Food and the Senses in Film

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> Good food is like music you can taste, color you can smell. There is excellence all around you. You only need to be aware to stop and savor it.
> *Chef Gusteau, Ratatouille*

Abstract *As food has acquired greater prominence – not only in film but across a range of visual media – its representation has evolved as well: we see a growing emphasis on and further refinement of the textures, surfaces, light and sounds connected with cooking; eating elicits even stronger physical reactions in spectators, ranging from salivation to hunger, from desire to disgust. This attention to materiality intensifies the effect of realism to the limit of hyperrealism, with extreme close ups, enhanced glistening on ingredients and dishes, and amplified sound effects. In this essay we explore this intensification and consider how the shift toward the food film as a genre in and of its own right has changed, highlighting the vicarious nature of sensory consumption even further.*

1. From the Grotesque to the Sublime – A Short History of Food in Film

Aside from precursors such as *La Grande Bouffe* (Ferreri 1873), the food film has fully developed into a genre in its own right since the second half of the 1980s. Works such as *Tampopo* (Jûzô Itami 1985), *Babette's Feast* (1987) and T*he Cook, the Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover* (Greeneway 1989) launched a new phase in the representation of food in film. Shortly after, we see the full emergence of the genre in *Like Water for Chocolate* (Arau 1992) and *Eat Drink Man Woman* (Lee 1994), which introduced a new visual language to represent food, a shift representing an extension food photography adapted to the moving image. This body of films established conventions, camera movements, lighting and sound effects that have been described as 'food porn,' which, according to Erin Metz McDonnell, is "a set of visual aesthetics that emphasizes the pleasurable, sensual dimensions of food, derived from (but not actually

employed in) human sexuality" (2016: 239). In film, the metaphor is particularly apt because this approach often used techniques widely applied in the porn industry (Kaufman 2005), from extreme close ups to the 'disembodiment' of body parts or the use of water mist and other tricks to increase the glistening qualities of skin.

Why and how the food film genre develops at this point of time has been a question that we have considered as scholars (Lindenfeld/Parasecoli 2016: 13–17). In our previous work, we recognized that food moved into the foreground, becoming a protagonist in its own right and not just functioning as a narrative or descriptive tool that enhances the realism of the action or the characters. Food acquired its own kind of narrative agency in film: its sensuous nature, its quality, and the emotional experiences connected with it affect the human characters who relate to it and often define their identity in relation to what they produce, cook, and eat. In fact, the protagonists are often professional chefs, domestic cooks, or people who, for various reasons, maintain a strong connection to food. Anne Bower points not only to the camera's attention, but also to settings like restaurants, private and professional kitchens, and domestic living rooms as key sites of representation (2004: 6). Cynthia Baron draws attention to an increasing number of scenes revolving around food and the order in which they appear in the narrative (Baron 2006: 103). Moreover, both critics and audiences now use the category, which has grown to include fiction film, animation, and documentaries, in describing this kind of film.

Since we first began exploring the evolution of this genre, we have seen food become even more stylized and central as a narrative force. Food has acquired greater prominence across a range of visual media; film has greatly contributed to this rapidly evolving ecology, especially in terms of a greater emphasis on movement and sound, and their potential to enhance textural and haptic elements that go beyond what still photography can provide. Together with growing attention to light and the way it plays on moving surfaces, representations of cooking and eating elicit even stronger physical reactions in spectators, ranging from salivation to hunger, from desire to disgust. This focus on materiality intensifies the effect of realism to the limit of hyperrealism, with extreme close ups, enhanced glistening on ingredients and dishes, and amplified sound effects. In this essay we explore this intensification and consider how the shift toward the food film as a genre in and of its own right has changed, highlighting the vicarious nature of sensory consumption even further.

At the same time, research on multisensory eating experiences that add haptic, aural, and smell elements to food consumption has stimulated filmmakers,' artists,' and critics' interest in the interaction of different senses around food and the potential of new technologies to heighten such experiences to involve spectators not as mere receivers but as co-creators (Velasco/Obrist 2020: 4). Well beyond Aldous Huxley's imagination of multisensory cinema in *Brave New World* and the 1960s attempts at Smell-O-Vision, current research strives to integrate different kinds of physical

stimuli such as temperature, movements, and even pain not just as add-ons but as constitutive story-telling elements designed into the narrative from the get go (Velasco/Obrist 2018). The popularity of food films and other food-related visual media is also connected with the growing interest of the younger generations towards food not only as a form of self-expression in social media but also as an element of community identities and as a political topic, above all in terms of sustainability and justice (Surace 2022).

