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**From Chef to Superstar: Food Media from World War 2 to the  
World Wide Web**

**by**

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## Abstract

This thesis examines representations of food in twenty-first century media, and argues that the media obsession with food in evidence today follows directly from U.K. and U.S. post-war industrial and economic booms, and by the associated processes of globalisation that secure the spread of emergent trends from these countries to the rest of the so-called Western world. The theoretical frame for the work is guided in large part by Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), which follows a Marxist tradition of examining the intersection between consumerism and social relationships. Debord's spectacle is not merely something to be looked at, but functions, like Marx's fetishised commodity, as a mechanism of alienation. The spectacle does this by substituting real, lived experience with representations of life.

Based on analyses of media representations of food from the post-war period to the present day, the work argues against the discursive celebration of globalisation as a signifier of abundance and access, and maintains, instead, that consequent to the now commonplace availability of choice and information is a deeply ambiguous relationship to food because it is a relationship overwhelmingly determined by media rather than experience. It further argues that the success of food media results from a spectacular conflation of an economy of consumerism with the basic human need to consume to survive. Contemporary celebrity chefs emerge as the locus of this conflation by representing figures of authority on that basic need, and also, through branded products (including themselves), the superfluity of consumerism. The subject of the work, therefore, is food, but the main object of its critique is media. Food media from World War 2 to the World Wide Web is about the commodification of history and politics, through food, and the natural (super)star of this narrative is the modern celebrity chef.

## 1. Theoretical Preliminaries

Food was not the primary focus of attention for French theorist Guy Debord, co-founder of the Situationist International (S.I.) and author of *Society of the Spectacle* (1967). The culmination of Debord's years as a Situationist, and informed simultaneously by the political climate preceding the student uprisings in Paris 1968 and the by-then flourishing post-war consumer economy, *Society of the Spectacle* has in later years been dismissed – and often misunderstood – as obsolete, for reasons including its context-specificity, its lack of historicity, and its inability to account for new and modern forms of media and subject articulation. Yet this thesis argues that his theory of the spectacle provides a valuable tool for understanding the phenomenon under investigation, namely the ever increasing commodification of human appetite through media representations of food in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

This chapter explains the theoretical framework of the thesis. Starting with the seminal influence of Karl Marx, I argue that Debord's theory of the spectacle remains an eminently useful critical tool because, while media and technology have certainly taken on proportions in the twenty-first century that he could not have accounted for, his analyses of the *effects* of media-based consumption on individuals and on their place in broader societal structures endure, and with remarkable clarity, to this day. Of particular relevance are the key connections between Marx's commodity fetishism and the primacy of appearance in the spectacle, both of which function to conceal, beneath a façade of plenty, an abundance of loss and alienation which manifest in each of the chapters to follow. These are what I term the narratives of progressive detachment that abound in food media, and which form the central argument of this thesis.

## 1.1 Marx and Debord: Spectres in the New World

That which exists for me through the medium of *money* — that for which I can pay, i.e., which money can buy, that *am I*, the possessor of the money. The stronger the power of my money, the stronger am I.... Therefore, what I *am* and what I *can do* is by no means determined by my individuality. *I am ugly*, but I can buy for myself the *most beautiful* of women.  
(Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 1844)<sup>1</sup>

The spectacle is *capital* accumulated to the point where it becomes image.  
(Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 1967)

In *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord (1931-1994) offers a Marxist<sup>2</sup> economic analysis of an increasingly image-dominated culture. He argues that our consumption of images – what he broadly terms the spectacle – informs dominant power structures by distracting us from social and material needs and convincing us, instead, of the needs of the advertiser: to consume. This complicity between spectacle and spectator, or the active concession on the part of the consumer, is fundamental to Debord's work, and also to how his concept of the spectacle has been misconstrued as a simple description of passivity in the face of the proverbial big screen. As Peter Wollen explains, 'Debord's political theory was more or less reduced to the title of his book, generalized as an isolated catchphrase, separated from its theoretical project' (Wollen, 1993:124).<sup>3</sup>

The following overview underlines the continuities between Marx's commodity fetishism, the spectacle, and the Situationist project that Debord's work grew out of, and in so doing serves to remind that *Society of the Spectacle*, as Wollen suggests, was intended not as mere description, but as a political undertaking in the

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<sup>1</sup> (Marx, 1992:377).

