So here’s the thing. I love kidneys. Sautéed in butter, Worcester sauce and redcurrant jelly on bread fried in beef dripping. Most people that know me think it’s pretty rank and fucked up. But that tasty morsel kind of resembles the idea of “viscera as art” this text is about. Hearts, liver (I also dig on lamb’s fry), stomachs and other undifferentiated tissue ooze an unsightly funk on to butcher’s paper like a form of inscription in extremis, writing dismembered viscera in blood. And yeah, that is a fancy Poindexter way of rehabilitating this repugnant shit. So if it makes you feel more intellectually tuned in, think animate organs without the need of a body, like the “semi-living” meat of the Tissue Culture and Art Project. Laboratory cultivated on Petri dishes with biopolymer rather than grass fed on King Island pastures, this is a taste sensation I must try.

Spread out before you is a potential gastronomy in which an infernal electricity, Galvani-like, perturbs untidy lumps of flesh into dithering animation. But let’s get real. Most of the artisans of dismembered flesh I deal with at Preston market don’t batter an eyelid when wrapping up toothsome, unsightly morsels carefully harvested for a meal so nouveau that, in a previous age, was blunt necessity. Imagine for a minute, though, that this is not a workshop for experimental creation but some knucklehead providore’s backyard pantry. One look at this twitching half-life and those same charcuterie merchants would be off to the funny farm.

A literal, journalistic expose of this gorge-rising theme of living parts without a whole is French scribbler Marie-Monique Robin’s 1993 shockumentary Voleurs d’yeux. Eye Thieves took the filleting knife to the Burke and Hare purveyance of intact bodies, serving up instead a new economy of purloined parts. Hardly surprising that Gilles Deleuze threw himself out of a window two year’s later, fed up with the ravages of emphysema and the philosophical conundrums of a new postmodernism more weird and sinister than his body without organs. If nineteenth century bodysnatching was the macabre commerce of modernity, organ harvesting succeeded it as the rough trade of a new age of abhorrent connectivity, of bits as well as bytes for sale on the net. Like a child pornography ring doing its worst at a distance, filched corneas and spleens are rated like marbling on a Wagyu steak. If you think this sounds like perverse fabulation out of a Michael Crichton novel or a Rob Zombie gore flick you’d better brush up on the 2008 Declaration of Istanbul’s “ethical” clarification of how the internet is used for organ trafficking and transplant tourism.

When Robbie Williams chortled it was “time to move your body” while eviscerating his guts I doubt he was thinking about a new Epicureanism (had Deleuze and Félix Guattari not been philosophers, by the way, they would have been top butchers). “Rock DJ” (2000) is a canny riff on the post-age’s interest in dismemberment. So too this display of pulsing innards is an infomercial for something on its way to the slaughterhouse of a utility research kitchen near you. Bon appétit.

Darren Tofts, 2013