Food films now originate in very different cultures from around the world, each with their specific connections with gastronomy and eating. However, the global success and the international circulation of such films suggest that audiences' interest is based on a shared experience rooted in the body, its sensory world, and its relationship with food beyond cognitive and discursive elements. Aida Roldán-García (2020: 40) argues that the emphasis on embodiment and alternative modalities of connection to the moving image can foster a more open, less judgmental way to relate to the Otherness, as the sensory engagement with food tends to help viewers to identify with the life experience of characters from other cultures. We also cannot help but think that the COVID-19 epidemic invited viewers to transfer their experiences of dining out – or even dining together – onto representations on screens, a further displacement from communal eating toward vicarious visual feasts, where viewers can enjoy the consumption of food in all its glory through highly polished, evocative images and sounds.

In this article, we examine works that present and define themselves as film, regardless of their length or their medium, which includes movie theaters, Blue Rays and DVDs, streaming services, or hand-held devices even if the impact and effectiveness of cinematic specificities on viewers' experience, such as surround sound and communal spectatorship, are obviously limited. After the brief introductory examination of the rise of food film as a genre, we discuss different theories of how food invites interactions with viewers' senses. We then move to the analysis of more recent food films, focusing on animated movies as a case study.

2. Senses and Food on Film

The embodied experience of consuming food films invites us to consider what happens off screen in spectators' bodies as they watch a movie. It also asks us to consider the qualities and characteristics of the images (Sobchack 2004, 59–60). In this section we explore how film theory has examined the off-and-on screen dimensions of virtual food consumption. This brief literature review also suggests that food and taste are quite often marginalized in such reflections, while great attention is dedicated to touch or, as it is usually referred to, the haptic. As Roldán-García states, "a haptic image is one that seeks to erase the distance between spectator and film by

capturing objects from extremely close perspectives, so the viewer can appreciate physical textures of the portrayed objects […] Haptics take the audience's experience beyond the mere visual by resorting to physical reactions" (2020: 39). Moreover, the haptic aspects of the cinematic experience can be amplified by sound and the way the camera moves closer to or further away from food and the characters that cook or consume it.

The body, with its physiological and affective reactions, reemerges as an important site for examination in film theory. According to phenomenological approaches to embodiment, communication in and through film is effective only because it is built on "shared structures of embodied experiences" (Elsaesser & Hagener 2015: 127) that are activated in the spectator's bodies before any cognitive process or emotional involvement. The starting point for such investigations is the human sensorium, which, in Angela Ndalianis's words "refers both to the sensory mechanics of the human body, but also to the intellectual and cognitive functions connected to it" (2012: 16).

Since the early 1990s, film and media theories, particularly those grounded in feminist thought, have tended to focus on the body itself in movie-watching as part of a broader reexamination of the primacy of vision over the other senses, often interpreted as an expression of patriarchal ways to be in the world (Marks 2000; Shaviro 1993; Crary 1992). Linda Williams described horror, porn and melodrama as "body genres" (1991: 2): centered respectively on violence and pain, sex and pleasure, romance and emotions, they allow spectators to experience "sensations that are on the verge of respectable" (1991: 2). According to Williams, the mechanism through which such experiences take place is the involuntary mimicry on the part of the viewers of the emotions and sensations performed by characters on screen. Until this body of scholarship emerged, the body tended to be ignored as the site where visual and audio representations landed.

Referring to food films such as *Babette's Feast*, *Like Water for Chocolate*, and *Big Night*, Vivian Sobchack (2004) drew attention to the centrality of the spectators' bodies in the cinema experience as "cinesthetic subjects." Viewers are able to experience the more visceral and tactile aspects of film through two characteristics of the human sensorium: synaesthesia, the exchange of feelings among the senses and with language, and coenaesthesia, the "prelogical and nonhierarchical unity of the sensorium" (Sobchack 2004: 69) that spectators experienced as their sensory at birth before any organization of stimuli shaped by culture and practice. The emphasis on embodiment drew attention to haptic perception, which Laura Marks describes as "the combination of tactile, kinesthetic, and proprioceptive functions, the way we experience touch both on the surface of and inside our bodies. In haptic visuality, the eyes themselves function like organs of touch." (2002: 2)

The sensorium, however, is never isolated from viewing habits that are actively learned through cinema technology and memories that accrue over time, reflecting specific contexts (Stephens 2012). The viewer's experience cannot be separated from the on-screen aspects of cinema. Their multisensory perceptions constantly, actively, and creatively interact with the narrative and stylistic components of the film through visual and aural elements such as camera work and sound design. The audiovisual elements of mimetic images are meant to elicit multisensory reactions in spectators that involve other bodily experiences, such as flavor, touch, proprioception, and movement (Antunes 2016). Tiago de Luca argues that the long take, in particular, allows spectators to explore the physical reality of the fictional world of the film through the embodied experiences of the characters that inhabit it (2014: 11).