<sup>2</sup> I use the term Marxist to broadly indicate work that is based on, or revises Marx's own writings (also known as Neo Marxist and Western Marxist). In *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord's indebtedness to Marx is evident throughout the theoretical concerns of the work, but more superficially recognisable by his opening paraphrase of Marx (cited below), and his chapter prefaces, including extracts from Ludwig Feuerbach and Georg Lukàcs.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Jay reiterates that even when it was in vogue, the spectacle was typically decontextualised from its broader theoretical concerns, and functioned primarily as an anti-establishment trope: 'By the end of the 1970s, scarcely any discussion in France or elsewhere of the manipulative power of mass culture could resist blaming its spectacular dimension' (Jay, 1993:432).

spirit of Marxism: to empower individuals to be autonomous subjects of their own making. Yet, that *Society of the Spectacle* also was, and continues to be, compellingly descriptive of the ways in which individuals are overwhelmingly not of their own making, highlights Debord's theoretical affiliation to the concerns of the Frankfurt school before him (Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer), and shortly after, to other models of ideological subject construction, including Louis Althusser's interpellation (1969), Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony (1971), and Ulrich Beck's risk society (1992).

The final part of this first section examines the claims of one of Debord's most notable detractors, French postmodern theorist Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007). In a more pessimistic vein than the "active audience" theorists of British cultural studies in the 1980s who argued that new media allow consumers to actively produce their own meanings (Kellner, 1995:2), Baudrillard has suggested that the proliferation of simulations of reality have created a new "hyperreality" that invalidates Debord's spectacle by erasing the distinction between reality and appearance, and rendering us all 'interactive extras in a huge "reality show"' (Baudrillard, 2005).<sup>4</sup> I argue that consumers certainly are more interactive than Debord's 1967 work suggests, but that this simply represents, in the words of contemporary spectacle theorists Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, a 'more active participation of the subject in (*what remains*) the spectacle' (Best and Kellner, 1999:4, my emphases).

The spectacle represents for Debord what commodity fetishism represents for Karl Marx (1818-1883), and both are central to the narratives of detachment that inhabit contemporary food media. In Marx's analysis, a commodity is a product with a use value, denoting its practical function, and once in circulation with other

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<sup>4</sup> Unless in reference to an entire work, citations without page numbers are web-based.

commodities, an exchange value; what it signifies beyond its practicality, be it social or economic worth. Once the exchange value of a product exceeds its use value, or once we endow a thing with meaning beyond its practical function, the commodity becomes, in Marx's terms, fetishised. The result of an economy of commodity fetishism is a society characterised by an accumulation of, and relationship between, things, rather than people. As Marx explained in *Capital* [1887]:

There it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order ... to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities. (Marx, 1996:83)

Marx's recourse to religious analogy, where 'productions of the human brain' are 'endowed with life', is instructive of his wariness of anything that is not unquestionably a direct product of human labour.

There are two things of importance, for Marx, in making the distinction between things as products of human hands and things as having a life of their own, so to speak. The first relates to production, where, in his nineteenth-century context, he recognises the proletariat as the only sector to produce more than they consume. This surplus – destined for the market – belongs to whoever owns the means of production, and represents the economic power of the ruling class who, in addition, "own" the workers, themselves commodities with exchange and use values. The fact that economic power precedes social and political power means that the processes of

production described by Marx define and perpetuate class distinctions: the working class owns neither what they produce, nor their labour. The fundamental political injustice in this system, according to Marx, arises from the inability of this class to fulfill their basic needs – for food and shelter - except as functionaries of a system that depends on their subjugation. This is one form of social alienation that is ‘inseparable from the production of commodities’ (op. cit.).

The second kind of alienation relates to consumption, and consolidates the relationship between commodity fetishism and this means of production. Since, in Marx’s framework, the person who produces a commodity is not its primary consumer, what is lost in the passage of product to consumer is human labour. Put simply, once a product is in economic circulation – on a supermarket shelf, for instance – its history is eradicated. And it is the commodity abstracted from history that stands open to fetishism because its value – both practical and monetary – is no longer determined by the labour that went into its making, but rather, by a host of arbitrary and transitory factors. In our modern day these include fashion, market competition, exchange rates, and so on. When Marx wrote in 1887 that the commodity is a ‘mysterious thing’ (1996:82), therefore, he refers to this process of abstraction by which the accumulation of commodities becomes seminal to social status. Whereby who you are, in other words, is determined by what you have. The effect of this, argues Marx, is similarly to become alienated from basic needs. But in contrast to the workforce, whose alienation is predicated on subservience to a production process, the consumer of fetishised commodities is alienated by prioritising material things over social relationships.

