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Research Essay

Hannibal and the erotics of flesh.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The dark humour of the television series *Hannibal* (Fuller 2013-2015), according to its developer Bryan Fuller, mirrors Hannibal Lecter's motto: "Eat the rude" (Bryan Fuller Interview – Hannibal 2013:[o]).¹ When it was first aired by the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) in 2013, Fuller's "operatically



Figure 1: Paszt. Hannibal Fan Art Poster, 2014. (fanart.tv)

gross and sneakily romantic reimagining of Thomas Harris's *Red Dragon*" had a total of 4.3 million viewers (Acuna 2014:[o]; Pappademas 2015:[o]). The initial appeal of the series, was related to the series' aim to show the character of Hannibal Lecter as he had not been shown in other adaptations: as both a cannibal and a psychiatrist, yet neither psychopath nor sociopath (Bryan Fuller Interview – Hannibal 2013:[o]). An unnamed quote from IGN suggests that the "dark, frightening and subversive" content of the television series was not only responsible for the interest in the show, but also for its eventual loss in viewership (Acuna 2014:[o]).² Since 2013, the series has experienced a steady decline in viewership, until, in 2015, the second episode of the third season had only 1.5 million viewers (Acuna 2014:[o]; Hannibal cancelled ... 2015:[o]).³ After its third season's finale on 3 September 2015, NBC officially cancelled *Hannibal* (2013-2015).⁴

The initial popularity of the show may be ascribed to its contrast to former adaptations, which more easily depict the Hannibal Lecter's violent acts as opposed to his cannibalistic and psychiatric practice.

¹ Full interview available at <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=TzU7O7QOR5U>.

² The broadcasting schedule for May 2014 included other shows characterised by violence and even torture, such as *CSI*, *Blue Bloods*, *Chicago PD*, and *NCIS*, all of which follow motifs of crime, law enforcement and/or serial killing (Acuna 2014:[o]). In addition to these motifs, another characteristic of these shows is the exceedingly intelligent law enforcement consultant, as with Thomas Jane in *The Mentalist* and Sherlock Holmes in *Elementary*, who share multiple traits with characters Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham (Acuna 2014:[o]). These shows, all from different networks, have lighter and more palatable content in comparison with *Hannibal* (Fuller 2013-2015). *Hannibal's* more cinematic aesthetic provides an altogether different viewing experience from these other shows.

³ Few other reasons were given for the decline in viewership, among which was the choice to move the show to the 10pm slot on Friday nights (Acuna 2014:[o]). One that carries the most weight, however, according to executive producer, Martha De Laurentiis (2016:[o]) is piracy. De Laurentiis (2016:[o]) states that almost one-third of the show's audience came from pirated sites.

⁴ Fans of the show were outraged by its cancellation, taking to twitter with the trending hashtag #SaveHannibal and turning to streaming services, such as Netflix and Amazon Prime, to give the show its second chance (Debnath 2015:[o]).

This contrast is noted by Eric Goldman (2013:[o]), who states: “[W]e saw Hannibal present his beautifully prepared (and beautifully shot) meals, but we rarely saw Dr. Lecter actually harm anyone onscreen”. Goldman (2013:[o]) suggest that the emphasis of the show is not the serial killing, but rather the preparation and presentation of food. In particular, the show depicts cannibalism as a culinary practice.

The emphasis on food, translates from the source text, Thomas Harris’ novel *Red Dragon* (1981). In the novel there is a description of Hannibal lying in his cell, incarcerated for murder (Lanchester 1999:[o]). Open on his chest is a copy of Alexandre Dumas’ *Grand dictionnaire de cuisine* (ibid). In this publication Dumas provides a taxonomy of appetite (Popova [sa]:[o]). This taxonomy includes appetite aroused by hunger; one that is aroused by a dish, regardless of hunger; and a final arousal, after the meal (for desert) (Popova [sa]:[o]). This moment from the novel suggests that desire has a key function in a discussions concerning food and eating, which are prevalent ideas in the television series, specifically referring to human flesh. When considering the series’ representation of flesh, *Hannibal’s* cinematic nature and densely symbolic content allows for an exploration of what flesh is – in relation to cannibalism but also, as I will show, to consumption – through the lens of symbolism. There is a definite “need for further conceptual clarification” of what the symbolic is (Sebeok 2001:56). Žižek, referring to the Lacanian triad – real/symbolic/imaginary – as an ideological indicator, states that objects become symbols for associated imagined (imaginary?) experiences (Zizek: Lacanian triad ... 2010:[o]). When we are in possession of or in relation to certain objects, we are able to signal a myriad of interconnected significations or attitudes toward something (Zizek: Lacanian triad ... 2010:[o]). Therefore, the object is transformed into a symbol, which communicates the complexity of the imaginary.

The symbol expresses greater complexity than the sign, which is introduced in the study of semiotics. Semiotics studies the capacity of living organisms to “produce and understand signs”, which has a signifier (sound or letter) that refers to (signifies) the sign (Sebeok 2001:3-6). The sign is encoded with two referents – denotative, referring to *category*, and connotative, expressing *distinctive features* (Sebeok 2001:7). Bordwell (1991:8) makes use of a term that describes the working of the symbol for the viewer in the film watching process – the implicit meaning – which is covert; constructed by the viewer; and reached only through interpretation.

This study will interrogate the symbolism of flesh in *Hannibal* (Fuller 2013-2015); however, this is not a semiotic study. In particular, this study aims to investigate how the television series *Hannibal* constructs an erotics of flesh, by reading the symbolism in selected scenes and events in selected episodes of Seasons One and Two of the series. The available and accessible scholarship on the

television series *Hannibal* generally refers to the gastronomic element of the series as food porn.⁵ The current study will provide a textual analysis and close reading of Hannibal Lecter and his world, which aims to argue that the term food porn is not effective when addressing the series' treatment of flesh (as a component of Hannibal's dishes). *Hannibal* (Fuller 2013-2015), with its elaborate and aesthetically sensational visuals, is intellectually stimulating, inciting thoughts around the intersections between culinary practices and cannibalism. An intensive cross-disciplinary review of scholarship will serve to construct the conceptual framework from which to analyse the symbolism in selected episodes and scenes.

Two main theorists which the conceptual framework will draw from are Giorgio Agamben (2011) and George Bataille (1986). In his book *Nudities* (2011), Giorgio Agamben conceptualizes the nude body, especially from a theological framework. In these conceptualizations, the idea of flesh surfaces, both as it relates to the body and to nudity. In order to discuss the eroticization of flesh, I will consult George Bataille's 1986 publication *Eroticism: Death & Sensuality*, in which he considers ideas such as desire, taboo, transgression and how they relate to or serve to constitute the idea of eroticism. Bataille (1986) briefly discusses cannibalism as a taboo that functions on the same levels as other taboos, such as murder and sex, thereby providing considerations which may be applied to the consumption of and desire for flesh.

⁵ Some of these sources foregrounding the notion of food porn include:

- Carroll, A. 2015. "We're Just Alike": Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, and the Monstrous-Human. *Studies in Popular Culture* 38(1). The article approaches the Graham-Lecter relationship, from the perspective of Girard's mimetic theory, as a relationship of likeness. Carroll furthers her argument with Grix, Ingebretsen and Ling's ideas surrounding the monster as created by humanity in its own likeness, arguing that, in this way Lecter becomes a monstrous double of humanity or the "monstrous human".
- Fuchs, M. 2015. Cooking with Hannibal: Food, liminality and monstrosity in *Hannibal*. *European Journal of American Culture* 34(2). Fuchs argues the semiotic value of food in *Hannibal*, analysing the process of procurement, preparation and consumption of the human flesh. Fuchs also argues that the aesthetics and fetishization of food in *Hannibal* turns an object of basic need into spectacle, adding to what Baudrillard calls the hyperreality of media – the notion of 'food porn'. Food/ human flesh as cuisine has semantic value as a representative of liminality and the animalistic nature of humanity.
- Casey, J. 2015. Queer Cannibals and Deviant Detectives: Subversion and Homosocial Desire in NBC's *Hannibal*. In, *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 32(6). Casey discusses male homosociality and the "deadly bromance" that unfolds between Will Graham and Hannibal Lecter. Further, he discusses Will Graham as the *deviant detective* whose selfhood is threatened by his relationship with Lecter and for whom "lines between the pathological criminal other and the normative self" are blurred.
- Ercan, EE. 2015. Body on the Border: Hannibal or the Popularity of Chopping up on TV*. In, *İletişim* 22. [O]. Available: <https://iletisimdergisi.gsu.edu.tr/article/viewFile/5000120739/5000111376> Accessed: 17 March 2016. Ercan discusses violence on the body as it is used in the series, where the biological body – of which the potentiality of existence has become insignificant in the current economy and politics – is made useful once more through iconography. The dismantling of the biological body and its aesthetic transformation further serves as an indicator of the trajectory that the phenomenon of ideology follows in its relation to violence in media – a transformation from "disgusting" to "common".

