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# The Candy Project: the re-enchantment of candy in a liquid world

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**Abstract:** Sugar consumption has become an extremely serious problem, especially since its incorporation into every type of food not only those considered to be sweet culturally. This is not exclusively a health problem but also a gastronomic one, since this “invisible sugar” is perceptible by the stomach but not by the senses. Sugar’s ubiquity has led to its demonization. The consumption of candy has been one of the victims of this process. A social image of “empty calories”, or food without nutrients, has been built up around it. In this article I want to emphasize what this “medicalized” image of candy leaves out: the social, imaginary, nutritional and gastronomic potentialities of this form of alimentation. It is true that since sugar became invisible we have no understanding of its power. But by focusing solely on negative aspects we overlook the potentiality of candy as, amongst other things, vehicles for nutritional socialization and education in taste. Redeeming candy thus involves changing the social imaginaries associated with it. This new imaginary is largely emerging in the field of Internet and the new technologies.

**Keywords:** sociology of food, gastronomy, candy, social imaginaries, consumption

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*The Candy Project. Le réenchantement de la sucrerie dans un monde liquide*

**Résumé:** La consommation de sucre est devenue un problème extrêmement grave, surtout depuis son incorporation dans tous les types de nourriture et non seulement ceux considérés comme culturellement sucrés. Ce n’est pas exclusivement un problème de santé mais aussi gastronomique, puisque ce « sucre invisible » est perceptible par l’estomac, mais pas par les sens. L’omniprésence du sucre a conduit à sa diabolisation. La consommation des bonbons et d’autres friandises a été l’une des victimes de ce processus. Une image sociale des « calories vides », ou de la nourriture sans nutriments a été construite autour d’elle. Dans cet article, je tiens à souligner ce que cette image « médicalisée » des bonbons laisse de côté les potentialités sociales, imaginaires, nutritionnelles et gastronomiques de cette forme d’alimentation. Il est vrai qu’une fois le sucre devenu invisible nous n’avons aucune compréhension de sa

puissance. Mais en nous concentrant uniquement sur les aspects négatifs, nous négligeons la potentialité des friandises qui sont, entre autres, des véhicules pour la socialisation et l'éducation nutritionnelle au goût. La rédemption des sucreries implique donc de changer les imaginaires sociaux qui leur sont associés. Ce nouvel imaginaire est largement émergent dans le domaine d'Internet et des nouvelles technologies.

**Mots-clés:** sociologie de l'alimentation, gastronomie, imaginaire social, sucrerie, consommation

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### Introduction

Are we what we eat? Or are we how we eat? What (the object) and how (the process) not only mark the limits of what we understand by alimentation, but also the way we approach it. While the social definition of alimentation – if one can speak of such a thing – has traditionally revolved around what we put into our mouths, i.e., around that transgression of frontiers between inside and outside that Claude Fischer called “incorporation”, the ritual and social aspects, everything surrounding food, is currently acquiring greater weight. This is probably because with sustenance guaranteed, our attention turns to contextual aspects that we did not previously notice.

Only when societies attain a certain level of material welfare and organizational complexity does gastronomy emerge as a system of norms that seeks to establish the social patterns of alimentation. Since eating became a subject of thought (Hamilton & Todolí, 2009), or better put, since an economic surplus made it possible to think about eating, creative cookery, together with research in questions of alimentation, nutrition and the technology of foodstuffs, has been the most self-conscious and reflexive part of the gastronomic field. It is what has taken the controversy around cooking the product, focusing on what, and cooking as a process, focusing on how, to its furthest extremes. These two approaches are the two great paradigms, not always well-reconciled, of contemporary cooking.<sup>1</sup>

This article sets out to make a research project, *The Candy Project*,<sup>2</sup> more widely known. This project emerged from the collaboration between a creative cookery restaurant and university departments of sociology and education in taste. The project aims to explain a phenomenon that is at once social, alimentary and gastronomic: the consumption of candy, in which the product (what) and the process (how), both of which are relevant, are articulated in an asymmetrical manner. I

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<sup>1</sup> The controversy between traditional cookery and creative cookery – also referred to as auteur cooking, techno-emotional cooking or molecular gastronomy – is a controversy between cooking that is committed to taking care of the product and cooking that is more committed to innovation in the forms of processing it.

<sup>2</sup> The following are participating in this project: Mugaritz Restaurant (the Basque Country, Spain), the University of the Basque Country (the Basque Country, Spain), Slow Food International and the University of Gastronomic Sciences (Piamonte, Italia).

speak of asymmetry because, given its deficient nutritional composition, when dealing with candy more emphasis is placed on its technical characteristics, for example, the quantity of sugar and sugar derivatives incorporated in it, than on the sociability and rituality generated around its consumption. Reference is made to the risks of consuming candy, but not to its potential as a vehicle for alimentary socialization and education in taste. In other words, reference is made to the power of sugar, but not to its potential. The paradox of this operation is that, as mentioned above, it takes place in reflexive societies that are sufficiently developed as to have become sensitive to dimensions of alimentation beyond mere sustenance. In questions concerning candy, then, “we have never been modern” (Latour, 1993).

Numerous questions arise around the phenomenon of candy. These have not received particularly rigorous study because, paradoxically, candy is so visible. It is so much to the fore that, as occurs with many socially structuring and scientifically interesting phenomena, it goes unnoticed. That is the epistemological challenge of *The Candy Project*: to scientifically and systematically study a phenomenon to which no interest is attached because it is of only marginal importance from the perspective of socially sanctioned and gastronomically regulated forms of feeding ourselves<sup>3</sup>. From the perspective of how, the process, and not so much what, the consumption of candy thus involves a way of eating that challenges the *a priori* values of gastronomy; it constitutes a stress test for socially accepted gastronomic standards since it challenges the underlying system of certainties. Given that according to some dictionary definitions it is a “short and light” foodstuff “serving more for taste than for sustenance”, the phenomenon of candy has not been approached with sufficient seriousness, except from the perspective of the sciences of alimentation and nutrition, fields from which it has been demonized due to the risks of every type it entails, above all for childhood. It is no accident that this stigmatization has taken the form of a process of *medicalized* construction of candy.

