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## *Eat the pain.* Food in the work of Marina Abramović

**Nikolina Skenderija-Bohnet**

IFK-International Research Center  
 for Cultural Studies, Vienna  
 University of Arts, Linz  
 skenderija-bohnet@ifk.ac.at

By radically using her body as an artistic medium, Marina Abramović managed to open up a new dimension in Performance Art. During her provocative performances, the Serbian artist has been pushing physical and psychological boundaries since the 1970s, turning herself into her own working material. While here early performances still included self-harming practices, such as scarring, flogging, self-freezing or even hitting herself against walls, Abramović later moved on to so called *Slow Art*; an art form more focused on meditative lingering, where the emphasis lies on the spiritual or esoteric moment.

In Abramović's whole oeuvre, eating plays an important role. She incorporates different aspects of food and eating (like cooking, the kitchen or groceries) into her artistic practice, without however turning the food itself into a work of art – she rather creates her art around the food. From 1979 up to today for example, a participative, several hour long work performance entitled *Counting the rice*, remains part of one of Abramović's workshop series, „*Cleaning the House*“, whose goal consists in enlarging the physical and mental boundaries of the artists, as well as the audience. With the help of these meditations, Abramović managed to forgo food for 16 days as part of her *Night Sea Crossing* performance.

Two others of Abramović's works from 1996 are characterized by an excessive interaction with food: during her video registration *The Onion*, Abramović under tears ingests a raw onion and for the multimedia-based art performance *Spirit Cooking*, she created a series of aphrodisiac recipes, written on the walls of the Zerynthia Gallery with pig's blood. Abramović again stressed the role of materials as such as part of her *Balkan Baroque* performance: at the Venice biennial arts festival in 1997, the artist sat on a large pile of cattle bones cleaning them for four days, with the intention of visualizing her memory of the then current situation in the Balkans.

The artist further worked on her childhood memories and experiences in a photo-series named *The Kitchen- Homage to Saint Therese* (2009), where she celebrates cooking as an important everyday ritual and the kitchen as a central place of her childhood. In her most recent documentary film about her search for spirituality and inspiration in Brazil (*The Space In Between*), Abramović investigates the role of food in modern society and underscores the vital importance of a responsible approach to food – its production, processing and consumption.

This question of the role of food in Abramović's oeuvre is going to be at the center of my presentation: what eating practices does the artist use to confront her personal past? What role does fasting play in Abramović's physical performance work? How does Abramović's approach to food and eating express her criticism of consumerism? What connection exists between Abramović's *Slow Art* and *Slow Food*? The role of women and sexuality can be construed as another important aspect of the use of food in her artistic work.

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**Nikolina Skenderija-Bohnet** has studied German studies in her homeland Bosnia-Herzegovina. After she had moved to Berlin, she finished her Studies in German Literature and Cultural Studies at the Humboldt University of Berlin. Since July 2016 she is a PhD candidate in Cultural Studies with the subject "On eating and being eaten. Death, Animals and Eating in the work of Elias Canetti." Currently, she is a Junior-Fellow at IFK- International Research Center for Cultural Studies in Vienna. Nikolina Skenderija-Bohnet has attended, planned and organized many workshops and conferences in the area of food studies, such as: Workshop: „*Hunger, Eating and Asceticism*“ at IFK- Summer Academy Vienna (August, 2016), CIERA Workshop: *La figure consommateur immigré en Europe*, Paris/Leipzig (2017), and Conference on „*Food and Migration*“ at IFK, Vienna (June, 2018). Publications: *Transforming the fat. Beauty and body practices of immigrant youth*. Brill Publishing, Leiden, 2019 (in preparation); *Tod, Tiere und Essen bei Canetti*.

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