The existence of cannibalism (as an institution or custom) has been denied and disputed by many authors, based on the lack of ‘proof’ – “nowhere was a scene of cannibalism directly observed” (Lévi-Strauss 2016: c9 p7/11). However, Lévi-Strauss (2016: c9) states that not only is this untrue, historically (testimony’s of witnesses have been documented), but that it remains a practice at present. Lévi-Strauss (2016: c9 p9/11) suggests that injections of pituitary gland and grafts of brain matter can be seen as a form of prescribed, therapeutic cannibalism – this can open discussions on many modern practices that could possibly classify most people on earth as cannibals. However, Lévi-Strauss (2016:c9 p9/11) also lists more familiar functions of cannibalism, such as nutritional needs, political statements, magical purposes such as the “assimilation of virtues of the deceased” or as a rite/ritual. In addition to listing the previously documented functions of cannibalism and identifying it in modern practice as a therapeutic one, Lévi-Strauss (2016: c9 p9/11) also gives a concise definition for the term: “intentionally introducing into the bodies of human beings parts or substances from other human bodies”. However, within this study, I will refer to cannibalism as constituted by the literal ingestion of human flesh, where the eater is another human being.

This broad, inclusive definition will allow for a study of *Hannibal* (Fuller 2013-2015) on levels that surpass ideas around direct ingestion of human animal flesh and stimulate thoughts around other cultural practices (art in particular). However, first, this direct form of cannibalism must be addressed, specifically within the television series *Hannibal*, in order to lay the foundation for other discussions.

In *Hannibal* (Fuller 2013-2015) the practice of cannibalism is elevated in that a moral judgement of this practice – as a “monstrosity ... [and] aberration of human nature” only practiced by savages – is averted. The television series appears to use delicate culinary practice to eroticise human animal flesh to a level of desire where the consumption thereof becomes elegant and elitist. Moments from the first two seasons of the television series will serve as examples to demonstrate this argument.

This study, which largely focusses on both flesh and eroticism, falls in the domain of qualitative research, which can be defined as a “people-centred” approach to research (Munro 2015:52). According to Carla Willig (2001:9), “Qualitative researchers tend ... to be concerned with the quality and texture of experience, rather than with the identification of cause–effect relationships”. More specifically, this approach deals with the quality and texture of “lived experience” and the construction of theories based thereupon (Munro 2015:51.52). As such, the methodology is concerned with the making of meaning without the objective to predict, but rather to describe and explain the meaning that people ascribe to events (Willig 2001:9). From a post-modern perspective, a qualitative study will consider the probability of multiple, socially constructed realities, truths and knowledges, and will work mainly with perspectives and subjective engagement (Maree 2007:63,64). Doing qualitative

research makes it possible for the researcher to contribute to the development of knowledge and the understanding of reality, by way of interpretation rather than relying on 'facts' and 'truths' (Maree 2007:64).

Furthermore, this study will employ a process of "inductive thinking", defined by Munro (2015:53) as the emergence of a theory through interrogation of the experience, which is aimed at explaining the studied experience. The nature of the study could be classified as a textual analysis, which, simply put is when the researcher makes an "educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of [a] text" (McKee 2003:1).

The post-modern view of such a methodology is that knowledge is a text or discourse itself, constituted by various words and images that is, in turn constitutive of the perspective of a culture or its powerful members (Maree 2007:64). Maree (2007:64) states that it is because knowledge and 'reality' is constituted by perspectives that "we have to deconstruct text to uncover the hidden or intended meanings and discourses" when we engage in research. As this study is of a qualitative nature, the conclusions drawn following the critical textual analysis of *Hannibal* (Fuller 2013-2015) are subjective as they are interpretive (Munro 2015:70).

The study will explore flesh, eroticism and cannibalism through an erotic lens, in the following scenes, listed here in order of broadcast:

- i. Season 1 Episode 1, *Apéritif*.
- ii. Season 1 Episode 5, *Coquilles*.
- iii. Season 1 Episode 6, *Sorbet*.
- iv. Season 2 Episode 1, *Kaiseki*.
- v. Season 2 Episode 2, *Sakizuke*.
- vi. Season 2 Episode 6, *Futamono*.

An analysis of the symbolism of these scenes will demonstrate how *Hannibal* (Fuller 2013-2015) eroticizes flesh, and how it establishes cannibalism as an erotically elevated culinary practice. The study will consider related concepts such as pornography, cannibalism, eating, sin and knowledge in offering a close symbolic reading of the above scenes. Further questions to be considered in order to argue the above, include:

- how can flesh can be considered in addition to nudity, within the context of erotics?
- How does the erotic function in gastronomy?
- How is flesh symbolically different from pornography to eroticism? And;
- How does flesh connote notions of sin and religion?

In order to answer these questions and successfully formulate the proposed argument, the notion of flesh should be defined and discussed in the context of the body.

Chapter Two: Defining Flesh, will formulate a working definition for the notion of flesh, primarily drawing from Giorgio Agamben's *Nudities* (2011). In scoping the trajectory of the following chapter, ideas of sin and consumption will be considered. In Chapter Three: Erotics and Consumption, theory on the concept of erotics and its nature in visual art forms and media will be outlined. Erotics will be linked to flesh, as defined in Chapter 2, as well as the desire of the flesh, but more importantly, notions of consumption to satiate desire. Further, the notion of food as pornography as it opposes the idea of food as erotic will be interrogated with the aim of applying such notions to the symbolic and cannibalistic content of *Hannibal* (Fuller 2013-2015). In Chapter Four: Cannibalism in *Hannibal* (Fuller 2013-2015), selected episodes from the television series will be interrogated to identify the nature of their gastronomic cannibalism content, linking to the idea of desiring flesh, as defined at the onset of the study. This chapter will argue how flesh is eroticised in selected instances of the television series and argue that the television series eroticises the eating of human flesh, constructing the idea of the sophisticated cannibal. The concluding chapter will summarize the findings and arguments of the study and attempt to outline the extent and nature of its contribution to scholarship. Further, the chapter will state the shortcomings of the study and propose possibilities for further research.

Chapter Two: Defining Flesh

While Giorgio Agamben (2011) links flesh intimately to nudity, which, as important as the idea of nudity is in defining this notion, is not how the notion is intended in this study. This chapter, while still drawing parallels to the concept of nudity, will discuss and define flesh as a substance of the body.

According to Dermot Moran (2011:9) it was Sartre who introduced the concept the flesh (*la chair*) in his discussions of the body (*le corps*). Sartre views flesh as the incarnation of the body in the world, the substance that constitutes our presence in the world (Moran 2011:10). In Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943), he discusses the embodiment of this substance or vessel as constituted by three ontological dimensions (Moran 2011: 11). These ontological dimensions place the body in the domain of phenomenality and refer to the body's "modes of manifestation" (Moran 2011:12). These modes of manifestation are discussed in terms of the body or the 'self' in relation to the Other.⁶ These ontological dimensions are: the "lived body"; the "body for the [O]ther"; and "the-body-for-itself-for-[O]thers" in the words of Martin Dillon (Moran 2011: 13,14).

The first ontological dimension concerns the body as a medium for experiencing the world and transcending towards the world (Moran 2011:13).⁷ This dimension concerns a first-person experience of the body or the "lived body" (Moran 2011:13). This dimension can be explained in terms of the phenomenon of proprioception (having a sense of where the parts of one's body are in space) as well as the Enteric Nervous System (ENS) or gut brain that Richard Schechner (2001:37) discusses in *Rasaesthetics*. Schechner (2001: 37) quotes Gershon, who states: "[T]he enteric nervous system is a vibrant, modern data-processing center that enables us to accomplish some very important and unpleasant tasks with no mental effort. When the gut rises to the level of conscious perception, in the form of, for example, heartburn, cramps, diarrhea, or constipation". The "lived body" is experienced when the Self (conscious agent) is aware of the form and functions of the body as an inhabited vessel, where the body is the vessel.

The second ontological dimension refers to how the body is used and experienced by the Other (Moran 2011:13). The body is not only a physical tool among other tools when engaging with the body of the Other, but a tool through which things are disclosed and with which to engage with the world (Moran 2011: 13). For example, the body is experienced by the Other as a physical, tangible thing, that

⁶ Zygmunt Bauman discusses the Other as 'strangerhood', which functions within the "differential logic of opposition" through which the Self constitutes its identity as the opposite of Other (Marotta 2002:42).

⁷ The body is *transcended* or *surpassed* insofar as the primary experience of the body has the capacity to do things that are beyond its "exact current situation" (Moran 2011:14). The body can be in one place while its "I can's" enable it to look or 'think' somewhere else, therefore it has the capacity to transcend into the world (Moran 2011:14).

can be danced with and touched. The body is also experienced in this instrumental way by the Self as third-person observer of its own body –this body (its ocular system) is what I need to receive images; to be capable of sight.

