

'on-fold worldly-cares' *Metrical Cookery* with Bill Griffiths

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ABSTRACT

This article closely examines Bill Griffiths' fugitive pamphlet *Metrical Cookery*, published through his Amra Imprint in 1991. Considering the anecdotes regarding Griffiths' diet, a sequence about cooking seems like a peculiar subject matter, but this article seeks to demonstrate that underneath the domestic exterior of the poems, the poet is in fact conducting a sociopolitical interrogation of the 'illogical' and 'arbitrary' premises of hierarchy and power, and ultimately presents a challenge to these systems of societal exclusion. This analysis is approached with reference to other Amra publications from 1991; Marx's concept of alienated labour; as well as studies into the social anthropology of cooking and eating. The article also makes reference to Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, along with briefer discussions of works by both Adorno and Bürger. Ultimately, the article suggests that the poems of *Metrical Cookery* are a refusal of constraints that is enacted through the familiarity of its subject matter, which allows Griffiths to explore – if only on an aesthetic level – alternative modes of solidarity and sociality.

KEYWORDS

alienation • autonomy • cooking • Bill Griffiths • small press publishing
• sociality

Preparing

The first chapter to Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (1983) begins with a provocative thought. It proposes that the history of our time is comparable to a cartoon character that believes it can fly only

until it looks down and sees the ground below; the subsequent crashing descent, for Vaneigem, is the encounter with the reality that is lived every day. In other words, the opening statements of his treatise characterize the history of thought as preoccupied with illusory and essentialist profundities, whereas the tools for liberation lie in what is most familiar. This is concretized in the closing statements of the chapter: to speak of revolution ‘without referring explicitly to everyday life, without understanding what is subversive about love and what is positive about the refusal of constraints’ (Vaneigem, 1983: 15) is equal to harbouring a corpse in your mouth.

The everyday is undoubtedly at the heart of Bill Griffiths’ *Metrical Cookery*, a pamphlet the poet published through his Amra Imprint in 1991. At first glance, the poems across the 24-page sequence appear primarily concerned with the pleasures of simple domestic tasks, specifically cooking. The book consists of 47 relatively short poems, primarily named after various dishes and food items. The poems are mostly formulated around the methods in which these foods can be prepared, cooked and consumed. With the exception of ‘Moretum’ – the first text of the pamphlet – the poems are arranged according to an alphabetical catalogue from ‘Apple Bakewell’ to ‘Zizganes’. There are times where the texts recall Virgil’s approach to a similarly domestic milieu; the minute details in which Griffiths describes the preparation of various recipes recalls the Latin poet’s attempts to see ‘the familiar’ Italian landscape ‘as though it were strange and wonderful’ (Jenkyns, 2004: 363). In fact, Doug Jones –¹ who compiled the bibliography of Griffiths’ publications for the Salt Companion published in 2007 – observes that ‘Moretum’ belongs to the tradition of Latin poetry ‘concerned with getting up in the morning and making breakfast’ (Jones, 2012: n.p.). However, while Griffiths’ attention to the rhythms of domesticity is clearly a part of *Metrical Cookery*, this seems somewhat incongruous in the context of the more casual discussions that were held during the colloquium on Griffiths at Northumbria University in January 2012.² Although the delegates who had known Griffiths personally remembered the poet fondly, there were very few anecdotes about his culinary achievements; more often, these stories referred to Battenberg cake and tea brewed in a microwave. This incongruity gives rise to the questions that form the point of departure for this article: why would Griffiths write these poems about cooking? And, perhaps more importantly, is there a way in which these domestic poems could be seen as—even the broadest sense—revolutionary? What forms sociality do these poems enact? To address these concerns, I will closely investigate examples from the pamphlet in order to indicate the various actions that are *carried out* within the poems; in doing so, I hope to demonstrate that underneath the deceptive domesticity of the work’s

exterior, *Metrical Cookery* is driven by the same socio-political commitments that are present in more renowned texts such as *The Cycles* or *War W/ Windsor*.³

