic drives (the oral, the anal and the genital). Irion takes this connection between drives and cultural production further and identifies the urge to achieve immortality as the defining common characteristic of them both.[592] Can Saleem's cultural production in narrative and cooking be said to be geared towards evading his own extinction? *Midnight's Children* stresses Saleem's impotence, his inability to produce offspring and Saleem attempts to balance this perceived failure with creative productivity. On several occasions in the novel, his penis is described as the 'other pencil'. 'Now that the writery [sic] is done', Padma says to Saleem, 'let's see if we can make your other pencil work!' (MC 45). A reading in the light of Freudian psychoanalysis implies that Saleem's

[590] Fischler, 'Identity'.
[591] Krieg, 'Hybrid Identities', para. 35.
[592] Ulrich Irion, *Eros und Thanatos in der Moderne: Nietzsche und Freud als Vollender eines anti-christlichen Grundzugs im europäischen Denken* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1992), p. 40.

cultural activities, cooking and writing, are geared towards immortality as genital libido is out of order. Since his 'other pencil' refuses to function, Saleem strives to 'immortalise in pickles [and] words' (MC 502), to achieve the '*impregnation* of food' and narrative with form, meaning, structure (MC 459; italics mine). According to Kane, the narrator here indeed 'pits textual production against biological procreation as a superior method of national formation, even as he portrays his own writing as phallic'.[593] Thus writing is a method of evading mortality. But what about culinary cultural production?

Kane's interpretation overlooks that the relation established between writing and libido does not only affect genital, but also oral libido. Readings of Freud have emphasised that 'sexual desire originates in the satisfaction of the need for nourishment'.[594] In this view, oral rather than genital libido is seen as basis of human behaviour.[595] The oral combines aspects of narrative, especially in Saleem's tale which is narrated to Padma, and a reference to food. Food and sex are commonly linked linguistically and 'metaphorically overlapping'.[596] Characteristics of the oral libidinal stage, the mouth as erotogenic zone and the relation between food and eroticism are represented in Saleem's behaviour.[597] His autobiography begins with an extreme possessiveness of the breast: he 'drains' his mother's 'not inconsiderable breasts of milk' (MC 169) before a wet-nurse is employed who leaves the house 'dried-out as a desert after only a fortnight' (MC 169-70). Saleem continues to be attracted by breasts: his first sexual experience centres on this erogenous zone, which Saleem associates with delicious food: breasts are 'spherical as melons, golden as mangoes' (MC 335). At the end of the novel the thirty-year-old father suckles side-by-side with his son (MC 642).[598] Freud's theory of sublimation suggests that, in the light of Saleem's libidinal fixation, his cooking and narrative are alternative activities in the attempt to satisfy the

[593] Jean M. Kane, 'The Migrant Intellectual and the Body of History: Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children", *Contemporary Literature*, 37 (1996), 94-118 (p. 97). Note also the parallelism of genital libido and oral narrative in *The Arabian Nights* where narrator and her listener regularly withdraw to have sex and over the years produce several children.

[594] Ellmann, *Hunger Artists*, p. 36. This view is not only held by psychoanalysts: Counihan says that 'eating, intercourse, and reproduction […] share certain biopsychological attributes that endow them with metaphorical and symbolic identity – particularly their contributions to life and growth': Counihan, *Food and Body*, p. 62.

[595] Abraham pays more attention to this stage of libidinal development, observing that in the oral stage, food intake and eroticism are one: Abraham, 'Prägenitale Libido', p. 87.

[596] Counihan, *Food and Body*, p. 62. Counihan furthermore observes that 'in many cultures there are associations between eating, intercourse, and reproduction (ibid).

[597] See a detailed analysis of Saleem's breast fixation below.

[598] Grass's novel *Der Butt* also speaks of this typically misogynist fixation: 'Diese typisch männliche Tittomanie[.] Dieser Schrei nach der Ur-Super-Nährmutter': Grass, *Butt*, p. 11; 'This typically male tittomaia[.] This cry for the primal mother, the super wet-nurse': Grass, *Flounder*, p. 5.

basic drive to procreate despite his impotence.[599] Freud describes sublimation as the 'capacity to exchange its originally sexual aim for another one, which is no longer sexual but which is psychically related to the first aim'.[600] The presence of food in and around Saleem's narrative (he speaks of food as well as living at the pickle factory) and his urgent oral narrative can be read along these lines as cultural sublimates of sexual intercourse.

These are interesting outcomes, yielded by a reading of food in the light of Freudian psychoanalysis. Yet first cracks appear in the clean and controlled image of cultural sublimation of basic drives. Does Saleem's ongoing breast fixation not suggest unsuccessful sublimation? In relation to his son Aadam, Saleem asks a crucial question applicable to himself: 'who […] does the boy imagine he is?' (MC 642). Who *does* Saleem imagine he is? The ultimate 'pickler-in-chief' (MC 459) and 'master of […] cookery' (MC 44) in the Hindu pantheon is Indra. The novel refers to the myth according to 'which, as all students of Hindu cosmology will know, Indra created matter' 'by stirring the primal soup in his own great milk-churn' (MC 268). While Padma wishes Saleem was like the potent god (MC 268) and while Saleem figures himself an Indra figure, churning the whole of India into being in his huge pot of chutney-narrative, it is in fact Padma who churns: she administers a home-made aphrodisiac which puts Saleem in the 'state of "churning"' that he speaks of (MC 268). Rather than a controlling, creating narrator-cook, Saleem is also the object of the powers he believes to hold. Rushdie's narrator can therefore only up to a degree be read alongside controlled Freudian libidinal sublimation. And if he satisfactorily sublimates drive energy by means of narrative and cooking, then why is he falling apart? Can one trust Saleem's self-presentation of controlling 'pickler-in-chief' (MC 459) when uncontrollable cracks are spreading all over his body (MC 42; 645) and when, as cook, he admits 'the flavourful contributions of the occasional speck of dirt' (MC 644) in the chutneys he is supposedly the master of (MC 44)? Can Saleem be said to have successfully sublimated and controlled drives if the novel ends with him succumbing to potent, uncontrollable Shiva who produces 'legions of' (MC 615) offspring?[601]

Lacanian theory offers a perspective on such cracks and discrepancies. According to Lacan, the child experiences a loss of an imaginary unity with the nourishing mother.

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[599] It is questionable in how far Saleem produces culinary art. He is nevertheless psychologically involved in the process, even if the actual cooking is in other people's hands (see below the section on producers).
[600] Freud, 'Sexual Morality', p. 187.
[601] Shiva the god is commonly represented by the Lingam, which is a phallic symbol.

This loss of the breast, originally perceived as part of the self, cannot be compensated for, because the unity was illusionary to begin with. Lack is met with fantasy, which conjures up what cannot be had because it does not exist: according to Lacan, the end of the Imaginary Order coincides with the rise of the Symbolic, which is language. Rather than a strategy to achieve control as in Freudian theories, cultural production in Lacan results from lack. The end of Lacan's Imaginary Order with the severance form the milk-producing breast is doubly evoked in *Midnight's Children*. First, there are complications during the nursing period when his mother's and subsequently also his wet-nurse's breasts are withdrawn from him (MC 169-70). Second, the lack-inducing severance from the breast is represented symbolically in Saleem's first sexual encounter.[602] When his parents find out that he is not their biological child, they 'loan [him] out' (MC 33) and he temporarily becomes Pia and Hanif's foster-child. Yet Saleem is infatuated with Pia's 'adorable breasts' (MC 335) and finds himself 'trying to keep [his] eyes away from two impossible orbs, spherical as melons, golden as mangoes' (MC 335). Saleem pretends not to notice when 'her wondrous skin-wrapped melons heaved' (MC 335-6), but eventually he finds himself 'huddling against my mumani's perfumed curves' (MC 345), a 'golden melon caress[ing his] cheek' (MC 345). Saleem's pleasant experience ends with the withdrawal of Pia's breast as he is turned out. The food imagery stresses the relation of sexuality and delicious nourishment via the breast.

According to Lacan, following the withdrawal of the breast, lack becomes structural. This aspect of Lacan's theory reverberates in Saleem's autobiography. First there is the 'perforated sheet', described as 'the point at which it really began' (MC 4). Saleem regards it as his only 'guide' in his endeavour to 'remake [his] life' (MC 4) through narration and cooking. The hole in the sheet as Saleem's narrative guide mirrors Lacan's presentation of lack as leading via language to cultural production. Second, there is Saleem's perception of a 'hole in the centre of' (MC 266) him. This hole in the location of the stomach relates lack back to the nutritional aspects of the lost nourishing breast.

In Lacanian theory, the original unity with the mother is imaginary so that the original state cannot be reinstated and lack cannot be overcome. In Saleem's tale, this is shown when not even the women he presents as mother figures and as responsible for

[602] The representation of Lacan's stage can be said to be mere symbolical, because the development is part of infant development and does not usually take place in puberty as the scene in *Midnight's Children.*

the hole in him can satisfy him: the hole remains 'the place which they [women] should have filled' (MC 266). Lack produces desire. This desire and the failure to satisfy it, in other words the continued hunger, is reflected in Saleem's narrative and culinary attempts to overcome it. The 'substances' that Saleem chooses to fill the multiple voids inside – narrative and chutney – fail to satisfy his desire: chutney is itself an unstable substance that stimulates appetite rather than satisfying hunger. As a slippery, changeable substance it evades definition and even its subjugation by putting it in glass jars is illusory: it continues to change uncontrollably even within the container. The condiment and Saleem's treatment of it represents the desire of control and satisfaction as well as showing the futility of any attempts in that direction. Read against the backdrop of Lacanian theory, food in *Midnight's Children* reflects the incapability of narrative to satisfy desire, which is always already related to something impossible, inexistent, a lack. It is thus impossible 'to live or die in peace' (MC 647) for no matter how many jars and chapters Saleem fills, one 'must remain empty' (MC 645).

