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## ***Worth it?***

A visual reading of spectacle, food porn and culinary capital  
in YouTube food media

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## **Abstract**

Studies on food media rarely engage with the visual aspects. If it does it is mostly concerning cookbooks, television and film. This thesis will take another approach by examining food media on YouTube, through the YouTube channel *Buzzfeed* and their series “*Worth it*”. Through the theoretical concepts of spectacle, food porn and culinary capital the thesis *Worth it? – A visual reading of spectacle, food porn and culinary capital in YouTube food media* studies the visual representation of food within a selection of three “*Worth it*” episodes using the method of social semiotics. The objective of this thesis is to study how food and food experiences are portrayed in this series. Focusing on the representation of the food, the cooking process, the restaurants and the emotions included in the episodes. The thesis results in an understanding on how we visually consume food. This turns out to be essential for the spectacle of food and the food porn. The thesis also show that the visual representations are shaped based on the culinary capital.

Keywords: Food, Visuality, Youtube, “*Worth it*”, Spectacle, Food porn, Culinary capital

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# **Introduction**

## *Background*

For a long time food has meant more than simply nourishment. It not only represents a basic need and as fundamental for human survival. Food can function as a symbol of status, art, as a lifestyle, to name a few. Food is often considered to be a craftsmanship and an art form.

Particularly within gastronomical circles, but quite often also in every man's kitchen. This is visible in cooking shows where ordinary people compete for the best baker or home chef. Food is considered to be an experience, entertainment and intellectually stimulating. It generates added value to people. To borrow Pierre Bourdieu's terminology, today food generate cultural and social capital, maybe also economical capital.

This thesis will investigate aestheticizing and representations of food in daily life and in the gastronomical sphere through selected videos from the *Buzzfeed* series on YouTube called "*Worth it*". Why is it relevant to research a YouTube program about food one might ask? Signe Rousseau argues that food representations, much like other types of representations, follow a certain framework, through which the viewer is being navigated.<sup>1</sup> This framework are created through inclusion and exclusion of what is and what not showed in the image. The thesis will take a closer look at how this framework manifest itself in the "*Worth it*" series. What image of food is represented in the videos?

In a society consisting of reproductions there is, according to Rousseau, an undeniable continuity of food representations, in everything from cookbooks to cooking shows.<sup>2</sup> Food on YouTube is a growing phenomenon. You can find everything from inspiration, entertainment and education. In 2014 there was a 280% growth in food channel subscriptions on YouTube, mostly spawned by millennials (ages 18-34).<sup>3</sup> Even celebrity chefs from television are finding their way to YouTube. Jamie Oliver and his YouTube channel *FoodTube* is one of them. The theme of *value* of food, that is being presented in the "*Worth it*" series, is something that seem to be recurring on YouTube. Another example is the YouTube channel *Food Busker*, a show where the cook is taking his food out on the streets, asking people to taste it and then pay him the amount of money they think the food is worth. Could the subject of *value* be a new way of thinking about food in food

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<sup>1</sup> S. Rousseau, 'Food Representations', in: A, Bentley ed., *A cultural history of food in the modern age*. London, Berg, 2012b, p. 183.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>3</sup> J. Delgado, B. Johnsmeyer & S. Balanivskiy, 'Millennials Eat Up YouTube Food Videos', *think with Google* [article], June 2014, <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/consumer-insights/millennials-eat-up-youtube-food-videos/> (accessed 11 dec 2017)

media? If so, is it something that is specific for a platform like YouTube? Unfortunately, we will not answer these questions here, although it is a question worth pursuing in the future. YouTube is not the only digital platform where food media has increased, just look at Facebook, Instagram and various food applications for your phone. They are filled with recipes, inspiration, every day food hacks and diet suggestions. Today you can even order home food from your smartphone, without ever having to leave your home. The digitalization of food is evident in that a growing group of people (mostly millennials) bring their phones into the kitchen instead of a cookbook or a printed recipe, where “the smartphone is becoming the ultimate sous-chef”.<sup>4</sup> There is also a democratization process here that we will discuss further in this thesis.

### *Purpose and research question*

The question I pose in this thesis is:

*In what way does the representation of food and food experiences in the YouTube series “Worth it” relate to the concepts of spectacle, food porn and culinary capital?*

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how food and food experiences are visualised in the YouTube series “Worth it”. I will look at the aesthetics of the videos, how they portray the food, the restaurants and their feelings. How do the presentations of the different price classes differ? In what way do they talk about the food and their experience? The visual manifestation of feelings will also be taken into consideration.

### *Theory*

#### **The spectacle**

The spectacle is a recurring concept within food studies - this thesis will look at the episode of ‘\$47 Taco Vs. \$1 Taco’ through this idea. The concept originates from the French philosopher Guy Debord. In his book *The Society of the Spectacle* he argues that life as we once knew it has been consumed by spectacles. We live in a world of representations of the spectacle, where the commodity and the mediation of it is all we know.<sup>5</sup>

When dealing with the idea of the spectacle, Jean Baudrillard is worth mentioning and his concept of simulation and hyperreality. In Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* first published in 1981, he defines simulation as the formation of “[...] a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal.”<sup>6</sup> The simulacrum according to Baudrillard is a reality that is not real and not

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<sup>4</sup> J. Cooper, ‘Cooking Trends Among Millennials: Welcome to the Digital Kitchen’, *think with Google* [article], June 2015, <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/consumer-insights/cooking-trends-among-millennials/> (accessed 11 dec 2017)

<sup>5</sup> G. Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, [2. Rev. Ed.], London, Rebel Press, 1987, pp. 7-8

<sup>6</sup> J. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1994, p. 1.

imaginary, but placed in an in-between of these two.<sup>7</sup> Simulation create a hyperreality, which is a society where nothing is real, only revisited versions of the past mediated through reproductions.<sup>8</sup> Debord and Baudrillard talk about a kind of staged reality, and that people believe this staged reality to be true, in Baudrillards case he questions if there is a reality at all.

### **Food porn**

The concept of *Food porn* will be a theoretical concept used throughout the thesis, especially in relation to the episode on steak. This idea is used to investigate the fetishisation of food and food experiences as sexually charged, as well as the *visual* consumption of food.<sup>9</sup> To look at the video through the concept of *Food Porn* entails a special focus on the visual and emotional aspects that is mediated in the video.

### **Culinary capital**

The third and last theory that is exemplified through a specific episode is Peter Naccarato and Kathleen Lebescos' concept of culinary capital. With inspiration from Pierre Bourdieu, they have extended his idea of the capital. Capital according to Bourdieu stretches beyond the economical. In addition to economic capital, he argues, there are cultural, social and symbolic ones. All of which can be used to acquire social status. Like Bourdieu, Naccarato and Lebesco view food and food practices as means to obtain power and status. Meaning that the food we eat and where we eat it help shape our identities and help us differentiate within communities.<sup>10</sup>

### **Hard and soft culinary capital**

The empirical material of this thesis opens up the discussion of hard and soft culinary capital. This is a distinction made by Carolin Schmech in her master thesis from 2014. This is a theoretical model she built on the concept of culinary capital and Bourdieu's distinction of *taste of luxury* and *taste of necessity*. In her model, hard culinary capital refers to more physical active actions, like cooking and the acquired knowledge it involves. Soft capital on the other hand refers to the way people, specifically the consumer, talk about food and taste.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 6

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 12-13

<sup>9</sup> R.M. Magee, 'Food Puritanism and Food Porn: The Gourmet Semiotics of Martha and Nigella', *The Journal of American Pop Culture* [online journal], vol. 6, no. 2, Fall 2007, [http://www.americanpopularculture.com/journal/articles/fall\\_2007/magee.htm](http://www.americanpopularculture.com/journal/articles/fall_2007/magee.htm) (accessed 14 december 2017) S. Rousseau, *Food Media: Celebrity Chefs and the Politics of Everyday Interference*, London, Berg, 2012a, pp.74-78.

