

Introduction

In an essay collection on food and its utopian modes of socialisation, it might be convenient to remember that the first systematic reflection from within the social sciences on the topic of the meal was produced by the German sociologist Georg Simmel, in a short essay published in 1910, “The Sociology of the Meal”.¹ Writing decades before the socio-anthropological structuralist and poststructuralist conception of food and its discrete preparations as a form of language or as a message codifying a profound structure, be it mental (Lévi Strauss²) or social (Bourdieu³), Simmel argues that the human act of eating expresses a dialectical tension between its necessarily natural content, related to survival, and the culturally organised form in which this survival manifests itself. In its sociological explanation of the meal, founded on the form/content dialectic with which Simmel repeatedly works in developing his thought, this tension between what belongs to the natural domain and what belongs to the cultural realm implies a third term mediating between these two, which is precisely that of society. Simmel is not a utopianist, but his theoretical model built from a dialectic between the material dimension of food – the nutritional physical substance – and its ideal dimension – the practice of its sociocultural codification – can, without abusing or distorting his model, be broadened to the possible utopian representations of human food. It is a model that plays with the opposition between several categories:⁴ axiological (“inferior” vs. “superior”); ethical (“selfishness” vs. “allocentrism”); biosociocultural (“individualist atavism” vs. “socialized autonomy”); as well as with their paradoxical correlation. Simmel’s essay is complex and extends to questions of aesthetics (the ideal composition and display of the table and room for meals), religious symbolism (the meaning, for believers, in the sacrament of the Christian eucharist, of communion as an experience participating in an indivisible totality overcoming the act of individual physical human feeding) and other issues. But, for the purposes of our argument, it matters only to retain the functionality of those categories as a principle or frame meant to explain the food/utopia dyad. The “inferior”, “selfish”, and “individualist atavistic” act of eating is, paradoxically, according to Simmel, the most common of human activities and, for that very reason, it contains or constitutes itself as a condition of possibility of its conversion into an act which is “superior”, “allocentric” and of “socialized autonomy”. His explanation is intellectually productive: since it is the most vital and egocentric of human necessities, the

universal search for the satisfaction of hunger and thirst is converted into the most social and culturally shareable of experiences. In other words, because it is co-existential, the selfishness inherent to the physiological impossibility of food's material division is a condition for ideal sharing, that is, it is converted into a conceptually codified practice of distribution of food under the social form of the meal. By its temporal regularity, by its elective and congregational character and by the set of ethical and functional precepts which characterise and define it, the meal, as a socially ordered and ordering practice, as an ideal symbol of conviviality or as a social act transfiguring primary organic needs into a culturally codified practice, therefore constitutes itself, through its traces of ideality, into an outline – in Ernst Bloch's expression – of a better world, or in a prefiguration of the principle of utopia. In fact, and in the footsteps of Simmel's thought, this prefiguration becomes more evident if one emphasises his thesis according to which the meal works as a converter of selfish atavism into a distributive, communitarian practice. Or, amplifying his argument even more, it works to transform solipsistic ontological nature into the social condition of the companion, of the person who – according to the Latin etymology of the name, *cum panis* – shares the bread. It is evident that a meal is only the climax or the key event of a set of activities involved in the cycle of human feeding, including production, distribution, preparation and consumption, to which one should add the disposal of the remains, activities which can potentially be represented according to the above-mentioned principle of utopia.

The first essay in this collection, "From Production to Disposal: The Interaction of Food and Society in Utopias", by Lyman Tower Sargent, focuses precisely on the utopian figuration and documentation of these activities. Sargent thus analyses a representative set of eutopias, or positive utopias, in English, diachronically encompassing five centuries of history – from 1516, the year of the first edition of Thomas More's *Utopia*, to our days. The essay draws attention to the critical dimension of many of these eutopias, denouncing circumstantial situations regarding conditions of production, material scarcity and injustice in the distribution of food, as well as the prospective alternatives presented to overcome these situations, many of which would become a reality with the passing of time.