Beyond Lacanian theory, narrative dissatisfaction and the impossibility of achieving universal meaning also lies in the language Saleem chooses for his attempt to create a large narrative, one bigger and longer-lasting than himself. In order to communicate this grand narrative of collective memory, Saleem strives to employ a universal language in the hope to address all India. Yet distinction and exclusion are already inscribed in his narrative through taste. The language of food has been described as signifying system used by all humanity: 'if there is no society without a language, nor is there any which does not cook in some manner'.[603] Sen points out that 'what the young Saleem had learned about communicative cookery from his ayah, his grandmother, and his Aunt Alia in a private, domestic setting, he hopes to replicate in a national, or even international, scale'.[604] As a tool of 'mass communication' it appears to be a good option in Saleem's attempt to address a nation comprised of speakers of at least three hundred different languages, many of them illiterate.[605] Saleem identifies the metaphor of food and cooking as easily accessible to all India. To him, it is a common language between himself, the educated middle-class boy, and his uneducated audience. This view becomes clear in exchanges such as the following, where Saleem patronisingly uses food to explain and illustrate to Padma: 'I attempt to educate her: "things – even people – have a way of leaking into each other", I explain, "like flavours

[603] Lévi-Strauss, 'Triangle', p. 28.
[604] Sen, *Eating India*, p. 99.
[605] Ibid, p. 103.

when you cook"'' (MC 44). Despite the universality of the sensual experience of food, class differences and distinction are frequently expressed through taste. This aspect is of great relevance in this novel which centrally addresses class and class difference (Saleem's relationship to both Padma and Shiva highlights class: Saleem has been 'saved', as he puts it, by 'education, or class-origins' while his arch-enemy Shiva grew up in poverty and believes that 'there is only money-and-poverty, and have-and-lack'; MC 293-4; 354).[606]

The connection between class and chutney-narrative lies in taste as described by Bourdieu: taste, he has demonstrated, is a mode of distinction and Saleem's sole role in chutney production is precisely the choosing of ingredients according to taste (MC 642). His extraordinary nose (MC 44; 643), one of the two main organs of taste, is an organ whose incredible abilities are absolutely exclusive to Salem: 'I, Saleem Sinai, possessor of the most delicately-gifted olfactory organ in history' (MC 44). The register with which he describes his 'olfactory organ' also points to distinction (the irony of the quotation is not Saleem's but the novel's as it ridicules Saleem) and widens the gap between his language and his audience's (does Padma know this almost medical term?). Banerjee believes that Saleem's chutney-narrative is a 'matter of personal taste'.[607] Yet as Bourdieu has shown, taste is frequently not a private matter and instead indicative of social division. While Saleem seeks a language with which to communicate a narrative of validity to all India, his tale is based on a signifying system which divides as well as unites. The universality in voice and meaning that he strives at to unite all India in one narrative is impossible: the relation of food and taste implies that unity (the universal signifying system of food) co-exists with separation (the distinguishing function of taste).

Saleem's specialised involvement at the pickle factory has a further aspect, for in final analysis it means that Saleem handles raw ingredients rather than engaging in the cooking process, the stirring and churning. He chooses fruit, yet is uninvolved in the cultural transformation of the raw materials. 'Copper vats bubble and seethe' (MC 290), yet who are the 'vat-stirrers' (MC 643) working among the 'bubbling' (MC 291) pots? The cultural activity of chutney production and thus, according to Saleem's own alignment of the two, of narrative production, is by no means only Saleem's. There are other cooks – Saleem's 'Other' cooks.

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[606] The novel also presents the arbitrary nature of class as Saleem and Shiva are exchanged at birth.
[607] Banerjee, *Chutneyfication*, p. 206 .

4.6 Producers and the problem of authorship

While Saleem's is the only narrative voice, reading *Midnight's Children* through food brings out marginalised cultural agents from the kitchen and pickle factory. According to Saleem's alignment of the production of chutney and narrative, whoever cooks is a potential producer of his narrative and thus holds a powerful role, creating collective memory and national identity. The other cooks are thus potential competitors for what Saleem likes to present as his exclusive narrative authority. The Other cooks in the novel include Padma, Saleem's grandmother Naseem, his spinster-aunt Alia, his mother Amina and his Ayah Mary Pereira, who opens the pickle factory where Saleem later produces his narrative. The present analysis refutes interpretations that have read these figures as secondary. It is instead shown that they are producers of what Saleem appropriates and misrepresents as exclusively *his* narrative and *his* chutneys ('my chutneys'; MC 44).

Grass is famous for the central role of food and cooking in his oeuvre.[608] *Der Butt* has been described as Grass's most culinary novel and its narrator perceives himself as teller of 'Küchengeschichten', kitchen stories. [609] The novel is true to this description, as it is concerned with 'the relationship between food and political history, food and being human, food and "higher ideals," and food and freedom'.[610] The narrative is 'a gastronomic history' of humankind which it relates to the consequences of matriarchy and patriarchy.[611] Grass's novel *Der Butt* articulates aspects which remain obscurely implicit in Saleem's dichotomous presentation, manifest in food and nourishment, of himself as male narrator and his female Other. Rushdie appears to be mimicking some of Grass's techniques of *Der Butt* in *Midnight's Children*: like Grass's narrator, Saleem too offers an alternative history.[612] Grass's text, using food as an icon of cultural development, traces the development of civilization beginning with the prehistoric.

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[608] For food in Grass see Volker Neuhaus and Anselm Weyer (eds), *Küchenzettel: Essen und Trinken im Werk Günter Grass* (Frankfurt a.M.: Lang, 2007); Noel Thomas, 'Food Poisoning, Cooking, and Historiography in the Works of Günter Grass', in Bevan, *Literary Gastronomy*, pp. 7-17; Fenichel Pitkin, 'Food and Freedom'; Alois Wierlacher, *Vom Essen in der deutschen Literatur: Mahlzeiten in Erzähltexten von Goethe bis Grass* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1987). Grass also won the Eckart Witzigmann-Preis of the *Deutsche Akademie für Kulinaristik*.

[609] Markus Wallenborn, 'Tell us what the Children eat…Kinderlose Mütter und mutterlose Kinder im *Butt*', in Volker Neuhaus and Anselm Weyer (eds), *Küchenzettel: Essen und Trinken im Werk Günter Grass* (Frankfurt a.M.: Lang, 2007), pp. 109-21 (p. 109). Grass, *Butt*, p. 13. 'Kitchen tales': Grass, *Flounder*, p. 7.

[610] Fenichel Pitkin, 'Food and Freedom', p. 469.

[611] Ibid, p. 468.

[612] According to Engel, *Der Butt* underlies the idea of the re-writing of history in *Midnight's Children*: Engel, *Grass bei Rushdie, Irving, Malamud*, p. 127.

Saleem's (hi)story begins in the colonial era and, with the chutney as guiding principle, moves into the postcolonial. Like Grass, Rushdie presents Saleem's narrative as oral narrative. A close relation to folk- or fairy-tale can be observed and the narrators' (would-be) lovers Ilsebill and Padma function as respective audience. The audience in both cases also hold the function of cooks. In both *Der Butt* and *Midnight's Children*, women are cooks and figures of nourishment. *Der Butt* spells out how power relationships manifest in food, cooking and nourishment: Woman is the natural nourishing figure, which accounts for her great historic power; Man is the archetypal author, which gives him narrative power which he has used to misrepresent Woman in the attempt to oust her. This explicit presentation in *Der Butt* helps bring out aspects of authorship in *Midnight's Children*: Saleem marginalises the female cooks, yet they are not marginal. Grass's representation of the gendered power struggle over the *making* of history is applied in *Midnight's Children* to the power struggle over historio*graphy*, over narrative and authorship. Rushdie takes Grass's historical anthropology, which juxtaposes matriarchy and patriarchy, into a new context: in Rushdie's novel cooking is aligned with writing (a central difference to Grass) and the question of who cooks is also the question of who speaks. Food in *Midnight's Children* implicitly presents the power politics of authorship, the struggle for narrative legitimization and the processes of marginalization to which it leads.

The frame narrative of *Der Butt* presents the first person narrator and his pregnant wife Ilsebill. The narrator represents the male half of humanity at all times. In his narrative he describes in chronological order his incarnations beginning with the Neolithic age. His wife Ilsebill is the contemporary incarnation of woman at all times.[613] While the narrator is always the artist and writer figure, Ilsebill is through the centuries the cook and nourishing mother-figure. (Note that in contrast to *Midnight's Children*, narrative and cooking do not overlap.) The narrator's first memory is of the Neolithic age: 'when myths were beginning to distinguish between raw food and cooked food'.[614] In other words, this narrative of human history begins with the conceptual distinction between raw and cooked, which is, following from Lévi-Strauss, the inception of food as signifying system. The second narrative voice in addition to the narrator is that of the flounder who takes it upon himself to try to help Man achieve independence from, or wean from, Woman, furthering the cause of the development of humankind, in other

[613] Grass, *Butt*, p. 9.
[614] 'Als das Rohe und Gekochte in Mythen geschieden wurde': Grass, *Butt*, p. 9. Grass, *Flounder*, p. 3.

words its cultural progress beyond mere survival. Realising that the flounder has been behind the patriarchal order, he is put on trial by a group of feminists in the 1970s. The narrator reports and comments on the tribunal while the flounder's testimony conveys the story of his interaction with humanity throughout the ages. The trial ends with the flounder's condemnation and punishment. The end of the novel implies the birth of a new matriarchy.[615]

In *Der Butt*, women's power through cooking is quite literal: women 'ruled by cookery' – 'the kitchen is dominion'.[616] In *Der Butt* women have power over cooking, Man has power over writing and cannot cook. Yet in *Midnight's Children*, Saleem has a choice – he cooks *and* writes – the women in his tale do not – the kitchen is the only sphere of cultural production open to them. Thus, the kitchen is both locus of power but also of limitation.[617] Ostensibly feminist theories frequently describe the nourishing role as empowering: the 'control of alimentation is a source of power because food is a very special substance'.[618] Cooking is powerful in that it may satisfy hunger but also, as Fischler points out, may induce illness and lead to death. Counihan believes that 'the power of women has often derived from the power of food'.[619] Arlene Avakian's collection of essays in *Through the Kitchen Window* presents the cultural role of culinary work.[620] In 'Appetite Lost, Appetite Found' Barolini describes the kitchen as 'an embassy of cultural tradition', 'not only the center of food-making – it is the place from which emanate ritual and tradition and family history'.[621] Mary Pereira's pickle factory could be regarded as such a locus of culture and family history: her pickles provide Saleem access, as he believes, to his past.[622]