Marx’s analysis is naturally constrained by the specificity of his historical context, and any modern application of his ideas would have to take into account

several fundamental differences between the production processes he describes and those that characterise the twenty-first century. The distinction between producers and consumers, for instance, is no longer as easily discernible as it may have been for Marx, for two main reasons. Firstly, because a significant portion of modern commerce – in which we would find the ‘workforce’ - is based not on the production of material commodities, but of intangible assets, including service and information. Secondly, because the consumer economies spawned in the aftermath of the Second World War have, to a large extent, eclipsed the structures of Marx’s capitalism to demand that everyone be, and to promise that everyone can be, a consumer. This signifies the shift, in a number of “Western” economies, from production to consumption. One of the ways this is achieved is through the relentless expansion of leisure industries that optimise expenditure, or consumption, during non-productive hours. These extended systems of production and consumption combine to problematise any generalised critique based on Marx’s work, yet his core thesis on the relationship between commodities and alienation continues to be of significant critical value.

Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle*, written in 1967, responds to another great shift, since Marx, in the definition of a commodity. Debord’s work stresses the ascendancy of images over goods,<sup>5</sup> a revision by which Marx’s emphasis on the accumulation of material commodities is supplanted by the primacy of appearance:

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<sup>5</sup> The commodification of images inaugurated by industrial advances in the post-war period has been of concern to a range of leftist theorists, including Roland Barthes (1915-1980), in *Camera Lucida* [1981]: ‘What characterises so-called advanced societies is that they today consume images and no longer, like those of the past, beliefs: they are therefore more liberal, less fanatical, but also more “false”’ (Barthes, 2000a:118-119), and Susan Sontag (1933-2004): ‘Needing to have reality confirmed and experience enhanced by photographs is an aesthetic consumerism to which everyone is now addicted. Industrial societies turn their citizens into image-junkies; it is the most irresistible form of mental pollution’ (Sontag, 1973:24).

An earlier stage in the domination of social life entailed an obvious downgrading of *being* into *having* that left its stamp on all human endeavor. The present stage, in which social life is completely taken over by the accumulated products of the economy, entails a generalized shift from *having* to appearing: all effective “having” must now derive both its immediate prestige and its ultimate *raison d’être* from appearances. (Debord, 1995:17)<sup>6</sup>

It is an economy based on the visual rather than the material that Debord terms *Society of the Spectacle*. That his critique pays homage to and revises Marx’s *Capital* is immediately clear on comparison of the opening lines of the two works, respectively:

The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as “an immense accumulation of commodities”. (Marx, 1996:45)

The whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. All that once was directly lived has become mere representation. (Debord, 1995:1)

The broad narrative that follows in *Society of the Spectacle* is that, in the same way as Marx’s commodity fetishism leads to social alienation, so, too, the spectacle for Debord: whether we increasingly spend our time engaging with other people’s lives through television, films and so on, or we invest a material object with a value beyond its use, we risk alienating ourselves from our basic needs. We risk, in other words, not being able to tell the difference between what we need and what we want.

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<sup>6</sup> *Society of the Spectacle* is arranged as a series of numbered theses. Citations of this work therefore refer to a specific thesis, rather than a page number.

This difference between needs and wants was crucial for Marx and Debord alike, who both set themselves the intellectual task of exposing the difference between representation – how things seem – and reality; how things are. As Marx wrote to his colleague Arnold Ruge in 1843, ‘The reform of consciousness consists entirely in making the world aware of its own consciousness, in arousing it from its dream of itself, in explaining its own actions to it’ (Marx, 1974:209). Debord would echo this sentiment more than a century later: ‘As long as necessity is socially dreamed, dreaming will remain a social necessity. The spectacle is the bad dream of a modern society in chains and ultimately expresses nothing more than its wish for sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of that sleep’ (Debord, 1995:21).

Often poetic, though more frequently obscure, Debord’s metaphorical language does not lend itself to an easy definition of the spectacle. It is not, in the etymological sense of the word, merely something to be looked at: ‘The spectacle is not a collection of images,’ he states in his opening pages, ‘it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images’ (Debord, 1995:4). The influence of Marx is particularly evident here in the suggestion of a fundamental inseparability between a prevailing economy and social life. These days, of course, the relationship Debord refers to might usefully be re-defined as a *non*-social relationship, where people watch – and consume, in all senses of the word – more, and interact less. Yet this only consolidates Debord’s argument that spectacular society is based on the production of individual alienation through the consumption of hegemonic images.