In contrast to, or extending, some of the issues examined in this inventory of positive utopias, in particular those related to the mode of food production, Teresa Botelho's essay "What Will We Eat? Food as Signifier in the Projection of Futurities in Climate Change Fiction" focuses on a corpus of twentieth/twenty first North American dystopian fiction depicting a future world drastically threatened in its food security as a result of population growth and dramatic climate change. Drawing on data from and conclusions of the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report on the need to reform the prevailing food production protocols in order to avoid the irreversible disruptions of global environmental conservation, the essay demonstrates the extent to which the narratives it analyses – Harry Harrison's *Make Room, Make Room* (1966), Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Calorie Man* (2008) and *The Water Knife* (2015), Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* (2017) –, are, in their thematic variations, inventive experiments imagining future devastating food shortages largely caused by the ongoing climate change crisis.

In "Please, oh Snowman, what is toast?: Memories and Nostalgia for Food in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake*", Manuel J. Sousa Oliveira takes Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *Oryx and Crake* (2003) as examples of dystopian novels which make use of the utopian function of remembering food. By exploring the tension between the dystopian present and the traces of utopia which can be found in meals from the past, Oliveira argues that this results in a critical nostalgia that opens up utopian possibilities. Therefore, by looking back to an age of plenty, past meals and food become an essential part of, on the one hand, comfort, and, on the other hand, resistance for the characters surviving in dystopia.

Considering the role of spaces in the construction of a dystopian ambience, in "Fuelled by Bodies, Fed by Souls: Exploring 'Hangry' Houses in Horror Fiction", Jaqueline Pierazzo focuses on food in horror fiction and begins by pointing out that, in such contexts, it tends to invoke the horrors of death. In her chapter, she thus considers this complex relationship in a sub-genre of horror literature that Dale Bailey called "the haunted house tale" and turns to Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* and Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" in an approach that combines Food and Horror Studies in order to shed new light on the works of these two authors.

The critical utopia is a twentieth-century literary innovation in terms of writing about ideal societies and political forms of relationship. The conceptualization of these goes back to H.G. Wells' *Modern Utopia*. Joana Caetano, Mariana Oliveira and Miguel Ramalheite Gomes's collaborative essay "Refectories and Dining Rooms as 'Social Structural Joints': on Space, Gender and Class in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*" is an interdisciplinary reading exercise of the architectural concept of "structural joint" applied to a classical critical utopia. The authors highlight how the cultural motif of food, represented by the practical architectural and literary categories of space, gender and class, plays a cardinal role in Ursula Le Guin's critical utopia *The Dispossessed* (1974). They analyse the ideological diversity of food-related spaces (dining halls and dining rooms) as well as their consequences for gender behaviour and for the representation and interpretation of social classes in the relational universes dialectically described in that novel.

If one of the critical features of Le Guin's utopia recalls the mischief caused by the competitive and exploitative voracity of the capitalist system, Joanna Russ's dystopian tales "Nor Custom Stale" (1959) and "The Throwaways" (1969) examined by Marinela Freitas foregrounds the most sordidly damaging aspects of this system in the context of social eating habits: the boredom-generating automation and the generalisation of the culture of discarding. Highlighting the contrast between the upbeat tone of John Elfreth Watkins, Jr's early 1900s predictions for the second millennium, and Joanna Russ's pessimistic view of a not-yet futuristic society ravaged by pseudo-material comfort, Marinela Freitas emphasises Russ's fictionalised social criticism of robotic and non-human food preparation and hyper-consumerism.

Another productive category in utopian studies is Foucault's heterotopia. In Alvany Rodrigues Noronha Guanaes' "Empathy through Foodways in Colum McCann's *Let the Great World Spin*" literary references to food are seen as a door to build the empathy of readers. The essay discusses Colum McCann's *Let the Great World Spin*, a novel where a radical Irish priest, prostitutes and a group of mourning mothers, among other characters, cross paths and share their losses, hopes and

differences placed in “heterotopias of crisis” (Foucault 1997), through food-character interaction.