<sup>10</sup> P. Naccarato & K. Lebesco, *Culinary Capital*, Oxford, Berg, 2012, p. 2

<sup>11</sup> C. Schmech, 'Why children are better cooks and better people – How *MasterChef Junior* reinforces the "taste of luxury and freedom", gives children high culinary capital and portrays them as having multitude of positive characteristics', Master Thesis, Lund University, 2014, p. 36-37.

## *Methodology and empirical material*

### **Empirical material**

The empirical material for this thesis consists of selected videos from the YouTube channel *Buzzfeed* and their show "Worth it". The videos that will be analysed is '\$47 Taco Vs. \$1 Taco', '\$11 Steak Vs. \$306 Steak' and '\$2 Pizza Vs. \$2,000 Pizza – New York City'. In the show, viewers get to follow Steve Lim, his friend Andrew and their cameraman Adam as they visit different restaurants and trying specific dishes at three different price points. The purpose of the show is to compare the food and see if it is worth the price they have to pay for it. Each episode, they go to a cheap restaurant, one middle priced and one expensive. The viewers learn about the chefs vision and the restaurants history, followed by the actual cooking of the food, the lay-up and presentation of the food. Finally the viewer gets to watch Steve and Andrew while they eat the food. Each show ends up with a summary of the dishes and the visited restaurants and finishes with Steve, Andrew and Adam stating their "worth it winner" of the episode, meaning each of them decides which one of the dishes they though was worth the money they paid for it, taking into consideration both taste, presentation and experience. This will not be considered in the analysis, as it is not part of the representation of food, but rather it is an expression of opinion.

### **Social semiotics**

The method for this thesis is based on Theo van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitts *Handbook of Visual Analysis* and their approach to social semiotics applied on moving imagery. The main focus of social semiotics is to distinguish the deeper and sometimes hidden meaning of images.<sup>12</sup> These hidden meanings are withdrawn from a detailed reading of the images. One benefit of social semiotics is this deducing of hidden meanings instead of just seeing what is presented to us and that this is possible to do on any kind of *text*, whether it is paintings, literature, film, maps even social contexts, like parties - which makes it a beneficial method for visual culture studies. For this thesis, the main focus of social semiotics as a methodology is to study the meaning-making in these videos through the metafunctions: *representation*, *orientation* and *organization*. Leeuwen and Jewitts make a detailed account on how to break down moving imagery into frames, shots, scenes, sequences and genres. This thesis will not have a schematic overview of shots like this one. Instead, we will look at selected shots, sequences and scenes that will be of relevance for the analysis. Some of the shots will not be discussed in detail, some will function as a visual reference point for a discussion, for the reader to get an image of for example the restaurant. The purpose of this method is to see how food and the food experience is being

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<sup>12</sup> T. Van Leeuwen & C. Jewitt (red), *Handbook of visual analysis*, London, SAGE Publications, 2001, pp. 135-136

represented, both in the preparation process, in the presentation and in the consumption of food. Quotations of the dialog will also be a part of the empirical material as this too is part of the representation according to social semiotics.

### *Review of current research*

In *Food Studies: An Introduction to Research Methods* written by Jeff Miller and Jonathan Deutsch there is a detailed description of different methods one can apply in food studies.<sup>13</sup> The pure visual aspects of food studies is not mentioned here. However, this thesis will look at the visual aspects and representations in order to bring forward this approach when it comes to food studies. Although visual representations of food have not reached any wider acknowledgement in the field of food studies, there are researchers who study it. One example is Signe Rousseau, in her book *Food Media: Celebrity Chefs and the Politics of Everyday Interference* from 2012. Rousseau not only looks at the representation of food in magazines, cookbooks, television, movies and on the internet, but she also looks at the consumption of food imagery and the ones that prepare it.<sup>14</sup> This is something that is of relevance through this thesis. Fabio Parasecoli studies visual representations of food through pop culture in *Bite Me: food in popular culture* from 2008. Both authors look at the consumption of images. The consumption of images is closely related to *Food Porn*, which in turn is similar to Jean Baudrillard's idea of *War Porn* in many regards, although it is not as commonly used. Baudrillard speaks of *War Porn* as a parody of violence and war, where pornography is used as a last resort, when war no longer can be just war.<sup>15</sup> The same can be said about *Food Porn*, where mundane food is being aestheticized to be visually consumed. The consumption of images of food is something Roland Barthes discuss in his *Mythologies* from 1957. Where Barthes from a philosophical point of view looks at aestheticized food imagery in magazines and how we visually consume it.<sup>16</sup> A different approach to images was presented 2005 by Art Historian W.J.T. Mitchell in *What Do Pictures Want?*. Mitchell asks what desires occupy the image. How do the images want to be consumed in food media? The visual aspects of food studies is an underestimated area, which this thesis will try to address.

### *Delimitations*

In order to get as much out of the discussions as possible I have decided to narrow down the empirical material to three videos. There are a lot of "*Worth it*" videos that could be included in this thesis, but in order to make a thorough readings of the videos three is more than enough. I

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<sup>13</sup> J. Miller & J. Deutsch, *Food Studies: An Introduction to Research Methods*, Oxford, Berg, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Rousseau, 2012a, op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> J. Baudrillard, 'War Porn', *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 5, no. 1, April 2006, p. 86, EBSCOhost [online database], (accessed 5 Dec 2017)

<sup>16</sup> R. Barthes, *Mythologies*. Translated by A. Lavers, 1991. New York, The Noonday Press, 1957, pp. 78-79



have made a selection of images from the video and use print screens of these in this thesis. This will work as a foundation and as a starting point for the discussion in the analysis. The aesthetical look of the food will not be taken into consideration, instead focus will be put on the representation of the food.

### *Disposition*

The analysis is divided into sections, starting with a discussion regarding the visual consumption of food, followed by a short account for the method and how it will be used through the analysis. This is then followed by summaries of each episode. They are here discussed through the concepts of the *spectacle*, *food porn* and *culinary capital*. The shots and sequences will be looked at through the terminology from van Leeuwen and Jewitts on social semiotics. *Representation* is discussed in the previous sections. *Orientation* and *organization* will be discussed under two separate headings. The videos will then be compared and further discussed in the next section with the help of different theoretical inputs together with the three theoretical concepts of this thesis. The thesis conclusion is done in two parts, where the first one is concluding the analysis and presenting the results of the thesis. The last part will discuss further research possibilities on the subject. The images are gathered in an appendix.

## ***Analysis***

### *Visual consumption of food*

The twentieth century has seen an exploding rate of food representations on television, social media, in phone applications, cookbooks and magazines. This, according to Signe Rousseau, has issued an increase in the consumption of visual representations of food and the ones who prepare it or eat it.<sup>17</sup> This means that the visual consumption of food has become more important than the realisation and the actual *consumption* of food. Fabio Parasecoli question "What is it that keeps audiences glued to the screen, even if they have no intention to cook, ever?".<sup>18</sup> As stated in the introduction, the entertainment value of food media seems to be an important part of food media. To Rousseau a large portion of food media is made to entertain, but most importantly to divert, referring to its voyeuristic qualities.<sup>19</sup>

As a suggestion to his question, Parasecoli asks if it is the voyeuristic aspect of food, gastro porn and celebrity chefs that keep us watching food media without engaging in cooking.<sup>20</sup> Food is not only looked at, but also objectified here, placing food in the domain of voyeurism and fetishistic scopophilia where the pleasures of looking is essential. In the essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', Laura Mulvey make a distinction between these two objectifying gazes. Voyeuristic looking is characterised by control, guilt and the sadistic nature of the gaze. Fetishistic scopophilia on the other hand is the erotic pleasure of looking, the fetishizing and objectifying of the thing or subject being looked at.<sup>21</sup> The appearance of these types of looking on food is a result of aestheticizing of food and the preparation of food, to make this mundane activity enjoyable to watch. The gaze can also be generated by particular perspectives, close-up shots being one of the most common, which we will discuss this more later on.