The third dimension can be loosely considered a combination of the first two dimensions, which considers the experience of the body under the gaze of the Other, “as in the case of *shame* or *embarrassment*” (emphasis in original) (Moran 2011:13,14). For example, person X stares at my body; I momentarily transpose myself into the body and perspective of person X; I see from that perspective that my nose is skew; I infer my own judgement of my nose onto person X; from my perspective I experience shame at the inferred judgment of my body.

In this discussion of embodiment, the body seems to be split into two forms – the first form is the body as a material object and the second is the body as an ‘experiencing’ object. The second form of the body is what Sartre refers to as the psychic being – a feeling, thinking body (Agamben 2011:74).

Following the idea that Adam and Eve were created with animal bodies instead of spiritual bodies in the Genesis story, Giorgio Agamben (2011:67) conceptualizes the body’s nudity through the theological notion of grace as clothing. In the seventh chapter of his book, Agamben (2011) traces a definition of grace from its function in a theological framework to its function in defining the psychic being, in relation to the body. Agamben (2011:63) quotes theologian Erik Peterson, who holds that

“Man is an animal before all else
...” – George Bataille (1986:149).

grace is clothing of “supernatural justice, innocence, and immortality” that constitutes the dignity God bestowed upon Adam as a garment, which hid his essentially animal (sinful) body. As such, the suggestion is that the unclothed body, nude and without grace is, by nature, sinful. Adam and Eve lost the clothing of dignity, exposing their animal bodies or

pure biological functionality with exposed signs of sexuality (Agamben 2011: 59,60). Essentially, by losing their grace, and with it their dignity, their sinful nature was revealed.

As opposed to dignity, per se, it is Sartre’s view that the psychic being is the animal body “in situation”, by which he means a gesture through which the body moves toward a specific goal (Agamben 2011:74).⁸ Sartre describes grace as the acts and gestures that cover or hide the pure biological functionality of the body – creating a conscious, agent, psychic life form, as opposed to a purely

⁸ The body in situation can be understood in opposition to the flesh as the “pure contingency of presence” or true corporeality (Agamben 2011:74). For clarity’s sake, the first can be taken to mean *conscious agent* and the latter as the *biological body*.

biological (not necessarily dead/without breath) body (Agamben 2011:73, 74). When the body is not in situation – which is to say that the conscious agency of the person is gone – the body is returned to a body without the clothing of grace, therefore an animal body in sin (again, not necessarily dead). This suggests, following the theological route, that through gestures and acts, people are able to clothe themselves in a sort of faux-grace and hide their sinful nature in adopting a semblance of the dignity that was originally bestowed upon Adam.

When considering the ‘animal’ body, as human bodies are biologically classified, the idea becomes somewhat ambiguous (Memon 2006:29). In differentiating between flesh and meat, Memon (2006:20) attempts to first establish a difference between human and animal, which are inevitably tied to one of the former notions. Drawing on Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty’s work, Memon (2006:21) distinguishes between human animal and non-human animal. Here, the human animal refers to people bodies and the non-human animal indicates, in the simplest sense, all other animals. What Memon (2006:32), further suggests is that these two notions can be distinguished by their substance, stating that flesh belongs to the human and meat belongs to the animal (non-human).

In French, as in English, there are distinctive words for each of these notions, which Deleuze uses in his discussions on human and animal, namely flesh (*l’chair*) and meat (*l’viande*) (Memon 2006:24). He defines ‘flesh’ as “the bodily material of the Figure”, which is significant, since the capitalized F (in the French translation) suggests a face (Memon 2006:23). The head, which does not have the gestures and expressions of the face, is then associated with ‘meat’, which Deleuze explains with reference to Francis Bacon’s paintings as heads without faces (Memon 2006:24).⁹

Merleau-Ponty defines flesh more broadly as the “texture, the inter-fabric in which all things and non-things are woven. It is the ‘common inner framework’ of everything there is”, which does not differentiate it from meat or distinguish between human and animal (Memon 2006:22). Rather, Merleau-Ponty defines flesh as “fields of intersection”, which is similar to Deleuze’s notion of the “zone of indiscernibility”, as both speak to the idea that there is a correlation between the human animal body and the non-human animal. This correlation can be either in substance, as Deleuze notes or in “anticipations or caricatures of the human in the animal”, as in Merleau-Ponty’s view (Memon 2006:23). The provocative aspect of Deleuze’s idea of indiscernibility between human and animal, is

⁹ Deleuze (2003:18) further discusses the role of bone in Francis Bacon’s work, stating that the bone is part of the face, rather than the head, which is deboned, but firm. Deleuze (2003:16) states that “the body is revealed when it ceases to be supported by the bones ... [when] the bone [exist] as the material structure of the body, [and] the flesh as the bodily material of the Figure”.

that if the only available grounds for identification is substance, then meat and flesh can successfully pass for one another (Memon 2006:26).

Referring to Bacon's paintings, Deleuze (2003:15) notes how the artist dismantles the face and makes the head appear, thereby making the human appear non-human and the flesh appear as meat. As such, the flesh passes for meat in the absence of the defining 'face'; an identifiable marker of the human animal. Here, the face does not necessarily mean the arrangement of the eyes, mouth, nose and ears. Rather, it should be understood as metonymic of any body part that identifies it as human animal. As such, the 'head' should be understood as metonymic of the substance of the body; muscle, sinew, tendons and fats. The work of Francis Bacon, shown in figures 2 through 4, either juxtapose the human animal as psychic being and as purely biological; or it displays the flesh of the human animal through a dismantling of what identifies it as human animal.

In Figure 2, *Three Studies for a Crucifixion* (Bacon 1962), the centre study of the triptych depicts a mound of muddled biological matter, which does not show a specifically human marker. However, both the title and the item of furniture on which it rests, suggest that the mound belongs to a human animal, and therefore consists of flesh. However, this mound of biological matter could easily belong to the non-human animal, and as such be meat rather than flesh. This example illustrates how human animal flesh, in the absence of an identifying marker/'face' can pass for non-human animal meat. What Hannibal Lecter does in *Hannibal* (Fuller 2013-2015) is a similar dismantling of the face when he acquires and prepares his meat. He essentially makes the 'head appear' – which is an integral part of the body, therefore, included in the substance – and as such, makes the human-animal flesh appear as non-human animal meat (Deleuze 2003:15).



Figure 2: Francis Bacon. 1962. *Three Studies for a Crucifixion*. Oil and sand on canvas. 198 x 145 cm (each). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. (Copyright) The Estate of Francis Bacon. (francis-bacon.com).



Figure 3: Painting. 1946. Oil on canvas, 198.1 x 132.1 cm (78 x 52 in); The Museum of Modern Art, New York. (ibiblio.org).



Figure 4: Francis Bacon. 1966. Portrait of George Dyer Talking © The Estate of Francis Bacon / DACS London 2014. (francis-bacon.com).

Concerning the perception of flesh, Agamben (2011:73) notes Sartre’s definition of desire – a strategy toward making the “flesh” appear in the body of the Other by removing its ‘situation’, “mak[ing] it exist as pure flesh”. Here, flesh is perceived as a substance of the body as opposed to the nudity of the body, as Agamben (2011) largely discusses it. This relates to Deleuze’s (2003:15) idea of removing the face to make the meat or head appear, essentially removing the markers that identify a body as human animal. If the human animal body, with its identifiable markers, is regarded as the Self, then the removal of identifiable markers or ‘situation’ can be regarded as a process of Othering – establishing an opposite from which to distinguish the human body or Self.

The forceful removal of grace/ the ‘situation’ of the body, as opposed to the loss thereof (as with Adam), is the method of the Sadist (Agamben 2011:76). The sadist attempts to produce the incarnation of the body, as it happened in the Garden of Eden, by applying sadistic apparatus – the equivalent of sin – to the body that is clothed in the faux-grace of its gestures (Agamben 2011: 75) These apparatuses are the straps, whips and gagging instruments that are used to “force the body ... into incongruous positions that reveals its obscenity, that is, its irreparable loss of all grace” (Agamben 2011:75). It could be argued, for comparative instances later in this essay, that *Hannibal* (Fuller 2013-2015) shows instances of this sadistic method with the bodies of victims displayed by the killers in the series, including Dr Hannibal Lecter. Here, a third type of animal body can be identified – the inhuman

animal body – which can be understood as the human animal body that has been stripped of its situation, but not its identifiable markers, and has further been manipulated or re-animated to mimic its former situation.

Painting (Bacon 1946) and *Portrait of George Dyer Talking* (Bacon 1966) (Figures 3 & 4) both illustrate a partial dismantling of the face, where a defining marker (the mouth or an eye) remain visible, however, the bodies of these figures are contorted in a manner that the line between human and non-human are blurred. I would argue that the image of the *Angels* (Figure 3) illustrates this notion in the same manner as Bacon's works, where the bodies can be identified as human, but are contorted or reanimated in a way that suggests otherwise. While flesh belongs to the human animal body with its identifiable markers, meat belongs to the human animal without markers and the non-human animal and the inhuman animal body. By way of the sadist's method – the distortion and reshaping of the body – flesh is reduced to meat. However, I would argue, that in the use of these inhuman animal bodies in the frame of art or an artist's medium, that the meat is displayed as flesh.