It is necessary to invert this stigma, even if only because candy is one of the essential assemblages (*agencements*) in the formation of taste and alimentary habits in the first stages of socialization. In this sense, it is very reductionist to evaluate it solely in relation to its organoleptic or nutritional characteristics, that is, as a product. If we wish to form a complete image, it is also necessary to take account of its processual facet, how and why it is consumed: its multiple social uses, both expected – playing, rewarding, entertaining, etc. – and unexpected, for example, familiarizing children with money and (micro)economy in the epistemological meaning of the term *oikos nomos*: management of the domestic patrimony. If we do not proceed in this way, candy will continue to be considered a product without a process, a what without a

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<sup>3</sup>The research was largely based on the exploitation of an open access online survey (available at [www.thecandyproject.org](http://www.thecandyproject.org)) in which participants were asked about various issues related to sweet consumption: technical, organoleptic and nutritional aspects; the micro-economy generated around sweet consumption; memorabilia and other emotional aspects; and, finally, the production of semiotic, social and cultural imaginaries. Since the text has an eminently speculative character a rigorous statistical analysis of the data obtained was not conducted. The paper, therefore, seeks to provide a sociological interpretation rather than statistical representativeness.

how, or, in short, a product that is no more than an “industrially processed” foodstuff aimed at compulsive, decontextualized ingestion that is highly dangerous due to the high doses of energy without nutrients it provides.

In any case, this growing awareness of the process, of “ways of eating”, makes it clear that the real revolution in candy has yet to arrive. The principal revolutions of modernity have taken place on a small scale, we could say on a fractal scale: the revolution of the atom in physics; the gene in biology; the bit in computing; and more recently the pixel in the visual arts. Setting differences aside, why not speculate – now that we are starting out on this narrative to redeem candy – that the revolution in the field of food will also take place on a small scale<sup>4</sup> and that candy, and forms of eating micro-doses in general, will be some of the precipitants of this revolution? It is possible that beyond its process of stigmatization, candy is giving advance notice of a post-conventional and gastronomically challenging way of eating.<sup>5</sup>

*The Candy Project* sets out from this premise. It is a project that challenges pre-conceptions about candy and seeks to dignify it: to invert or neutralize the accusation of negativity levelled at it and thus exploit its potentialities. The challenge of the project lies in making the proactive facet of candy prevail, its function – why not? – as a vehicle of sane, balanced and sustainable alimentation. In this sense, candy becomes a crucial tool of alimentary literacy. Well used, it is more a technology of alimentation (a process) than a foodstuff properly speaking (a product). Or a product whose principal ingredient is not so much what it contains as processed food, but its process, the way it is eaten.

### 1. Consumption of candy as a state of nutritional exception

My starting point is the hypothesis that a state of nutritional and gastronomic exception is emerging in global societies. Candy, its production and consumption, is a clear symptom of that insofar as it expresses a double vacuum. Candy could be expressed through the following algorithm: eating empty calories in places empty of sociability.

In the first place, from the perspective of its condition as a product, it is considered to be empty calories, energy without nutrients. Thus, candy as a paradigm of processed food is, as Michael Pollan warns, hyper-cooked food: “If any form of cooking makes foods easier to absorb by the human body, when they are processed the tendency is to take all the fiber out of them and increase the rhythm at which they can be absorbed. That processing is centered on sugars and other compounds that are very easy to absorb” (Pollan, 2014, p. 3).

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<sup>4</sup> Nutrigenomics and molecular gastronomy already point in this direction.

<sup>5</sup> The chef Ferrán Adrià usually insists that *tapas* are the great innovation of Spanish cooking. The menus of creative cuisine restaurants no longer mention dishes, but mouthfuls, sequences and other terms that allude to food based on micro-doses.

In the second place, from the perspective of process, the social situations, the space-times favorable to the consumption of candy are the so-called non-places (Augé, 1993) or *empty meeting grounds* (MacCannell, 2007). If, as Michael Pollan says, candy has its fiber extracted to facilitate its ingestion, sociability is removed from the social contexts where candy is consumed in order to multiply and accelerate consumerism. This is because, to force the analogy a little, it can be said that sociability is the fiber of social life, protecting us from what Jürgen Habermas called the “colonization of the life-world” by accelerated systemic logics.

Concerning candy, I am thus speaking of compulsive, solitary consumption lacking in social meaning, of calories without nutrients. I will now deal with the discursive construction of this close link between candy (empty food) and non-places (time-spaces empty of sociability) that sets the parameters for evaluating this form of alimentation.

#### 1.1. *Empty calories: the medicalized construction of candy*

Candy has recently been subjected to a type of medicalized construction. There is a lot of scientific and medical evidence which leads to analysis of the power of sugar and candy being directed at their facet as a product. Candy is profiled more as a pernicious alimentary and nutritional product than as a social/ritual assemblage. This evidence forms the basis for demonizing candy and for the policies of fear associated with it.

From the evolutionary perspective, the inclination of human beings for what is sweet proceeds, according to Desmond Morris, from their antecessor the primate: in spite of our strong carnivorous tendency, our simian lineage is expressed in a predilection for sugary substances (Morris, 2014). Throughout evolution, sweetness has played a role in human nutrition, helping to direct alimentary conduct towards food that provides energy and essential nutrients (Drewnowski, Mennella, Johnson & Bellisle, 2012). In this sense, a recent review of innate or acquired food preferences directed by Alison K. Ventura (2011) found that children’s taste for everything sweet is not only a result of current technology and advertising, as is often believed, but on the contrary reflects their basic biology. The liking for a sweet taste is, in short, innate and universal. Thus, babies and small children largely base their food choices on familiarity and a sweet taste (Jackson, Romo, Castillo & Castillo Durán, 2004, p. 1146). This same tendency can be observed, although less intensely, in individuals of all ages.