Having power over cooking, women in *Midnight's Children* hold a tool of socio-cultural communication. In *Der Butt*, the inception of the distinction between raw and cooked is attributed to women, rendering the women the initiators of early culinary

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[615] Grass, *Butt*, p. 693-4. Grass, *Flounder*, p. 631-2.
[616] 'Herrscht[en], indem sie kochte[n]'; 'Die Küche ist Herrschaft': Grass, *Butt*, p. 16; 18. Grass, *Flounder*, 10; 12.
[617] In reference to Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*, Banerjee describes women's cultural expression as limited to the culinary: Banerjee, *Chutneyfication*, p. 36.
[618] Counihan, *Food and Body*, p. 47.
[619] Ibid, p. 46.
[620] Arlene Voski Avakian (ed.), *Through the Kitchen Window: Women Explore the Intimate Meanings of Food and Cooking* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998).
[621] Helen Barolini, 'Appetite Lost, Appetite Found: Horace's Torte, Vegetables Gardiniera', in Avakian, *Kitchen Window*, pp. 228-37 (p. 235).
[622] This is illustrated in the Proustian scene in which the consumption of green chutney brings back Saleem's past (MC 637).

culture, which is, as Lévi-Strauss describes it, based on this distinction.[623] Goonetilleke describes Mary Pereira as the 'nurturer of Saleem's creative/ chutnifying power'.[624] The same can be said of Padma, who feeds Saleem through his cultural production process. However, Goonetilleke overlooks that nourishing women do not only *aid* cultural production. By cooking, they actively *engage* in cultural production and although Saleem lays claim to being the 'master' of the narrative and of chutney, the women in his life are literally his 'masters' as he learned his art from them:

> What my aunt Alia took pleasure in: cooking. What she had, during the lonely madness of the years, raised to the level of an art-form: the impregnation of food with emotions. To whom she remained second in her achievements in this field: my old ayah, Mary Pereira. By whom, today, both old cooks have been outdone: Saleem Sinai, pickler-in-chief at the Braganza pickle works. (MC 459)

According to Sen, Saleem learns the language of food from his grandmother and Mary Pereira as they communicate their views and stories through cooking.[625] From Mary Saleem learns the technique of 'the pickling of time' (MC 642). Thus, the cultural role of *Midnight's Children*'s female cooks is not minor: read against Grass's intertext, they develop the language of food (having conceptually separated the raw from the cooked in *Der Butt*) and the art of preserving and creating narrative by cooking.

Yet these cultural agents are excluded from what is presented as the locus of literary cultural production. This seems paradoxical but is not: these figures are demonised and marginalised by Saleem precisely because they are powerful cultural agents with whom Saleem, anxious to create a unified, stable narrative, competes. Padma is a good example of women's exclusion that is manifest on several levels. Illiterate Padma is excluded in terms of education as she has access to the narrative (in which she figures as object) only through Saleem. She is physically marginalised as she listens to Saleem's narrative from the position on the floor beside his desk (MC 142). She is not even on eye level. Excluded from participation in the production of a tale that also tells her own story, Padma 'makes up a cot in the corner of [his] office and prepares [his] food' (MC 44). With the world of writing as cultural practice and expression closed, it is precisely nourishment which is left for Padma and the other women in

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[623] Grass, *Butt*, p. 16.
[624] D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke, *Salman Rushdie*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 42.
[625] Sen, *Eating India*, p. 103.

Saleem's narrative as sphere of power and cultural expression. In the world of cooking and culinary cultural production, they 'rule' (MC 49). Yet, as Weickgenannt points out, 'women in *Midnight's Children* cannot be portrayed as powerful without at the same time carrying the potential for the monstrous'.[626] The following quotation illustrates this as Reverend Mother's rule over kitchen and pantry is portrayed as both powerful and cannibalistically threatening:

> Pantry and kitchen were [Reverend Mother's] inalienable territory; and she defended them ferociously. When she was carrying her last child, […] her husband offered to relieve her of the chore of supervising the cook. […] when Aziz approached the kitchen, she emerged from it with a metal pot in her hands and barred the doorway. She was fat and also pregnant, so there was not much room left in the doorway. Aadam Aziz frowned. "What is this, wife?" to which my grandmother answered, "This […] is a very heavy pot; and if just once I catch you in here, […] I'll push your head into it, add some dahi, and make […] a korma". (MC 48-9)

Such passages illustrate the strong tendency of *Midnight's Children* to portray its female characters as powerful in the limited sphere of the culinary and simultaneously as 'endowed with a form of monstrosity which is in general directed against men and which leaves them either dead or emasculated'.[627] As the culinary is the only tool of power left to these women, it is also here that Saleem's 'patriarchal anxiety about women's power' manifests.[628] In the 'war of starvation' (MC 51), a row about their children's religious education, Naseem vows that 'no food will come from [her] kitchen to [Aziz] lips! No, not one chapati' (MC 51). Refusing to feed her husband, Reverend Mother blackmails Aadam Aziz and, so Saleem presents it, almost kills him. While Reverend Mother's threat is comic, the novel presents nourishment in the hands of women as a matter of life and death that puts men at the mercy of a demonic force: 'the images associated with [Reverend Mother] float freely between various monstrous creatures such as witch, vampire and demon'.[629]

Saleem's portrayal of women's rule in kitchen and pantry indeed frequently makes use of imagery of unpredictable magic, manipulative witchery and enigmatic potions.

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[626] Nicole Weickgenannt, 'Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*: The Nation's Monstrous Women: Wives, Widows and Witches', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 43 (2008) 65-83 (p. 72).
[627] Ibid.
[628] Ibid, p. 73.
[629] Ibid, p. 72.

Saleem describes the female cooks in his life not only as nourishing mother figures but also as dangerous, unpredictable witches.

> I never entered the [kitchen], but remembered staring through the pantry's locked screen-doors at the enigmatic world within, a world of hanging wire baskets covered with linen cloths to keep out the flies, of tins which I knew to be full of gur and other sweets, of locked chests with neat square labels, of nuts and turnips and sacks of grain, of goose-eggs and wooden brooms. (MC 48)

Like in a fairy-tale, where forbidden doors often hold the sweetest secrets and open to magic places, kitchen and pantry are restricted 'enigmatic world[s]' (MC 48) in which mysterious 'locked chests' (MC 48) hold unknown substances with magic powers that can transform their eater. Saleem's description reminds us of that of a witches' kitchen, at which he stares with equal amounts of temptation and fear. His aunt practices 'culinary witchcraft' (MC 462) and 'Parvati-the-*Witch*' (italics mine) produces 'a dinner of biryani so exquisite that [Shiva] stopped wondering what was happening to him' (MC 574). Peeking through the pantry door, Saleem notices 'wooden brooms' (MC 48).

With its context of cooking and nourishment, this portrayal corresponds to Fischler's description of the tensions between the potential danger and pleasure of food.[630] The witchery can both poison and heal: Padma poisons with the home-made aphrodisiac (MC 267-8) and Parvati's food is designed to make the energetic Shiva apathic. Yet Saleem's father is 'revived by his mother-in-law's cookery' (MC 195) and Padma's food gives Saleem the energy to continue his narrative. Referring to his aunt, Saleem points out that 'her food tasted good. (Despite its hidden content.)' (MC 459).[631] In Saleem's portrayal, these powerful witches' food is sustaining yet also dangerously poisonous interference.[632]

As women in *Midnight's Children* are excluded from the world of literacy and narrative cultural production, they are protective of the culinary sphere that has (until Saleem's entrance) been left to them. Reverend Mother fiercely defends her kitchen against male intruders and a similar situation happens when Saleem first tries to enter

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[630] Fischler, 'Identity'.

[631] The misogyny of the dual imagery of witch or submissive saint is addressed by Ilsebill in conversation with Grass's narrator: 'Aus mir hier eine Hexe machen wollen oder Heilige, wie es dir grad in den Kram paßt'; 'Trying to make a witch or a saint out of me, whatever serves your purpose at the moment', *Flounder*, p. 129.

[632] Saleem's portrayal of women can be read as the culinary version of the misogynist Madonna-whore dichotomy described in psychoanalysis.

Braganza Pickles chutney factory where Padma 'plant[s] herself in front of [him], arms akimbo' and demands: 'You, mister: what you want?' (MC 638). The factory is initially an entirely female space. Women finance the enterprise (MC 640), the deity watching over the factory is the Mother Goddess Munbadevi (MC 637) and Mary Pereira's recipes are produced by an 'army of strong, hairy-armed, formidably competent women' (MC 229). The chutneys produced here, it is important to note, have been made famous by these female workers long before Saleem showed up (MC 640).

Saleem ridicules the women's defence of their culinary spaces. Yet that it is justified becomes clear when Saleem is finally allowed into the factory by Mary, who 'admits no males […] into her new, comfortable universe' (MC 643-4) but makes an exception for Saleem. (The exception results from her sense of guilt as she exchanged Saleem with another baby at birth.) Having been allowed in, the guest in a world which, contrary to his perception, does not much need him, monopolizes the factory. Saleem is hardly engaged in any actual work at the factory: the place is buzzing with productivity while he takes a stroll (MC 229) or lies thinking in his office (MC 291). Nevertheless, he literally looks down on the workers on the cooking-floor (MC 290), describes himself as 'pickler-in-chief at the Braganza pickle works' (MC 459). Despite his disengagement, Saleem passes off the recipes and chutneys as his own: he states that 'my responsibility is for the creative aspects of our work' at the factory (MC 642). Yet he admits that he at most 'supervise[s] the production of *Mary's* legendary recipes' (MC 643; italics mine) and the reader knows that the chutneys here have for decades been successfully produced following Mary's recipes. Having been allowed into the factory, Saleem appropriates the labour of others. In this light, the women's previous harsh defence of their already limited sphere of self-determined cultural production appears reasonable.