Following his proposal of the ontological dimensions of the body, Sartre discusses the objectified or material body, which is constituted by an exterior perspective of the body as an object in the world (Moran 2011:15). When the body of the Self is viewed by the Other, it is viewed as an object by a subject (Moran 2011:22). As opposed to sight, encountering the body through touch is what brings about an understanding between bodies as flesh, suspending hierarchical readings of an object (Moran 2011:23). For Sartre, it is specifically the erotic caress that opposes an engagement with object-body (Moran 2011:23). It is by placing one's own body as flesh alongside the body of the other, which "awakens" the incarnation of both. However, in addition to the erotic caress, the image is another method of expressing or coming about knowledge of the body's incarnation.

According to Agamben (2011:84), it is the incarnation of the body – its nudity – that makes it "knowable". Agamben argues that the nudity or 'incarnation' of something is best expressed through the image. Following medieval psychology, Agamben suggests that the image is the medium of knowledge and the process of attaining the knowledge that the image offers, involves stripping or baring the image to its ultimate objective form (nudity/incarnation). As such, the image of something is not the thing itself, but its knowability, meaning the possibility of knowing it in its nude/objective/incarnate form.

[In expressing nudity or "incarnation", Agamben (2011:83) argues, following medieval psychology, that the image is a "perfect medium between the object in the mind and the real thing". The logic here is that the image or "phantasm" is the medium of knowledge, and the process of bringing about knowledge is the stripping or baring of the image down to its ultimate objective form (Agamben

2011:83). Therefore, “the image is not the thing, but the thing’s knowability (its nudity)”, which makes the nudity or substance of the body, the image of the knowable, incarnate body (Agamben 2011:84).]

In the same way, Dr Lecter strips or bares the image of the body to its ultimate incarnation or nudity – flesh – which brings it to a form where it provides knowledge of the human animal body itself, just as the fruit in the Garden of Eden brought knowledge of good and evil. It could be argued that through his gastronomic creations, Hannibal Lecter bares and reveals the substance or ‘flesh’ of his victims. What this situation suggests is that there is an offering of knowledge, the knowledge of the taste and texture of human animal flesh and therefore a knowledge of one’s own substance. Here, flesh is analogous of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, which holds the promise of knowledge. However, when flesh is made to pass for meat, the fear of punishment is eliminated, removing the possibility of rejection on moral or ethical grounds. As such, for those who partake in Hannibal’s dishes of human flesh, eating becomes a gateway to knowledge – a sensorial knowledge of their own bodies – the knowledge of their own nudity; to see one’s own nudity as Adam did.

In light of the above, flesh is defined as the substance of the human animal body, with all markers that signal it as human animal, but removed from its psychic situation. Flesh as a substance could successfully pass as the meat of the non-human, due to its indiscernibility in the absence of visually identifiable markers. Just as the substance of the human animal body can be made to pass for the non-human, the body of the human animal can be re-animated to become the inhuman. In the images or tableaux that Dr Lecter (as some of the other killer in the show) constructs from the bodies of his victims, there is a removal of the situation, by way of the sadist’s method, but the identifiable markers of the human animal body remain, which frames them as inhuman. The process of re-animation is not only applied to Hannibal’s tableaux; it can be used for an outcome other than establishing the inhuman. In the careful culinary practices that Hannibal applies to the cuts of flesh-made-meat, he re-animates the substance into flesh once more.

The eroticization of flesh may still be associated with the nude body and sexuality, specifically as they relate to pornographic content. If the argument of eroticized flesh is to be made, there must be clarity around the concept of erotics.

Chapter Three: Erotics and Consumption

3.1 The erotic and the pornographic

The concept of erotics, according to Audrey Lorde (2006:88) is too easily and inaccurately related to pornography. As a result, definitions of erotics bear too close a resemblance to that of pornography (Lorde 2006:88). If this is taken to be true, the result would be that, in a visual form such as film, there is an ambiguity in what type of film classifies as pornographic and which would classify as erotic.

Already, there exists two clear differences between the erotic and the pornographic recognized by Umberto Eco in his essay *How to Recognize a Porn Movie* (1994). Eco (1994:222) states that the first, and arguably the most obvious of differences between erotic content and a pornographic movie, is the aim. For a “pornoflick”, the sole aim is to arouse the spectator sexually, whereas a movie with erotic content is made with the aim to express “certain concepts or [a]esthetic ideals” (Eco 1994:223). This difference seems easy enough to employ as a tool for separating the erotic from the pornographic. However, according to Eco (1994:223), another deciding factor is that of wasted time. In some films wasted time is usually “exactly what the film is about”, which Eco (1994:223) suggests, classifies them as erotic. Pornographic movies, on the other hand, waste time simply because the entire running time of the movie cannot consist of only its main ingredient, which is sex (Eco 1994:224). These movies waste time for the purpose of creating a sense of normality in order for the sex to be arousing (Eco 1994:224).

Audrey Lorde (2006:88) defines the erotic from a feminist perspective, reaffirming its dissimilarity to pornography. Lorde (2006:88) states that the erotic is an “internal sense of satisfaction” of having experienced “a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings”. After the initial experience of the erotic, we continuously strive toward it (Lorde 2006:90). The erotic is foremost a primarily sensory experience, stimulated in the viewer (or reader), and, taking from George Bataille’s (1986) discussion of the concept, is not necessarily sexual in nature. The pornographic differs in that it is mainly focussed on sexually explicit content.

Above, I identified the following criteria for recognizing erotic visual content in film: the erotic aims to be a sensorial experience; wasted time is purposeful; and is aesthetically elevated/driven. However, eroticism as a concept is yet to be defined and not to be confused with erotica, which is a genre of art and literature and, according to Fisher and Barak, is a sub-element of pornography (Kuhn, Voges, Pope & Bloxome 2007:166). Erotica is defined by Kuhn *et al.* (2007: 168) as an intentional “communication material provided for the purpose of arousing or titillating individuals who will consume it in a company”. Kuhn *et al.* (2007: 167, 168) suggest that erotica, which presents “non-violent, non-degrading, consensual sex” is conceptually different from pornography. Erotica, according to Kovetz, has purposes of intimacy and humanizing sex, rather than dehumanizing private arousal for gratification, as pornography does.

“Killing must feel good to God too. He does it all the time, and are we not created in his image?”

- Hannibal Lecter (Fuller 2013: S01E02, *Amuse-Bouche*).

Erotica, as with eroticism differs conceptually from pornography, however, they also differ from one another in that, considering George Bataille’s 1986 work, eroticism (as a phenomenon rather than a genre) does not necessarily involve sexual desire, but does not exclude it either. Most significantly, Bataille (1986:72) links eroticism to taboos and

notions of transgression, which involve prohibitions of other acts and objects in the same way it prohibits sexual ones. In Bataille’s (1986:73) view, the prohibition of an object, even the act of labelling something as forbidden, creates a desire for it. Similarly, when a certain act is considered taboo, it is awarded the “significance of religious violation” (Bataille 1986:74). According to Bataille (1986:72), one of these taboo acts is that of killing. Bataille (1986:72) ask: “who would go so far as to deny that [killing] has as lively, if not as exacting, an existence among the masses as sexual appetite?”, suggesting that for some people the desire to kill may be equal to sexual desire.

Killing, as with sexual appetite, is restricted by the taboo (which are both related to sin) (Bataille 1986:72) For killing, the restricting taboo is murder, but Bataille (1986:72) suggests that killing also has instances of exception as sex does. Bataille (1986:72) suggests that such selective prohibition of acts such as killing and sex have been, and are still a part of the taboos in those societies or cultures that live by Christian teachings – “Thou shalt not kill”, but it is condoned when in duels, feuds and wars (Bataille 1986:72). Presently, as with the non-industrial cultures of the past, and as can be seen among religious peoples throughout history, the violation of any taboo (including killing and sex) is only permitted if it is done with religious intent (Bataille 1986:73).

This tension between prohibition, liberation and religion evokes the eating of forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden (Agamben 2011:80). By prohibiting the fruit that held the promise of knowledge (which served as a test of obedience), a desire was created to transgress the taboo, which was amplified by the serpent's adornment of the object of desire – eroticising the act further. Adam and Eve were made to believe that, once eating of the tree, they would see and know good and evil – a level of knowledge possessed only by God (Agamben 2011:80). Giorgio Agamben (2011:81) notes that with the opening of their eyes, “the only content of their knowledge of good and evil ... [is] nudity”. In their acknowledgement of nudity, Adam and Eve became privy to what Augustine calls *libido* – the uncontrollable excitation of the genitalia and the consequence of sin – which leads to lust and further sin (emphasis in original) (Agamben 2011:68).