Moving from utopian/dystopian/heterotopian paradigms to the world-estranging domain of Science Fiction, Ian Watson’s essay “Better Than Being Fossilised” focuses on the absences and presences of foodways in Science Fiction, which goes back to techno-utopian texts of the nineteenth century, to identify the roots of the fascination with artificial foods that is still present not only in many literary texts, but in contemporary popular science discourses. It then identifies two preoccupations emerging in science-fiction texts, namely the types of food required by the imagined future human colonists of other worlds and the difficulties of obtaining food to feed those left on a Planet Earth plagued by climate instability. It does this by using texts like Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Mars Trilogy*, which scrutinizes the (im)possibilities of extraterrestrial food production, and the anthology *Looking Landwards*, which offers diverse projections of the future of farming on Earth, and various imagined attempts to evade and survive the “Ecotrophy” in the horizon of humanity.

Still within the Anglo-American cultural boundaries, but resuming the positive trait of the utopian impulse, Maria Teresa Castilho and Sofia de Melo Araújo in “What we need is here”: Food, Sustainability, and American Myths and Projects” discuss the New Agrarian Movement in the United States, focusing on the work of Wendell Berry, a Southern writer, poet, essayist and New Agrarian cultural critic, a strong defender of an agrarian revolution for a better world. Tracing Berry’s perspectives back to John Crowe Ransom, who defended “that a happier human destiny should be secured through ‘an honourable peace with nature’”, and Robert Penn Warren, who warned against the destructive effects of industrialism and materialism, the essay inserts Berry into what Marius de Geus called the tradition of ecological utopias, envisioning a sustainable society, in contrast with the American myths of abundance and affluence: The Land of Cockaigne, El Dorado, Sierra de la Plata, The Big Rock Candy Mountain. The authors demonstrate how Wendell Berry’s ‘taking a stand’ comes up in the course of this mythological tradition, and so does any reflection of Society and Food in the United States of America.

Aligned with the thematic range of the previous essay, Ana Paula Pedrosa, in “Alternative Agri-Food Networks and their Implications for Social Policy: A Literature Review” approaches the potential of alternative agri-food networks, especially the Communities Supported Agriculture, to transform the Food Systems and create innovative forms of sociability. The essay argues that the community capital and collective actions for the solution of environmental, economic and social problems are important to the development of sustainable communities, helping to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda. Initiatives related to consumption and production of food can create fairer communities and directly impact the food and nutritional security of the community. The essay concludes that these networks also act as a resistance movement to the conventional way of production and access to food, by addressing the particularities of each territory, food traditions and local biodiversity.

The following two essays discuss a key issue in food studies: dietary ethics related to species and gender theoretical and practical issues. Overviewing the social, scientific, economic, philosophical and literary implications of vegetarianism from an eco-feminist point of view,

Aline Ferreira examines three narratives ranging from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in “The Gendered Politics of Meat: Becoming Tree” in Kang’s *The Vegetarian*, Atwood’s *The Edible Woman*, and Ozeki’s *My Year of Meats*.” Based on contributions from various fields of knowledge, from philosophy, gender and animal studies to plant science, this essay analyses the destabilising rule of the patriarchal (“carnophallogocentric” in Derrida’s terminology) order embodied in the revolutionary course of action of the female protagonists of those novels. Foregrounding Carol Adams’ reflection on the sexual politics of meat (1990), the essay focuses on the intersections of animal and women’s rights, meat eating and the sexual commodification of women as meat to be consumed.

In “Diet, Consciousness and Ethics. Convergent Praxis in the Animal Rights and Vegetarian Writings of Henry Salt and Agostinho da Silva”, José Eduardo Reis and Chris Gerry turn to some of the main publications of Henry Stephens Salt (1851-1939) and Agostinho da Silva (1906-1994). Considering the courageous missions on which each embarked, and the pertinence and quality of their published work, Reis and Gerry discuss their work from a comparative perspective. They therefore present the political, philosophical and practical approaches employed by these two “food militants” in their attempts to raise awareness and promote attitude change among the public with regard to human diet and animal welfare, thus providing evidence of convergences and dissimilarities between the positions each took regarding ethical utopian vegetarianism.