Once again, this brings us to the concept of *Food Porn*. Yasmin Ibrahim makes this explanation of *Food porn* in the article 'Food Porn and the Invitation to Gaze: Ephemeral Consumption and the Digital Spectacle':

Used synonymously with 'gastro porn,' it alludes to the fetishisation of food and its

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<sup>17</sup> Rousseau, 2012a, op. cit., p. xx

<sup>18</sup> F. Parasecoli, *Bite Me: food in popular culture*, Oxford, Berg, 2008, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Rousseau, 2012a, op. cit., p. xxi

<sup>20</sup> Parasecoli, loc. cit.

<sup>21</sup> L. Mulveys, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in L. Braudy & M. Cohen (eds), *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, New York, Oxford UP, 1999, p. 840

coalescence with desire by styling culinary offerings through the vantage point of the camera lens to be consumed by hungry publics. This food is meant to be consumed by sight and other senses (well removed from just ingesting it), evoking our hidden desires while highlighting its unattainability. Its pornographic quality removes food from the mundane and ordinary, elevating it to the level of the pornographic.<sup>22</sup>

What is it that makes these images pornographic? And what is the difference between idealised images and pornographic? To Richard M. Magee it is the glossy close-up image of food that is so far removed from reality that it is unreachable. The connection between food porn and “regular” pornography according to Magee is that it is a form of performance and it is voyeuristic. The visual appearance is crucial and unattainable for the ordinary cook.<sup>23</sup> This distancing from reality make it a kind of spectacle. The line between pornographic food and idealized food is not that evident here. To make a distinction between the two is difficult. But the idealisation of food needs to in some way be aesthetically appealing, which is not always the case with food porn. On the contrary, food porn can sometimes be disgusting and grotesque.

In “*Worth it*” there are some close-up imagery of food. There is also an element of food pornography in *watching* Steve, Andrew and Adam consume food. Magee and Rousseau pay attention to this act in relation to the celebrity chef Nigella Lawson, who does not hesitate to indulge in her own food and who is not hiding the pleasures she gets from eating.

### “*Worth it*” – episodes

“*Worth it*” is a show positioned within the domain of food media and its main purpose is to entertain rather than to educate. It is a show that engulfs taste and indulgence. To discuss the episodes I will be using social semiotics. I will here take a moment to explain how this will work in the following analysis. Imagery, music and talk will be analysed through meaning-making metafunctions. The first is *representation*, like the name suggests, this look at the visual, oral and audio representations. *Orientation* is concerned with the orientation of the camera, angles, distance and camera movements. *Organisation* on the other hand takes a closer look at how meanings are constructed in the film. This metafunction is concerned with rhythm and structure of the video and how this influences the reading of the imagery. The method of social semiotics provides a visually descriptive framework to further understand the meaning of the imagery.<sup>24</sup> Dividing the

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<sup>22</sup> Y. Ibrahim, ‘Food Porn and the Invitation to Gaze: Ephemeral Consumption and the Digital Spectacle’, *International Journal of E-politics*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2015, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Magee, loc. cit.

<sup>24</sup> Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, op. cit., p. 154.

videos into these three metafunctions creates a platform from which to build the analysis of the thesis. The main focus of the analysis will be on the actual food related imagery, meaning, the food tasting, the restaurants, the cooking process and the discussions related to food. In the following sections there will be detailed descriptions of the three videos connected to one of the themes of spectacle, food porn and culinary capital.

### *Spectacle - '\$47 Taco Vs. \$1 Taco'*

#### **Pricey - Rose.Rabbit.Lie**

The first episode we will look at is the Taco-episode made in Las Vegas and Los Angeles from season 2. Usually they start with the cheapest dish, making their way up to the most expensive dish. This time they start off with the most expensive meal at *Rose.Rabbit.Lie* (see fig. 2), which consists of a one bite taco in the size of a thumb. At the price of \$47 it is served under a glass cloche. The taco has a thick layer of caviar covering the whole taco shell and is of course, it is served with champagne. The sequence in *Rose.Rabbit.Lie* starts off with shots of the making of the taco and of the surroundings inside the restaurant. Classical music is playing over the images, followed by the executive chef Bryan Fyler introducing himself, the restaurant and the dish that they are about to eat called the *Osetra caviar taco*. Meanwhile, Bryan explains the dish, they show the cooking process, and the music is still being played in the background as the caviar is carefully placed in the taco shell. Once Steven and Andrew realise the taco is a one-biter (fig. 4), Bryan kindly responds "Go big or go home". The chef instructs Steven and Andrew to taste the caviar by pressing it with their tongue against the top of their mouths, popping the caviar to spread the creaminess and flavour around the mouth. Before the tasting there is a shot of the finished dish and a price tag, a shot that is repeated for every dish they eat (fig. 1).

Immediately after putting the taco into their mouths they get a smile on their face, Steven looks at Andrew and Andrew looks into the camera with excited and a bit surprised eyes (fig. 5), both shots are in close-up. Still in close-up, Steven looks into the camera and says "Holy crap", still with his mouth full, moving his hand up to his mouth (fig. 3). Andrew respond "Wow, I've never had an ocean taste like that". He continues "I've never been so sad that there wasn't a second bite", meanwhile Steven licks his finger while looking surprised and excited in the camera (fig. 6). Steven continues "It was so pleasant in the way that it just melted in my mouth". He sums up the dish by saying, "That was cavi-art".

#### **Middle - Guisados**

Back in Los Angeles the second stop is *Guisados* (fig. 7), where they make stewed tacos. The co-owner Armando De La Torre Jr. tells them about the restaurant and what makes a guisado taco.

He then takes Steven and Andrew into the shop next door, where the restaurant buys its hand-made masa dough and tortilla bread for their tacos, showing how they are made. He introduces the three different tacos (fig. 8) that Steven and Andrew are going to taste. The music has a more jazzy feel to it compared to the first one.

The reactions after they taste the tacos are a little bit more subdued than for the first taco (fig. 9). They talk about the taste and how well the taco is holding together. At one point Andrew says “delightful” in a little bit of a forced way. Steven calls it “a perfect taco” with not a lot of sentiment. For the last of the three tacos they get a little bit more excited, nodding and making “Mmm” noises, calling it a flavour explosion and dynamite.

### **Cheap – Leo’s Taco Truck**

The last stop of the episode is the cheapest one, the \$1 taco at *Leo’s Taco Truck* (fig. 10), located by a gas station. Here they eat the Taco al pastor, a taco consisting of sliced meat cut from mounted spinning grill (similar to kebab) (fig. 13), and cut off grilled pineapple in tortilla bread. The meat is shown in close-up several times in the cooking process segment (fig. 12). Miguel Martinez, who is the manager, tells them about the food truck and the food they are about to eat. The music played has changed to Mexican styled music.

They eat standing up outside of their car with the food truck in the background. For the first bite the shot is close-up and in what appears to be a slight slow motion action (fig. 15). Andrew bursts out “That is so good!”, Steven answers “It’s perfect” and later continues with “It’s like a simple food that leads to a simple joy”.