Appropriating their work while simultaneously competing with them for narrative legitimization, Saleem can be expected to cut the female cooks out of his picture of cultural production. It has been shown that these figures are already excluded from literary cultural production. How does he deal with the role of Other cooks in culinary cultural production? Saleem makes use of cliché and misogynist tropes related to food and nourishment to marginalise these cultural agents. Based on the physical distinction of the nourishing breast, food behaviour has, according to some theorists, become a tool of gender identification: 'by claiming different roles in regard to food […], men and

women define their masculinity and femininity, their similarity and difference'.[633] In her Body Studies reader, Londa Schiebinger discusses the body/mind dichotomy, describing a conceptual opposition which can be translated into mind/male/culture versus body/female/nature.[634] Sarah Sceats points out that the body still makes for a large part of the construct of female identity.[635] What is not said explicitly in *Midnight's Children* is addressed directly in Grass's novel: 'Männer nähren nicht', men do not nourish, 'don't give suck'.[636] With this, Markus Wallenborn argues, gender differences are in *Der Butt* defined along the line of nourishing/ not nourishing as an irrevocable natural law.[637] Saleem uses this misogynist association of women with the body and natural nourishment less overtly. Yet the association is less effective than in *Der Butt*, because, in contrast to Grass's novel, Saleem equates cooking and narrative.

Saleem reads the many women in his life as the multiple faces of the goddess Bharat-Mata (MC 567), a Mother Nature figure.[638] The implications of this metaphor are twofold. First, it presents the archetypal woman as mother. Second, as 'notions of motherhood are inextricably entwined with feeding', the archetypal mother is also a great nourishing figure.[639] Saleem positions women as much as possible in the realm of the natural and physical. When it comes to mental abilities, *Midnight's Children* frequently ridicules female ignorance and juxtaposes it with male knowledge, thought and culture. Saleem describes the 'ignorance and superstition' (MC 206) of his audience Padma, who is illiterate; Mary Pereira is portrayed as submissive fanatic; Ahmad Aziz despairs at his wife's ignorance who exclaims: 'I am not stupid. I have read several books' (MC 40).

Saleem's portrayal of women in the novel is here read as politically motivated: it reflects the need to marginalise a competing cultural agent in order to be able to appropriate their work while simultaneously securing his legitimization over narrative and culinary cultural production. The present analysis puts into perspective some

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[633] Counihan, *Food and Body*, p. 12.
[634] Londa Schiebinger's collection of central texts from feminist body studies illustrates the various issues of the association of women with the body in the traditional body/ mind dichotomy: Londa Schiebinger, *Feminism and the Body* (Oxford Readings in Feminism) (Oxford/ New York: Oxford University Press, 2000)
[635] Sceats, *Food, Consumption, Body*.
[636] Grass, *Butt*, p. 79. *Flounder*, p. 67.
[637] Wallenborn, 'Mütter', p. 111.
[638] See also Charu Gupta, 'The Icon of Mother in Late Colonial North India: "Bharat Mata", "Matri Bhasha" and "Gau Mata"', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 36 (2001), 4291-99 and Sumathi Ramaswamy, 'Maps and Mother Goddesses in Modern India', *Imago Mundi*, 53 (2001), 97-114.
[639] Arlene Voski Avakian, 'Introduction with Letters from Ruth Hubbard', in Avakian, *Kitchen Window*, pp. 1-9, (p. 8).

interpretations of the novel which follow Saleem's biased portrayal of the other cooks. This is best illustrated at a reading of Padma as juxtaposed with some critics' interpretation of the character. Padma holds a vital yet unmentioned cultural role: she is the only factory worker we meet and thus the only character in the novel who is literally involved in the cooking of what Saleem passes off as his chutney-narrative. From Saleem's perspective, Padma is 'other, usable, exploitable, disposable. She is, in other words, a mere commodity'.[640] Her cooking affects him both positively and negatively. Initially, she is jealously against his writing (MC 24) and blackmails him with food or uses it to distract him (MC 24). Once she is hooked to the narrative she uses the same method to force Saleem to tell her his story (MC 35). Goonetilleke believes that 'the mythological associations of her name suggest that she is a sort of Muse. […] Saleem needs Padma's support'.[641] This reading follows Saleem's representation of Padma as subservient, as secondary: he is the great producer of culture, she is his muse, dedicated to nourishing the artist. Yet Padma is at the least co-producer of the chutneys that Saleem claims ownership of.

Goonetilleke's naïve reading of Padma reflects Saleem's marginalisation of women as she goes on to say that Padma is 'in touch with the real world' and that 'the intellectual [Saleem] requires a companion like Padma'.[642] Heffernan argues that Padma represents the antithesis to Saleem's abstract notions because she reminds him of the body.[643] Her supposed 'earthiness of spirit' (MC 206) have led these critics to read Padma in this way as an 'archetypal Earth-Mother' who nourishes and sustains the artist.[644] As Verma has it, writing is 'Saleem's territory' and 'privileged over her cooking'.[645] With such readings, these critics take Saleem's portrayal of Padma at face value: he may present the women as belonging to the realm of the body and natural nourishment via the breast, yet they are also cooks and cooking is, in his presentation, narration. The critics thus overlook that Saleem's presentation of women serves the purpose of marginalising figures who are, contrary to his presentation, central – and competing – cultural agents.

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[640] Verma, 'Padma's Tragedy', p. 160.
[641] Goonetilleke, *Rushdie*, p. 41.
[642] Ibid.
[643] Heffernan, 'Nation', p. 486.
[644] Uma Parameswaran, 'Handcuffed to History: Salman Rushdie's Art', in Parameswaren, *The Perforated Sheet: Essays on Salman Rushdie's Art* (New Delhi: Affiliated East-West Press, 1988), pp. 1-11 (p. 11).
[645] Verma, 'Padma's Tragedy', p. 157.

The opposition of the realm of the physical and natural (suggested by Saleem to be associated with women and mothers), with the realm of the mental and cultural (supposedly represented by men) means the attribution of nourishing activities to women and of historiography to man. Food in *Midnight's Children*, however, undercuts Saleem's premise: as cooks, the figures who Saleem portrays as representatives of physicality and nature are in fact cultural agents and participate in narrative production. Whether he likes it or not: Saleem is not the only author of his narrative. He mentions the Hindu myth according to which, so Saleem summarises, 'Indra […] created matter by stirring the primal soup in his own great milk-churn' (MC 268). Yet this is not how other scholars know the myth. 'The creation of the world by churning is old Hindu tradition', yet it is commonly not one god or demon who does the stirring, but a whole group of cooks.[646] Neither the marginalised cooks nor Saleem are the only authors of the narration of the nation. As poststructuralist thought has demonstrated: there is no objective 'standard by which to measure anything' and chutney knows neither duality nor hierarchy – or singular authorship.[647]

4.7 Consumption and continued transformation

The present reading of food in *Midnight's Children* has focussed on the conditions of narrative production, because this is also a focus of the novel. However, Saleem's alignment of narrative and chutney also gestures towards the afterlife of the chutney-narrative: what of the conditions of its consumption? Sen believes that 'if we are to understand the significance of Rushdie's pickled narrative […], we have to pay attention to its consumption in the finished form'.[648] In finished form there are two products: the narrative as book of thirty chapters and chutney in thirty jars and an empty one. But Saleem's narrative encounters a problem in comparison with the item of food: Saleem consumes chutney that brings back his memories, but the reader can only consume the narrative. Food is a tool of '*sensuous* communication', Saleem's and Proust's narrator's is a *physical* experience of taste.[649] Saleem's use of chutney as tool of remembrance in narrative means to take it out of its context of sensuous experience into the non-sensual. Exchanging eating with reading/ listening, Saleem loses the level

[646] Stephen Fuchs, 'Another Version of the Baiga Creation Myth', *Athropos*, 47 (1952), 607-19 (p. 614, note 28); Cornelia Dimmitt, Johannes Adrianus and Bernardus Buitenen (eds), *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Purāṇas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), p. 63; 74.
[647] Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 59.
[648] Sen, *Eating India*, p. 98.
[649] Sceats, *Food, Consumption, Body*, p. 85 and 86 (italics mine).

of the physical experience of taste. He speaks of the reader/ listener having to 'swallow' his narrative, but it cannot be physically experienced in this way (MC 145). Saleem's chapters cannot reproduce the effect of the consumption of food as it revives memories in the eater. This is, of course, a generic problem of representations of experience. By foregrounding it, Rushdie invites questions as to the inevitable failure of narrative to reproduce experience.

A further condition of the consumption of Saleem's narrative as read through its link to chutney is related to control. Incorporation is an uncontrollable process as it is impossible to control or know, which parts of the incorporated food are excreted and which remain in the body where they become part of and transform the eater. The lack of control is manifest in Saleem's idea of 'unleash[ing]' (MC 643) chutneys upon the nation. The consumer cannot predict the consequences of incorporation (especially with a versatile, heterogeneous substance such as chutney), much less can the cook. Consumption of the chutneys in particular means to open the jars, exposing their content to accelerated transformation by digestion. In the novel, the literal chutney jars are unopened at the close of the narrative. Yet the chapter-jars are opened as the reader turns the pages, consuming their content. Those who open the chutney jars, onto which Saleem was eager to put a lid, transform them into a new narrative. Consumption leads to transformation, controllable neither by producer nor consumer. In *Midnight's Children*, Fischler's notion of the uncontrollability of incorporation thus enacts postmodern ideas about the impossibility of stability of meaning and narrative control: the nature of language, always already in process.

Saleem's chutney-narrative stimulates appetite for what it cannot provide: memories are woven in Saleem's narrative, yet they cannot be physically experienced or actually encapsulated. Despite the impossibility to satisfy, despite the impossibility to recreate experience and despite the lack of control, there is a sense of potential in the way narrative is presented here: food in *Midnight's Children* implies that the potential of fiction in postmodern times is not satisfaction but appetite.