The improvement of film technology and the availability of digital tools alongside their integration in viewers' daily experience of food, and the increased use of professional video and photography in food and drink business to stimulate sharing among users and greater sales has upped the ante for cinematic representations of food and eating (Cankul et al. 2021). We see this along with the shift toward augmented and virtual reality. Agnes Peth observes that a cinematic experience of food "can no longer be connected exclusively to films seen at the cinema, but can also be found in video installations, new media art, or in a variety of 'vernacular' forms enabled by these new, accessible digital technologies" (2015: 1).

This brief literature review indicates great interest in the sensory aspects of cinema and the bodily experiences of spectators, with a particular focus on genres such as horror (Barker 2009; Hanich 2010; Ndalianis 2012), and porn (Stella 2020; Ryberg 2015; Groda 2009). However, very little theoretical reflection about the senses extends to food films, which are instead widely examined from psychoanalytical, symbolic, and narrative points of view that at times seem to bracket the materiality of what is represented on screen and its sensory relations with the bodies of film characters and spectators (Novielli 2021; Kostopoulou 2020). We argue that it is necessary to expand Williams' 'body genre' approach to include food films, as they also elicit physical reactions in viewers. James Keller, for instance, evoked the 'cinematic hunger,' a full sensory response that filmmakers are capable of stimulating through the manipulation of gustatory imagery: "Food cinema thus invokes the gustatory appetite in a fashion similar to the arousal of the libido through romantic and sexual imagery, accessing the full sensory experience of the actor and, subsequently and vicariously, of the audience." (2006: 1)

Taking the body as a starting point, how then might we consider the evolution of food films and the ways in which they invite sensory engagement? In the following pages we look at a number of more recent food films, focusing on animated films as a case study, to consider how viewers' bodies are invited to participate in the virtual consumption of food.

3. Where is the Body? Moving from the First Food Films to Contemporary Cases

When we consider the earlier food films, we see a noticeable shift toward the sexualization or glorification of food. As the genre evolves, the films representations of food become more and more visceral, and the viewer is invited to an ever more immersive experience of consumption. This shift in tone and style heightens opportunities for more intense sensory experiences.

As we move into the 1990s and beyond, we see an evolution in how food films represent food and eating. In the early 2010s, sensual representations of food and food porn stylistic elements appeared also in documentaries that focus on the work of famous chefs, such as *Three Stars* (Drei Sterne – Die Köche und die Sterne, Hachmeister 2010), *A Matter of Taste: Serving Up Paul Liebrandt* (Rowe 2011), *El Bulli: Cooking in Progress* (Wetzel 2011), *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* (Gelb 2011), and *Step up to the Plate* (Entre les Bras, Lacoste 2012) (Parasecoli, 2016). These documentaries have provided a template for food documentary series that have enjoyed great success on streaming platforms, including *Chef's Table* and *High on the Hog*. The appeal of sensual images of food and eating has recently extended to films that do not fall under the food film genre per se, but in which nevertheless food plays a central role; we can mention *First Cow* (Kelly Reichardt 2019) and the Academy Award winning *Parasite* (Bong Joon-ho 2019). The case of animated movies is particularly interesting in examining the foregrounding of food as a character in food films and the growing role the sensory dimension plays in them. The visual and haptic approaches and the narrative dynamics that have supported the development and broadening success of food film as a genre are purposely recreated through technological means that mimic camera work.