From the moment of prohibition in the Garden of Eden to Augustine's notion of *libido*, the suggested conclusion is that eating serves as the gateway to sin, knowledge and new ways of seeing nudity, the body and flesh. Through the promise of reward (knowledge), after consuming, the desire for the consumable object is increased. Just so, the desire for food is increased through the promise of a sensorial experience – taste (both culturally and gustatory), smell, texture etc. – as reward. However, eating certain foods may also be prohibited, as with the taboo on cannibalism – eating human flesh. Before I can critically discuss the connections between eroticism and cannibalism, the connections between eroticism and consumption as a whole must first be studied.

3.2 Consumption and erotic gastronomy

Consumption, translated from the Latin form *consumere*, refers to forcefully overwhelming something to dissolve its autonomy or completely destroy it (Graeber 2011:491). Historically, the term refers to the devouring of food, or the consuming disease tuberculosis (Graeber 2011: 491,492). In contemporary use, the term is associated with the rapid usage and depletion of material goods and is considered in opposition to ‘production’ (Graeber 2011:492). Plato, as mentioned by Graeber (2011:493), suggests that the consuming of goods responds to a desire that is created by a feeling of lack or absence and requires filling.

If consumption is considered in its original form and in relation to food, it can be related to gastronomy, which is “the art and practice of cooking and eating good food” (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 2010: 619). On media platforms such as television, the internet and magazines, mouth-watering images of food are referred to as “food porn” (McBride 2010:38). Sociologist and assistant professor of food studies, Krishnendu Ray, in an interview with McBride (2010: 40), notes a level of unease about the idea of “food porn”, as first used by Michael Jacobson of the Center of

Science for the Public Interest. Jacobson “coined the term to connote a food that was so sensationally out of bounds of what a food should be that it deserved to be considered pornographic”, juxtaposing it with healthy food (McBride 2010:38). Alexander Cockburn used a similar form of the term in 1977, namely “gastro-porn”, by which he refers to idealistic portrayals of food in the media and cookbooks that present dishes that are nearly unattainable (McBride 2010:38). Cockburn’s use of the term does not fully coincide with the idea of the pornographic. The nature of pornography as it pertains to images of food, is aptly encapsulated by Alan Madison, who has previous experience in the porn industry and has moved on to producing/directing food shows for television across the world (McBride 2010:40, 46):

Pornography has nothing to do with the enhancement and increased valuation of image and action and everything to do with the devaluation of the image and the actions it depicts. Porn is designed to subordinate by pictures or words, not to elevate or deify. Porn’s images are graphic, not stylized; real, not enhanced. Pornography does not idealize sex—quite the opposite, it diminishes it. Sex porn contains no art, and the making of it contains little, if any, craft.

Madison provides clear criteria with which to identify a pornographic image, and by so doing provides opposing criteria that could be used to identify the erotic image. In the previous chapter, one aim of the erotic has been identified as conveying aesthetic ideals. This aim aligns the erotic image with Madison’s opening criteria, as one that is enhanced, stylized, valuating and artistically aesthetic (McBride 2010:40). If the erotic image is an elevated, artistic and aesthetic one, then it cannot necessarily be judged on the same grounds as the graphic and devaluating pornographic image. Bataille (1986:227) quotes Fr. Tesson of the Catholic Church, who says in his *Sexualité, Morale et Mystique* that “[m]orality judges and guides the mystical life”. If morality (the basis for judging the pornographic) serves as a form of religious law, then it cannot allow for religious violation. As such, the erotic cannot be morally judged, since it is related to the taboo, which is subject to violation on religious grounds (Bataille 1986: 74). It would seem that another difference between porn and eroticism is the manner in which they are judged and invite (or do not invite) a morally exaggerated attitude to its contents.

If morality (the basis for judging the pornographic) serves as a form of religious law for the individual (where crossing a line equates immorality), then it cannot be violated with religious intent, because there is an absurdity in using religion as a reason to transgress its own laws.

Bataille (1986:129) differentiates between sacred prostitution and low prostitution, a differentiation which I position as analogous to erotic content and pornographic content. Bataille (1986:131) states that prostitution becomes the consequence of the “feminine attitude”, which he describes as the adornment of the object of male desire. Ignoring for a moment the patriarchal allusions and

implications of such a generalization, Bataille's (1986:131-136) point overall is that the female is fated to become prostituted in one way or another. Whether it be by her husband or by a stranger, this condemnation is a consequence simply of being female bodied and even a gentle refusal of male (sexual) advances, will sharpen the initial desire for her body (Bataille 1986: 131). Bataille (1986: 134) suggests that an expression of shame serves as an acknowledgement of the taboo, which circumvents moral judgements of the act. The acknowledgement of the taboo and signalling shame at the transgression thereof, as with the ritual orgy in earlier societies, the transgression is permitted and viewed as sacred, not immoral – only to be judged by a higher entity (Bataille 1986:136). If, as with low prostitution, the prostitute has “become a stranger to the taboo” and is reduced to the level of non-human animals, then human beings, who feel superior in their morality, will exercise their self-given right to exercise judgement (Bataille 1986:134;136).

If the above differentiation is applied to food, it can aid in distinguishing food porn from erotic gastronomy. The image of a rustic looking burger, dripping with cheese, caressed by a golden bundle of potato chips and voluptuous onion rings (see Figure 5), can be equated to a pornographic image – one that suggests ideas of gluttony and excess. On the other hand, the image of “[a] prosciutto ‘rose’ wrapped around a black-olive sphere, with summer herbs and flowers, a crunchy prosciutto crumble, and decorative touches from the forest” can arouse aesthetic and sensorial pleasure (see Figure 6). The latter creates a more sophisticated gustatory desire and communicates ideas of sensibility and delicacy. As such, a clear difference between these images, following Eco (1994:223), is wasted time. On an aesthetic level, the image of the burger is excessive. It is in its excess that the pornographic image of food can be classified as wasteful. On the other hand, the image of the rose displays the deliberate use of time and materials, therefore, not wasteful. It can then be said that the erotic image is deliberate with time and effort in the composition of the content as well as the photographic image, in addition to being sensible and delicate rather than excessive and garish.



Figure 5: Top 10 Toughest Burger Challenges in The World, [sa]. (top-ten-foods.com).



Figure 6: A prosciutto 'rose', 2016. (thebittersweetgourmet.com).

Chloë Taylor (2010:75), in her arguments for ethical vegetarianism, states that what we eat plays a large part in constituting our “self-identifications as human”. She suggests that the “manner in which we regulate our food consumption has been revived as a means of ethical and aesthetic self-constitution”, following Foucault’s note about the Greeks, for whom diet served as a locus of self-discovery (Taylor 2010:72,731).¹⁰ Here follows the old adage, ‘you are what you eat’, which is chosen according to what people are told they should be, or want to be – superior (Taylor 2010:75). This same adage can be used to draw links between culture and what we consume.

The idea of superiority, specifically in culture and the frame of consumption, links to Pierre Bourdieu’s work *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979). In this book, Bourdieu (1996:18) formulates a form of equation (following the analysis of data) which suggests that class, as an identity, is constituted by the relationship between two variables: the independent (sex, age, occupation, places of residence etc.) and the dependent variable (music, art, food). The independent variable links to the idea of cultural capital, which one can possess as a matter of lineage (aristocracy/ bourgeoisie) or it can be attained through classificatory practices such as concert-going or playing a noble instrument, that create conditions for acquiring the corresponding dispositions, which constitute the dependant variable (Bourdieu 1996:18,19). The relationship of all variables constitute a social classification, which functions on the basis of the habitus, as Bourdieu (1996:19,170) names it. Bourdieu (1996:170) defines the habitus as follows (spacing as in original):

The habitus is both the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgements and the system of classification (principiū divisionis) of these practices. It is in the relationship between the two capacities which define the habitus, the capacity to produce classifiable practices and works, and the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products (taste) , that the represented social world, i.e., the space of life-styles, is constituted ... The habitus is necessity internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions; it is a general, transposable disposition which carries out a systematic, universal application—beyond the limits of what has been directly learnt—of the necessity inherent in the learning conditions. That is why an agent’s whole set of practices (or those of a whole set of agents produced by similar conditions) are both systematic, inasmuch as they are the product of the application of identical (or interchangeable) schemes, and systematically distinct from the practices constituting another life-style.

What Bourdieu (1996: 19,160,170) suggests is that social class (constituted by various forms of capital) and taste (classificatory judgements) can be acquired through certain practices and education, which involves cultural transmission from both the school and the family. The habitus is the internalization

¹⁰ In *The Use of Pleasure* (1985), Foucault discusses *Dietetics* (Taylor 2010:72). Here he notes the Greek view of the “self as an ethico-aesthetic project”, to be cared for with dietary regimes, writing, meditations and sexual limitations (Taylor 2010:72).

of these necessary classificatory practices and judgements culminating in a disposition or temperament that constitutes a specific life-style (class).