Cooking

Methodologically, the trajectory I outlined above poses a certain predicament. By approaching *Metrical Cookery* through a close examination of the poems, a part of the project will remain beyond my reach. Of course, in some ways the entire project exists in a fugitive state. After the Amra Imprint publication, fragments of the sequence subsequently appeared in collections such as *The Mud Fort* (2004),⁴ but the pamphlet itself has practically vanished;⁵ today, it can only be accessed through specialist libraries and archives. Yet, there is an additional absence involved with *Metrical Cookery*. The subtitle to the work identifies it as a ‘performance text for two mouths or more’, but recorded readings of the sequence in its entirety appear unavailable.⁶ Furthermore, the text itself does not feature any clear directions for how it ought to be performed. Indeed, the only clear indication that Griffiths intended the work specifically for this medium is provided by the aforementioned subtitle. Therefore, despite the numerous physical descriptions of Griffiths during readings and performances – from his ‘powerful, slightly hunched body’ (Bush, 1997: 291) to his ‘assured, accomplished and erudite’ (Fisher, 2009a) demeanour – *Metrical Cookery* will not reveal this aspect of its design. Although the italics featured in a vast quantity of the poems seem to designate one possible method in which the performers could divide their duties, it would appear as if Griffiths wanted to leave this work as open as possible. Perhaps, like the preparation for Sacher Torte, the performance of these poems is meant to be ‘*improvisatory*’ (Griffiths, 1991c: n.p). Consequently, in the absence of documentation that could subject these ‘apparently non-graspable’ (Clausen, 2005: 15) events to new methods of interpretation and analysis, we must approach *Metrical Cookery* from a speculative, preceding space. To formulate this loosely in terms of an Austinian ‘illocutionary’ act – or the ‘performance of an act *in* saying something’ (Austin, 1975: 99) – the action of the pamphlet may be brought into being through the *act of reading*.

But what exactly is *carried out* within the work? In one of the few instances *Metrical Cookery* was mentioned in any supplementary discourse, Nicholas Johnson suggested that these poems are engaged with ‘mass culture’ (Johnson, n.d.: n.p). However, Johnson never elaborated upon the nature of this proposed engagement. As I indicated in the introduction to this article, the poems themselves appear – especially in comparison to Griffiths’ more erudite material – representative of a ‘simpler’ style the

poet claimed to deploy when he felt ‘a little more relaxed’ (Griffiths and Rowe, 2007: 185). As a result, the poems frequently contain humorous qualities, as ‘Tea’ ably demonstrates:

This applies
 boil water
 warm pot
To any blended
 infuse tea
 in a bag or pierced holder
Tea of Indian base
 2 minutes
 remove
Drunk breakfast or afternoon
 as you often are (Griffiths, 1991c: n.p)

Not only is detailing a ‘recipe’ for tea indicative of a playful tone, but additionally, the pun in the concluding lines turns the past participle of ‘drink’ to a state of inebriation. This joke is then extended with the following poem, ‘Tokaj’, which takes the Hungarian wine from this region as its central concern. In these sections, the sequence overtly demonstrates a sense of immediate enjoyment in its subject matter; an appreciation of the poem’s turn of phrase becomes comparable to the physical pleasures of culinary delights.

However, these jovial works designate only one of the multifarious features in *Metrical Cookery*. For instance, on close inspection, poems such as ‘Pasta’ suggest that Griffiths is simultaneously interested in preparing alternative commentaries:

Pasta is notable
 which is boiled
for its manufactured shapes and colours
 in copious water
like tubes and strands
 with salt
(what tiny, tiny, tiny threads
 and oil
the spiders hang on)
 till soft
and coloured shells and wheels
 (not too soft)
invented by Romans
 To make, take
strong flour
 or durum wheat (a semolina),
a spoon of oil
 and egg to mix,
stand / roll / stand / roll
 till translucently thin,

*then roll up and ribbon it,
and boil a few minutes
in salt-hot-water.* (Griffiths, 1991c: n.p)