4.8 Conclusion

The narrator of Rushdie's novel sets the cooking and filling in jars of chutney side by side with narration. Chutney-making appears to him a useful analogy as it includes aspects that are conductive to his aims and needs. Yet what Fischler describes as ambiguity of the individual's relationship with food and its incorporation is of great relevance here: on the one hand, Saleem strives to use food, cooking and the containing

of cooked food in jars in order to create a grand narrative of would-be nation-wide applicability. The cultural activity of cooking and the product's containment in jars creates an impression of control. Yet on the other hand, the ambiguous tool which Saleem chooses to achieve these aims implicitly and without his realisation simultaneously denies his aims. Food in *Midnight's Children* implicitly raises questions of narration, of authorship and the possibility of meaning. Saleem chooses chutney as it represents to him the possibility of containing experience. Yet instead it expresses both the need for and the impossibility of master narratives, narrative control and single authorship.

Chutney may initially appear a fitting medium for the production and spreading of Saleem's master narrative of collective memory: once in jars, it is transportable and marketable. (Braganza Pickles sells not only in India but around the world.) Yet rather than achieving a grand narrative of ostensibly universal validity, a concept rejected by both postcolonial and postmodern thought, Saleem's activity at the factory is based on his taste. The aspects of distinction, which this entails according to Bourdieu, stress the impossibility of a universal language and universal meaning. Taste is a mode of distinction and thus the opposite of what must be expected of a universal language used to write a master narrative of validity to the lives of 'four hundred million five hundred six' (MC 647). The problem of the grand, universal narrative is also entailed in the novel's relation to the Proustian intertext. Like the madeleine, chutney can revive memory. Yet chutney emphasises, in contrast to Proust's madeleine, that experience cannot be contained and applied universally, that memory is subject to continuous transformation. And the narrative will indeed be transformed and appropriated by the consuming reader in a way that is out of Saleem's control.

While postmodern aesthetics point to the impossibility of containing experience in narrative, Saleem attempts to create an alternative master narrative as the result of his desire for meaning, uniformity, stability and most of all controllability. Filling jars with chutney manifests this desire. Yet Saleem's narrative is both chutney and jar, both uncontrollable and contained. The psychoanalytic discourse presents this double-sidedness. Freud describes cultural production as deriving from but transcending natural drives. Yet the natural and physical is already inscribed in Saleem's narrative either as rawness or as his inability to overcome his oral obsessions (with the breast, with narrative). Furthermore, Freud speaks of control by sublimation, yet the leaking, indefinable, hybrid substance of the chutney-narrative, produced by an unknowable multiplicity of cooks, undermines Saleem's claims of control. Instead of control,

Saleem's obsession with the nourishing breast and the many cracks and holes imply Lacanian lack, which is uncontrollable and unavoidable.

The absence of control over his narrative goes so far that food in the novel denies Saleem's authorship by implying a complex system of influences and interferences. Translating Grass's gendered power struggle from the making of history to the narration of history, *Midnight's Children* presents single authorship as a highly questionable concept. In the struggle over legitimization of voice, food production implicitly presents Saleem's appropriation of the work of those he marginalises as Other. The relation of food and power in Grass does not threaten the narrator's narrative legitimization, as men are responsible for art and writing and women are responsible for nourishment and cooking. In contrast, Rushdie's narrator's struggle with the female cooks cannot rely on a distinction between cooking and writing – they are inextricably linked and every chutney cook is a co-producer of Saleem's narrative of India. Authorship is here defined by a multiplicity of voices where individual contributors and their precise contribution are no longer knowable. Hybridity extends from the substance's/ narrative's ingredients to include also its producers. The cooks in the novel thus implicitly comment on the making of the narrative of a nation, which has a multiplicity of sources. They also again relate to the ambiguity entailed in both food and narrative: Saleem depends on the female cooks to teach him his art and to nourish him as he practices it. Since he appropriates their work, he also depends on their culinary artistic production. Yet at the same time, he perceives them as manipulative witches, because they threaten his status as author.

The fundamental ambiguity of things related to food in *Midnight's Children* reflects on narrative: food in the novel suggests that narration is never straightforward, never under control, meaning is arbitrary and changeable and no stable entity. Printed words – black on white – suggest solidity and unchangeability like chutney contained in jars. Yet in both cases, change is constant as meaning cannot be contained in any language.

Approached from a multiplicity of angles, a reading of food in *Midnight's Children* presents the narratives' implicit yet extensive preoccupation with its own ambiguity: narrative, as imagined by the narrator as a closing down to a single ultimate version, as a containing of experience in a stable form, is impossible. Yet food in *Midnight's Children* also gestures to the potential of narrative. This lies in the ability to question itself and thus open to multiple voices, gesture to other perspectives and possible narratives. While food here shows in many different ways how Saleem's envisaged exclusively legitimised narrative is impossible, this impossibility simultaneously

implies the potentials of narrative which lie beyond Saleem's narrow view. Preserving an experience is impossible in postmodern thought, yet creating something new from existing, raw material, is. According to the culinary and alimentary in *Midnight's Children*, narrative closure is not achievable. Instead, the potential of narrative is an opening-up to multiple, ever-changing tastes, perspectives and interpretations and the acknowledgement of the multiplicity of interacting producers and their overlapping voices.

5 Conclusion: food and words – a fruitful problematic

The close analysis of the culinary and alimentary in *The Sea, The Sea*, *Holzfällen* and *Midnight's Children* in the light of a variety of theories of or involving food and food-related intertexts has had two aims: first, to present the great critical potential of the culinary and the alimentary with specific focus on the connotations of food for cultural production and narration; second, and working towards the first, to offer new insights into the three novels.

In order to relate the three readings to each other in a comparative analysis, this conclusion initially presents the main arguments and outcomes of each of the novel-based chapters. The summary shows that each narrator's respective aims are implicitly brought into question by food in the three novels. Their artistic-cultural ideals are set side by side so that it may be shown how food in each novel relates in different ways to the respective artistic-cultural aims. This juxtaposition introduces a comparative section which highlights similarities and differences in the ways in which food comments on artistic-cultural production and narration in the three novels. What is here analysed is the relation, established in the three texts, of the culinary and alimentary with the problem of narrative control, with the concept of artistic integrity and independence, with the ideal of stability of meaning and with the problem of ambiguity. Showing parallels as well as nuanced divergences between the connotations of food in the texts, I argue in this conclusion that the narrators' different projects are in different ways simultaneously supported and undermined by the culinary and the alimentary. This relation between ideals of artistic-cultural production and food shows that the culinary and alimentary is a crucial instrument with which to tackle these texts' implicit comments on their own inception and their justification (or not) to be called artistic products.

In chapter 2 I have argued that the culinary development of the protagonist in *The Sea, The Sea* reflects a moral development (in terms of Murdoch's ethical framework). In this novel, the culinary is linked to ethics and since ethics are fundamental to the production of what Murdoch considers 'good art', the culinary is thus relevant to artistic production. The chapter has discussed Charles's food behaviour in the first stage of his culinary development in the light of Sartrean existentialism. Charles's justification of his food choice reveals it as a mode of Bourdieusian distinction and with food, Charles

seeks to, in Sartrean terms, 'choose himself'.[650] (As shown below, Charles's distinction through food differs from similar processes in the other novels, while all three work to undermine the narrators' respective projects.) As a form-giving tool, cooking creates a sense of meaning by means of form. (It is thus a transformative process – that of cooking – which is in this novel as well as in *Midnight's Children* presented as constructive of meaning.) This reading of food in *The Sea, The Sea* gives new insights into the text's relation with the problem of stability of identity and meaning: the culinary, it has been shown, reflects Charles's desire to create identity and meaning. Yet what Charles is unaware of is that basing his sense of identity on the culinary destabilizes his very concept of stable identity: characterised by transience, the language of food demands constant reaffirmation and reconstruction of meaning and identity. A cooked dish sheds its created form when consumed or rotting, rendering stability of meaning through form impossible. As in Rushdie's novel, the cook-figure in *The Sea, The Sea* has a desire for form which he strives to satisfy by means of cooking and writing, yet which is undercut by the connotations of food identified here and of which the narrators are largely unaware.

The novel's culinary-ethical argument begins with the first stage, in which Charles's behaviour contrasts with Murdoch's moral concepts of 'unselfing' and 'attention' to the Other. In the crisis (triggered by Charles's encounter with his childhood love), this attitude is presented as problematic: reflecting Sartrean existentialism, in which the subject's relationship with the Other is described as defined by the desire, effectively, to incorporate that Other (to borrow a term from Fischler), Charles develops cannibalistic urges. These also reflect Freud's and Abraham's descriptions of the cannibalistic stage of oral libido. Based on an existentialist self-perception, problematized by the culinary and alimentary in the novel, Charles's attempt at (figurative) incorporation of the Other fails. Without offering complete closure, the novel leads toward a moral resolution based on food. Food initially contradicts, questions and undermines Charles's narrative even as he writes it and finally suggests a shift in his ethical outlook from solipsism toward Murdoch's moral ideals. As an independent signifying system, food implicitly relates to the discourse of moral philosophy while the texts' narrator is unaware of this.

Sartre's short story 'Nourritures' expresses explicitly fears which are implicit in Charles's food behaviour. Sartre's short story evokes Kristeva's theory of abjection.

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[650] Sartre, *Existentialism & Humanism*, p. 31.

The comparison between his 'Nourritures' and *The Sea, The Sea* in the light of aspects of the Kristevan theory gives new insights in the way in which food and cooking in Murdoch's novel relate to the narrator's fear, presenting the paradoxical nature of Charles's behaviour: he attempts to construct meaning through cooking and writing; yet food, according to Kristeva, is abject and the abject is 'where meaning collapses'.[651] There is no disgust on the side of the narrator, while the reader is repelled by some of the concoctions. This emphasises Charles's strategy to console and deceive himself by means of art, beneath which he hides aspects of life which seem unbearable. The philosophy and art of cooking, as which Charles presents his culinary opinions and practices, are a way to create ostensibly lasting values, yet the transient nature of food, its function to sustain the mortal body, makes it simultaneously a constant reminder of mortality.

