INTRODUCTION

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When one thinks of the table, the immediate tendency is to associate it with the biological need to eat, with food, and with the act of sharing a meal. However, from a historical-sociological perspective, the table goes far beyond its utilitarian function as a simple piece of furniture. It is an object that is simultaneously material and conceptual, playing an active role in creating social bonds and organizing communities. The table reflects the worldview of each era, functioning as a microsystem where material culture, social rules, and human sensibility intersect. Before becoming the stage for complex rituals, the table asserts itself through its practical value. As a piece of furniture, it takes on varied shapes and functions — from the domestic dining table to the versatility of the military table in campaign, or the leisure space of the gaming table. These typologies mirror the daily needs and class divisions of a society. On the reverse side of grand celebrations stands the everyday table: a space for daily dialogue where routines and eating habits intersect, establishing the basic structures of identity and family bonds. The experience of the table in the early modern period (17th-18th centuries) — a period marked by the maturation of the Baroque and the transition into the Enlightenment — centered on the multiplicity of its meanings and the environments created around it. As an object present in the most diverse contexts, from the opulence of palaces to the sobriety of the ordinary citizen's home, the table invariably functioned as the center of gravity of the social experience, bringing people and diverse activities together. However, it was in Baroque culture that the table reached its highest expression. The 18th-century palatial table became the perfect reflection of power dynamics. Far from being a neutral space solely for nutrition, the Baroque banquet functioned as a political instrument to assert the host's importance and prestige. The strict seating of guests and the associated rituals translated the social hierarchy and the networks of influence within the court. This demonstration of authority depended heavily on the act of «dressing the table», a practice that gained the status of a work of art during the Baroque period. The visual and functional composition of the

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space relied, among other things, on the refinement of porcelain services, glassware, and cutlery. In parallel, the emergence of etiquette manuals established the norms that began to discipline the body and public behavior. By regulating gestures and conversation, Baroque etiquette operated as a mechanism of exclusion and social distinction, mirroring the civilizing process and the evolution of mentalities in modern Europe.

Par excellence, the table is the place for socialization, where one of the most elementary acts for survival takes place. For this reason, it brings together two fundamental dimensions: the nourishment of the body and the definition of each individual's place in society. From this perspective, the connection between the table and food extends to the architectural space, relating directly to kitchens and preparation areas. Over time, the technical and hygienic developments of these spaces sustained the sophistication of the dishes served. At the table, physical proximity and the direct confrontation with the gaze of others can either reinforce bonds of solidarity or generate divisions. It is the space where diplomatic alliances are signed, affections are forged, or latent conflicts explode. This complexity is further enriched when analyzing intercultural practices linked to gastronomy. The modern banquet was also a space of sharing and hybridity, where the influences resulting from maritime expansion and the circulation of new products reconfigured Western palates and customs. When the festival suspends routine, the full scope of the relationship between the table and celebration emerges. Under the Baroque aesthetic, the furniture is transformed into the center of theatrical and multisensory celebrations, where food openly dialogued with court attire, dance, music, and theater. Highlighted here is the importance of ephemeral art — such as sugar or ice sculptures and pyrotechnic displays — which transformed the banquet into a total, yet fleeting, artistic event, preserved only in the memory of each guest. This almost sacred dimension finds an echo in the Western table of Christian matrix. The evangelical texts made the table the quintessential space for miracles, teaching, and inclusion. This theological weight was widely integrated by the visual arts, in genres ranging from history painting to still life, including sculpture, tilework *(azulejaria*), and decorative arts. The representation of biblical episodes where Jesus sits at the table — such as the Wedding at Cana, the Supper at Emmaus, or the Last Supper — solidified the imagery of the table as the place of truth and communion, where food gains a spiritual meaning. In literature, the table frequently emerges as a central resource to dissect the psychological tensions and class realities of an era.

In contemporary times, the legacy of these excesses and stagings is well recovered by cinema, especially in works linked to a neo-Baroque aesthetic — such as Peter Greenaway's film *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover* — which resort to the

exaggeration of the banquet to explore visual saturation and institutional decadence. In this way, the concept projects itself into the present day under the category of the «neo-Baroque table». This concept demonstrates how the aesthetic, theatrical, and hyperbolic principles of the Baroque remain active in contemporary representations of gastronomy. They are evident in *food styling*, the spectacle of *fine dining*, and the aestheticization of consumption, but also in its political deconstruction, as witnessed by Judy Chicago's famous art installation *The Dinner Party*, where a triangular table functions as a historical manifesto of women's role at the convivial table. Finally, the digital humanities and contemporary museography introduce the possibility of virtualizing the table. Through digital tools, three-dimensional models, and augmented reality, it is now possible to recreate the Baroque table in an immersive way and interpret it critically. This allows contemporary audiences to experience the spatial and sensory complexity of, for example, the banquets of the *Ancien Régime*. In short, the table — as a multifaceted object and generator of sociocultural manifestations — illustrates the very essence of the human condition, perpetually oscillating between the serenity of conviviality and the fracture of discord. It is precisely under this plural perspective that the studies gathered in this volume are structured, adopting a diversified approach that critically analyzes the relationship between objects, images, and eating habits.

The transition between codes of behavior and artistic languages is explored in investigations such as *Do que se deve observar quando estamos à mesa* […]. *Etiqueta e civilidade na representação da mesa na azulejaria do século XVIII* [On what should be observed when at the table […]. Etiquette and civility in the representation of the table in 18th-century tilework], expanding into the complex ideological tensions present in European still lifes in *¿Católicos austeros y protestantes opulentos? Tensiones visuales en el bodegón barroco* [Austere Catholics and opulent Protestants? Visual tensions in the Baroque still life].The festive dimension and ritualized excesses of the banquet find an echo in the analyses of «*The King Drinks» by Jacques Jordaens: when the festivities are condensed*, while the theological and confessional transfiguration of the table is analyzed in *Table and Reform. Iconography and visual representation of the Last Supper in the Tridentine period*. The kitchen space and the work preceding the banquet gain centrality in the readings of *Desde la cocina… Miradas barrocas. Sevilla, m. XVII* [From the kitchen… Baroque views. Seville, mid-17th century] and in *O espaço culinário e a transmutação dos alimentos: uma leitura iconográfica de «Jesus em Casa de Marta e Maria» de Velázquez* [The culinary space and the transmutation of food: an iconographic reading of Velázquez's *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*]. In turn, the staging of power and the assertion of aristocratic and royal status through the sumptuosity of spaces are detailed in fundamental contributions such as *D. João V e os banquetes no palácio em Santo Antão do Tojal em 1730* [King John V and the

banquets at the palace in Santo Antão do Tojal in 1730], and in *A casa de jantar do palácio de Oeiras – cenografia da mesa do marquês de Pombal* [The dining room of the palace of Oeiras – scenography of the Marquis of Pombal's table], as well as in the sacred and profane intersections proposed by *Cenografias de aparato: convergências entre a mesa de altar e a palaciana* [Scenographies of pomp: convergences between the altar and the palatial table].

On the dark reverse side of these institutional celebrations, the Baroque imagination reveals its fascination with the transgressive in *Invited to the Devil's feast: banquets from witchcraft scenes in early modern art*. This performative dimension returns to sensory and artistic harmony with *«Pois Vós falais em pintura»: música e dança à mesa no largo tempo do Barroco em Portugal* [«Since You speak in painting»: music and dance at the table in the extended Baroque period in Portugal].

By intertwining these multiple perspectives, this collection invites the reader to sit at a table of transdisciplinary debate, where the past is reinterpreted in light of its aesthetic and ritual permanences.