Here, the two voices of the poem no longer operate in equilibrium. Instead, they are engaged in a duel, with the text in italics ultimately forming the substance of the poem. This torque is also carried out within the text itself. By the seventeenth century, the diachronic development of ‘manufacture’ had mutated its original sixteenth-century meaning of ‘making something by hand’ to also denote large-scale production by machinery. By contrast, ‘make’ is derived from the Old English *macian*, which shares its etymological roots with ‘match’. Therefore, the exchange carried out within the poem involves a struggle between the alienating mechanisms of large-scale industry and practices that describe a more equal and corresponding approach to work.⁷ In other words, Griffiths’ quotidian juxtapositions mirror certain broad developments in Marx’s critique of alienated labour; the ‘manufactured shapes and colours’ are presented as a power that is independent of the producer, who can only relate to these items as one would to an alien object. As a consequence, the text in italics serves as an attempt to reorient the labour of the poem so that it may become something other than a loss of reality.⁸ Therefore, the disequilibrium between the typographical modes of ‘Pasta’ enacts a temporary halt to the machinations of the dominant culture by generating a set of surprises in the cracks of its proprietary powers, whereby the gradual supersession of the roman typeface by the italics ultimately represents – to borrow from de Certeau – a subversion ‘from within’ that attempts to reappropriate ‘the dominant’ discourse to ‘another register’ (de Certeau, 1988: 32) in order to divert it without necessarily disengaging from it in its entirety.

It might be difficult to apply this reading to each individual poem in *Metrical Cookery*, but Griffiths frequently returns to expressions that are more or less isomorphic with this scenario. The making of an omelette, one poem claims, is ‘improved’ by ‘cooking [it] over wood’ (Griffiths, 1991c: n.p.), which calls to mind the hearth’s role as the ‘focal centre’ (Griffiths, 2006: 8) for the fifteenth century North-Eastern homes that Griffiths would subsequently study in *Stotty ‘n’ Spice Cake*. Similarly, after the instructions to ‘wash’ spinach and ‘dowse it with pepper’, another poem remarks that ‘only Popeye / uses tins’ (Griffiths, 1991c: n.p.), again contrasting the autonomy of *making* with the alien objects of manufactured goods. At times, the proliferation of these references feels almost tantamount to a peculiar kind of domestic atavism, but it would be inaccurate to read Griffiths’ attentiveness to traditional modes of cooking as an utterance of nostalgia. The final lines of the sequence reveal that another form of production is also at stake:

everywhere
 everything is growing
 sun-absorbent hot
 and wind-balletic
 and abundant,
 self-replicating
 (like out of the hob of the copier
 pages come hot and crisp
 not edible yet
 but to enjoy) (Griffiths, 1991c: n.p.)

By adjoining the hob and the copier, *Metrical Cookery* draws parallels between the *making* of food and the autonomous activities of Griffiths' small press publishing.⁹ Ergo, the 'decision to work' (Griffiths, 1991c: n.p.) asserted early in the pamphlet through 'Moretum' involves not only a resistance against manufacturing foodstuffs, but also against *manufactured* commercial publishing. Like Giard in the second volume of *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Griffiths demonstrates an awareness of the parallels between the act of writing and the act of cooking, in that both practices subject the 'raw material[s]' of the work to multiple forms of 'organising, combining, modifying and inventing' (de Certeau et al., 1998: 153). Indeed, these parallels are also carried out through the materiality of *Metrical Cookery*. Considering the pamphlet's limited print run, along with its ambiguous relationship to performance, it would appear as if this printed object – like the activities it depicts – anticipates that its 'trace will' eventually be 'erased' (de Certeau et al., 1998: 153). In this respect, the poem's reference to 'edible' recalls a project from another period of innovative British poetry. Griffiths had taken part in a performance of Allen Fisher's *Blood Bone Brain* in 1974, which featured visuals and texts concerning Fisher's *Edible* magazine.¹⁰ Written with 'cochineal' on 'rice paper' and printed 'via a gelatine press [with] shortcake pastry for covers' (Fisher, 2009b: n.p.), these artefacts were inherently ephemeral, as they could either be eaten, or grow mouldy and rot. Although this situation is not completely replicated in the case of *Metrical Cookery*, the diction in these closing remarks indicates a comparable awareness of the ephemerality of small press publications.