In general, all foods possess two dimensions that make them attractive to us: their nutritional value and their taste. In natural products, these two factors go together. For example, sugar in fruit includes fiber that makes it possible to mitigate its negative effects. However, in processed foods or foods produced artificially, as is the case with the candy that is most consumed, these two elements, taste and nutrients, can be found separated, which entails certain risks. Thus, comestible substances

lacking in value from an alimentary perspective can become extremely attractive by simply adding a little sugar to them. This is what normally happens with increasingly popular low fat foods. By removing the fat, the food acquires an unpleasant taste that is only rectified by incorporating sugars.<sup>6</sup>

Sugar therefore has two facets, occupying an ambivalent position in what Claude Fischler calls the omnivore's dilemma (Fischler, 1995). On the one hand, it is indispensable for the working of our organism. When we digest sugar, our organism attains a chemical balance and attracts certain nutrients, like minerals and vitamins. But, on the other, when consumed in excess, it increases calorie intake, removes hunger and reduces the ingestion of foods richer in nutrients, which can favor an unhealthy diet.

The final link in this chain of scientific evidence indicates that sugar, as happens with fat and other energy-dense foods, is also a powerful source of neurobiological reward: it provides sensorial enjoyment and more pleasure than other foods. This is called the *positive hedonic response* and is characteristic of both sweet foods and other addictive substances. In short, this body of scientific evidence leads to the conclusion that, in the words of Claude Fischler, "the biological appetite for sugar and the unlimited availability of this product form a critical amalgam, with the result that all the socio-cultural controls that could combine to regulate its consumption (...) disintegrate" (Fischler, 2010, p. 4).

In gastronomic terms, candy is basically a confectionary product that takes various shapes and sizes, and is composed of a solid paste elaborated with sugar, aromatized and colored by a generous use of additives. To speak of candy in nutritional terms is to speak of sugar in its most diverse and curious presentations and of numerous equally superfluous ingredients like gelatin, aromas, colorants and other additives: acidifiers, thickeners, jelling agents or taste enhancers (Zudaire, 2013). In short, according to its scientific-medical construction candy is a pathogen and basically superfluous:

a) Superfluous in terms of nutrition: it provides energy without nutrients; thus, if its consumption is frequent or excessive, it exhausts the reserves of nutrients (Ventura & Menella, 2011, p. 25).

b) Superfluous in terms of health: an association has been demonstrated between the consumption of candy and caries, putting on weight, poor digestion and abdominal swelling, greater risk of fungal infection, bacteria and parasites.

c) Superfluous in terms of alimentary education: in general, candy is so processed and has so many additives that it is far removed from what is natural, less processed and manipulated.

From the above, it follows that candy is empty food, that is, empty calories: fatty and sugared caloric bombs, an "industrial, nutritionally unbalanced foodstuff" (Jack-

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<sup>6</sup> This is what is known as "the bliss point": the amount of an ingredient such as salt, sugar, or fat which optimizes palatability.

son, Romo, Castillo & Castillo Durán, 2004, p. 1236), “junk food”, “hyper-cooked” food (Pollan, 2014), i.e., process (better put, processed) without a product. The corollary is that candy and the consumption of sugar in general is the epitome of deregulation and the cultural deficit in alimentation. In a word, *gastro-anomie* (Fischler, 1995), what I have called the state of nutritional exception.

Nonetheless, when it comes to evaluating candy the other side of the definition is often overlooked, that which says that apart from being a “short and light” foodstuff, candy serves more “for taste than for sustenance”. From this perspective, the most powerful dimension of candy is not the pathogenic dimension but that associated with pleasure. There is in this other dimension – which is not centered on the technical characteristics of the product but which refers to its potential for desire – a revalorization of candy in the sense that it is its ludic character and palatability that enable it to be understood, in its process dimension, as an efficient vehicle, even for obtaining nutrients. The component of its health value is thus reduced to a collateral effect. It is other functions, which we could call “socializing” or “libidinal” (desiring), that acquire preeminence: from integration into the peer group during childhood (adhesion to the group’s gastronomic norm), to the system of prizes and punishments since candy is a simple, much used and very pleasurable gift, and including the management of orality through knowledge of, and experimentation with, the mouth. In short, the palatability and the libidinal component of candy contribute to the reemergence of its socio-anthropological dimension in a context hegemonized by the construction of a scientific-medical discourse and the policies of fear associated with the latter,<sup>7</sup> which sketch a dystopian scenario characterized by the ubiquity of inexpensive, good tasting, super-sized, energy-dense food.<sup>8</sup>

### 1.2. *Empty places: candy as food for non-places*

Both the potentiality and the risks of candy are contained in the following phrase, which is a challenge to gastronomy as a social norm that regulates alimentation: “eat anything, anyhow, anytime, anywhere”. Thus, in questions of food, as in many other fields, geography and the seasons are no longer the space-time parameters that structure cultural patterns related to eating.

The French anthropologist Marc Augé has enjoyed great success, and not only in the academic field, with his notion of non-places (Augé, 1993). Stated synthetically, non-places are the typical spaces of late modernity. As the negative prefix indicates, non-places are defined by their lacks, as happens, incidentally, with candy; which is probably why they go so well together. They lack what characterizes places: identi-

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<sup>7</sup> Several documentaries have recently been produced that speak of the innumerable dangers of sugar: *Fed Up*, *The Secret of Sugar* and *Sucre: Comment l’industrie rend across are the most notable*.