### **Summary**

The spectacle in this episode is initially evident in the first dish, where this tiny little taco protected by a glass cloche is presented. Just the look of this dish is a spectacle in itself. A justifiable question is: Is it still a taco? This is an example of when one reality is turned into a spectacle. Not only in the way the taco is being presented, but also the ingredient of caviar. The thing of reality is removed from its natural state and returns as a representation of something else, of primarily haute cuisine and secondary as taco. Another element where the spectacle is present is the tacos made by Leo’s Truck. Here they make the cooking process into a show. Where they cut off the meat, letting it fall into the bread and then cut off the pineapple, letting it volleyball down to the taco (fig. 11). Again making an ordinary taco seem like a spectacle. The two restaurants use the spectacle of the food and the cooking process in order to get people to consume. In a sense the consumer is led to believe that they consume the spectacle, rather than the food. In line with Debord, the consumer does not merely consume the food, but the

spectacle of the food as a commodity. If we look at *Guisados*, the show- and entertainment element with the other two dishes is stripped away. Here, they let the food speak for itself. The spectacle here is situated in the food and the products used for making it. Showing how the masa bread is hand-made next door, to showing of the craftsmanship of the food. Elevating it from a commonplace food to tradition, skill and identity.

If we look at the *representation* of the episode, the most eye catching, or maybe ear catching difference between how the different price ranges are represented, is the music. In this episode they use a classical soundtrack for *Rose.Rabbit.Lie*, a jazz soundtrack for *Guisados* and what sounds like Mexican music for *Leo's Taco Truck*. The selected music makes a distinction between the different restaurants, especially with the classical music which adds a dimension of high class and luxury to the segment. Another element of representation that shows difference in presentation is the cooking process. Here we see that the cooking process at *Rose.Rabbit.Lie* is more elaborated on, explaining the dish, the ingredients and the techniques used for making it in detail. Slow motion, close-up shots and changing of focus are used to portray a feeling of elegance to these shots (fig. 4). The slow motion effects have also been added to the cooking process at *Leo's Taco Truck*, for another reason. Here to emphasize on the cooking technique and the show of the cooking process (fig. 11). The close-up shots here are focused on the grill and the big piece of meat that slowly turns in the fire coming from the grill (fig. 12 and 13). Looking at the representation of the cooking process of *Guisados* it differs from the other two. There is no slow motion and the shots have a much faster feel to it. There are not a lot of shots of the food and not as much close-up as used for the other two restaurants. Maybe this is because the stewed tacos are not as aesthetically pleasing to the eye? There is also not any cooking per se involved here, as the stew is already finished. The audience get to see how the tortilla bread is made, but the tacos are just put together with the different stews and components of the three different tacos. In comparison, at *Rose.Rabbit.Lie*, where there are more shots of the food before they taste it, showing of the aesthetic aspects of the taco. The only time the viewer really get to see the surroundings in the restaurants is also at *Rose.Rabbit.Lie*. Panning shots through the restaurant, showing elegant place settings in a dampened purple lighting and the stage setting of the staging area. Compared to the other two restaurants more time on presentation is put on the more expensive restaurant. For the tasting here close-ups, slow motion and blurring are used to emphasize their emotions while tasting the one-bit taco (fig. 3 and 5). This is also used for the tasting at *Leo's Taco Truck*, although it is not as eye-catching. The technique is not used at *Guisados*.

## *Food Porn - '\$11 Steak Vs. \$306 Steak'*

### **Cheap - Uncle John's Café**

The first restaurant is *Uncle John's Café* (fig. 16) where they are served an 8-oz. steak, with fried rice, eggs and a side dish of pancakes for \$11 (fig. 17). Shirley Ng, the owner and manager, tells them more about this American Diner-styled restaurant with Chinese influences. While she cooks the food in the busy kitchen there is upbeat jazz music playing in the background. Before tasting the food, Steve and Andrew comment on how much food there is for the amount of money they paid. Andrew states that he is excited. After cutting a piece of meat of the steak and showing the pink meat to the camera in close-up, Andrew says "Yeah dog, she knew what she was doing!". After tasting, Steven leans his head back with closed eyes and groans with pleasure (fig. 18). Andrew answers "Yeah, that's good" followed by "Look at that delicious morsel". Stating that it's the best meal he has ever eaten, he drops his knife and fork on the plate and grabs his head in awe. After Steven and Andrew's tastes, Adam sits down to have a taste, his reaction is "This is seriously so good".

### **Middle - Nick & Stef's Steakhouse**

The second spot is *Nick & Stef's Steakhouse* (fig. 19), here they eat a 28-oz. dry aged steak. The music changes to a more R&B influenced lounge type of music with a clear-cut bass. A shot of the chef holding a large piece of meat with attached bones and a close-up of the meat cooking lead into the introduction of the executive chef of the restaurant, Andreas Roller (fig. 20). He talks them through how they dry age the meat and the process behind it. There is a lot of shots of the meat and the cooking process compared to the previous one (fig. 21). In the meantime, the chef talks about the cooking of the meat by using a lot of different analogies.

While cutting through the meat Steven loudly say "Oh my goodness! Do you see that?" as the pink meat is revealed. Andrew answers, "My knife never had an easier time going through meat", noting the tenderness of the meat. After tasting the meat both Andrew and Steven smiles and starts laughing softly while chewing (fig. 23). Steven looks into the camera and puts his hand over his face. Andrew smiles and pleasurably sighs. Steven loudly say "wow!", Andrew answers "Yeah, holy moly". Steven then bursts out, "This is how people live!?" looking at the camera and pointing down at the food, emphasizing the absurdity of the meat. They continue to talk about how the meat dissolves in the mouth. Andrew adds "I'm also gonna say that eating steak with this big boy knife really does a lot for the whole experience". Steven later concludes on their way to the next spot that the "steak was magnificent".

### **Pricey - Cut**

The last stop of the episode is set in a Beverly Hills restaurant called *Cut* (fig. 24). The camera pans into the restaurant as joyous classical music comes on, showing close-ups of cut off slices of meat. Hilary Henderson is the chef de cuisine at the restaurant. She introduces the two steaks that they will be served and also shows them a certificate on one of the cows that they are about to eat, explaining where the cow was raised. Again, there are close-up shots of the meat being cooked as she explains the cooking process (fig. 25). As Hilary walks out with the plates the music changes tempo and there is an intense violin piece playing. First they get to taste a dry aged prime New York strip for \$48. “Like a hot knife through butter” Andrew states while cutting the meat. Andrew responds after tasting the steak “Very interesting”. Steven leans forward and puts his hand on his head staring intensely, later saying “That was a wonderfully tender steak”. They seem satisfied, but not too excited about the steak. The next steak, a Japanese Wagyu New York strip from Miyazaki is \$25 an ounce, making the total price is \$306. Before tasting Steven says “My heart is racing right now”, Andrew says “Okay, that was the most fun I’ve ever had cutting something before”. Immediately when they put the meat into their mouths, the music changes again to an even more intense violin piece. Close-up shots of both Steven and Andrew show them closing their eyes in pleasure and shaking their heads, while you hear soft laughter from Steven in the background. Again, Steven puts his hand on his forehead and closes his eyes while chewing (fig. 27). When finished chewing, Steven says “Mm, okay, that’s the one.” Andrew responds “That is a completely new thing”. Steven says “It tastes like pure luxury”. Andrew then say “I’m like embarrassed to be watched eating this, because it’s like, something so pleasurable shouldn’t be done in public”. They then let Adam have a taste, and with surprised eyes he just starts laughing.