Furthermore, the presence of 'enjoy' in the final line conveys additional layers of signification. At one level, it recalls aspects of the pamphlet's celebratory tones; like the practice of cooking, the process of poetry is presented as a source of physical pleasure. On another level, however, these concluding lines also acknowledge that the enjoyment of this autonomous practice must be performed in the margins; the pages are self-replicated through a copier, which implies a level of production that one might associate with more samizdat artefacts. This form of marginality would cohere well with the social context of the Amra Imprint. As Peter

Barry notes in *Poetry Wars*, after the ‘Poetry Society debacle’ of the late-1970s, the radical impulse of British poetry was not exactly ‘snuffed out,’ but more accurately, it was ‘displaced’ and ‘migrated elsewhere’ (Barry, 2006: 118). Although *Metrical Cookery* was published over a decade later, the pamphlet is still characterized by a physical sense of migratory displacement. Griffiths moved to County Durham in 1990, which would mean that *Metrical Cookery* was produced and published some distance away from his erstwhile milieu in London. Moreover, the inception of the Amra Imprint coincided with this geographic relocation. As Griffiths explained to Will Rowe during an interview published in 2007, the Imprint was formed partially in order to ‘qualify for a grant’ that Griffiths spent on a ‘second hand photocopier’ (Griffiths and Rowe, 2007: 187), which was used to produce booklets such as *Metrical Cookery*. In fact, the majority of the poet’s work from the early 1990s appeared through this Imprint,¹¹ so much so that when Invisible Books offered to publish *Rousseau and the Wicked* in 1996, Griffiths welcomed the opportunity to reach a relatively wider audience.¹² Therefore, the conclusion to the sequence effectively comments upon the process of its making. By first delineating a distinction between ‘manufacturing’ and ‘making’ food and then pairing the latter with small press publishing, *Metrical Cookery* extends beyond domesticity. More specifically, this self-produced pamphlet, which is both open to its performers and resistant towards market forces, ultimately enacts its own sociality.

Consuming

But what exactly *is* the sociality of *Metrical Cookery*? In light of my earlier discussions regarding autonomy and marginality, it might be tempting to associate the pamphlet with Adorno’s concept of art as negation, whereby the work would communicate more by its denial of meaning in the ‘organized society of which it will have no part [...] than by any capability of positive meaning within itself’ (Adorno, 1973: 20). However, while Griffiths’ parallels between writing and cooking could be understood in this context, the sequence as a whole seems to work differently. Although Griffiths rejects cultural commodity, he does not rebuke it from the position of ‘a passive conduit, nostalgia addict, or a preacher’ (Rowe, 2007: 163). Indeed, if *Metrical Cookery* – as Johnson intimates – engages with mass culture, Griffiths also rejects the pessimistic views of Bürger’s *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. These poems are not resigned to a project of incommunicable autonomy, but nor are they willing to succumb to cultural institutionalization.¹³ Therefore, in order to arrive at a more complete awareness of the pamphlet’s sociality, we must first consider the manner in which *Metrical Cookery* engages with the social sphere.