Reading Charles's culinary art as a reaction to underlying fears relates art to mechanisms of escapism and repression. This suggests Freudian sublimation, which describes art as the product of processes aimed at bringing id-drives under control. The analysis has presented a reading of Charles's cooking as activity seeking to control various kinds of hunger by means of sublimation. The comparison with Shakespeare's *The Tempest* strengthens the Freudian reading: Charles exists in the tension of containing characteristics of Prospero, who strives for control, and Caliban, who is the uncontrollably contingent and characterised by visceral, sexual and emotional hunger. The reading of Charles's art as sublimation is supported by the event of the crisis, which can be read as a Freudian return of the repressed, dissolving control. This reflects the rejection of narrative and culinary control in *Midnight's Children* but other than in Rushdie's novel, reading *The Sea, The Sea* in the light of Freudian psychoanalysis suggests additionally that both Charles's fears and his attempts to tame them are linked to food: cooking relates to both form – culture/ control/ ego/ Prospero – and contingency – nature/ contingency/ id/ Caliban. In *The Sea, The Sea*, food implicitly presents both the attraction and the failure of form. Rushdie's narrator is attracted by different aspects of the culinary and the alimentary and yet other aspects undermine his project.

Whether read as defence against contingency or against id drives, Charles's culinary art and writing are in *The Sea, The Sea* a way to deal with egocentric fear. On this basis, Charles is incapable of producing what Murdoch regards as 'good art',

[651] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 2.

because he meets contingency (in Murdoch's writing regarded as the reality of life) with form, thus hiding behind unrealistic, consolatory constructs. Furthermore, Charles's culinary art and self-centred autobiographic writing are narratives of the self and solipsistic appropriations of the world. As such, they conflict with Murdoch's moral ideals of 'unselfing' and 'attention' to the Other. *The Sea, The Sea* presents as impossible the production of what Murdoch calls 'good art' from an existentialist outlook that posits solipsism as unchangeable human condition.

In *Holzfällen*, Bernhard's narrator's discourse also implies the existence of good and bad art, produced by good and bad artists. Yet while the culinary in Murdoch's novel does not overrule the text's own premise but instead serves to problematize its narrator's moral starting point, food in Bernhard's novel brings into question more clearly the possibility of what the narrator presents as his artistic ideal. With the dinner as principal event, Bernhard's novel is more explicitly structured around food than *The Sea, The Sea*. Its central phrase 'artistic dinner', quoted repeatedly by the narrator from the hosts, links commensality, with its many social connotations, and art. The phrase provokes the narrator precisely because it inscribes the social into artistic production, which he insists must be independent of social concerns. According to Fischler, commensality also implies the individual's incorporation into the social group, compromising the artist's integrity further. The analysis has shown that the narrator's use of food and art for purposes of distinction betray him, paradoxically, as part of the group that defines itself by these very strategies. Bernhard's novel reverses the process of distinction to turn it into an activity which defines the narrator's co-implication in the social group he wishes to distinguish himself from. Reading *Holzfällen* alongside the dinner parties in Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann* highlights the ways in which distinction is articulated via food and art as the intertext foregrounds the performativity of commensality for social purposes. The Auersbergers set the menu in line with contemporary artistic fashion and the dinner becomes a postmodern art-work. The incongruous character of the menu also suggests a constructed artificiality of the hosts' social identity: their food choices mark the Auersbergers as social imposters, whose ostensible social background is mere performance. The Proustian intertext brings to the fore how the Auersbergers put to use food and art for social purposes. This social use is perceived by the narrator as compromising his ideal of art as above things social and as characterised by full integrity.

The central difference between the characters lies in the attitude toward the dinners they participate in: in contrast to Swann, Bernhard's narrator develops the rage that

characterises his monologue. It has been argued in Chapter 3 that this rage originates in the relation between food and power, rather than an unmotivated ungratefulness, as which some critics have read it. The analysis of food as gift according to both Mauss's and Lévi-Strauss's theories brings new critical perspectives to light on the recipients' social obligation. The offer and acceptance of the dinner creates a power relationship, resulting in simultaneous participation and revulsion on the part of the narrator. The narrator's ambivalence, his disgust for and acceptance of nourishment, reflects on a level of cultural politics the artist's relation to governmental institutions: artistic production in *Holzfällen* is presented as both dependent on benefits and compromised by opposing integrity with assimilation. While Bernhard's narrator's disgust at sharing the dinner can be traced to his social co-implication, Murdoch's narrator makes, at the beginning of the narrative, a point of not sharing food. This aspect is discussed in more detail below.

In *Holzfällen*, the power relationship between artist and oppressor is continued in imagery that aligns commensality with collaboration, giving food an implicitly political function (in *Holzfällen*, the narrator's aspirations are undercut by his collaboration, in *Midnight's Children* they are undercut by its narrator's co-production). The relation between commensality and collaboration presupposes an analogy of food and thought or ideology, discussed by Barthes, who argues that culinary signs are ideologically loaded. Bernhard's *dramolett* 'Der deutsche Mittagstisch' (1988) expresses explicitly the relation between food and ideology which is implied in the use of food in *Holzfällen*. The short play furthermore provides a particularly striking image of commensality as collaborative act, underlining this aspect in *Holzfällen*. In the novel, the guests' acceptance of food is thus read to correspond to the political corruption of Austria and its artists. The comparison with Ibsen's *Vildanden* presents commensality as resulting in an affirmation of the power of the oppressor. Yet while Ibsen's Hjalmar is socially excluded, Bernhard's narrator is deeply co-implicated: he accepts the gift of food and engages in the same modes of distinction as his hosts. The conditions under which the narrator shares the meal reflect his criticism as well as his collaboration (note that, in being counter-cultural, he affirms existing structures as their rejection is also a projection of them). Collaboration in *Holzfällen* is read as a representation of the (political) collaboration of the art scene and the artists' cooperation with the government and its institutions. This results from the nourishment which society provides and the social incorporation and power-relationship to which this leads. The frequent reduction of the novel to autobiographical text oversees the larger view of the co-implication of

the artist in society and politics, of which the socio-political connotations of the dishes speak.

The reading of the culinary and alimentary in *Holzfällen* suggests a dependence of production on consumption. In this novel, art and artists are society's fodder and artists are presented to feed off each other, for instance in the funeral feast for (or of) Joana as which the dinner party doubles. On the one hand, this evokes Adorno and Horkheimer's views of art as *re*-production. While the theory of the Culture Industry is limited to popular culture, *Holzfällen* shows that ostensibly advanced art is also derivative.[652] So is the narrator's art, who participates in the mechanisms. Like those he despises, the narrator consumes the dead artist Joana in symbolic cannibalism, an act which in turn enables him to engage in artistic production. As artist, he cannot withdraw from processes which compromise integrity. On the other hand, the relation of consumption and production renders the latter an act of transformation and thus partly withdrawn from the producer's control. (Set in relation to *Midnight's Children* and *The Sea, The Sea*, this aspect is below used to argue that food in the three texts implicitly brings the possibility of control over narration, meaning and identity into question.)

Bernhard's narrator's artistic ideal is threatened by the social and physical necessity of food, precisely because he depends on it: he and his art come into existence through nourishment, administered by society in which he is consequently co-implicated. As a product of visceral, social and artistic consumption, his narrative self-reflexively lays open its dependence on physical and metaphysical nourishment. In Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, self-reflexivity reaches another level of explicitness through food. It is the only of the three texts in which the narrator uses food consciously and explicitly in the attempt to achieve narrative aims (the construction of a narrative of collective memory).

The relation established by Saleem between narrative and chutney, writing/ narration and cooking, reading (or listening) and eating forms the basis of the self-reflexive problematisation of narration in Rushdie's novel. Central characteristics of the postmodern chutney-narrative are versatility, multiplicity, hybridity, ambiguity and changeability. Chutney de-hierarchizes and as what is identified here as chutney-narrative reflects the postmodern rejection of master narratives. Storing chutney in jars is an implicit attempt to counteract these characteristics. The attempt fails: chutney continues to transform and Saleem's hope to contain everything conflicts with the

[652] Adorno and Horkheimer, 'Kulturindustrie', p. 136; 'Culture Industry', p. 101.

novel's postmodern imagery of fusion, leakage and spillage. Saleem's attempts thus represent the simultaneity of the individual's desire for form and meaning and the impossibility of stable meaning. These aspects are also central in Murdoch's and Bernhard's novels where the ambiguity of food creates this tension. In Murdoch's and Bernhard's novels, the ambiguity lies in the discrepancy between escapist culinary art and the facts of the human condition and the tension between the need for nourishment and its simultaneously artistically inhibiting characteristics respectively. In *Midnight's Children*, the ambiguity lies in the simultaneity of desire and dissatisfaction.

Saleem's attempts to create a master narrative are undercut culinarily by the complex connotations of chutney of which he is only partly aware. The analysis has traced Saleem's reasons for choosing the chutney as basis of his narrative to his personal experience of the condiment. Like the madeleine in *Du côté de chez Swann*, chutney initially unwittingly revives the narrator's memory. Following Proust's modernist view, chutney and writing about it thus appear to Saleem to be appropriate tools with which to contain past experience. In contrast to Proust's text and Saleem's aims, however, the characteristics of the chutney jars and their narration in *Midnight's Children* imply the inability to contain experience in narrative. Saleem's chutney-narrative is unable to contain past experience, because, from the novel's postmodern perspective, taste is, like narrative, subject to constant transformation and not repeatable.

Using psychoanalytic discourses to consider food in the novel affirms the idea that the culinary and alimentary destabilizes Saleem's ideals of narrative, meaning and control. In the Freudian view, cultural production represents the possibility of control and psychological satisfaction by means of sublimation: uncontrollable drives are channelled into cultural production. Sublimation thus seems to offer a resolution by means of ego control, yet this theory does not help address the holes, cracks and leakages in Saleem's narrative. Lacanian theory offers a perspective on these aspects of Saleem's narrative: according to Lacan, lack is a fact of any individual's life, resulting in desire and hunger which can be neither satisfied nor controlled.