Molly Watson (2012:[o]) has revised Bourdieu's Food Space Chart from as an example of food choices (a classificatory practice, intentional or not) according to cultural and economic capital (Watson 2012:[o]). Watson (2012:[o]) says of her chart: "It has none of the deep sociological research that spawned the original behind it, and questions of women's free time and status, as well as rates of food and cultural consumption, have been left off. I have embraced and re-positioned some of Bourdieu's original categories and items, but also added some specific to 21st-century America." This chart suggests that those who choose "sweet, white, salty, fried" foods are those with low economic capital (Watson 2012:[o]). Those who choose, in addition to the previous list, "instant, lite, microwavable" foods have low cultural capital as well - connoting the social status 'common'. However, Kateryna Bakhnak (2015:[o]) uses pictures of celebrities eating fast food to argue against the assumption that upper class individuals only choose healthy, exotic and artisan foods. Bakhnak (2015:[o]) problematizes this assumption from another of Bourdieu's works *The Aristocracy of Culture*, wherein he argues that an individual's culture and upbringing shapes what they consume. Bakhnak (2015:[o]) states:

Bourdieu's argument cannot really apply to these people, of course if one was to play the devil's advocate it could be argued that eating fast food is a cultural norm for everyone. But why then is fast food associated to people of the lower classes, since it is priced down? So even though taste and culture are very much connected the connection is not black and white. Culture can be defined in different ways based on the perspective of the person defining it.

If we consider Bakhnak's (2015:[o]) statement, then junk food or fast food can be considered as a metaphor for popular culture (as opposed to Dr Lecter's preference for the rarefied) across all social groups (especially in America, as in the context of Bakhnak's argument). However, arguing from the frame of Bourdieu's arguments as noted by Watson (2012:[o]) and Bakhnak (2015:[o]), the gluttonous indulgence of the burger and trimmings connotes obesity, lifestyle diseases and the 'low culture' of the eater. On the other hand, the eater of the gourmet dish would do so to appear to have, or uphold a level of sophistication. As such, it appears that the social distinction of sophistication can be attained through specific culinary habits, routines and preferences. This seems to be the case with Hannibal Lecter, who is in a position of economic wealth and makes choices that place him in a position of cultural wealth and superiority.

The idea of choice largely factors into what Taylor (2010:75) argues about the superiority of human animals, if only in perception: "[H]uman superiority is something which we construct through our instrumentalization of other species" (Taylor 2010:75). There is the argument from some that by

having the agency to choose what we eat as humans, we are elevated above other animals as moral agents. Therefore, even vegetarianism proposes human animal superiority over other species, regardless of morality. However, if this choice stretches to include eating of our own species, it would seem that it can elevate the eater above even human animals. If a dish from the flesh of its own species is crafted by or presented to the eater with erotic artistry and care, it would seem that the eater may become, in addition to his superiority, sophisticated. As such, the idea of the superior, sophisticated cannibal arises – a concept that differs from the forms of cannibalism seen recently in television. The representation of cannibalistic practice differs between television series' in serving specific narrative purposes. Here I will reiterate my amended version of Lévi-Strauss' definition of cannibalism, which is the intentional introduction, by way of ingestion, into the human body parts of other human bodies. For the purpose of the comparisons below, I will refer to only one half of what constitutes cannibalism – the consumption of human flesh – and not the other – that the eater is human.

In *The Walking Dead* (2014), Season 5 Episode 1, the character Bob watches as his leg is cooked on an open fire and eaten by his captors. The grime and primitivism of the scene, frames cannibalism as an act of survival – “a man's got to eat” – and a form of punishment in a power relationship – “it is almost a kind of cosmic justice for it to be you” (Bobs Leg Gets Eaten ... 2014:[o]). Another image of eating human flesh throughout the television series is that of a 'walker' or zombie seeking out and feeding on the living. In these images, although those eating aren't human, the idea of cannibalism is aligned with disease that destroys the faculties of those infected, leaving them with a primal need to feed on human flesh. These 'walkers' are not seen as either animal or human (therefore they cannot be cannibals, even when consuming human flesh), and more significantly, they are not even considered supernatural – they are simply animated biological bodies without conscious agency. It could be said that the narrative purpose of these representations of consuming human flesh is to alienate the viewer from those who are committing the act of cannibalism and aligning with the victim – something that Hannibal does not do.

Another comparative instance is in the latest season of *American Horror Story: Hotel* (Falchuk & Murphy 2015), where the consumption of other bodies is shown as pornographic and vampiric, casting it in lights of monstrosity and sexual pleasure. In the first episode of the series, the characters played by Lady Gaga and Matt Bomer, 'hunt' their prey (a couple) and lure them back to their room, where the consumption of these bodies becomes foreplay, complete with nudity, gyrating, lace, leather and red silk. Insofar as narrative purpose goes, the connection between consumption, lust and 'binging' introduces the act as digestible in that the characters are supernatural and not human. I would argue that the purpose of this instance of consuming human flesh is therefore neither alienating, nor

enticing, but rather serves a purpose of world creation and illuminating certain qualities of the characters.

In *Hannibal* (Fuller 2013-2015), cannibalism is treated as an art form, of which an appreciation would require a highly sophisticated palate. It becomes possible for the experience of visual and intellectual pleasure, which leads to shame (for the viewer) at the realization that a desire has been created alongside images of consuming human flesh. In *Hannibal* the narrative purpose of cannibalism could be seen as a method of stimulating intellectual pleasure through the gastronomic, eroticised visuals.

Cannibalism in *Hannibal*

In the previous chapters, I have constructed a conceptual framework from a review of scholarship that includes political-existential thinkers such as Giorgio Agamben (2011) and George Bataille (1986), who provide the necessary vocabulary with which to discuss an eroticization of flesh in the television series *Hannibal* (Fuller 2013-2015). Here I will reiterate my research question and sub-questions:

- how does *Hannibal* (Fuller 2013-2015) construct an erotics of flesh?
- how can flesh can be considered in addition to nudity, within the context of erotics?
- How does the erotic function in gastronomy?
- How is flesh symbolically different from pornography to eroticism? And;
- How does flesh connote notions of sin and religion?

In this chapter, through the analysis of episodes that follows, I will focus on the symbolism and elements that frame the presence of flesh as erotic and position the practice of cannibalism as an erotically elevated and sophisticated one. For the sake of clarity, hereafter, I will refer to Hannibal Lecter as Dr Lecter to avoid confusion with the title of the series *Hannibal*.

4.1 Season 1 Episode 1, *Apéritif*.

The episode opens with Will Graham at a crime scene. In the point of view of the killer, Will re-enters the house through a red door, one I would argue is symbolic of the threshold of transgression, of the taboo to come. From the onset of the series there are instances of symbolism, which prepares the viewer for an experience that goes beyond entertainment, one that requires a reading of the symbolic in order to make sense of the finer nuances of the show.

There are cues that introduce characters by way of representation. First there is the cat that leads Will and FBI agent Jack Crawford to the body of the missing girl, lying in her bed. This symbol of the cat can be read as one of intuition, particularly, Will Graham's intuition as part of his ability to catch killers through an application of his pure empathy for their position. The second introduction in the episode, is that of antler velvet, found in puncture wounds of the girl's body. Ultimately, this leads Will to the conclusion that the victims of this killer are being eaten, which does not only foreshadow Hannibal Lecter's cannibalism, but also the images of the stag and wendigo that represent Hannibal Lecter throughout the series.

The first time the viewer is introduced to Dr Hannibal Lecter, it is through a piece of classical music. The camera then pans up from the reflection of food on the shiny dinner table to where Dr Lecter, dressed in a suit, expertly cuts a piece of meat and gently places it in his mouth, savouring it as a connoisseur would a glass of wine. Following this, all scenes of Dr Lecter cooking or eating are

accompanied by classical music, whether it be in the score or diegetic, as well as the abundance of books, décor that reflects wealth, Dr Lecter sketching and so forth. These references to a scholarly background, money and an interest in sketching and classical music, all serve as indicators of Dr Lecter's class.¹¹ As Bourdieu (1996:23,39) outlines, the display of cultural capital, academic capital and economic capital are all classificatory, especially through Dr Lecter's judgements, all indicate certain dispositions and tastes.

Dr Lecter is brought in by Jack Crawford as Will's psychiatrist, in order to keep an eye on Will's mental state while working with the FBI on the case of Garret Jacob Hobbs (The Minnesota Shrike, a cannibal). Will is unable to profile the killer. He finds himself missing an essential part of the pattern that would eventually lead him to Garret Jacob Hobbs. Dr Lecter kills in order to stage a negative, so that Will could see the positive – 'gift wrapping' the answers for Will.



Figure 7: "Stag Girl", Hannibal Season 1 Episode 1, Apéritif. 2013. Screen shot by author.