This task may at first seem challenging, as the poems rarely contain overt allusions to a world outside its domestic milieu. When explicit references are made, they frequently draw upon either ancient Rome, as with the mention of the Coliseum in 'Cake', or to ecclesiastical matters, as evidenced by the Christian connotations in 'Lamb', 'Vegetarians' and elsewhere. While these features could be an echo of the pamphlet's debt to Latin poetry, they also involve a more complex development, particularly when read in parallel with other booklets that Griffiths published in 1991. For instance, in *Darwin's Dialogues* (1991b), the history of empires and the political force of the Church are both woven into the themes of 'The Relief of Aachen'. As Gilbert Adair has pointed out, the Bishop of Aachen epitomizes a shadow of the 'religio-military ('Holy Roman') empire' (Adair, 2007: 143), whose deal with the American General to 'shape the [German] people back into some sort of democracy' (Griffiths, 1991b: n.p.) represents a bleak vision of '*realpolitik* in the wake of genocide' (Adair, 2007: 143). Furthermore, the Bishop's decision to hide inside the hollow throne of Charlemagne serves as a satirical symbol of another historical convergence between Church and State – that is, the divine right of kings. The selfsame doctrine is one of the targets of the polemic that Griffiths outlines in *A Pocket History of the Soul* (1991a), another Amra pamphlet from 1991. While Griffiths begins with an analysis regarding the origins for the concept of the 'soul', the focus of his tract is on the 'fundamental political tenets' of authority and ownership derived from the 'creed that God creates human life' (Griffiths, 1991a: 26). In effect, the 'soul' that Griffiths criticizes is a socio-political tool that was once used to justify the hegemony of the ruling classes, and, through the individualist perspectives of Protestantism, more recently provided ideological support for both nineteenth-century imperialism and twentieth-century capitalism. Ultimately, this argument is developed – through Griffiths' scepticism about alternatives 'to divine-based authority' (Griffiths, 1991a: 41) – to the crucial proposal that 'all authority is illogical and arbitrary' (Griffiths, 1991a: 43). This proposition, in turn, allows Griffiths to contrast between an ideal relationship where 'governments and professionals' should be specialists working as 'servants of the people they are trying to help' (Griffiths, 1991a: 40) and the less harmonious actualities of a parliamentary democracy as a 'system of exclusion' (Griffiths, 1991a: 39) that is mainly centred on property and ownership, and which only permits 'illusory' participation from the public.¹⁴

Although the examples that appear in *A Pocket History of the Soul* primarily address issues involving public and private land,¹⁵ it is worth noting that the cultural histories of food, cooking and eating feature comparable 'systems of exclusion' to the ones that Griffiths analyses in his treatise. For Lévi-Strauss, 'cooking is a language through which [...] society

unconsciously reveals its structure' (Lévi-Strauss, 1978: 945) as complex systems that distinguish between what foods are edible, how they should be prepared as well as when and *by whom* they should be eaten. As Giard notes, the practice of such codes can involve a

large number of exclusions and a limited number of valid authorizations within a particular circle of compatibilities [...] concerning not only mixtures of ingredients, but also the appropriateness of a certain food to social status. (de Certau et al., 1998: 181)

In addition, these demarcations are also tied to a network involving the price of commodities, the fluctuations of the free market, and the regularity and rationing of supplies.¹⁶ In fact, similar hierarchies of eating were also practiced within the historical institutions of authority that Griffiths challenges in *A Pocket History of the Soul*. For instance, while discussing the sixteenth century dining habits at the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple, Peter Goodrich observes that the barristers of the Inn arrived dressed according to their social status, so that each rank could be allotted a 'value of meat' and portions of wine 'served in measures according to' (Goodrich, 1996: 77) their respective positions. These practices, Goodrich argues, were components of a system where

the order of dining [...] is the order of a lawful world, a symbolic order in which justice, rule and law are to be understood as being expressed together through culinary measures, victuals and wine. (Goodrich, 1996: 77)