A central aspect of the resulting discrepancy and dissatisfaction in Saleem's creative production are the ambivalent mechanisms of food as a signifying system. In his attempt to produce a narrative of collective memory, Saleem chooses the language of food (his chutney analogy) in order to reach a large audience. Yet, as the analysis has shown, what can be perceived as ostensibly universal signifying system is also a mode

of distinction. It is thus both inclusive and exclusive, both supporting and undercutting Saleem's aim to create a grand, universal narrative of Indian history.

Saleem's chutney-narrative thus challenges the concepts of stable meaning and narrative control in several ways. Indeed, narrative control is negated by the text in that the narrative denies Saleem single authorship and presents instead a multiplicity of narrative influences and interferences. Saleem's involvement in chutney production at the factory is, contrary to his self-presentation, more closely linked to what Lévi-Strauss identifies as the raw than to the cultural (he does not cook the chutneys). Yet whoever cooks is a potential (if always partial) producer of the narrative-chutney. The novel's Other, exclusively female cooks are thus competitors for narrative control in the struggle over legitimization of voice. (Note the pivotal importance of issues of voice in postcolonial discourse). Saleem appropriates their work by demonising and marginalising the female cultural agents, using misogynistic clichés. The reading of women in *Midnight's Children* as cooks and cultural agents overthrows criticism which reads women in *Midnight's Children* as secondary. The fact that these Other cultural agents are women is used by Saleem for a clichéd and misogynistic marginalisation of the Other cooks into the realm of the physical in contrast to which he presents himself as on the side of the cultural. Rather than secondary or marginal, these figures are marginalised. The contrastive reading of Rushdie's novel with its intertext *Der Butt* highlights among the many parallels between the novels a central divergence: in contrast to Rushdie's novel, the cooks in *Der Butt* do not threaten the narrator's narrative legitimization. In Grass's novel, narrative and writing are clearly assigned to men, nourishment and cooking to women. Grass clearly separates between what he presents as cultural production – writing and narrative – and supposedly non-cultural production – cooking. Rushdie's novel, by contrast, stresses that cooking and writing are both cultural activities, going even so far as to imply their identity. In this way, cooking in *Midnight's Children* undermines the clichéd view of women as belonging to the realm of the physical and men to the realm of the cultural. Saleem is but a co-producer of the chutney-narrative which cannot be traced to one single, knowable and controlling producer but is in the hands of a multiplicity of cultural agents whose contribution cannot be divided from that of others. The conditions of the production of the chutney-narrative thus reflect the hybrid multiplicity of agents involved in creating a narrative of the nation and in forming a corresponding narrative of collective memory.

Saleem's relationship with the Other cooks is highly ambivalent: he needs them as teachers and to nourish him so that he may practise what they have taught him. He also

depends on them to produce what he subsequently appropriates as his own. Saleem marginalises them in order to protect his illusory concept of single authorship and narrative control. This ambiguous relationship of dependence and rejection recalls *Holzfällen*. Like Bernhard's narrator, Saleem simultaneously depends on others and, because the dependence runs counter to his narrative project, needs to marginalise them. Like Bernhard's narrator, Saleem's integrity is impaired by need and dependence, his control impaired by the fact that he is always only co-producer. In both cases, the mechanisms of food reflect aspects of artistic-cultural production which the narrators would rather ignore – and thus do not address. Reading the texts through food brings out these covert connotations which reflect destabilizing postmodern views of artistic-cultural production (in this particular case, the uncomfortable view is that all production is re-production, which postmodernism expresses in the idea that all texts are intertexts).

In order to compare the impact of food on artistic-cultural production in *The Sea, The Sea, Holzfällen* and *Midnight's Children,* the following sets side by side the narrators' respective artistic-cultural and artistic-ethical ideals. Bernhard's narrator in *Holzfällen* sees art as 'das Höchste' (H 95), the highest, the peak. Above and beyond human concerns, this artefact can only be produced in conditions of integrity and independence on the part of the producer. It must be untouched by external influences. The presentation of eating and food as basis of creative production in *Holzfällen* contradicts the narrator's artistic ideal of perfect integrity, reminiscent of divine *creatio ex nihilo*: consumption in *Holzfällen* necessarily precedes production, the product can expressly not come out of nothing. Yet food in the novel emphasises that art does not magically develop *ex nihilo*, neither does it go into nothing: it has a life before its current incarnation (production is always re-production) and it has an afterlife (its transformation continues, whether in a jar, by digestion or through rotting). In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem's main narrative aim is to create a master narrative of collective memory. His vision is out-dated in so far as the concept of grand narratives is under fierce attack in the novel's postmodern and postcolonial context. In contrast to both *Holzfällen* and *Midnight's Children*, rather than an artistic-cultural ideal, Murdoch's novel implicitly problematizes through food its narrator's solipsistic (a)moral concept. Food in *The Sea, The Sea* does not destabilize an artistic-cultural ideal. By contrast, the novel presents via the narrator's moral-culinary development an artistic ideal which posits the existence of 'good art' and bases its definition on moral principles. Food is related to both artistic production and ethics and used to pass moral judgements. The narrator is presented, through the culinary, to produce 'bad art' out of a

morally misguided solipsistic self-perception. The novel's implicit critique of Charles's artistic production is secondary to the moral critique (in Murdoch's philosophy, 'good art' can only follow from ethics), expressed implicitly through the culinary in the novel. In the light of Bernhard's and Rushdie's novels, Murdoch's concept of 'good art' and 'bad art' and the link between 'good art' and ethics appear particularly conservative. In fact, the reading of food in *The Sea, The Sea*, as will be discussed below, shows them to be contradictory.

The outline of outcomes of the three chapters of literary analysis and the parallel presentation of the narrators' artistic, cultural and artistic-ethical ideals facilitates the following analysis of particularly important aspects of these ideals. The relation of the culinary and alimentary to narrative control is to be analysed first, followed by a comparison of the impact of food on the ideal of artistic integrity in the three texts as well as its impact on the possibility or not of meaning and form.

Narrative control is a central theme in the three novels and implicit in different ways in the culinary and alimentary. In *The Sea, The Sea* and *Midnight's Children*, cooking and writing seemingly give control to the author-cook. Yet the activities also entail aspects which compromise control: lack, desire, continued transformation, leakage, crossing of borders of binaries. Control is also an issue for Bernhard's narrator, who does not cook but whose control and integrity are shown to be illusory by consumption. While they rely on food and its various related activities, the three narrators are subject to, yet largely unaware of, its ambiguous connotations, the way in which it betrays the illusory nature of the control and integrity they seek.

The Sea, The Sea and *Midnight's Children* present the problem of control in different ways through food: in Murdoch's novel, as the Freudian reading suggests, control through sublimation is disrupted by the return of the repressed. *The Sea, The Sea* shows the individual as subject to what is presented as the human condition, implying the necessity to accept it. Following from Murdoch's novel, avoiding or ignoring what is thus presented as reality is unrealistic and prone to increase pain and lead to dissatisfaction. In *Midnight's Children,* the attempt to control through sublimation is negated by lack. In their representations of food, both novels implicitly reject the possibility of control, yet their presentations are differently nuanced: Charles's culinary-narrative failure is a moral failure, developing from a misguided, largely existentialist world view. Charles's failure is not primarily the failure to control but the failure to see the realities of his condition – which are, as his food, helplessly transient, abject and contingent – and the reality of other people – whom he implicitly wishes to consume.

Rushdie awards his character comparatively more insight: while Saleem also follows the illusion of control, he is aware that his narrative does not fulfil his demands, that one jar 'must remain empty' (MC 645). Yet while Rushdie's narrator uses food more purposefully than either Murdoch's or Bernhard's narrator, he too cannot avoid its unwelcome connotations, undercutting his narrative control. Murdoch's novel, by contrast, presents a conservative image of artistic production: Charles's food behaviour underpins a moral development; and moral development in Murdoch implies also artistic development. Food in the novel thus leaves hope for a moral-artistic ideal, which is distinctly not the case in *Midnight's Children*. Instead, Rushdie's text presents the irresolvable simultaneity of a desire and hunger for control in cultural production and its impossibility. This difference is represented in the presence of the Freudian return of the repressed in Murdoch, while *Midnight's Children* introduces elements of Lacanian lack: the moral resolution of Murdoch's novel suggests the need to let go of this desire, Rushdie's novel, stressing Lacanian lack, suggests the continuing co-existence of the impossibility and the need of control.

While *Holzfällen* also posits the impossibility of control, it differs fundamentally from the other two texts: the novel comprises imagery of mechanised consumption sustaining a cannibalistic mechanism which needs input in order to produce output. From the implication that production is preceded by consumption follows that all production is *re*-production. In this Culture Industry, the individual producers' control over their product is limited, because it depends on and is only a part of larger mechanisms. This relation between individual and society is reflected in the frequent projection of the dinner party onto a larger frame of politics and cultural politics: incorporated into the social body, artists are part of socio-political mechanisms and can only function dependently within them.

Holzfällen presents production as the result of consumption of what others have produced. In the present analysis of *Midnight's Children*, this aspect has been described as co-production. *Holzfällen* and *Midnight's Children* address this issue in different ways through food. In *Holzfällen*, the individual's dependence on and his acceptance of society's nourishment leads to his incorporation into the group. It means his collaboration and co-implication. As a part of the mechanisms within which he produces art, he is a co-producer with limited integrity and control. In *Midnight's Children*, the multiplicity of cooks or cultural agents means that Saleem's product, while he appropriates others' work and negates their part in their production, is co-produced and that there is not one controlling 'master' of the narrative.