<sup>8</sup> The film *Idiocracy* by Mike Judge is a hilarious dystopia about a deranged and tautological world in which idiotic citizens, governed by those who are apparently less idiotic, struggle to obtain the necessary doses of an energy drink that is rich in the electrolytes they need... to continue struggling to obtain that drink.



ty, memory and sociability (social relations). Place provides us with a memory, on which an identity is built, finally unfolding into a network of relations that sociologists of everyday life call the “life-world”. The social function of the life-world is to provide meaning to what we do on a daily basis.

Now, those who circulate through or inhabit non-places construct their “life-world” in a precarious way, since these spaces do not provide them with either memory or identity, much less with satisfactory sociability. In fact, to be able to operate in non-places, given that these are defined in purely functional terms, those who circulate through them must leave behind the heavy weight of their identity at the entrance, to thus *be what they do*; so that their identity is modelled according to the function they are performing (consumer, tourist, traveler, etc.) while circulating through the particular non-place.

The nutritional state of exception referred to above finds its chronotope or “natural” space-time in non-places. Candy would thus be the perfect food for a dystopian future: empty food for empty spaces; food lacking nutrients, empty calories, for social worlds that are empty of sociability. If, as Claude Fischler says, to incorporate food is to incorporate all or part of its properties on both real and imaginary levels, candy, bearing in mind its “medicalized” construction as empty food, is the perfect example of “incorporating a bad object” (Fischler, 1995, p. 69). It thus implies fear of a series of essential risks: not only a health risk, but also loss of identity, that is, of one’s “place” in the world, in the anthropological sense of Marc Augé.

In the field of alimentation, states of exception are gastro-anomic situations: they are not governed by any system of rules. By gastro-anomie one should understand the modern tendency towards making flexible the rules that govern “the everyday unconscious of culture” in questions of alimentation. As Fischler says, “amongst certain ‘atomized’ individuals who live in big cities, the traditional framing of behavior does not really make sense any longer (...) socialized, ritualized food, no longer finds its place unless it is inscribed in leisure time” (Fischler, 1995, p. 205). Viewed in such terms, the non-place of candy is a state of exception that permits everything, a no man’s land where, as Giorgio Agamben says, there are no crimes because there are no laws.

Likewise, states of exception are situations favorable to the production of *black boxes*. Candy, bearing in mind the deficit in regulation characteristic of situations of gastro-anomie, can be considered as a perfect example of an alimentary black box. When we allow external agents to process food, that is, to cook, it is easy to forget where the food comes from and the processes it has been subjected to. It is there, in the non-places of industrial production, where black boxes emerge, where food, once it has been transformed by the inventiveness of the scientists and technologists of alimentation, and wrapped or isolated in cellophane, loses its link with its *place* of origin as well as its identity. It is there, in the factory or the laboratory, where food is split off from its origin and acquires its new condition as a UCO: Unidentified Cooked Object. According to Michael Pollan, cooking, going to markets, cultivating

an allotment, etc., are “ritual reminders” of the place food comes from, the place where food is something “familiar”. However, the contemporary tendency is the opposite: an increasingly significant part of the population consumes food that is entirely produced out of its sight and immediate awareness (Fishler, 1995, p. 209); food produced in the black boxes of the laboratory and the factory, ready to be consumed in a compulsive and solitary way in the non-places of late modernity.

For those who see in it more of a risk than an opportunity, this is the new philosophy of candy, closely aligned with that sign of the times that has been called post-modernity: food loses its essence to the benefit of form; it lacks identity because it is de-territorialized, isolated in laboratories and on production lines; it is content and container at the same time; it makes no distinction between inside and outside; nor between copy and original, between natural and artificial. Candy concludes this terrifying sequence with its lack of distinction between taste and sustenance: as Fischler says, the beautiful and the good have been hidden definitively.

## **2. A world filled with sugar: candy in the porno-medicinal regime**

Candy – food that is so stigmatized it is not even considered as such; instead it is taken to be a non-food or an anti-food – is subjected to a Manichean dualism in these liquid times (Bauman, 2002). In the universe of candy we are witnessing a struggle between two paradigms or ideal types. On the one hand, on the declining side, we have traditional candy, which is loaded with rituality and integrated into a life-world that gives meaning to its ingestion, combining the dimensions of product and (social) process. At the same time, traditional candy favors an extraordinary candy-diversity, both from the perspective of its nutritional, morphological and organoleptic characteristics, and from the perspective of “ways of eating” and the rituality associated with them. On the other hand, on the emergent side, multinational candy makes its appearance: stigmatized candy because, while traditional candy was included in a place, this other candy is only conceivable in the framework of meaning of non-places, the de-ritualized and anonymous spaces of late modernity.

*Zero kilometer candy* would encapsulate the candy that corresponds to the (anthropological) place, since it evokes (articulates a memory), provides identity (it is my candy or my community’s candy) and makes possible a network of relations and a moral economy around its consumption. We are dealing with *gastro-nomic candy*. On the contrary, what I have termed multinational candy is the candy of non-places, candy designed for solitary consumption, decontextualized, ubiquitous and compulsive: “eat anything, anyhow, anytime, anywhere”, that is, *gastro-anomic candy*. As it is disconnected from childhood rituals and games and from the places of memory, multinational candy is, following the Manichean schema, “non-candy”.

Now, beyond anthropological or scientific-medical discourses, from the perspective of the imaginaries it activates, the most challenging aspect of candy is that it definitively breaks with one of the basic gastronomic precepts: the correspondence

between form and content. I will use an image from Terry Gilliam's film *Brazil*, a beautiful and hilarious dystopia released in 1985, to illustrate my argument.



**Figure 1.** Still from *Brazil* (T. Gilliam, 1985)

This photograph shows the dish the film's protagonist orders in a crazy restaurant of the future. On this plate one can see a radical split between the material (the real) and the image (the imaginary). The material is a shapeless, but nutritional mass, while the image is an obviously inedible photograph. Now, candy is precisely an edible photograph. Candy is the *Photoshop* of food, which is to say that sugar is the pixel of gastronomy. We are at a stage of development where food has become editing, pure design: *digital* food enabled by the possibility of endlessly molding sugars and fats, producing a radical split between form (container) and content. Anything can be a piece of candy and a piece of candy can be anything.