By the end of the episode, the idea of knowledge is fully represented in a scene where Dr Lecter and Will Graham are seated at a breakfast table. As with the crime scene that is staged for Will, Dr Lecter presents him with a protein scramble containing the flesh of the victim. As Will takes a bite of the sausage, made from the flesh of the girl at the crime scene staged by Dr Lecter, the two men discuss the opening of Will's eyes to what he could not see about the killer before. Here, the eating of the sausage becomes symbolic of the genesis story, where Adam and Eve's eyes were opened in eating of the forbidden fruit.

¹¹ Agent Jack Crawford mentions, when speaking to Dr Lecter, one of the doctor's publications called *The Evolutionary Origins of Social Exclusion*. The title of this paper alone suggests Dr Lecter's strong ties with ideas of class and taste.



Figure 8: "Protein scramble", *Hannibal* Season 1 Episode 1, *Apéritif*. 2013. Screen shot by author.

What *Hannibal* (Fuller 2013-2015) does from this first episode, is create an aesthetic, sensorial and symbolic world within which to engage with flesh and cannibalism. This environment sets the frame where elements of the erotic can function in relation to flesh.

4.2 Season 1 Episode 5, *Coquilles*.

There are two prominent images in this episode that speak especially to the theological discussions on both grace and knowledge. The first of these images also serves as an example of how the television series eroticizes flesh. Figure 9 shows the work of the killer referred to as The Angel Maker. Here, two of his victims are modelled in a position of supplication, praying over where the killer lay. These bodies have been manipulated and re-animated in a process similar to the Viking 'Blood Eagle', a torture used on Christians, as mentioned by Jimmy price of forensics. The Angel Maker transforms his victims into angels by cutting wings from the skin of their backs.



Figure 9: Angels, *Hannibal* Season 1 Episode 5, *Coquilles*. 2013. Screen shot by author.

This instance can be seen as a partial dismantling of the face, as is present in Francis Bacon's work (Deleuze 2013; Memon 2006). The identifiable markers of a human animal body are still present although the faux-grace (gestures that clothe their sinful bodies) have been stripped away by apparatuses of torture, as used by the sadist (Agamben 2011:76). What eroticizes the flesh of these

bodies lies in the artistry. As Will Graham states when analysing the scene, angels do not have wings in scripture, it is only in art (paintings and sculptures) that they are depicted with wings. As such, what the series does with this image, is stage its composition in such a manner that references art, displays deliberate use of time and materials and considers composition. It is not only the killer who uses deliberate time to stage such an image, but the series as well, in that the lines, holding these bodies and their wings in place, catch the light in such a way that they seem to descend from the heavens in rays of sunlight.

This theological theme is also present in the second image, where Will and Dr Lecter discuss The Angel Maker's perception of God. Dr Lecter stands on the upper level of his library, with collections of books stretching out behind him, looking down at Will, for whom he lets a book fall. This image symbolizes the passing of knowledge in a very Biblical sense, especially since the discussion concerns God and angels. The elevated position of Dr Lecter, surrounded by books (knowledge), and the lower position of Will (who only has a few books with him), puts Dr Lecter in a deified position – as God who holds the knowledge of good and evil. However, at the same time, Dr Lecter assumes the role of the serpent, “trying to alienate [Will] from Jack Crawford”, after substituting Jack in the analogy of God's abandonment of The Angel Maker (Fuller 2013).

These Biblical images eroticise the flesh of The Angel Maker's victims in that his belief is that he is doing God's work, therefore, if sanctioned by God, the taboo on killing may be transgressed. In transgressing the taboo and the presence of deliberate artistry, the flesh of these inhuman animal bodies is eroticised.



Figure 10: “A deified Dr Lecter”, Hannibal Season 1 Episode 5, Coquilles. 2013. Screen shot by author.



Figure 11: “Will, the receiver of knowledge”, Hannibal Season 1 Episode 5, Coquilles. 2013. Screen shot by author.

4.3 Season 1 Episode 7, *Sorbet*.

This episode is rich with references and symbols of Dr Lecter's economic, academic and cultural capital, but especially the latter. One of the moments in this episode shows Dr Lecter at the opera, a “Concert for Hunger Relief”, which is a lovely paradox, but also an indicator of his economic capital – the ability to donate money. While listening to the opera singer, Dr Lecter tears up with appreciation

for what he hears. This instance displays the internalized classificatory judgements, that Bourdieu (1996:170) discusses, of a sophisticated and almost aristocratic form of music. To quote Bourdieu (1996:18) “nothing more clearly affirms one's 'class', nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music”.



Figure 12: “At the Opera”, Hannibal Season 1 Episode 7, Sorbet. 2013. Screen shot by author.

Another reference to Dr Lecter’s cultural capital and, naturally, a central focus of the show’s visuals, are his culinary practices. Near the end of the episode, Dr Lecter is coating flesh in herbed flour. Using only his fingers, he delicately traces a pattern in the flour, using almost choreographed movements to coat the cuts of flesh. Further, the composition of the food on the plate suggests careful consideration of the complimenting asymmetry. There is order and meticulousness to Dr Lecter’s methods, which is why I suggest that, when cooking, his movements seem choreographed and theatrical, as if they are poses in a dance. This aligns with Will’s assessment of the Chesapeake Ripper (Dr Hannibal Lecter), when he says that the Ripper “wants to perform. Every brutal choice has elegance, grace” (Fuller 2013-2015).¹²



Figure 13: “Reds and whites”, Hannibal Season 1 Episode 6, Sorbet. 2013. Screen shot by author.



Figure 14: “Tomato skin flowers”, Hannibal Season 1 Episode 6, Sorbet. 2013. Screen shot by author.

What *Hannibal* (Fuller 2013-2015) does, is create a sensorium of sounds, textures and colours. In this particular scene, the images are arranged in whites and reds, there is a mixture of violin and the sizzling of fat in the skillet, the contrasting textures of flour, herbs, meat, wood, cloth and so forth. I would argue that all of these colours, textures and sounds create a sense of tangibility, one that instils a desire to engage the senses of taste and smell. In constructing the scene as a sensorium, in addition

¹² Here, the use of grace is apt, as even Dr Lecter’s body is only clothed in grace and dignity through gestures and practices.

to the deliberate use of time and stages of cooking, the main ingredient is aesthetically elevated along with the rest of the dish – flesh is eroticised.

4.4 Season 2 Episode 1, *Kaiseki*.

Kaiseki, as Dr Lecter points out, is the “Japanese art form that honours the taste and aesthetic of what we eat” (Fuller 2013-2015). This episode offers one of the densest images, one that speaks to almost all of the elements that contribute to the eroticization of flesh.

While under hypnosis with Dr Bloom, Will attempts to recover a memory that would prove how Dr Lecter had framed him for murders he didn’t commit. During his state of hypnosis, Will finds himself seated at the end of the dinner table in Dr Lecter’s dining room, elaborately decorated and overflowing with a feast. The tablecloth is of a rich, quality fabric; fine crockery and cutlery are laid out; and large floral arrangements are set out between dishes. All the foods on the table seem to writhe, crack or rot in front of him. At the other end, watching Will intently, sits the figure of the Wendigo - “[Ojibwa *wintiko*, Cree *wihtikow*] refers to one of a class of anthropophagous monsters, “supernatural” ... who exhibit grotesque physical and behavioral abnormalities and possess great spiritual and physical power” – a Native American cannibal creature (Carlson 2009:337). On Will’s plate is a single human ear – the piece of evidence that ultimately convicted him.



Figure 15: “Wendigo feast”, *Hannibal* Season 2 Episode 1, *Kaiseki*. 2014. Screen shot by author.



Figure 16: “Feast”, *Hannibal* Season 2 Episode 1, *Kaiseki*. 2014. Screen shot by author.

The first symbol is that of the elaborately decorated dinner table with the fine cloth – a symbol of cultural capital and economic capital (Bourdieu 1996: 23). This display of cultural capital elevates the almost excessively decorated table to an aesthetic level – not simply to be garish, but to be deliberately overflowing, eroticizing and elevating the presence of the cannibal symbol. The ear on Will Graham’s plate, here, is an identifiable marker of the human animal body – therefore – the dismantled ‘face’ that carries with it the connotations of grace (Agamben 2011:67; Deleuze 2003:15). As such, the presence of human flesh and the reference to cannibalism – i.e. the reference to consuming human flesh – at a feast table, eroticizes this practice in that it not only involves the transgression of the taboo

on cannibalism, but frames this practice as a classificatory one that forms part of a higher class disposition (Bataille 1986:72; Bourdieu 1996:170).

4.5 Season 2 Episode 2, *Sakizuke*

In *Sakizuke*, as in all other episodes, the circles in which Dr Lecter and Will Graham move are very cultured. Everyone is always formally dressed, well mannered, well-spoken and appropriate. The dialogue between characters are very verbose, jargon laden, metaphorical and filled with scholarly and cultural references. As such, flesh is placed within the context of class, as has been previously noted.