As a way of denouncing and sublimating a historically wronged and forlorn world society, the fictional and religious journey to alternative celestial bodies or metaphysical realms is a common device in utopian literature. In their respective main argument, the last three essays show how the dietary aspects of these fictionalized or envisioned ideal worlds are important to their symbolic or spiritual configurations. In “*The True Story of Planet Mars: A Portuguese Utopia about Food and Public Health*”, Maria Luísa Malato and Manuel Loff discuss *The True Story of Planet Mars*, a twentieth-century Portuguese utopia presented as an eighteenth-century Portuguese translation of a French novel by one Henri Montgolfier. Written by his “translator”, José Nunes da Matta, a committed republican reformist, and published in 1921, during the first Portuguese republican regime (1910-1926), *The True Story of Planet Mars* includes a political constitution, with reforms made by a Martian philosopher. Matta’s utopia depicts a healthy human life, based on a respect for nature and a delicate change of diet.

Two works by Cyrano de Bergerac – *Les États et Empires de la Lune* and *Les États et Empires du Soleil* – are discussed by Antoine Brandelet and Anne Staquet in the essay “Eating in the Other Worlds.” After establishing the utopian characteristics of these works, the essay compares how the texts imagine the parallels and oppositions between people originally from the Earth, the Moon and the Sun by referring to their eating habits. It concentrates then on passages about acts of eating where the Bible and its mythology are reinterpreted by characters from the Other Worlds, and it concludes with the discussion of how these considerations about food and nourishment are consistent with the atheist and materialist philosophical perspective of Cyrano de Bergerac.

Finally, in “Juana de la Cruz’s Heavenly Banquet: A Utopian Way of Thinking about Food,” Rebeca Sanmartín Bastida discusses Juana de la Cruz’s visions of the heavenly banquet. Born in 1481, Juana de la Cruz died in 1534 in Toledo. She was a Franciscan tertiary in the *beaterio* of Cubas de la Sagra, with the reputation of being a “living saint”. She composed a book of visionary sermons, *Libro del conorte* (ca. 1509), committed to paper by her fellow Franciscan María Evangelista, and others. In her book of revelations, she creates a paradise filled with heavenly banquets, and Sanmartín considers how utopian *agape* meals are depicted in this formidable text.

Once singled out as a signifying element, foodways will often reveal an unexpected significance in otherwise discreet moments of utopian representations and speculations. In these essays, the imagination of food will be shown to play a decisive role in utopian world-building, as well as in firing the real-world critiques and reflections of utopianists and other thinkers. The present collection thus takes food as an object of urgent thought and explores the present challenges and potential solutions inhering in discussions of the ways of food, by insisting on giving much due attention to the traditions of utopian writing and utopianist reflection on food-ways, past, present and future.

Notes

1. The essay was originally published in the German newspaper *Der Zeitgeist*, a supplement to the *Berliner Tageblatt*, Berlin, n° 41, 10 October, 1910, 1-2 (commemorative number of the centenary of the University of Berlin). English translation in Michael Symons (1994), “Simmel’s gastronomic sociology: An overlooked essay”, *Food and Foodways*, n° 5.4, 333-351, DOI: 10.1080/07409710.1994.9962016.
2. Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The Culinary Triangle” (1966), in *Food and Culture, a Reader* (2013), ed. by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, New York, Oxon, Routledge, 40-47.
3. Pierre Bourdieu, “Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste”, trans. Richard Nice (1979), in *Food and Culture, a Reader* (2013), ed. by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, New York, Oxon, Routledge, 31-39.
4. The terminology is ours and is inferred from a reading of Simmel’s essay.