If this is so, new potentialities and paradoxes are opened up. Candy can only develop all of its potential once it has been uprooted from its place and from the coherence of form and content decreed by place. Only "non-candy" is susceptible to becoming functional candy, with all the benefits that this can provide to nutritional society and education in taste, for example making use of its plasticity to promote healthier consumption. It is only in non-places, probably in the non-place of techno-scientific production and critical design (Dunne & Raby, 2001), that candy can show its full potential. Here we once again encounter the constitutive ambivalence that traverses gastronomy in global societies: every new way of eating – for example, consuming candy – necessarily implies an anomic shift that uproots the foodstuff, de-territorializes it so to speak, because only in this way is it possible to imagine other functional variants that will certainly re-signify its consumption (if they are not already doing so).

In a recent work, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, Giorgio Agamben, referring to religious movements in the Lower Middle Ages, makes an interesting distinction between rule of life and form of life. The monastic movements proposed a change in the *rule of life*. Very much to the contrary, the spiritualist movements that renounced enclaustration – amongst which Franciscanism is the best-known – proposed a change in the *form of life*. Differences aside, the controversy around candy can be compared with this dispute between the monastic and the spiritual.

Changing the rule of life is the conservative answer, in the non-pejorative sense of conservationist. The *Slow Food*<sup>9</sup> movement operates in this imaginary: recovering *gastronomic meaning* through the recovery of the experience of the senses,<sup>10</sup> which are bloated by the dynamics of the accelerated life of late modernity. As its foundational manifesto states: “We are enslaved by speed and have all succumbed to the same insidious virus: *Fast Life*, which disrupts our habits, pervades the privacy of our homes and forces us to eat Fast Foods”<sup>11</sup>. In opposition to this universal whirlwind, the movement proposes a return to material pleasure, ensuring sensual pleasures that provide slow and prolonged enjoyment. “In the name of productivity *Fast Life* has changed our way of being and threatens our environment and our landscapes. So *Slow Food* is now the only truly progressive answer”, they conclude. For this movement, consuming candy is a stress test, if not an intellectual challenge.

Facing the rule “eat anything, anyhow, anytime, anywhere”, *Slow Food* opposes the counter-rule “respect the seasons of foods and the territory where they are produced”, the natural *place* and *time* of the food, it could be said, through the slogan “good, clean and fair”. With this aim *Slow Food* is organized as a movement that in a certain sense is the heir of the monastic tradition. It is formed by a global network of small communities, called *presidia*, aimed at education in taste amongst other things.<sup>12</sup>

Now, the strategy of *Slow Food* is formulated from a conception of society that is largely dying out. It is a model characterized by its national dimension, by the manufacturing economy that sustains the latter, and by a culture that, like a superstructure

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<sup>9</sup> A curious tension can be found in Italy concerning gastronomic imaginaries. While the father of futurism, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, stated in his manifesto on futurist cooking that heavy foods like pasta prevented Italian citizens from developing the speed and lightness required by modern times, *Slow Food*, a movement that also emerged in Italy, proposes a return to the sensorial pleasure of slowness to recover Italy’s gastronomic identity. In any case, such disagreements express Italy’s high level of alimentary self-consciousness.

<sup>10</sup> *Slow Food* has published a manual on sensorial education titled in a deliberately polysemic way “In What Sense?”

<sup>11</sup> Retrieved March 15, 2015, from <https://www.slowfoodusa.org/manifesto>

<sup>12</sup> Together with the *presidia*, the *bastions* are another form of articulation of *Slow Food*. Bastions are small-scale projects to help food producers to conserve their methods of work and their traditional products. Only 8 of the more than 400 bastions are dedicated to sweet products and none of them could be considered candy. Another of the institutions of *Slow Food* is the Ark of Taste whose aim is to elaborate a catalogue of alimentary products closely linked to specific communities and cultures that are in danger of disappearing. *Presidium*, Bastion, Ark are all an expression of what I term here the monastic paradigm.

or autonomous instance, adopts the form of domination or resistance, according to the case. In this context, gastronomy would be that culture with an eminently national character (the *presidia*, for example, continue to correspond to a nation-state structure), a type of normative corpus which struggles so that alimentation does not become mere “global cultural consumption”. In any case, we continue to speak of an economy of manufactured objects, whether candy or any other, which circulate as cultural goods and contribute to the accumulation of capital. Now, there is increasing evidence that in the *global culture industry* (Lash & Lury, 2007) cultural objects are now circulating “cultural entities” that escape from the intentions of their producers and take on their own dynamic. Since they acquired a reflexivity that was previously only attributed to individuals or social formations, they are things that mediate in social processes. The question, transferred to the subject I am analyzing, is not so much how we use that cultural object called candy, whether we do so with acceptable gastronomic (cultural) standards, but rather what candy makes us do. Candy is no longer a cultural object, but an assemblage properly speaking: a device that chooses us (in a certain way it eats us) and makes us do things. That is its power and its potential.

In this sense, the less conservative response to the candy controversy is provided by a change in the *form of life*, that is, in the scale of the problem that we face: the candy controversy must be approached at the “nanometric” level. It is necessary to act beyond alimentary bodies and regimes – what Foucault called anatomo-politics – or populations and communities – biopolitics – and change the dimension of the problem towards the nanopolitical level (Martínez de Albeniz, 2008). It is in this sense that candy can signify a revolution in the gastronomical imaginary. I am referring to candy as a crucial assemblage in the framework of the stimulants in which sugar has become ubiquitous and invisible. As occurs with invisible sugar, which we eat in our stomachs but not with our senses, there is a radical split at the nanometric or fractal level between the phenomenological – what our subjectivity experiences – and the systemic – the processes that are really taking place. Hence, from the political point of view, in the nanometric dimension, we are not practicing politics when we think that we are, and we are practicing politics when we think that we aren’t. This, the systemic level, is where *the politics of candy* functions, however counterintuitive the appearance of the words politics, system and candy in the same sentence might seem.