In this respect, I would suggest that reading *Metrical Cookery* in parallel with texts such as 'The Relief of Aachen' and *A Pocket History of the Soul* allows us to uncover the intricacies of its sociality. While the aforementioned Roman and ecclesiastical allusions may have their roots in Latin poetry, it seems doubtful that Griffiths would uncritically embrace the societies they represent. On the contrary, considering the parallels between *A Pocket History of the Soul* and the cultural histories of cooking, it is far more likely that the poems in *Metrical Cookery* are in active conflict with the 'systems of exclusion' that are implicitly present within its materials. In fact, this is already illustrated through the titles of the sequence. For instance, of the 47 poems, only five deal specifically with meat,¹⁷ which calls to mind the old conventions of the Inns of Court, where cuts of meat were used to distinguish a member's social standing. Thus, the materials of *Metrical Cookery* understand meat's historical role as a symbolic 'luxury item' that was frequently consumed in order to imitate the 'great institutional dinners of the privileged classes' (Griffiths, 2006: 27). In other words, Griffiths' cookery is a somewhat paradoxical phenomena; it is both a tool towards autonomy and a site of everyday life where social inequality manifests itself.

However, as with the aforementioned disequilibrium in 'Pasta', Griffiths does not observe these social disparities as a passive and retrospective historian. Consider, for instance, 'Egg Poem', which opens with:

crew-cutted and stamped
we are all in place
in the egg-box of life

we are 'lloved keep our helmets on
while we're scoured for clap
no-one breaking rank (Griffiths, 1991c: n.p.)

In another example of the wit in *Metrical Cookery*, the poem extends the implications of 'egg and soldiers' *ad absurdum*. After beginning with the image of the egg-box as regimented lines, the poem continues to narrate this culinary event with satirical machismo; shells are consistently likened to helmets and armoury, the frying of an egg is associated with a scene of battle and a broken yolk 'in white / all mixed all over the floor' (Griffiths, 1991c: n.p.) resembles a scene splattered with blood. Yet, these humorous elements also enact certain forms of resistance. The poem concludes with:

Brothers (you think everything's tyranny), it's
nothing.
Some trays are white. Some trays are brown.
Just trust the sorter.

And I tell you
When I hear that Breakfast Bugle
I'm gonna rise and grin, be neat, do my duty, toe
the line, love the ladle,
come up smiling, sunny side up, and say my
thankyou. (Griffiths, 1991c: n.p.)

The final accumulation of locutions such as 'do my duty' and 'toe the line' alongside phrases that describe the frying of an egg, as well as the apparently imaginary expressions such as 'rise and grin' and 'come up smiling' effectively depletes the conclusion's language of compliance from any force or significance. To elaborate, as the end of 'Egg Poem' attempts to dismantle the absurd demand to 'just trust the sorter', the poem effectively twists back on itself, which transforms the earlier stanzas from a mockery of military machismo to a further question about the purposelessness of 'getting smashed' in 'the defence of the defence of democracy' (Griffiths, 1991c: n.p.).

In this respect, the criticisms presented by 'Egg Poem' further affirm the link between the concerns of *Metrical Cookery* and the hierarchical 'systems of exclusion' that Griffiths attacks in *A Pocket History of the Soul*. The latter describes the treatment of a soldier under the rule of

Frederick the Great of Prussia in virtually the same terms as the eggs of the poem:

he had no mind of his own, was purely an agent of the officer's orders [...] was shown off in public by being made to drill in lines and ranks [...] the status of such a soldier was not rational [...] much as a radish might be pulled up to eat, so the soldier's body was sacrificed in battle, at the whim (or rational dictate) of his superiors (Griffiths, 1991a: 54)

Thus, underneath the domestic exterior of these poems, Griffiths interrogates and challenges at least two acts of brutality; the first being the alienated labour of 'Pasta', and the second being the blood sacrifice for the 'defence of the defence of democracy'. However, this is not to say that *Metrical Cookery* regards these brutalities as discrete and separable; rather, the sequence suggests that both are rooted in the 'illogical' and 'arbitrary' institutions of authority. Indeed, reverberations of both 'Egg Poem' and 'Pasta' appear across the subsequent sections of the pamphlet. For instance, they inform and enrich the diction of 'Swede':

Swede is fodder food
 dice and boil
 and thoroughly good
 mash it orange with butter
 for anyone
 pepper and nutmeg (Griffiths, 1991c: n.p)