How exactly we consume images relates to the second important point about the spectacle, namely, that it is not confined to what we would typically think of as spectacular, or extraordinary. On the contrary, Debord suggests that the abundance and persistence of images in everyday life means that we become unable to

distinguish between the fantastical – the unreal – and the ordinary. The spectacle, in short, offers a version of life which is so readily assimilated that it, in turn, becomes life:

Understood in its totality the spectacle is both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production. It is not something *added* to the real world – not a decorative element, so to speak. On the contrary, it is the very heart of society's real unreality. In all of its particular manifestations — news, propaganda, advertising, entertainment — the spectacle represents the dominant *model* of life. (1995:6)

What is eradicated, then, is the boundary between what we see and what we experience. The spectacle is both what we look at and the lens – the spectacles – through which we see, resulting in a life that Debord characterises, variously, as 'counterfeit' (48), 'disconnected' (157), based on 'pseudo-needs' (51) and informed by 'false choices' (110).<sup>7</sup>

As much as this brief summary of a complex work risks demonstrating, one of the common charges against Debord is the homogenising effect of relegating everything, and particularly everything negative, to "the spectacle" – a term that is historically unspecific and vague, at best – with the attendant implication of a world of passive spectators, bar the author himself. David Roberts, for instance, suggests that 'Debord's concept of the spectacle is too compact to be analytically useful' (Roberts, 2003:4). Roberts' critique centres on Debord's division of the spectacle into two forms: the 'concentrated' spectacle, typically in the form of ideological state bureaucracies – 'If every Chinese has to study Mao, and in effect *be* Mao, this is

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<sup>7</sup> In Andrew Hussey's summary, the spectacle described 'how modern life reduced individuals to a state of passivity in which they lost all sense of full human potential and became spectators of their own lives' (Hussey, 2001a:114).

because there is *nothing else to be*' (Debord, 1995:64) – and the 'diffuse', which relates more broadly to consumerism and 'the abundance of commodities' (Debord, 1995:65). In Roberts' analysis, this division 'fatally contaminates his theory of the spectacle. In a typical avant-gardist gesture of total rupture and supercession Debord dismisses the crucial historical fact that the political and aesthetic religions of modernism, whether of the right or the left, regarded the capitalist culture of the commodity as their deadly enemy, while laying claim to be its sole authentic dispossessor' (Roberts, 2003:5). This represents one trend of writing about the spectacle that underplays, as Best and Kellner similarly argue, Debord's Marxist inclinations in favour of his 'avant-garde aesthetic roots' (Best and Kellner, 1997:17).<sup>8</sup>

From one perspective, readings that prioritise avant-gardism are not unlikely responses to a man whose first published book was bound in sandpaper in order to destroy its neighbours on the bookshelf (Hussey, 2001a:123) and whose first film<sup>9</sup> subjected his audience to an hour or so of blank screen (Hussey, 2001a:61, Jay, 1993:423). To be sure, Debord made no secret of his contempt for most of the world, nor of his intellectual arrogance.<sup>10</sup> Yet the division that Roberts isolates as that which 'fatally contaminates' Debord's theory is mitigated by two factors that, in the end, have the same effect on Roberts' critique. First, that Debord's distinction between diffuse and concentrated spectacle indeed correlates with Gramsci's description of

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<sup>8</sup> Best and Kellner cite further examples of this tendency as Griel Marcus' *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (1989), and Sadie Plant's *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International and After* (1992).

<sup>9</sup> *Hurlements en faveur de Sade* ("Howls for Sade", alternately "Howls in Favour of Sade", 1952).

<sup>10</sup> See his "autobiography", *Panegyric* (1989): 'I will say that I have always been content to give the vague impression that I had great intellectual, even artistic qualities of which I preferred to deprive my era, which did not seem to merit their use. There have always been people to regret my absence and, paradoxically, to help me maintain it. If this has turned out well it is only because I never went looking for anyone, anywhere. My entourage has been composed only of those who came of their own accord and knew how to make themselves accepted. I wonder if even one other person has dared to behave like me, in this era' (Debord, 1989).