## **Summary**

Compared to the taco episode there is an element of pleasure for Steven, Andrew and Adam throughout this episode (fig. 18, 23, 27). This was also there in the tasting of the expensive taco, but here it is present throughout the whole episode. The pleasure and enjoyment of the food that Steven, Andrew and Adam express becomes the most noticeable in this episode. The voyeurism of watching them eat comes as a result of that, but there is also an element of fetishistic scopophilia, where the meat is objectified with close-up shots to awaken a desire with the viewer (fig. 21, 22). This is where the most obvious imagery connected to Food Porn is. However, it is not only the imagery that bring forward these food pornographic connotations, but also how they talk about the meat and their facial expressions while tasting the meat. This is most apparent in the expensive restaurant, when Andrew says that he feels like he shouldn’t be *watched* eating the steak, as it is so enjoyable for him. The voyeurism here is evident, where he points out that this is



not only pleasurable for him, but it is pleasurable for people on the internet who *watch* him eat. Whether it is awakening a desire for meat or just the act of watching somebody eat, one can make a connection here to feeding fetishism. Andrew also points out the connection between meat and masculinity when saying: “I’m also gonna say that eating steak with this big boy knife really does a lot for the whole experience”. The words *big boy knife* illuminate the idea of the meat-eating man. Bourdieu talks about the masculine way of eating, making the connection both to meat-eating and the particular way of eating to masculinity. He points out that the masculine way of eating includes drinking aperitifs from big glasses.<sup>25</sup>

Again we see differences in the representations of the different restaurants. The cooking process is important in this episode. As already acknowledged, there is an elaborate introduction to the meat and the cooking of the meat at both *Nick & Stef’s Steakhouse* and *Cut* (fig. 21 and 25). There is a lot of close-up shots of the meat in these segments. At *Uncle John’s Café* there are shots of different food items, showing the variety of the food there. The meat is never in close-up except for when Andrew first cut the meat. They cook the meat on a large cooking plate, placing weights on the steaks to get an even surface. Compared to the other two restaurants, who cook the meat over charcoal and fire, this feels simple. At *Nick & Stef’s Steakhouse* the imagery shown is from the kitchen, not showing the dining area. This shows the emphasis on the cooking here. Just like the taco-episode, the surroundings of the restaurant are shown more at *Cut* (fig. 24), panning into the restaurant to the sound of classical music. The music is again used to differentiate the moods of the different restaurants, this being more jazzy, symbolising the classical American-Diner feel. The second one at *Nick & Stef’s Steakhouse*, gives a modern and trendy feel to the restaurant. At *Cut*, the classical music gives the impression of luxury and elegance. Here, they also change the music within the same segment, switching between the classical pieces three times to emphasize different emotions at the restaurant.

### *Culinary capital – ‘\$2 Pizza Vs. \$2,000 Pizza – New York City’* **Cheap – Joe’s Pizza**

This time the guys are in New York to try pizza. They start at what they call a “New York styled pizza” place, at *Joe’s Pizzeria* (fig. 28 and 30). Here, they try a cheese slice for \$2.75 a slice. The music played has a Broadway feel to it and the initial shots of the place are in synch with the music. The chef or “Veteran pie-slinger” as they call him, called Alex Bisogni (fig. 29), introduces himself and the pizza restaurant. He talks about the pizza dough, saying that he’s “hard with the

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<sup>25</sup> P. Bourdieu, ‘Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste’, trans. R. Nice, in C. Counihan & P. Van Esterik (eds), *Food and Culture: A Reader*, third edition, Routledge, New York, 2013, pp. 34-35.

dough”. After tasting the pizza slice, Steven nods in agreement (fig. 31). Andrew complements the crispiness of every bite. Steven concludes “It’s just perfect”. Andrew responds “It’s what you hope every piece of pizza is gonna taste like. So fucking good”. Andrew calls it a treat-pizza saying, “I think I’m gonna have this pizza as a dessert after every next pizza place we go to”.

### **Middle – Rosso Pomodoro**

The second place is a shop called *Eataly NYC Flatiron* and the restaurant *Rosso Pomodoro* (fig. 32) where they actually eat with the owner and chef Mario Batali. Here, they eat a marinara pizza for \$13 (fig. 33). There is Italian styled music in the background as Batali introduces himself, the restaurant and the concept of the “experiential grocery store”. When they sit down to eat there is a lot of explanation from Mario regarding what an Italian pizza should be like, what Italian cooking is about and the ingredients it involves. This means there is not much room for reactions from Steven and Andrew, and they additionally have the chef sitting next to them, which makes the honest judging of the food difficult (fig. 34). Instead they comment on the food on their way to the next spot. Andrew’s response is that he couldn’t believe how good the pizza tasted. Steven complements Mario Batali for making cooking look so easy.

### **Pricey – Industry Kitchen**

The third place is *Industry Kitchen* (fig. 35), where they eat a pizza worth \$2,000 called 24K (fig. 36). Made with the most expensive ingredients, including truffle, gold, caviar, squid ink and foie gras. The music has a modern soft guitar intro. The executive chef Braulio Bunay explains that he came up with the idea for making a pizza with only the most exclusive ingredients while walking past a jewellery store on Broadway. The restaurant’s priority is to be different from other places. The dough is made with squid ink, the foie gras is put on top of the dough, and a layer of English stilton cheese spread on top. On this, Bunay slices winter black truffles from France. On top of this he puts 24 karat gold from Ecuador; both strips of gold and dispensed from a gold shaker (fig. 37). After it has been baked he finishes it with Osetra caviar from the Caspian Sea and flowers on top of that.

When Steven and Andrew taste the pizza they are excited before they taste it saying that they felt rich watching the gold shaker spread gold over the pizza (fig. 38). Steven’s reaction while chewing is a weird facial expression, after tasting he responds with a mellow “Whoa”, saying that bite only, was worth \$30 (fig. 40). Andrew talks about the creaminess of the stilton cheese and how it complements the caviar and the foie gras. Steven says he’s speechless, later saying that he feels weird eating a pizza that is that expensive, saying that he feels like he has committed a crime by eating it. Andrew responds that the pizza is fulfilling one of his fantasies of feeling like a James

Bond villain. They eat one slice each and then they bring it to *Buzzfeed's* New York office. The staff there show mixed emotions about the pizza. Some are closing their eyes in enjoyment (fig. 41), some shrug their shoulders and one spits it out screaming she didn't like it at all. At the end of the show, Steven says that he would have preferred to eat the ingredients on this pizza individually. After that they go for a "desert pizza" at *Joe's Pizzeria*.