After 'Egg Poem', the 'fodder food' of 'Swede' could be understood as both feed for livestock and as the 'cannon fodder' of war. However, the indefinite pronoun of poem denotes further degrees of ambiguity. A swede could just as well be food for any *body* that the aforementioned 'systems of exclusion' regard as 'soulless' material for use. In this respect, the alienated labour that Griffiths reveals in the lexicon of 'Pasta' also haunts the diction of 'Swede'. Because the external character of labour, Marx argues, no longer belongs to the worker, the conditions of their task demand a loss of self. Consequently, the worker feels freely active in only their most animal functions, while their human functionality – especially labour – leaves them feeling as if they were only animals. In sum, 'what is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal' (Marx, 1975: 354). 'Fodder food', in this sense, is a venomously ironic phrase that masks a serial violence that is uncovered only by observing the creative linkages across the sequence.

These serial connections are indicative of the act of conflation performed by *Metrical Cookery*, where the irrational violence of war is blended with the equally irrational violence of everyday life. Set against a background where Conservative legislators had weakened union powers, rejected the policies of the Social Charter, and where unemployment

was due to rise to 2.5 million by the end of 1991, the viands of the poems act as the exterior to the pamphlet's social commentary.¹⁸ Ultimately, Griffiths – like Lévi-Strauss – sees these 'silent and repetitive systems of everyday servitudes' (de Certau et al., 1998: 171) as a language that unfolds and interrogates multiple systems of alienation and exclusion, from market forces to forms of governance. With this in mind, I would like to return to the final poem of the sequence. Earlier, I suggested that the 'hot crisp' pages from the copier establish a connection between writing and cooking. Yet, considering the various challenges against authority that Griffiths presents throughout *Metrical Cookery*, they also involve a wider claim regarding the sociality of the sequence, as these lines provide a counterpoint to the divisional structures that Griffiths abhors. They are a resounding affirmative that revels in the ideals of unison instead of exploitation:

 You can have
carrots with aniseed,
 peas with basil,
potatoes with poppy seeds,
 tomatoes with basil,
onions with bay,
 mushrooms with tarragon
turnips with celery-salt
 cauliflower with paprika
baked beans with ginger,
 spinach with mace,
sprouts with mustard seed,
 lamb with garlic
kidneys with carraway
 chicken with lemon
ham with cloves,
 pork with dillweed
rabbit with thyme,
 beef with rosemary
turkey and saffron strands,
 everywhere
everything is growing
 sun-absorbent hot
and wind-balletic
 and abundant (Griffiths, 1991c: n.p.)

'With' is evidently the operative term of the passage, which indicates that the 'unison' Griffiths promotes at the end of the poem is not simply seeking a passive connectivity, but a more active form of participation. In this sense, the resounding affirmative from *Metrical Cookery* shares the same concerns as one of the key passages from *A Pocket History of the Soul*:

Without participation there can be no meaningful 'democracy'. Bringing people into their own government is possible, but it means people doing things for themselves, a reduction of government role, and an increase of doing things for yourself. It would bring about a reduction of luxury or leisure time, but might encourage unison with rather than exploitation of the environment. Participation is thus something quite different from token consultation at a General Election, or token opportunity to put objections to some local scheme devised elsewhere by planners at county or country level. It is the opposite of social engineering, since no grand theory is involved but only local conditions are taken into account. (Griffiths, 1991a: 41)

In the end, perhaps these participatory ideals shed some light on the role of performance within *Metrical Cookery*. By labelling the sequence a 'performance text for two mouths or more', Griffiths introduces these poems as a collaborative activity; they are, in effect, an invitation to work *with* someone, either in a performance event or through the process of close reading. Like Fisher in 'Necessary Business', the 'on-fold worldly-cares' of *Metrical Cookery* recognize that the sociality of poetry requires our 'engagement to create it' and 'produce it', which suggests that its 'affirmation of life' (Fisher, 1999: 23) occurs through agency. Therefore, while the pamphlet itself expresses the incredulity of officially sanctioned systems of exclusion, the practice of reading or performing *Metrical Cookery* offers a chance to explore, if only on a poetic level, alternative modes of solidarity and sociality.