Animated films that were released in the second half of the 2000s show a visible shift in how food is represented. Using sophisticated graphic technology, *Bee Movie* (Hickner and Smith 2007), *Kung Fu Panda* (Osborne and Stevenson 2008), *The Tale of Despereaux* (Fell and Stevenhagen 2008), and *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* (Lord and Miller 2009) represented ingredients and dishes with precision and attention to detail so they stand out as realistic elements in the films' fictional worlds, even when animal and human characters are more whimsically drawn. Accuracy in the visual description of edible matter obviously signals its relevance in the plot and in the protagonists' individual stories. These cartoons present the same extreme close-ups of food, amplified sounds, and attention to the textures of ingredients that characterize the food film genre. For example, in *Bee Movie* the glistening and transparent honey drips, flows, and whirls in ways that accurately mimic the real substance. The dumplings and soups in *Kung Fu Panda* are luscious, with vapors that stimulate spectators to relive their own smell and texture experiences.

Released in the same period, *Ratatouille* (Bird 2007) is the film that takes the sensorium most seriously. The subsurface light scattering and new CG techniques make the dishes appear translucent, appetizing, and realistic. According to a promotional podcast, graphic simulations were conducted on pictures of actual dishes prepared in the studio so that artists could make food relax and drape on itself, while great attention was paid to the textural and optical qualities of steam, heat waves of various intensities, and simmering sauces (Pixar 2007). During Remy the rat's first visit to a fine dining restaurant kitchen, besides swift and dramatic movements connected with the cooks' activities, sounds of whooshing flames, sizzling pans, knives chopping ingredients on cutting boards all contribute to the viewers' sensory experience, wrapping them up in a dynamic barrage of visual and aural stimuli. Ratatouille even experiments with the graphic representation of the internal sensory experience of Remy he tastes and pairs a piece of cheese and a strawberry: the background fades to black, and at each bite burst of shapes and colors pop up and disappear in synch with music with different moods, rhythms and instruments, causing the rat to smile blissfully. When he combines the two ingredients together, lively music, a colorful background, and explosions of colorful shapes point to a qualitatively, richer, more stimulating and satisfying experience. Later in the story, Remy manages to share his inner world experience of food with his brother, who implicitly stands in for viewers and their participation in the rat's gustatory (including olfactive) discoveries. In this case the movie shifts from realistic images toward abstract, but still accessible, representations of individual perceptions of flavors and aromas. By doing so, the film explores the synesthetic potential of images and sounds to convey other categories of gustatory sensations such as flavors, smells, and textures (Ransom 2021).

Ratatouille and the other food-centered animated movies that were produced in the US and released around the same period have established recurring tropes in terms of narratives, topics, and use of the sensory that continue to shape the genre, as more recent examples indicate. Many of such movies appear to focus on Asian culinary culture; such interest may be partly a consequence of the mainstreaming of Asian cuisines in US, partly the reflection of the desire of inclusiveness and multiculturality; moreover, all these Asian-themed films hinge on the same central theme, which the filmmakers may easily project on Asian cultures: food as the core of family ties or, at least, a crucial component in human connections. These topics appear less central in food-centered anime, as indicated by series such as *Oishinbo*, *Food Wars!: Shokugeki no Soma*, and *Silver Spoon*, which highlight instead various forms of somewhat obsessive foodism, competitiveness in showcasing culinary skills, and inflexible motivation toward professional success. From a visual point of view, such series explore food textures and the gustatory experiences of their characters in modalities that also emerge in full length animation films such as Hayao Miyazaki's 2001 masterpiece *Spirited Away*.

Bao (Domee Shi 2018), which won the 2019 Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film, moves between realism and imagination. The story is about a woman that fills her lonely life with cooking, until a bao dumpling she makes takes life and an anthropomorphic shape; she nourishes and cares for it. As the bao grows, it starts acting like a teenager. To pacify it, the woman cooks a whole meal; yet, it refuses her food, which she ends up eating all by herself in anger. When the ungrateful bite-size creature decides to leave with a woman, she ingests it in a fit of rage. We eventually realize that the bao was a personification of his estranged son (whose head is weirdly shaped as a bao), who at the end of the movie reappears, bringing desserts that they consume together, trying to recreate their bond. In the last scene we see the son trying unsuccessfully to close a bao while his girlfriend proves – to everybody's delight – to be very good at it. The whole family is reunited again around the table and food.