## Summary

In the introduction of the episode Andrew compares eating gold to "wiping your butt with dollar bills", he continues "at some point it's just gonna come in contact with my ass". At this point he questions the whole concept of eating gold leaves. In this episode, it is obvious that the last pizza represents excess. One can compare this pizza to conspicuous consumption, where the pizza becomes a symbol for wealth.<sup>26</sup> When taking these expensive and exclusive ingredients and mixing them together, for what it seems, not in order to make the pizza taste better, but to make this pizza be as different and luxurious as possible, goes from being the *taste of necessity* to a *taste of luxury*. Consequently, it moves from basic need to desire of luxury and a desire to differentiate.<sup>27</sup> This pizza can also be perceived as excessive luxury, which, according to Georges Batailles is synonymous with sacrifice. He argues that the use-value and exchange-value disappears in a luxury commodity.<sup>28</sup> Here, taste seems to be sacrificed in order to be different and luxurious. With all of these exclusive ingredients the restaurant accumulates culinary capital, more specifically hard culinary capital as they put together these ingredients to make an expensive meal. Here, culinary capital is taken advantage of by the restaurant, showing that they know what upscale ingredients are. They also make sure to point out what country the ingredients come from, thus enhancing their culinary capital. At first glance there is a divide between the cheap pizza from *Joe's Pizzeria*, the pizza from *Rosso Pomodoro* and the expensive pizza from *Industry Kitchen*. Where the first two are unpretentious compared to the last one. However, when you listening to how the first two talk about the dough and the ingredients, they express a sense of respect towards the ingredients. This is something that we today connect with luxury, the luxury of eating something where the person who cooked it knows what they are doing. This is another type of culinary capital. In fact, *Industry Kitchen* does not talk about the ingredients more than declaring the name of the ingredient and where it is from. *Joe's Pizzeria* shows another expression for excess. Where simplicity is key. Compared to the cheaper pizzas the expensive pizza almost feels

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<sup>26</sup> Conspicuous consumption is a term by economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen referring to how the upper class consumed luxury goods in order to express their high social status. The term was introduced in the book *The Theory of the Leisure Class* in 1899.

<sup>27</sup> P. Bourdieu, loc. cit.

<sup>28</sup> S.P. Connolly, 'Georges Bataille, Gender and Sacrificial Excess', *Comparatist*, vol. 38, 2014, p. 108

baroquesized, where such an amount of luxury items is piled together that it almost become an absurdity. One can almost say that this is a question of capital vs. culinary capital, luxury vs. Italian cuisine. Pierre Bourdieu looks at class distinction through the choices of food. He concludes that the higher class are concerned about taste and non-fattening foods, while the lower class is concerned about nutrition and to get strength from food.<sup>29</sup> In relation to this episode, taste seems to be prioritised by the two cheaper restaurants, while *Industry Kitchen* worries more about being different and exclusive at the cost of taste. The reactions of Steven and Andrew show that they found it hard to enjoy the 24K pizza and that they were struggling with the foie gras consistency (fig. 40). The soft capital for this dish is therefore not that high, which consequently effects the hard culinary capital of *Industry Kitchen*.

Looking at the representation of the restaurants, the one with the most focus is probably *Rosso Pomodoro*. Here, the audience get to see parts of the store, the groceries and the restaurant kitchen. At *Joe's Pizzeria*, you only see the kitchen as it is a small restaurant. In *Industry Kitchen* they show panning shots of details in the restaurant, like the toilet sign and the wine selection. You can see parts of the restaurant when the executive chef introduces the restaurant and the idea. In all the restaurants there are close-up shots of the making of the pizzas and the ingredients put on it. As *Industry Kitchen* has more ingredients on their pizza, there are more close-ups in this part of the episode, especially on the gold shaker in slow motion (fig. 37). When the pizza is finished there is a shot of the pizza spinning in close-up on a plate. Also in the presentation, the pizza spins on the plate, making the gold shimmer (fig. 36). This is also the only time in the episode where they show close-ups of the pizza slices (fig. 39) and the reactions of Andrew and Steven, where they also use slow motion. The close-ups in slow motion together with blurring effects is also used when they bring the expensive pizza to the New York office, showing the emotions of the staff while tasting the pizza (fig. 41).

### *Orientation*

The most important feature of orientation in "*Worth it*" is the close-up shots. This type of framing is used both on the food and on Steven and Andrew when they are tasting the food. It is here where the pornographic connotations are. Close-up is a technique used in pornography, and clearly the close-up images of food and the consumption of food becomes food porn here as well. If we look at the camera movements through the episodes, we see that the camera is alternating with different distances, movements and angles. With the help of switching focus, speed and distance the audience is directed to the main focus of the shot. Sometimes it is the

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<sup>29</sup> P. Bourdieu, op. cit., p. 32-35.

food, sometimes it is Steven and Andrews reaction. Slow motion is used in order to put emphasise on different emotions and looks, but also to show of the food at its best, specifically during the cooking process. Interesting to note is when these techniques are used. We see it primarily in the expensive restaurants, *Rose.Rabbit.Lie*, *Cut* and *Industry Kitchen*. The only other place where we see it is at *Leo's Taco Truck*, where the focus of the use is on the cooking process here as the chefs cut of the meat and volley ball the pineapple. This gives the impression that the effects are used primarily to catch the cooking process and secondarily to catch the feeling of being there and the emotions while tasting, which is the case for the more expensive restaurants. When the effect is used at the expensive restaurants, the focus is primarily on Steven and Andrew's reactions to the food. This gives the impression that it is the *expectation* of the food that is portrayed rather than the food.

### *Organisation*

Generally, the organisation of the videos is a build up in price from low to high. Exceptions can be made, as we can see in the taco-episode, but this is more often than not due to logistics. Each episode end with a summary of the different dishes and restaurants that the guys have visited. When Leeuwen and Jewitts look at organisation through social semiotics they try to find hidden meanings. In the case of "*Worth it*", I would argue that these hidden meanings are most evident in the organisation of the music, which is also in a way moving from low to high. The low being some kind of jazz music and the high being classical music. Classical music which is connected to a high culture still, even if it has trickled down to pop culture a long time ago, and the connotations of luxury and a fancy way of life are still very present. Through the music, the audience immediately knows what they can expect. Especially when the classical music comes on. Another hierarchy that can be seen throughout the organisation of the video is the longer segments and explanations of the cooking process in the more expensive places. This is reinforced with the use of close-up imagery of, for example, the meat being grilled over burning coal, as noted above.

### *Comparison and discussion*

#### **The spectacle of food**

There is one thing that all the dishes presented above have in common, that is the element of spectacle. All of them are examples of making something as mundane as food, something that all of us see every day, into a spectacle. It can be a spectacle of making the perfect New York styled pizza slice, to create a homemade feel of guisado tacos, to put as much on a plate as possible for

only 11 dollars. Or else it can be the spectacle of making cooking look good by tossing and catching, to cover a pizza with gold or to serve a piece of meat and have a certificate of its journey to the table. To feature these dishes in a YouTube show is also part of making these foods into spectacles. In a way we lose sight of what is real, as the food that we watch is not the same as the one we eat on a daily basis. There seems to be a difference between the food that we eat and the food that we watch.

If we look at the visual presentation of the food in these episodes, I think that many would agree that the most visually striking is the 24K pizza from *Industry Kitchen*. The gold covered black dough, spots of shiny caviar and colourful flowers are eye catching and borderline artistic (fig. 36). The one-bite taco on top of a little hill of crumbles under the glass cloche resemble a still life from the fifteenth century (fig. 1). One can actually look at the taco as a representation of memento mori and how everything has an end. The visual representation of food is important. Think of the saying “You eat with your eyes”, there are studies that say that the visual appearance of food changes the way tastes, smells and flavours are being perceived.<sup>30</sup> Roland Barthes writes about a *system of communication* of food. He argues that the visual communication of food is used as a means to differentiate ourselves within society. He is here primarily referring to class distinction.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Bourdieu argues that food is sign-bearing in a *system of distinctive signs*. He not only looks at food items, but also table manners and preferences.<sup>32</sup> Barthes points out, that it is not merely the product in itself that signifies an affiliation of some sort, but it is the preparation of the food. Although he does say that there are food items that are signifiers in itself, like truffles, caviar, salmon, to name a few.<sup>33</sup> How food is visually presented can signal what kind of food it is. As you go up in price, the aesthetical aspects of food become more important. Usually this is visible in the dish. In “*Worth it?*” it is mostly visible in the Caviar Taco and the 24K pizza. There is a whole type of cooking, called haute cuisine and molecular cooking that put a lot of effort into making food look aesthetically pleasing to the eye. For many years now, the look of food has become important to cheaper chains and restaurants as well, even McDonalds put a lot of effort in their commercials to make their food look good. Food is sold to us visually, to create desire and cravings. To make food pleasing to the eye has become an aspiration for all food in

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<sup>30</sup> J. F. Delwiche, ‘Brief communication: You eat with your eyes first’, *Physiology & Behavior*, vol. 107, no. Special issue: Flavor and Feeding, 05 Nov. 2012, pp. 502-504. Available from: *ScienceDirect*, EBSCOhost (accessed 27 January 2018)

<sup>31</sup> R. Barthes, ‘Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption’, trans. R. Nice, in C. Counihan & P. Van Esterik (eds), *Food and Culture: A Reader*, third edition, Routledge, New York, 2013, pp. 24-25.

