

PACIFIC INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT COMPANY

INVESTMENT

OUTLOOK

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Bon Appétit?

"Kill the Umpire," the fan cried to open the 1996 baseball season in Cincinnati, and 8 pitches later, the man behind the plate, John McSherry was dead, all 320 pounds of him screaming for more and more oxygen to feed his spastic heart. He'd been killed by his fatness, by a billion molecules of sink clogging, Drano-resistant cholesterol that fed on his coronary artery and sucked up his life's blood like a vampire in the heat of the night. The next day Howard Stern had characteristically railed that the antidote was obvious. It was the same for all fat people: "DON'T EAT," he howled. As if the ump hadn't known. The fact was, he couldn't stop. He loved the taste of food - every sugary, starchy, carbohydrate morsel. The first bite was a special ecstasy, as was the last, and everything in between. The man, it seemed, was a Cuisinart with four limbs.

Franz Kafka wove a tale 100 years earlier that was a mirror image of McSherry's tragedy. His "A Hunger Artist" described a professional faster - a sideshow freak in 19th century Europe who attracted attention and spare coins by withering away inside a wooden cage. The gapers marveled at his shriveled skeleton - stuck their hands

through the bars to nudge his boney ribs - and awed at his resolve to starve himself to the precipice of self-extinction. "I always wanted you to admire my fasting," said the hunger artist, "but you shouldn't have. (The fact is) I have to fast, I can't help it. I couldn't find the food I liked. If I had found it, believe me, I would have made no fuss and stuffed myself like you or anyone else."

Well, well - one man who couldn't stop and another one who couldn't start - eating, that is. Their stories, though, are really not about food, but life itself - what compels us to do what we do, what forces us to act or not to act, what makes us who we are. Is personal behavior, though, really beyond our control? Shakespeare would retort that the fault lies not in our stars, but in ourselves and I applaud that - strong-willed 175-pound guy that I am. But, on the other hand, who are we other than this morpous, gelatinous blob of moving flesh and bone that's been molded primarily without our input, first by genes, and then by environment into the living person we know as ourselves? Are we all just walking cuisinarts, or better yet mobile computers with a consciousness? Time

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