Closely related to issues of narrative control, ideals of personal and artistic integrity and independence characterise Bernhard's and Rushdie's narrators' writing. *Holzfällen* and *Midnight's Children* present in different ways through food the dissolution of the narrators' ideals of integrity and independence. The texts emphasise the need for nourishment before production: the producers depend on artistic nourishment in order to become artists, learn their trade and obtain material which to transform; they depend on physical nourishment in order to sustain their bodies and be able to produce. This dependence is directed differently in the two texts: in *Holzfällen,* it is a dependence on society in the form of patrons or governmental institutions; in *Midnight's Children*, it is a dependence on what is perceived and presented by the narrator as Other (women). This difference is reflected in the conditions of artistic or cultural production, which face different problems. In *Holzfällen*, the narrator struggles with his social and ideological co-implication, caused by commensality. The problem here is the artist's incorporation into society in Fischler's sense. In *Midnight's Children*, the problem is not integration into the group, but the multiplicity of cultural agents (cooks). Both narrators depend on nourishing sources which they appropriate to protect their ideals of artistic-cultural production. In Bernhard's novel, commensality is linked to collaboration, causing a compromising of the narrator's integrity. The acceptance and incorporation of the gift of food also result in the individual's subsumption into the dominant social group and its ideologies and the loss of integrity. In *Midnight's Children*, the loss of integrity consists of Saleem's dependence on others' cultural production. Saleem appropriates others' work while at the same time disqualifying them as cultural agents by means of misogynistic clichés. *Holzfällen* presents the appropriation of others' work particularly harshly as quasi-cannibalistic consumption, as appropriative destruction of some for the benefit of the artistic production of others. The differences in the way in which integrity is negated in these two novels relates directly to the texts' different projects. In *Holzfällen*, the co-implication of the artist is expressed through food in the context of the relation of artist and society, of the politics of this relationship and the problem of collaboration it triggers. In that it represses a certain group of society, rejecting their participation in the creation of cultural narratives, Saleem's behaviour reflects his project of the (re)writing of a master narrative in the postcolonial context: wishing to overhaul a master narrative, implicitly perceived as forced onto Indians by the colonial power, Saleem uses the same strategies: repressing other cultural agents by marginalising them from the creative process Saleem creates, while appropriating their work, a narrative which sets him at the centre.

In contrast to *Holzfällen* and *Midnight's Children*, artistic co-production and dependence are not major concerns of *The Sea, The Sea*. Yet Murdoch's novel can be fruitfully set against these central concerns of the other two texts: Charles develops a culinary philosophy in which the culinary and the social are mutually exclusive. Yet the novel shows this to be based on illusory concepts of the self in the world. At the end of the novel, commensality represents the character's ethical improvement. The narrators of *Holzfällen* and *Midnight's Children* also struggle with the role of others in nourishment, consumption and thus production, a role which compromises their artistic ideals in different ways, as has been shown. Yet in these texts, the tension is not resolved: the artists necessarily exist in a context and in dependence on society or other cultural agents. The difference results from the fact that in *The Sea, The Sea*, the conflict in the self-Other relationship is linked via food to a certain largely existentialist world view whereas in *Holzfällen* and *Midnight's Children*, the tension expressed in the culinary and alimentary is an integral part of being in the world and thus also of artistic or cultural production.

In *Holzfällen* food also implicitly presents the impossibility of the narrator's ideal of artistic integrity – yet the novel does not offer an alternative. The same is the case in *Midnight's Children*: the culinary and alimentary seemingly serve and implicitly undercut Saleem's artistic ideals – but there is, in contrast to *The Sea, The Sea*, no alternative way of dealing with what is presented as the reality of cultural production, characterised by continuing, uncontrollable transformation, unguided by a single controlling agent. The potential of this view lies precisely in the friction created by existing culinary-narrative desires and hungers and the impossibility of satisfying them. The fact that all three novels address, in very different ways, issues of artistic and personal integrity implicitly through food suggests these late twentieth-century novels' view of the impossibility of artistic or personal integrity, which is in all three novels differently negated through the integrative, incorporative mechanisms of food.

With food holding central, if different, roles in the texts, the culinary and alimentary implies that the opposition of inside and outside is conceptual and that independence and integrity are illusionary. In Rushdie's and Bernhard's novel, the lack of clear distinguishing lines between inside and outside, between self and other or the world means all production is co- and re-production. Rather than presenting a moral ideal in the way Murdoch does, Bernhard and Rushdie here implicitly describe what their novels understand as realities of artistic-cultural production. By contrast, Murdoch identifies the necessity to achieve a clear view of the separate existence of others as

ethical ideal. It is at this point that her moral ideal cracks over an inherent paradox which becomes obvious in food in the novel: Murdoch's moral philosophy and Charles's development in the novel emphasise the moral necessity to accept the ostensible separate existence of others. Yet food relates to a part of Murdoch's moral philosophy which contradicts this: her philosophical writing and food in *The Sea, The Sea* suggest the necessity to overcome the opposition of self and world. Food exemplifies this, because in the process of incorporation, an object literally becomes part the subject. It therefore appears that Murdoch paradoxically simultaneously suggests the need to accept the otherness of the Other as well as suggesting that the borders between self and Other should and can be overcome.

In the analytical chapters, extensive use has been made of intertexts in order to illustrate and strengthen individual arguments and to show how food is also central to other texts, suggesting the wider applicability of the present, multivalent approach. Yet in addition to this, the mere presence of these texts within the novels stresses the characteristic of artistic-cultural production as transformative re- and co-production. Referring intertextually to other texts, the three novels emphasise their integratedness within a cultural context, upon which they feed and which they in turn feed. The three novels' intertextuality corresponds to the specific relation which eating establishes between body and world. A relation in which conceptual borders are destabilized, in which physical and intellectual integrity are impossible and which, applied to narration, leads to the poststructuralist notion that each text is part of an intertextual weave which knows neither inside nor outside.

Alongside narrative control (and its impossibility), meaning and form (and their fallibility) are central aspects of the ideals of artistic-cultural production of Murdoch's and Rushdie's narrators. While Charles aims to create meaning through form in cooking and writing, Saleem strives to produce and preserve meaning and contain experience in his chutneys. In *The Sea, The Sea*, the desire for stable meaning as well as the failure to achieve it is expressed in Charles's urge for 'absolute truths' which he engages in culinarily and through narrative. In *Midnight's Children,* Saleem's desire for stable meaning is expressed in the attempt to preserve by cooking and filling into jars. The jars, however, end up containing a substance which is at the same time preserve(d) and subject to continued transformation. The protagonists' desires are frustrated. In *The Sea, The Sea* the frustration originates in the negation of form and meaning by the realities of the human condition (contingency, transience, abjection, borderlessness, the Other) which, in a crisis reminiscent of a Freudian return of the repressed, render impossible

the production of controlled, stable meaning. In *Midnight's Children*, by contrast, form is incapable of satisfying the individual's desire and hunger for meaning, because lack cannot be satisfied.

Saleem's aim to contain experience in narrative and jars of chutney must fail, because food and its related activities negate many binary opposites necessary for the creation of meaning.[653] Saleem is incapable of preserving meaning in stable forms, because his culinary and narrative constructs rely on arbitrarily constructed oppositions, characterised by a constant crossing of borders and continued transformation (the analysis has discussed consumption in terms of the consumer's/ reader's transformation of the substance, of its form and meaning).

Food undercuts the narrators' different projects in different ways. In each case, food at the same time seemingly supports the narrators' artistic-cultural aim. This double-sidedness is related to the ambiguous connotations of food. Bourdieusian distinction by means of food illustrates this. It functions differently in the three novels: in *The Sea, The Sea,* Charles uses food choice and cooking in order to distinguish himself, basing his sense of identity on a transient, unstable substance. Charles's aim is to construct a lasting, immortal image of himself, a project denied by the connotations of food. *Midnight's Children* problematizes distinction in a more complex manner: here, what appear as unconscious mechanisms of distinction undercut Saleem's aim of a grand, universal narrative (chutney as Indian national language). In contrast to both *The Sea, The Sea* and *Midnight's Children*, distinction in *Holzfällen* works paradoxically alongside incorporation to integrate the individual into the group with which he denies affiliation. This comparative reading shows how the three narrator's distinct projects and aims are undercut in different, even opposed ways by similar mechanisms and connotations of food.

The present analysis of food in these three novels has returned again and again to the ambiguity of the culinary and alimentary and the related ambiguity of narration, closely aligned with food. Food is never only one thing, but always carries a multiplicity of frequently contradictory but never independent connotations: even Saleem, who is, in contrast to Murdoch's and Bernhard's narrators, conscious of some connotations of food, overlooks many other connotations, which undermine his project. Cooking and writing both seemingly affirm and reject aspects of the narrators' ideals. Narration and food seemingly give control to the author-cooks, yet full control remains

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[653] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 2.

entirely out of reach. Narration and the culinary and alimentary relate to a desire for as well as reflecting the failure of form and meaning, the construction of which is always partial and unstable. And finally, food means both nourishment of the individual body and simultaneously a compromising of integrity. The frequent recurrence of desire and dissatisfaction in the culinary and alimentary but also in narration reflects the ambiguity of food and of narration. With its multiplicity of often contradictory, interconnected connotations, food has proven to be a particularly good tool with which to approach these twentieth century self-reflexive texts, which show both a rejection of absolutes and a continuing yearning for them.

The Sea, The Sea, Holzfällen and *Midnight's Children* reflect many of the conventional uses of food in fiction: it is here a marker of time and space, a symbol, metaphor or metonymy. It serves purposes of cultural, social and political characterization, creates interaction, gives occasion for speech, reflects social inclusion and exclusion and is a display of status. It represents relationships of power, rebellion and subversion, enforces the concepts of culture and nature, is sexualised and can be magical as well as a signifier of an ostensible reality. Until now, readings of these three texts have reduced food, if they have mentioned it at all, to one or more of these functions. The readings offered here in each case reach beyond these conventional functions: the culinary and the alimentary are more than a literary device, they are systems of signification. The present study has brought out aspects which exist within the signifying systems of food, languages which are largely independent within the narratives and speak of more and other things than the novels' narrators, in particular in relation to problems of artistic-cultural production and narration. Offering new readings of the three texts, then, this study has shown that food is a powerful critical tool which can be employed to test, question and problematize underlying concepts of art and narration.

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