<sup>32</sup> P. Bourdieu, loc. cit.

<sup>33</sup> I use Roland Barthes understanding of signify and signifier based on the use in ‘Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption’. They both stand for sign. Signifier is a sign of something.

the food hierarchy. That there is a food hierarchy is recognised today and consequently there is a hierarchy among those who consume it. This is maybe more true today than a couple of years ago. Haute cuisine, for example, is accessible for the chosen few, some people never get to eat this kind of food. Although today, just to eat lunch out in a restaurant can be a privilege as the restaurant business has become obsessed with high quality food experiences, being different and gourmet food. There is a trickle down effect in food though, according to many researchers, starting with Julia Child, a television cook from America, who took French haute cuisine and made it accessible for a wider audience.<sup>34</sup> We can also see a trickle up process in that everyday cooking has been picked up by haute cuisine. Pizza and tacos being two examples of that. The emergence of food on television, film, blogs and YouTube is another example of a democratisation process, where the foods of the chosen few becomes attainable through pictures. “*Worth it*” allows people who can never afford a \$2000 pizza to consume visually and it through watching Steven and Andrew eat it.

When it comes to the expensive food and restaurants that are featured in “*Worth it*”, they are in some way trickling down as they become a part of the community of YouTube. Steven and Andrew also minimize both the food and the restaurants in different ways. At the beginning of pizza-episode Andrew compare eating gold with whipping your ass with gold. Before every tasting they always toast their food before they eat something, by bumping it together (fig. 38). When they do this at the upscale restaurants it becomes almost a mockery. In another case, they use it to lighten up the mood, almost like a defence mechanism to bring it back to earth. One example of this is when Steven at *Rose.Rabbit.Lie* say “This is the cutest food I’ve ever seen! I just want to pinch its cheeks you know?”. In that way emphasize that they don’t want to be perceived as belonging to this kind of indulgence. Although they certainly seem to enjoy to be eating at the more expensive places. This brings up the polarity of these high-end restaurants and the YouTube community. Where Steven and Andrew sometimes give the impression that they don’t want to be judged to be “fancy-boys”.

### **Food porn**

We have already throughout this thesis touched upon the pornographic connotations of food. Something that is very visual indeed. The visual consumption of food porn have been discussed here, where the visual presentation of the food plays a big part in producing the sexual connotations. Using close-up shots of meat, both raw and cooked. The close-up shots on Steven

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<sup>34</sup> S. Rousseau, 2012b, op. cit., p. 187

and Andrew when they taste the food and also their reactions afterwards in the form of closing their eyes with pleasure and confronting the viewer by looking into the camera. This is an expression of the sensation something really desirable can generate. It has just as much sexual connotation, if not even more than the close-up shots of food. Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarins, who wrote *The Physiology of Taste* in 1825, made a distinction between need and desire. He called it ‘natural appetite’, which was the food people need and ‘appetite of luxury’, which is food people desire. He did not make a distinction between the desire for food and the desire for sex, the principal of desire to him are the same.<sup>35</sup>

When Steven and Andrew chew their food looking into the camera lens, they make the feeling relatable to the viewer and in that way visually communicate the taste with their facial expression (fig. 3 and 5). The question is whether the sensation of food is greater with expensive food? If we look at the taco-episode and the steak-episode, that is true. But if we look at the pizza-episode it is not. It also becomes a question of individual taste, which make it hard to speculate in.

Although it is hard to ignore the obvious pleasures Steven and Andrew get from eating the expensive taco at *Rose.Rabbit.Lie* and the wagyu steak at *Cut*. Steven actually says at *Rose.Rabbit.Lie* after tasting the one-bite taco “I think this is like the closest thing to drugs, I’ve ever eaten, done, in my life”. This statement alone says a lot of the emotions that are being put into the tasting of the food.

The food porn is also evident in the vocabulary used. Words like soft, smooth, tongue, melting and so on. At *Leo’s Taco Truck* Andrew says “We’re gonna watch them cut up some meat”. Here he expresses desire and the desire of *watching* the meat being cut of and fall into the taco bread. Accompanied with the close-up shots of the meat, the pornographic connotations are very present here.

### **Culinary capital**

As discussed before, the culinary capital is perceived as bigger with more expensive restaurants as they use more expensive ingredients, locations, more advanced equipment and techniques. This is hard culinary capital. An indication of this is that the introductions of the food products, the cooking process and the restaurants vision gets a lot of attention in the representation of the more expensive restaurants. The show of “*Worth it*” accumulates soft culinary capital, talking about food in a specific way. It shows that there is a specific way of talking about food, and this can differ depending on the food. People talk about a BigMac in a different way than they do of

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<sup>35</sup> R. Barthes, ‘Reading Brillat Savarin’, in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. R. Howard, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1989, p. 251.



an oyster, for example. The food discourse differs from amateurs and professionals, between the cook and the consumer and low culinary capital and high culinary capital. "Worth it" is part of the *Foodie* movement that can be seen around the world. *Foodies* are individuals with a big interest in food. To be a *Foodie* implies that you have a knowledge, a distinct taste palate and a way of talking about food. When Steven and Andrew talk about the food they are tasting they use a specific language, using words like texture, flavour, smooth, rich. This way of talking about food can henceforth be seen as part of the foodie discourse.

To return to Barthes, the food products and the preparation of them signify a certain belonging. To elaborate on this I would like to suggest that, not only are these signifiers, but they are also myths that place themselves within both hard and soft culinary capital. There is a mythification process of food products. A good example of this is the Italian pizza. Mario Batali explains how in a genuine Italian pizza the dough and the crust is the star of the dish. He only adds tomato sauce as a condiment to the dough. He reinforces the myth of the genuine Italian pizza with the help of the hard culinary capital that he has accumulated through the years as a celebrity chef. This myth is then further spread with the help of soft culinary capital. This is a myth of a dish. If we just look at the myth of the crushed tomato (that is put on the pizza here) we see that it is the same process. There is a big difference between how Mario Batali talks about the tomato sauce and the Italian tomatoes compared to Alex Bisogni at *Joe's Pizza*, even though they both shows a lot of respect towards the ingredients. Again, Mario Batali show his culinary capital by portraying the myth of the genuine Italian food.

## **Conclusion**

In this thesis I posed the question: *In what way does the representation of food and food experiences in the YouTube series "Worth it" relate to the concepts of spectacle, food porn and culinary capital?*

Food is not merely food anymore, we need a spectacle and we need desires to be fulfilled. Whether it is the sexual desire of watching food and food consumption, the desire of luxury or just a desire for food. We don't even have to cook and eat the food by ourselves. We will be perfectly happy to watch other people do it. Maybe we will get inspired to cook, but most off all we consume food visually. There is a new found visuality with food. Something that we didn't necessarily need before.