What must be made clear is that, having reached this point, it no longer makes any sense to speak in terms of individuals and societies (mediated by cultural systems). A change of perspective is imposed: the fractal dimension becomes relevant, the ubiquitous repetition of a minimal gesture (eating a piece of candy), and the systemic dimension, the unforeseen consequences (whether desired or not) of that infinite galaxy of gestures. Now, at this very instant, millions of people are putting a piece of candy into their mouths. It is not absurd to think that behind the accumulation of those gestures there are not only individuals who have chosen to consume candy; there is also, at the systemic level, a whole geopolitics of sugar and desire. It is only

through this change of scale that we can notice phenomena that were imperceptible from the more conservative logic of changing the rule of life.

As Claude Fischler rightly warned some time ago, since the end of the last century the massive growth in sugar consumption in Western countries has been based almost exclusively on the consumption of “invisible” sugar, the sugar that is introduced into prepared foods by the food industry. Such consumption would be imperceptible using our gastro-cultural distinctions (salty/sweet). Not so at the fractal scale, because it is at this scale, subliminally so to speak, that the sugared signal is perceived “in such a way that the biological mechanisms are activated without the social sensors being alerted, without the cultural codes and norms apparently being attacked” (Fischler, 2010, p. 10). The theory of fractals explains that reality changes according to the measure or scale at which it is observed. We must make the effort, however hard, to imagine eating at the fractal scale. That is where the most relevant changes are produced: atom, gene, bit, pixel...and candy.

From the gastronomic point of view, eating *fractally* might, for example, be to base one’s eating on snacks – that fractioned mode of alimentation based on multiple doses, constant nibbling, which escapes traditional socio-cultural parameters. Consuming candy would be the most developed version of this fractal food. Does this mean, as Fischler warns, that when we eat in that way, we are doing so without any type of structure or syntactic requirement? That the paradigmatic – the infinite capacity of selection – has been imposed on the syntagmatic – on gastro-culinary narratives or discourses? That communication has given way to the solitary pleasure of the masses? That what the Kantian enlightenment called the individual’s coming of age has given way to childish gluttony, to gastro-anomic childishness, in which candy is imposed on food? In which “the element converted into a fetish triumphs over the organized whole”? (Fischler, 2010, p. 11).

But fractality in questions of alimentation even goes beyond gastronomic patterns. The new social regime that has overcome the national-manufacturing order, a regime within which gastronomic imaginaries are admissible and operate comfortably, poses a new dependence with respect to sugar. Manufacturing societies formed the binary couple sugar/slavery, by means of which the expansion of colonialism occurred suddenly together with the globalization of the culture of sweetness. Since over two hundred years ago, and accelerating rapidly in the most recent period, sugar has become overabundant. World consumption doubled in the XX century.<sup>13</sup> In a world filled with sugar – in which, moreover, it is invisible most of the time (fractal and infinitesimal) – relations of dependence occur in a much more subtle way. It is as if not only other forms of eating were emerging (sugar), but other assemblages as well; as if instead of us choosing to eat sugar, we were chosen by it, which would make us into sweetened subjects.

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<sup>13</sup> “El mundo, inundado de azúcar”, Retrieved March 15, 2015, from [http://economia.elpais.com/economia/2015/03/24/actualidad/1427187838\\_040365.html](http://economia.elpais.com/economia/2015/03/24/actualidad/1427187838_040365.html)

The philosopher Beatriz Preciado argues in an original book *Testo Junkie* (Preciado, 2013, p. 33) that we are living in a new type of capitalism that is “hot, psychotropic, punk”, governed by a set of new micro-prosthetic devices that control subjectivity. The new “world-economy” no longer functions on a scale of individual/society, city/state or consumer/market, but on an infinitesimal scale (atom, cell and bits). I am referring to a sub-world inhabited by synthetic steroids, legal and illegal psychotropic substances, sign transmission based on computer bits, etc. This is a *plastic capitalism*, an infinitely malleable material that, like sugar, is capable of reproducing everything the world contains on the basis of joining carbon atoms in long chains, forming a parallel world, a sixth continent.<sup>14</sup>

In this new facet of capitalism, science and technology are achieving an extraordinary relevance thanks to their “material authority”, that is, their capacity to invent and produce artifacts. It is no longer classical science that discovers or describes, instead it is a techno-science that *produces* reality: “The success of contemporary techno-scientific industry consists in transforming our depression into Prozac, our masculinity into testosterone, our erection into Viagra, our fertility/sterility into the Pill, our AIDS into tritherapy, without knowing which comes first: our depression or Prozac, Viagra or an erection, testosterone or masculinity, the Pill or maternity, tritherapy or AIDS (...) The real stake of capitalism today is the pharmaco-pornographic control of subjectivity (...) and the entire material and virtual complex participating in the production of mental and psychosomatic states of excitation, relaxation, and discharge, as well as those of omnipotence and total control” (Preciado, 2013, p. 34).

Plastic, steroids, virtual communications... are all indications of the appearance of a new post-industrial (post-manufacturing), global (post-national), media regime that Beatriz Preciado calls “pharmaco-pornographic”. This is a regime that remained hidden in the Fordist economy and come into the open in the 1970s with the petroleum crisis. Just as happened with “invisible sugar”, which is nowadays the most-consumed form of sugar, it became evident that, beyond its consideration as a raw material or combustible, petrol also enclosed an invisible and ubiquitous dimension (in the production of plastic, for example). As Beatriz Preciado says, pharmaco-pornographic production is not based on quantitative preponderance, but on the fact that any of its “modes of production” takes the form of a molecular production of desire, which infiltrates and dominates every other form of production, from biotechnology to the culture industry and communications.

