

A Banquet for Ultra Bankruptcy: Desire*Flow*Inhibit

“There is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things... This I call Fetishism...of commodities” Carl Marx, Capital Volume 1 Chapter 1 (1867)

We are bankrupt. To celebrate this, artists Simon Davenport and Carl Rowe will hold a banquet; a banquet at which the tangled remains of imperialism will meld with the ghostly tastes and odours of its past glorious era. The olfactory senses, cloaked in nostalgia, will be guided through the darkness by new sounds and perfumes, new tastes and vibrant imagery. At this banquet the inertia of the past will be released by sensory triggers, sparks deep in the cortex, striking at the core of torpor.

Davenport and Rowe’s event *A Banquet for Ultra Bankruptcy* is essentially a revisiting of the Futurist banquets as they are described in the manifesto *La Cucina Futurista* first published by FT Marinetti and Fillia Colombo in 1930. Though ultimately flawed by the Fascist undercurrent of irredentism, the essence of the manifesto is a sensual and aesthetic elevation above the corporal, a notion that remains worthy of consideration. Politically as well as poetically driven, the Futurist’s renewed cuisine theoretically replaced the need for satiation with a more holistic embracing of all the senses. Decoupling the politics in a reading of the *La Cucina Futurista* results in a context that is curiously at odds with our current economic and political situation, one that becomes more apparent through *A Banquet for Ultra Bankruptcy*.

In *A Banquet for Ultra Bankruptcy*, the complexities of aesthetic stimuli along with current political and economic consequences have been combined, resulting in a reference to the milieu of contemporary world affairs. Here the bankruptcy is both fiscal and moral, hinting at global concerns and social dangers. The conflation of desire, power and commerce has its origins in the earliest civilisations and the corruption of these societal stimuli lie at the centre of eventual collapse. Where desire brings about an impulse and consequential action, there is a confusion of the senses opening up a vulnerability to persuasion. The logical guiding mechanisms can easily be re-routed by external stimuli in order to implant an unsanctioned action. Advertisers know this well and exploit our weakness for naturally seeking pleasure.

Salivate (2008), an earlier collaboration between Davenport and Rowe (and four other filmmakers) engaged with this notion of desire and coercion by making a work specifically for a commercialised public space. *Salivate* was a video screen projection in a vacant city centre shopping complex, comprising

films depicting beguiling, sensuous, aesthetic, intriguing, amusing and mesmerising subjects. The title *Salivate* was a reference to Anthony Burgess's novel *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) and furthermore to Pavlov's experiment with dogs. As a project, it also derived a theoretical context from B.F. Skinner's research into behaviour and *operant conditioning* the findings of which were published in 1959 by Cambridge MA. In the press release for *Salivate* Rowe and Davenport write:

"The spectacle of Salivate then becomes Pavlov's bell, ringing out amid the concrete walkways and steel shutters of the urban run, selling desires and thoughts rather than mass-produced commodities."

Davenport and Rowe (2008)

A Banquet for Ultra Bankruptcy expands on the synthesis of stimuli and actions explored in *Salivate*. As a performance, it attempts to model the confusing context of contemporary living and test the pliability of its participants (or dinner guests), thus inviting aesthetic-cultural-political-economic synaesthesia. There are six courses served at the banquet, each course designed as an aesthetic experience, awakening the mind from amnesia. The olfactory and visual senses are engaged in what Davenport and Rowe term a *symphony of epicure*, after which all senses are stimulated through a series of contradictory external stimuli such as poetry, the unleashing of gases and unfamiliar gestures. These are of course the methods and mechanisms adopted by Marinetti and the Futurists in their various banquets. But what Davenport and Rowe attempt is a contemporary deployment of Futurist rules, testing the situation of postmodernism and neoliberalism; connecting and synthesising a response through a heightened aesthetic awareness.

Expunging the politics from Marinetti's work, *La Cucina Futurista* offers a reassuring affirmation of the emotional capacity for mankind, over and above the need for unabated consumption. Consumption of food is of course a critical function in any living organism. Living organisms must convert energy into cell production and procreate before the forces that hold those cells together collapse; otherwise the flow of organisms is halted. In simple terms, biologically speaking we are tubes, complex albeit. To contemplate anything beyond this requires an elevated view of our role in nature. In response to Darwinian theory, Julian Huxley puts it succinctly by stating: "*Nature is not a mechanism, but a process. To define man's place in nature, we must discover what situation he occupies in the process*". Consumption is part of the mechanism, a state that we reach beyond in order to express our interaction with externality. This ultimately leads us to consider the body as machine and consciousness as part of the mechanism that responds to the process.

The Freudian construct of the pleasure principle, the instinctual force that guides us towards reward, would seem to offer a feasible reason for our inexorable drive forwards. Assuming the reward for consumption is further forward movement, without purpose, the desire is for desire itself. Gilles

Deleuze and Félix Guattari undertake to answer this notion of desire through their conflation of Capitalism and Schizophrenia in their book *Anti-Oedipus* (1984). They present us with the *Desiring-machines*, the endlessly mutable production of bodies that attach themselves to other bodies, a situation that Deleuze and Guattari refer to as *connective synthesis*. The synthesis of desire and consumption that fuels capitalism relies on a flow of production and a continuous, varied, enticing, exotic series of interruptions. So, Deleuze and Guattari's "either...or...or" forces the "and then" to submit to a bewildering array of possibilities resulting from capitalistic commodity fetishism.

Money becomes the driving force, the love of money, the fetishizing of capital and the negation of production or return. Michael Foucault in his preface to *Anti-Oedipus* argues the work as a model for anti-Fascism, to break with the innate desire to exploit labour for surplus capital. In a postmodern context, this is even more apparent in the exploitative mechanisms of neoliberal policy. In his book *Hopes and Prospects* (2010), Noam Chomsky writes "...*there are rich consumers, few in number, but disproportionate in the gigantic slice of income and consumption they take.*" For those people, the love of money has become the root of evil; their capacity for aesthetic fulfilment outstripped by the force of flow.

A Banquet for Ultra Bankruptcy will create a series of microtopian moments of complete absorption, allowing its dining guests to escape the gravity of indolence and to occupy instead a space of sensory wonder. It will entice the participant away from the need for satiation and replace that with the embrace of the unexpected, of life affirming, open-eyed wakefulness.

"It is not by chance this work is published during a world economic crisis, which has clearly inspired a dangerous depressing panic, though its future direction remains unclear. We propose an antidote to this panic a Futurist way of cooking, that is: optimism at the table" FT Marinetti La Cucina Futurista 1930.

Carl Rowe 2013

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