hegemony as being effected, on the one hand, by the “spontaneous” consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group’ (Gramsci, 1971:12) and, on the other, by ‘the apparatus of state coercive power which “legally” enforces discipline on those groups who do not “consent” either actively or passively’ (ibid.). Secondly, and in line with Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatuses (I.S.A.s) which collapse the visible distinction between the mechanisms of interpellation on public and private levels,<sup>11</sup> Debord himself, in his *Comments on Society of the Spectacle (Comments, 1988)*, revised his earlier distinction: ‘When the spectacular was concentrated, the greater part of peripheral society escaped it; when it was diffuse, a small part; today, no part. The spectacle is mixed into all reality and irradiates it’ (Debord, 1988:IV).<sup>12</sup>

Albeit in different language, then, Debord shared with Althusser and Gramsci the Marxist project of articulating the means by which subjects are constituted in modern society.<sup>13</sup> The specific value of Debord’s critique to this work is his particular focus, already in 1967, on the workings of *media* as one of the most powerful

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<sup>11</sup> Althusser begins by delineating the classic Marxist Repressive State Apparatus as a single entity in the public domain (government, police, army), whereas Ideological State Apparatuses (churches, families, schools, media) operate on a more private, and therefore ideologically more subtle, level: ‘As a first moment, it is clear that while there is one (Repressive) State Apparatus, there is a plurality of Ideological State Apparatuses. Even presupposing that it exists, the unity that constitutes this plurality of ISAs as a body is not immediately visible. As a second moment, it is clear that whereas the unified (Repressive) State Apparatus belongs entirely to the public domain, much the larger part of the Ideological State Apparatuses (in their apparent dispersion) are part, on the contrary, of the private domain.... What distinguishes the ISAs from the (Repressive) State Apparatus is the following basic difference: the Repressive State Apparatus functions ‘by violence’, whereas the Ideological State Apparatuses’ function ‘by ideology’ (Althusser, 1971:144-145). ‘Interpellation’ refers to the process by which individuals are “hailed” into particular ideological positions by ISAs, and thereby “transform[ed]”... into subjects’ (1971:174). The interpellative function of food media is examined in more detail in Chapter 5 (Beyond Recipes).

<sup>12</sup> Similarly to *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord’s *Comments* are arranged in numbered sections. Citations therefore refer to the section, rather than the page number of this work.

<sup>13</sup> Despite this commonality, Debord’s marginal status among even fellow Marxists is underlined by Althusser’s suggestion that he and Gramsci – whom he calls ‘a conscious Marxist’ (Althusser, 1971:144) – were isolated in their undertakings: ‘To my knowledge, Gramsci is the only one who went any distance in the road I am taking. He had the “remarkable” idea that the State could not be reduced to the (Repressive) State Apparatus, but included, as he put it, a certain number of institutions from “civil society”: the Church, the Schools, the trade unions, etc. Unfortunately, Gramsci did not systematize his institutions, which remained in the state of acute but fragmentary notes’ (1971:143).

ideological apparatuses; on recognising, in other words, the specifically interpellative function of a rapidly developing economy based on creating rather than satisfying consumer demand, or, on creating wants rather than fulfilling needs. The mechanisms of this process – Debord terms it ‘augmented survival’ (1995: 40; 150) – revolve around lack: the most expedient way to make a product desirable to a consumer is to represent it as a necessity. And because need depends on absence, the success of the transaction depends on manufacturing a perception of deficiency in the eyes of the consumer. Modern marketing, in sum, depends on the production of discontent.

If we return to Marx for a moment, we can see some of the ways that his theory of commodity fetishism is impacted by, and rendered more acute in the face of, the major advances in media and technology in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Marx’s concern with alienation centered on the social implications of valuing things above people, not least the loss of community, history, and tradition as sites through which to articulate the self. History and tradition supply two of the most convincing narratives to explain why we do what we do and we are what we are. The advent of images – from magazines to films and television, and now, to the World Wide Web – to provide evermore realistic representations of what we could have, and therefore who we could be, intensifies this remove by appealing to weakness. The result, as Debord puts it, is that ‘dissatisfaction itself becomes a commodity’ (1995:59). Further, this dissatisfaction works on a principle of non-fulfillment; it is in the interests of a production system based on surplus to keep consumers convinced, in perpetuity, that “new” is necessary.<sup>14</sup> Baudrillard articulated it similarly in an early

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<sup>14</sup> ‘The economy’s triumph as an independent power inevitably also spells its doom, for it has unleashed forces that must eventually destroy the economic necessity that was the unchanging basis of earlier societies. Replacing that necessity by the necessity of boundless economic development can only mean replacing the satisfaction of primary human needs, now met in the most summary manner, by a ceaseless manufacture of pseudo-needs, all of which come down in the end to just one – the pseudo-need for the reign of an autonomous economy to continue’ (Debord, 1995:51). In “The Culture

work, *The System of Objects* [1968]: ‘Consumption is irrepressible, in the last reckoning, because it is founded upon a lack’ (Baudrillard, 1996:205).