The following question immediately arises: If the pharmaco-pornographic regime is plausible, can it be imagined without sugar as the molecular production of desire associated with alimentation? There is in fact a family relationship between candy and the pharmaceutical field. It is no accident that some pharmaceutical companies have become candy producers and it is possible to read somewhere a genealogy of candy (probably apocryphal, but no less significant for that) which shows that it was

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<sup>14</sup> Retrieved March 15, 2015, from [http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isla\\_de\\_basura](http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isla_de_basura)

a pharmacist who had the idea of adding an aromatic substance used in cough mixture to chewing gum. In any case, in the pharmaco-pornographic regime we are facing a discursive production of candy that is very different from the medicalized version referred to above, which stigmatized candy as a mere pathogen. Candy is no longer construed in a gastronomic discourse that demonizes it; instead it is empowered, adopting the form of a desiring machine. “Give me a piece of candy and I will move the world” is the slogan guiding this new reality.

### 3. Candy crush or the dematerialization of candy in a liquid world

Such is the appeal of this desiring machine called candy, and so ubiquitous is its presence, that a lot of the candy we consume today is not even confectioned from sugar, but from computer bits. If there is one sphere where candy is being consumed lately on an enormous scale, it is in the non-place of mobile devices when we play *Candy Crush*. This game represents the dematerialization or definitive virtualization of consuming candy. *Candy Crush* makes it clear that candy is no longer only a product, a mere consumer good. It has literally been incorporated into the processes of subjectification, becoming a gesture in performative terms. This is candy in its mannerist phase: from ingestion we have moved to gesture; from the product to the process.

The number of issues of *Candy Crush* is superabundant. To give just one figure, its official website on Facebook had 74,927,316 “likes” when consulted on 28 March 2015. We are facing a game that is in a certain way iconoclastic, since its goal is to destroy pieces of candy. Now, as Bruno Latour has acutely noted with the concept of *iconoclash*,<sup>15</sup> what we destroy achieves its highest degree of visibility at the precise instant it is destroyed. Consequently, *Candy Crush* can be defined as an iconoclastic justification of candy.

What the game’s developers did was to set up the most simple and universal task possible – it’s a variant on tic tac toe – that anyone can take part in, from any device or place and at any time.<sup>16</sup> It is very much in line with the *imperialist* philosophy of candy: “eat anything, anyhow, anytime, anywhere”. In essence the game pursues the same goal as candy: to attain a ubiquitous presence by mobilizing what is most simple – that minimal, fractal, endlessly repeated gesture of eating or crushing a piece of candy. Before opting for candy – candy bombs, chocolate bombs, awkward jelly are the terrible adversaries the game’s sugary cosmogony presents<sup>17</sup> – the game’s

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<sup>15</sup> Latour, B. “What is Iconoclash ? or Is there a world beyond the image wars ?” Retrieved March 15, 2015, from <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/node/64>

<sup>16</sup> For example, the Vice-president of the Spanish parliament was “caught” playing *Candy Crush* while presiding over a session of parliament. Cfr. <http://www.elmundo.es/espana/2015/02/24/54eccf64ca47414a488b4579.html> Retrieved March 15, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> To get an idea of the sweet-toothed cosmogony of the game, the following are some of the different levels or sub-worlds that make up the game’s World One: Candy Town/Candy Factory/Lemonade Lake/Chocolate Mountains/Lollipop Forest/Easter Bunny Hills.



developers tested other stimulants, but “we found that candy was something that everyone could relate to because of their childhood memories. Pretty colors and forms are aspects that generate universal feeling. It was the best option”.<sup>18</sup> But the analogy with material candy does not end there. *Candy Crush* provides a strong feeling of satisfaction and overcoming, what I called a positive hedonistic response above. “These accomplishments are experienced as mini rewards in our brains, releasing the neurochemical dopamine and tapping into the same neuro-circuitry involved in addiction, reinforcing our actions”, as explained by Dana Smith, the science correspondent of the British newspaper *The Guardian*.<sup>19</sup>

*Candy Crush* gives a further twist to the imaginary of candy. The publicity spot of one of the game’s most recent developments, known as *Candy Crush Soda*,<sup>20</sup> shows two narrative elements that prove highly interesting. On the one hand, thanks to the freedom provided by fiction and the possibilities of digital technology, the spot consummates Fischler’s principle of incorporation – “we are what we consume” – when it transforms people, the passersby in a big city, into candy, that is, into candy-subjects. In the second place, as if it were ironically making Zigmunt Bauman’s powerful metaphor literal, the candy starts to dematerialize, becoming liquid, as can be seen in the following photograph.



**Figure 2.** Still from Candy Crush Soda’s TV ad

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<sup>18</sup> Tommy Palm, developer of *Candy Crush*, Retrieved March 15, 2015, from <http://www.abc.es/tecnologia/moviles-aplicaciones/20131115/abci-candy-crush-aniversario-150mil-201311142112.html>

<sup>19</sup> Retrieved March 17, 2015, from <http://www.theguardian.com/science/blog/2014/apr/01/candy-crush-saga-app-brain>

<sup>20</sup> Retrieved March 15, 2015, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9heY93Kxjo>

A very short time ago, the candy in the game made the leap into offline reality. A North American company marketed a real version of the digital candy from *Candy Crush*.<sup>21</sup> The commercial operation was a complete failure. *Candy Crush* is the collusion of two cultural revolutions that operate at the fractal level: the food revolution of candy and the imaginary revolution of the pixel; the joint assemblage of the new way of eating in micro-doses that candy introduced and the desiring potential of the cybernetic prostheses that produce subjectivity.