The eight-minute short is filled with very sensual and realistic representations of Chinese delicacies. It starts with a close up of hands kneading elastic down over a wood board covered in flour; the dough is then shaped, cut in small pieces, and flatted into small disks to make *bao* dumplings. The stuffing is also very realistically rendered also in the way it moves as the hands close the dumplings. They are then steamed in bamboo trays and brought to the table. The accuracy with which the different steps of bao making are depicted and the details of the ingredients contrasts with the human characters, who are much less true to life. This becomes particularly apparent when, in the opening sequence, we see just hands making *baos*: the food is represented much more realistically than the human body, also in terms of surfaces and light reflection. The cooking and the dish are accurately drawn, with liquids and vapors perfectly represented, their textures glistening, their movement accurately reproduced, the sounds of kneading, chopping, sealing, and steaming the *baos*, adding to the overall sensory experience. Even the little *bao* never loses its traits as an edible object, although the woman and the *bao* interact like humans. When he stumbles and falls, it flattens its head and the woman has to add filling to it to bring it back to its normal shape. The precision of the food depictions support both the realism and the absurdity of the short, which both operate to highlight the centrality of family values and food's capacity to both express contrasts and to reinforce bonds.

The same themes dominate *Let's Eat* (Dixon Wong 2020), winner at the 2020 Los Angeles Asian Film Festival. In the short film, Chinese food embodies the tension between an immigrant mother and her daughter, who grows up in a different world. A way for the mother to confirm her identity, food is central to the family relationship and is representative with extreme accuracy. As the daughter grows, she refuses her mother's cuisine together with her culture. The food the mother lovingly prepares, which the daughter leaves untouched on the table, is represented in detail. Food also turns into a symbol of the crisis in the relationship. One day the daughter comes back home to find her mother unconscious; we do not see her, but we see instead a

pot of stock boiling over, with realistic effects of the vapors pushing up the lid and the liquid dripping on the side of the pot and onto the stove. The sickness brings the two close again: the daughter feeds her mother while she is lying in the hospital bed. In the end, she will embrace Chinese cooking to express her love for her own little daughter. The same dishes she shared with her mother reappear on the family table, with the same luscious textures and attention to details that advanced 3D animation allows. The realism of the food is not just used to make viewers salivate or desire Chinese choking: the sensory involvement is meant to increase the emotional impact of the story.

In the full-length Netflix film *Over the moon* (Glen Keane and John Kahrs 2020), food is once again leveraged to convey the closeness between a mother and a daughter, and the daughter's grief when her mother passes away. In fact, her attachment to her mother's food brings her to refuse all attempts from her father's new partner to also use her own food to get close to her. The protagonists' family business is a mooncake shop in a traditional village. In one of the opening scenes, the images painstakingly describe the process of mooncake making: we see the traditional objects, the hands movement, the consistency and texture of the dough, and the stuffing up close from the girl's point of view, accompanied by a song that explains the various steps of the preparation. The sensory realism of the sequence is enhanced by details such as specks of dough sticking to a rolling pin and the vapors from the baked mooncakes swift out the shop onto the street where passersby visibly inhale them. The same attention to the materiality of food comes through when the whole family comes together to celebrate the Mid-Autumn festival around a festive table full of dishes that the young protagonist messes up to express her frustration. As the girl embarks on a trip to the moon, the food slowly moves to the background of the narration to reappear in the end. At the following Mid-Autumn festival the family gathers for dinner again, but now that the young girl has accepted her new stepmother and her son as a brother, she can enjoy food again, which reappears in all its glory. Viewers learn that "the circle of the mooncake is the symbol of a family coming together." The dessert expresses traditional skills, cultural identity, and family values, all represented as core elements of the Chinese community. The ethnic family dynamics are shown almost as exemplary, using the somewhat familiar but still exotic food to both titillate appetites and to draw global audiences into a culture that they may otherwise feel excluded from.

The tryptic East Asian culture – family values – replete with luscious culinary spectacles has become a trope of animated movies with Asian protagonists, even when food is not the main protagonist. In both *Wish Dragon* (Chris Appelhans 2021), an East Asian take on the Middle Eastern Aladdin lamp story (via the Disney adaptation), and *Turning Red* (Domee Shi 2022) food preparation and consumption in the family are used as a symbol of close family ties, and dishes are depicted with greater attention to sensory details than other elements in the story. A *Turning Red* sequence

in which the protagonist's father cooks dinner has the same accuracy of movements, textures, and light as a famous scene from Ang Lee's *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman*, where another father also cooks for his daughters to tighten emotional ties he feels are loosening. The camera still frames the family home exterior when viewers hear the sounds of knives at work. In the next shot, a shiny cleaver cuts a head of lettuce, droplets flying everywhere. Then a red chili pepper is thinly chopped and thrown dramatically into a sizzling wok, followed by a squirt of soy sauce. The movement, lighting, and sound of the ingredients being sauteed in the cooking vessel, together with very appetizing-looking pork belly slices, make viewers feel like they are in the kitchen. Even the salt falls into the food accompanied by an almost heavenly chime. Pixar is fully aware of the attention the food in the film attracted. They released the video *Mei from Turning Red Makes Congee* in the *Cooking with Pixar* series (Pixar 2022). *Turning Red*'s production designer Rona Liu said in an interview:

> The design inspiration we kept referring to was 'chunky cute.' So it's like, things have to be thicker, rounder, beefier. Instead of going for realism, the shape of everything has to be a little bit rounder, a little more simplified. Leaves can't have a thousand different turns and folds. It has to be cute. From *Bao*, we learned a lot about the textural and light response to the food – the shape can be stylized, but the shading response has to be realistic. Meat needs to look like meat, the way the light passes through the leaves has to look real, in order for the viewers to have the connection that this is food. The key ingredient is the oily gloss that we put over everything. (Saxena 2022)

In sum, representations of food in animated movies from the mid 2000s display increasing attention to the senses and materiality. It is a phenomenon that critics and scholars have not explored beyond the examination of *Ratatouille*. Nevertheless, we deem it significant. Highlighting the haptic attributes of food is likely to introduce young viewers to the contemporary aesthetics of food in kid-friendly ways that prepare them for the glorified images they will experience as adults, when they become consumers of food television, movies, magazines, and websites, as well as co-producers of food-centric social media. At the same time, the visuals appeal to adult food enthusiasts, widening the audience base for the animated films. The oversized presence of culinary delights in Asian-themed movies is so pervasive to almost constitute its own subgenre. On the one hand, these films appear to take advantage of both the growing popularity and familiarity of Asian culinary cultures and the glorification of food that has become central to contemporary consumers' culture in high-income countries. On the other hand, they present themselves as focused on tradition and family values that seem in opposition with Western culture, indirectly represented as shallow and lacking human connections. Is it a case of the dynamic

that bell hooks described as "eating the other" (1992)? Is consumerist food culture trying to find salvation in ethnic communities from any accusation of lack of depth?

4. The Senses in Food Film and the Food Media Ecology

The case study of animated films indicates how the sensory dimension has come to the forefront in food films as a genre, following changes in the way food and eating are represented on screen. Advanced digital technologies in making, showing, and watching movies, as well as new approaches in filming and editing, allow for haptic and aural aspects to be blended with visual ones, generating shifts in storytelling and providing more immersive experiences for spectators. These developments are connected with the growing porosity of film as a medium, which is increasingly integrated with a sprawling ecology that includes visual media ranging from video to photography. Users can now consume similar content through different media on appliances as diverse as computers to TVs, tablets, and smartphones. Cinema screens are now just another component of this communication ecosystem.

This meshing of disparate media accelerated during the COVID-19 crisis, when cinemas had to close and the movie industry took to launching new films directly on streaming platforms. Visual social media such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have made food representations even more accessible and popular, well beyond the success that food TV shows enjoyed from the late 1990s. To catch viewers' attention, which has turned into a marketable asset, media producers have progressively leveraged food's immediacy and its growing popularity as a marker of individual and collective identities. Moreover, they have embraced and amplified the sensory features of food representations to increase the appeal of their visual products. Film has inevitably adopted many of these communication strategies, which spectators have grown used to especially when the COVID-19 pandemic forced many to give up restaurants and other forms of social consumption of food to focus on their own cooking in their private kitchens. Deprived of varied eating experiences, consumers turned to vicarious consumption with a vengeance.

Food's growing presence in social media, deeply entangled with commercial enterprises geared towards marketing and monetization, inevitably has had an impact on film, in particular the food film genre. Against this background, food's visual consumption is not simply a surrogate of sensual experiences of flavors and aromas to which spectators do not have physical access. It rather constitutes an act of ingestion that shapes and conditions not only our enjoyment of media but also our sense of taste alongside the actual food we consume. Food representations alter the way we speak, think, and act around food, generating long-term trends and short-term fads that in turn have an impact on food business and the media industry, including cinema. We suggest that we cannot think of the consumption of food on screen and

actual ingestion as totally separate. Our enjoyment of food images in film, made more engaging and intense through recourse to multisensory dimensions, makes us hungry for 'real food,' just as 'real food' makes us hunger for mediated images of food.

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