Digesting

To summarize the proposals of this study: after framing the introduction with observations from *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, I set out to investigate the socio-political perspectives of *Metrical Cookery*. Partially, I approached this in order to understand the actionable features of the text. In the absence of documentation that presents *Metrical Cookery* in performance, our awareness of its performative qualities can only emerge from the poems themselves. After briefly observing the innocuous exterior of the poems, I suggested that these texts present the act of autonomous 'making' as a counterforce to consumerist 'manufacturing'. This was partially analysed with reference to the concepts of alienated labour in the works of Marx. I also suggested that by pairing cooking with printing, Griffiths was also developing a commentary on the process of making small press publications; in this respect, the sequence is aware of its own social role. In order to distinguish a more specific understanding of this sociality, however I began to examine the pamphlet in parallel with contemporaneous publications such as *Darwin's Dialogues* and *A Pocket History of the Soul*. The parallels and dialogues between

these works suggested that underneath its domestic exterior, *Metrical Cookery* interrogates the ‘illogical’ and ‘arbitrary’ premises of hierarchy and power, and presents a challenge to such systems of societal exclusion. Ultimately, these poems *are* a refusal of constraints, but that refusal is articulated only through the crushing familiarity of their subject matter. Bill Griffiths has no corpses in his mouth. Instead, these poems examine the everyday activity of cooking in order to demonstrate that ‘good is what connects, bad what divides—with the possibility that bad has no existence other than in delusion’ (Griffiths, 1991a: 80).

Notes

- 1 See Jones (2007).
- 2 For a report on the event, see Virtanen (2012).
- 3 See, for example: Griffiths (2010).
- 4 The poems included are ‘Citrus Note’, ‘Tokaj’, ‘Cake’ and ‘Moretum’.
- 5 The pamphlet appeared too late to qualify for the Reality Street collection of early work, and none of it features in *Lion Man and Others* (2008). In 2014, the publication of Reality Street’s second collected edition of Griffiths’ work finally made the sequence more easily available.
- 6 The item is not catalogued in the recordings held at the Eric Mottram archives in King’s College London, the British Library Sound Archive, Pennsound or the British Poetry Electronic Centre. ‘Tokaj’ is included in the recordings from Griffiths on Archive of the Now. The other food poems in this section are alternative versions. Griffiths reads ‘Tokaj’ alone.
- 7 My diction here is deliberate. Both ‘equal’ and ‘corresponding’ are both linguistically related to ‘match’.
- 8 See, for example, Marx (1975: 351-2).
- 9 For more comments on Griffiths’ work in this field, see pp. 174-5 in Griffiths and Rowe (2007) and Halsey (2007).
- 10 See Fisher and Walker (1981) and Fisher (1981)
- 11 See, for example, Jones (2007: 206-10)
- 12 See Griffiths and Rowe (2007: 189)
- 13 See, for example Bürger (1984: 68)
- 14 See Griffiths (1991a: 39-41)
- 15 See, for example: ‘there is nowhere a pedestrian has a lawful right to go in public except along routes where a pavement is provided, and even there he is subject to various conditions and restrictions on his behavior in the name of good over. As a simple example, 85% of the land in County Durham is privately owned’ (Griffiths, 1991a: 28), and ‘In England, this obsession with land was intensified with the introduction of the Feudal System in 1066, when William I, by right of conquest, appropriated the ultimate title to all land’ (Griffiths, 1991a: 28)

- 16 See de Certau et al. (1998: 173)
- 17 These are: 'Fish', 'Lamb', 'Meatloaf', 'Meat (To Roast)' and 'Pork'
- 18 Griffiths explicitly addresses two of these examples in *A Pocket History of the Soul*: 'Unlimited labor has often been claimed by masters from slaves and serfs, and presumably lies behind legislation to weaken Union power in England in the 1980s, and the reluctance to cede any Social Charter in 1990' (Griffiths, 1991a: 27)

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