Justyna Kociatkiewicz / Laura Suchostawska /
Dominika Ferens (eds.)

# Eating America: Crisis, Sustenance, Sustainability

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eating and apocalypse, America's being indigestible to contemporary immigrants, and cannibalism as a trope in many critiques of the American status quo. The fourth section offers the literal and metaphorical treatment of sustenance and its cultural significance which makes it impossible to limit sustenance to basic life-supporting nourishment. The last section focuses on the problem of sustainability, the strategies and techniques used to protect and ensure survival in the contemporary United States.

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# Introduction: Prolegomena to any Future History of Indigestion in America

*Zbigniew Białas*

There are, basically speaking, two major models of the body and its boundaries. One – that of a classical man, an eccentric detached body, "a walker in the world but apart from it" (Solnit 21), the classic image of the finished, self-sufficient man. The borderlines separating him from the outside world are sharply defined. On the other hand, there is the grotesque man, incomplete, open, not separated from the rest of the world by boundaries but blending with it - the body outgrowing itself and transgressing its own limits.[1] The latter is, of course, a Bakhtinian approach. Bakhtin maintains that at the time of the Renaissance bodies could not yet be considered for themselves; they still transgressed the limits of their isolation. The caesura seems to be the epoch of great geographical discoveries. The formula of the classical man cannot be maintained in all seriousness because whatever acts of the bodily drama do take place – whether before the discovery of America or after it – they take place on the confines of the body and the outer world.[2] Travel, colonisation, an encounter with the new world, just like any other encounter, are primarily contracts between the traveller's body and what is beyond it. There are different theories in relation to it, but whichever theory we wish to adopt, eating is a case in point - here the external world gains entry into the body. In the act of eating and digesting, the body most obviously transgresses its own limits. Bakhtin pointed this out succinctly: "[the body] swallows, devours, rends the world apart, is enriched and grows at the world's expense. The encounter of man with the world, which takes place inside the open, biting, rending, chewing mouth [is where] man tastes the world, introduces it into his body, makes it part of himself" (Bakhtin 281). In fact the situation is much more complex because it entails not only the question of the "input" of the world into the body but also, just as importantly, the "output" of the body into the world.

We should perhaps start from the very first literary representations of travel. One of the most famous travellers in Western culture was also a notorious liar and trickster; although fictitious, he was nevertheless formidably myth-forming. Odysseus, confronted with the Cyclops' monstrous body, denies his own corporeality, his flesh-ness. "Nobody is my name, Nobody they call me," insists

1 See: Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, pp. 23-25.
2 See for example Bakhtin, p. 317.