Dr Lecter tracks down the killer Roland Umber, who has created a human colour palette in order to construct a mural in the form of a human eye. This eye was crafted at the bottom of a silo in a corn field, which Dr Lecter looks down on through the opening at the top of the structure. Dr Lecter, flattering the killer and creator of the eye, convinces him that his own body should be the centre piece of the work and stitches his body into the centre of the mural. Dr Lecter removes Umber's leg.



Figure 17: "Finishing touches", Hannibal Season 2 Episode 2, *Sakizuke*. 2014. Screen shot by author.



Figure 18: "The eye", Hannibal Season 2 Episode 2, *Sakizuke*. 2014. Screen shot by author.

When Dr Lecter prepares Roland Umber's leg, he provides an example of the dismantling of the face. He removes the foot, an identifiable marker of the human animal body, which he throws away. He further cuts the leg into smaller sections, removing the identifiable shape of the human animal leg. The result is that these cuts of leg can pass for the leg of a non-human animal body, therefore, as meat. Again, Dr Lecter's culinary processes are accompanied by a piece of classical music, creating a sense of theatricality and precision, in addition to class references. I would argue that it is through these careful practices that meat becomes flesh once more, eroticizing it through through the varied procedures, delicate placement of the flesh on the serving dish, appropriately setting the table (even for one), complimenting the gastronomic centerpiece through the frame in which it is presented.



Figure 19: "Butcher", Hannibal Season 2 Episode 2. Sakizuke. 2014. Screen shot by author.

When Will Graham looks at the body of the killer stitched into the centre of the mural, he takes a moment to look up, where he sees the figure of the wendigo. The symbolism in this image suggests that they eye looks into the heavens, toward God, who holds knowledge. Again, situating Dr Lecter, who is represented by the wendigo figure, as a deified being in possession of knowledge and power that elevates him above other human animals. This idea can further be corroborated by Taylor's (2010:75) arguments that in eating other species, human animals establish their superiority. If Dr Lecter eats of his own species, then he elevates himself above even human animals, therefore, he deifies himself through cannibalism. This classificatory practice does not only establish his superiority in class, but also in taste. In Episode 12 of Season 2, when Mason Verger feeds parts of his face to Will's dogs, Dr Lecter says to Will, "He's broadened their palates, as I broadened yours". This suggests that *Hannibal* (Fuller 2013-2015) does not only position cannibalism as a practice of sophistication, but also a judgement or taste that constitutes a certain calibre of cultured person. Therefore, in this mural, flesh is tied in with ideas food, art, religion, knowledge, class and taste, in a single moment.

4.6 Season 2 Episode 6, *Futamono*.

Judgement seems an accurate theme for this episode, a divine judgement, one that Dr Lecter passes on those he deems beneath him. As has been identified in previous episodes, there is a clear deification of Dr Lecter that positions him as God in a very Biblical sense since the television series itself is rife with Christian references.

Will Graham provides an apt summary of Dr Lecter's judgments, when he says to agent Crawford that "[T]he ripper kills sounders of three of four ... [and] eats his victims because they're no better to him than pigs". This indicates a clear judgement from Dr Lecter of his victims, one that establishes his superiority over them, which he views as sounders of pigs.

Another instance of Dr Lecter's judgement is identified by agent Jack Crawford, when they find Tree Man (figure 20). There is a lovely hallucinogenic-style montage of flowers blooming, pushing out of the ground and opening their petals, followed by the image of a man, grafted into a tree, his abdomen filled with a bouquet of flowers. The organs that have been taken from the body of the victim are each replaced with a bunch of poisonous flowers. Jack Crawford identifies the use of poisonous flowers as the killer's judgement of the victim.



Figure 20: "Tree man", Hannibal Season 2 Episode 6, Futamono. 2014. Screen shot by author.



Figure 21: "Poisonous flowers", Hannibal Season 2 Episode 6, Futamono. 2014. Screen shot by author.

The floral motif is carried throughout the episode. When Dr Lecter writes the sheet music for a composition on the harpsicord (an instrument with aristocratic, bourgeois references), singular flowers blossom from the notes he writes down. This image becomes symbolic of the delicacy and artistry in all of his work. Everything that Dr Lecter creates is imbued with taste and beauty. Another floral image comes in the form of a prosciutto rose, carefully positioned on a melon cube. The composition of each of the canapé's is deliberate and aesthetically pleasing. I would argue that in this manner, Dr Lecter creates the desire through his adornment of the tabooed object, eroticizing it and setting in motion the transgression and acquisition of knowledge.



Figure 22: Prosciutto and melon, 2014. Hannibal Season 2 Episode 6, Futamono. Screen shot by author.

In addition, the manner in which Dr Lecter handles the flesh is so delicate and gentle that it almost seems respectful, caring or even loving. When preparing a cut of meat, Dr Lecter removes a business card that coincides with the meat he will prepare. By putting a name to the meat, he starts his process of reanimating it back into flesh. Since it has been pointed out that he views his victims as no better

than pigs, I would argue that through the finesse of his culinary practices, he takes sinful pieces of meat and bestows upon them the grace that they were meant to have, becoming flesh once more.

This episode is a symbolic example of Dr Frederic Chilton's assertion that "[c]annibalism is an act of dominance. [The Ripper] is attracted to medical and psychological fields because they offer power over man" (Fuller 2015). Once again, this episode demonstrates the sophistication and class that *Hannibal* (Fuller 2013-2015) associates the cannibalistic practice, through symbolism, with aesthetic and theological concepts.

Conclusion

This study set out with the aim of identifying symbolic moments that indicate an eroticization of flesh in the television series *Hannibal* (Fuller 2013-2015). In the analysis chapters, there are clear indicators of taboo, transgression, class, aesthetic, deliberate use of time and artistry that eroticizes flesh for the viewer, in that a gustatory and (arguably) an intellectual desire is stimulated for the consumption of human flesh. Further, these same indicators position the practice of cannibalism as a classificatory practice that serves as a marker of class and taste.

There is lovely ambiguity in the use of taste here, as it not only refers to classificatory judgments (the appreciation of cultural aesthetic), but also quite literally the taste of human flesh. This leads me to identifying the shortcomings of the study, which include, among others, an analysis of the third and final season of *Hannibal* (Fuller 2015). One of the biggest implications of the series finale on my current study comes from the title, *The Wrath of the Lamb* (Fuller 2015). In a recap of the episode, Adam Lehrer (2015:[o]) notes that there has been the belief that Dr Lecter strived to turn Will into a serial killer, but really, all Dr Lecter wanted for Will was to embrace his true nature. “Hannibal sees Will as a compassionate but violent avenger of the innocent, and that is exactly what Will Graham became in this episode” (Lehrer 2015:[o]).

The title is taken from Revelations 6:16, which says that “The Wrath of the Lamb” is to be seen at the end of days – Armageddon – when God, with Jesus (the Lamb) by his side, would destroy the sinful world. If the title likens Will Graham to Jesus Christ, then Dr Lecter is God in the metaphor. There are two possibilities, if this metaphor is considered alongside the closing scene of the final episode of the series, where Will and Dr Lecter embrace after killing The Red Dragon and, it would seem, Will guides them off the cliff. The first possibility is that The Lamb turns his wrath away from the ‘kings of the earth’ and onto his Father, in order to spare the innocent from His wrath. The Other possibility is that the lamb aligns with one of God’s angelic sons, Lucifer, in challenging his Father. To further a suggestion from my current research – Eating becomes the gateway to sin and knowledge, but knowledge is also the gateway to the end/destruction.

Will Graham knows that he has eaten human animal flesh at Dr Lecter’s table, therefore, he has knowledge of good and evil and the body as Dr Lecter (God figure) does. Once again, I will mention Taylor’s (2010:75) statement that humans establish their superiority through the instrumentalization of other species, especially for food. If humans eat of their own species, then arguably, they deify themselves, as Dr Lecter has. If this self-consumption continues, then humans would ultimately cease to exist. The species would, for lack of a better word, implode.

If this is taken to be true and cannibalism is considered as a metaphor for art as self-consuming, it could mean that in creating art (which is a consuming and regurgitation of other art), artists gain knowledge of the end of art itself. Artist will turn on their work because they know the truth about its substance/nature; they realize that what they create isn't truly theirs, therefore it is nullified, causing art to implode and cease to exist. The Armageddon of Art will come to be.

The ideas considered above, provide opportunities for further research. There is much to engage with on the idea of art as self-consuming. Further, there are many sources, which might provide an entry point into a further study of flesh and the human body in relation to gastronomy and class – some of these include Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* (2004) and a more in-depth consideration of Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique on the Judgement of Taste* (1996). These sources, a deeper consideration of the artworks (as installation works) in the television series, as well as Season 3 of *Hannibal* (2015) will provide many possibilities for a future study.

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