Through the three different episodes we see that the spectacle of the dish and also the cooking process of it is visible in different ways. This is the spectacle of making food beautiful, familiar,

exclusive, pornographic, desirable or astonishing. There is also an element of spectacle by showing it on YouTube. As we start to consume food visually we begin to rather consume the spectacle of food. This is a result of us not consuming these images of food in order to cook, but to be entertained. We are satisfied to just watch the food, knowing that we probably never can cook it for ourselves, thus consuming the visual spectacle of food.

To make something aesthetically pleasing to the eye is a huge part of the porn industry, it turns out that the same can be said about the food industry. The close-up images in combination with the oral representation in these episodes have been proven to have food pornographic connotations. As pornography primarily is a visual phenomenon the visual aspects of the close-up shot of food (specifically meat) and the pleasurable reactions of eating is of the essence to connect this imagery to food porn.

From the analysis, it becomes apparent that the representation of the expensive restaurants is shaped by their hard culinary capital. Both in that the surroundings of the restaurant are showed and that the chefs explanation of the food and the cooking process is given more time than for the cheaper restaurants. It is also evident in the close-up shots, with slow motion and shifting focus, of Steven and Andrew. This shows the expectations on the food that comes with hard culinary capital.

In conclusion one can say that spectacle, food porn and hard and soft culinary capital are in one way or another represented in the videos. This thesis has showed that a visual interpretation of this kind of food related entertainment can be academically studied and that these three theoretical concepts can coexist in this kind of medium. This thesis shows that the visual consumption of food is key for the spectacle of food and food porn. It further shows that the culinary capital help shape the representations of food.

### *Further research*

As I mentioned in the introduction there is not much research that look at the content of the YouTube videos, especially not within food studies. This thesis has been an attempt to do something different by combining visual studies and food studies through looking at the somewhat unexplored medium of YouTube. Further research could be to include comments in this kind of study, thus making the social network a part of the visual and discursive analysis. As this thesis has shown, that the visual aspects of food are of such a great importance and it surprises me that there is not more research on the subject. I see this thesis as an invitation to more studies in this field of the academic world.

“*Worth it*” is claiming to have a critical perspective, by asking the question: “Is this worth the money?”. But more often than not the sensation of the food takes overhand in the show, instead it seems to be about indulgence. What happens when the chef is eating together with them or standing behind the camera listening? Can they be honest? Then there is the question whether or not they are sponsored? These are all question that could be further investigated in the future.

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## Appendix

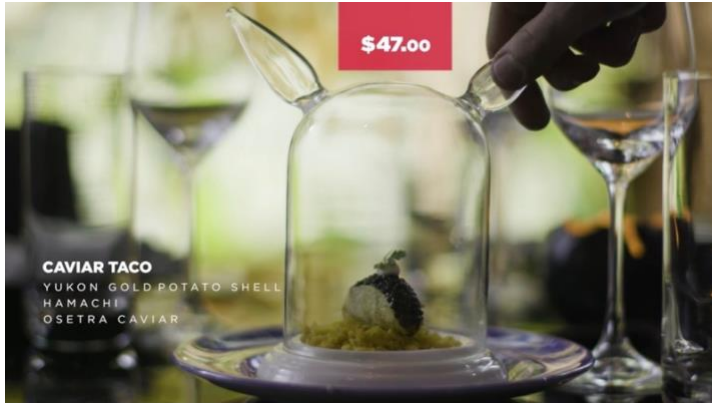


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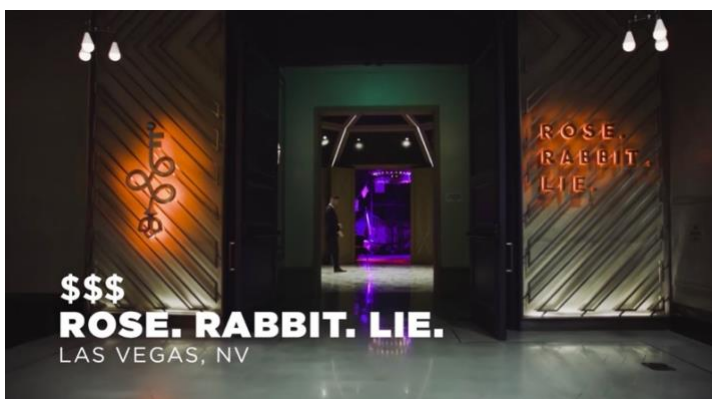


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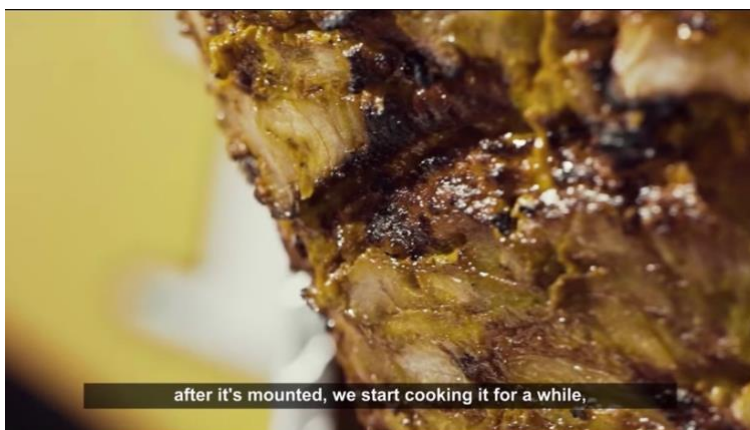


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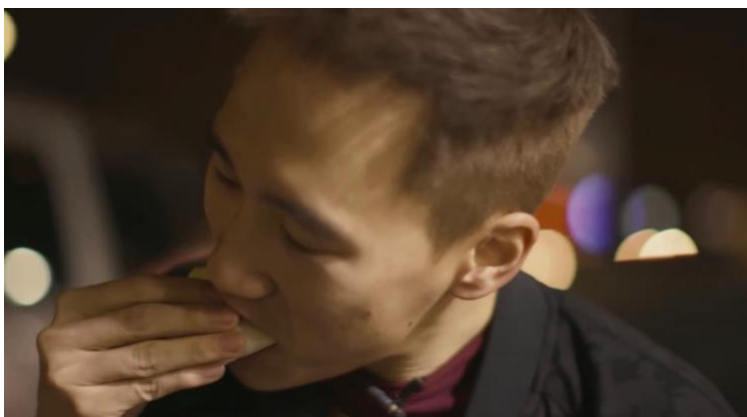


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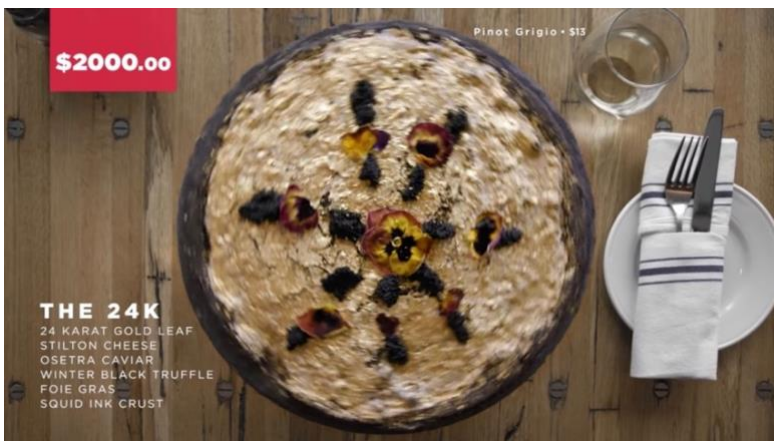


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