#### 4. Candy as assemblage: gastropornography and neo-rituality

Now, is there any turning back after *Candy Crush*? Is it possible to return to the “innocent” materiality of candy? What are the real consequences of candy’s digitalization? If candy was considered an empty food from the medical-scientific perspective, how should we consider this mannerist turn towards “really empty” candy consumption?

Manuel Castells (1997) has frequently insisted that if they are to succeed, movements of resistance to the system must be isomorphic with it. We can currently detect certain phenomena, many of them, paradoxically, on internet, that could well be indications of a clear desire to return to the materiality of food in general and candy in particular. These are small domestic neo-rituals, frequently adopting an obscene or object form, that have spread virally over the internet.

*Mukbang* is one of the most interesting cases. This consists of videos posted on Youtube in which certain individuals appear alone in their bedrooms, frenziedly eating in front of a camera. Some of these characters, called *youtubers*, have achieved extraordinary notoriety, to the point of charging to show themselves eating. A curious ritual-game has emerged in the field of candy and spread rapidly: the Harry Potter *Jelly Beans Challenge*.<sup>22</sup> Its origin lies in one of the sequences of the series of Harry Potter films where some candy appears in the form of jelly beans (Bertie Bott’s Every Flavor Beans) which have every imaginable flavor, both natural and artificial, with the specificity that some of them are repulsive – for example vomit or snot flavor. The game consists in tasting jelly beans, in a group and in front of a webcam, a type of Russian roulette using candy, and finding out the effect of the chosen piece of candy, whether it is pleasant or unpleasant.<sup>23</sup>

Is this a new form of gastropornography? I said above that these phenomena are obscene and I said this in the literal meaning of the term<sup>24</sup>: obscene is what lacks scenography, *mise en scène*, or translated into gastronomic terminology, *mise en place*. These neo-rituals – using uncontrolled orality that fuses swallowing with

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<sup>21</sup> Retrieved April 21, 2015, from at [http://www.teinteresa.es/ocio/caramelos-Candy-Crush-tiendas-golosinas\\_0\\_1036098232.html](http://www.teinteresa.es/ocio/caramelos-Candy-Crush-tiendas-golosinas_0_1036098232.html)

<sup>22</sup> Other variants have emerged like the “cinnamon challenge”, Cfr. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zsblJrbUsXU>. Retrieved March 17, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Retrieved March 15, 2015, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5wjXJL6ZwLk>

<sup>24</sup> Cfr. Jimenez Gato, F., (2008). “Pospornografía”, *Estudios Visuales*, 5, 96-105.

laughter, sobs and the use of language – seek to play or experiment with ingestion, moving on the frontiers of the mouth, between the inside and outside of the process of incorporating food. This is why compulsive eating is frequently seen, verging on binge-eating; food is shown while it is being ingested, and there are even scenes of provoked vomiting (there is always a plastic bag for vomiting into, should the jelly bean have an unpleasant taste).

Beyond their poorly articulated character, these examples are clear indications of the emergence of an online domestic neo-rituality associated with candy. It is no accident that many of these phenomena originated in Japan, a country that unlike many others, where rituality is disappearing, has not only maintained traditional rituals but also produced a new hyper-modern rituality. The novelty is that candy is no longer the center of the ritual, as in many traditional rituals in which it was present. These are not centripetal but centrifugal rituals, where virality and achieving as much notoriety as possible is their real *raison d'être*, and not eating candy in itself. Nonetheless, behind the abjectness of the images we see, what is being problematized, perhaps unconsciously, is the fact that the new gastronomic imaginaries in relation to both what we eat and how we eat are being resolved in ingestion, even in its most extreme and aberrant forms.

Yamashita and Kobayashi is a pair of Japanese artists, a type of post-modern version of Sisyphus, who have created a work that is very edifying in this sense. Their video<sup>25</sup> shows how they sit down together at a kitchen table day after day, in order to lick an enormous piece of candy until after many days they manage to make it disappear. The performance of these two Japanese artists should not only be interpreted as an ironic consummation of the ideas of *Slow Food*. It is also an attempt to re-enchanted or re-sacralize candy. Moreover, it is a reminder that, no matter how much the advisors on questions of sane alimentation insist, beyond the quantity of (visible or invisible) sugar contained by the product we consume, the solution to the problem of sugar also involves the process, insofar as ritual re-enchants what we eat, thus slowing down the speed of ingestion and attaining a restrained and responsible orality. This is a new way of consuming less sugar that is not based on what but on how. It is not based on reducing the quantity of sugar, but, through the ritualization of ingestion, it gives importance, relevance and social meaning – *aura*, in short – to what is devoured; thus avoiding compulsive consumption which makes any place, from the cellphone screen to the home, a non-place.

It is true that there is a symbiotic relationship between candy and ritual: ritual can do a lot for the consumption of candy by re-enchanting it; candy, for its part, given its social and imaginary appeal, is the perfect foundation for a return to rituality in societies that are fast losing it. Now, if there is one thing that these new uses of can-

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<sup>25</sup> Retrieved May 12, 2015, from <http://www.yamashita-kobayashi.com/works/candy.html>.

dy show, it is that the mouth is to all effects and purposes a ritual (and political) space; not because of what it says, but because of what it ingests.

I am referring to mouths that are not shy about showing themselves obscenely, almost pornographically, on our computer screens. In this order of things, candy is an assemblage of crucial importance. It is through the experimentation that candy provides, starting from childhood and accompanied by our peers, in conditions of a certain self-management and without being overseen, that we can learn what our mouth can do. This being so, it would not be amiss to apply standards of critical design in questions relating to candy: using cultural criticism to design prototypes that, beyond consumer or capitalist accumulation values, make the apparently banal gesture of consuming a piece of candy more reflexive. Because the true potential of candy lies in the fact that it is an assemblage that makes society. Not in the predictable, classical Durkheimian sense of *religere*, of uniting those who share candy, but in the more interesting and more controversial sense of creating situations that, provoking discomfort, activate what has been called “thinking about eating”. For better or worse.

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