The loss of history implicit in the priority of the new is what creates the ‘pseudo’ experience Debord speaks of, whereby persistent images of people and things encourage participation in representations – often idealised – of life, rather than participation in actual life. Debord’s spectacle, in this way, compounds Marx’s commodity by offering back to consumers a representation of what they are not experiencing:

[I]n the face of the massive realities of present-day social existence, individuals do not actually experience events. Because history itself is the specter haunting modern society, pseudo-history has to be fabricated at every level of the consumption of life; otherwise, the equilibrium of the *frozen time* that presently holds sway could not be preserved. (1995:200)

The provision of visual experience as compensation goes some way to explaining the paradox of knowledge and ignorance that Siegfried Kracauer commented on as early as 1927 when he suggested that magazines and photographic representations supply ‘one of the most powerful means of organizing a strike against understanding’ (Kracauer, 1993:432).

Kracauer’s claim serves as an important historical indicator of the origins of the spectacle that is specific to Debord’s work. It will be remembered that one of the risks of Debord’s spectacle as a critical tool is the homogenising tendency of a term

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Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” [1944], Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer likewise describe the artifice of the “new”: ‘[W]hat is new is that the irreconcilable elements of culture, art and distraction, are subordinated to one end and subsumed under one false formula: the totality of the culture industry. It consists of repetition. That its characteristic innovations are never anything more than the improvements of mass reproduction is not external to the system’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1969:136).

that has no specific genesis. John Crary elucidates: ‘A striking feature of Debord’s book was the absence of any kind of historical genealogy of the spectacle, and that absence may have contributed to the sense of the spectacle as having appeared full-blown out of the blue’ (Crary, 1989:98). Crary goes on to point out that it was only some twenty years later, in his *Comments*, that Debord referred to the spectacle as having had, ‘in 1967, ...barely forty years behind it’ (Debord, 1988:II). Following from this, Crary usefully locates several important events in and around 1927 to mark it as a likely starting point of the Debordian spectacle. These include the ‘technological perfection of the television’ that was signalled by Russian Vladimir Zworikin’s (1889-1982) patent of the iconoscope,<sup>15</sup> and, vitally, the release of the first full-length sound film, *The Jazz Singer* (dir. Alan Crosland):

This was not only a transformation in the nature of subjective experience; it was also an event that brought on the complete vertical integration of production, distribution, and exhibition within the film industry and its amalgamation with the corporate conglomerates that owned the sound patents and provided the capital for the costly move to the new technology.... The full coincidence of sound with image, of voice with figure, not only was a crucial new way of organizing space, time, and narrative, but it instituted a more commanding authority over the observer, enforcing a new kind of attention. (Crary, 1989:101-102)

This new, more encompassing, kind of attention was essential to establishing motion pictures as a prime feature of the burgeoning leisure industry central to a growing

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<sup>15</sup> Not all accounts agree on 1927 as the year of this patent. In the *Moscow Times*, Masha Hedberg suggests that Zworikin (alternately spelled Zworykin) ‘revolutionized the industry when in 1923 he invented the iconoscope, or television transmission tube, and followed it up in 1924 by thinking up the kinescope, or television receiver.... Zworikin, incidentally, also helped to give color to the pictures we view on the television screen, having developed a color television system, which he patented in 1928’ (Hedberg, 2000). Yet these minor discrepancies do not significantly challenge Crary’s chronology of the spectacle as beginning with noteworthy advances in the image industry from the mid- to late 1920s.

commodity culture. It was also this type of attention – essentially a powerful distraction – that would at once inform and unseat the kind of attention recorded by Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) in *The Arcades Project*, also begun in 1927, though only published in 1982.

Named in reference to the once-opulent Parisian arcades, Benjamin's project – published posthumously<sup>16</sup> and hailed by some as 'one of the key books of the twentieth century' (Rollason, 2002:262) – consists of a collection of observations, quotations and keywords that combine to portray the transition of nineteenth-century Paris to a modern city characterised no longer by history and tradition, but, increasingly, by commodities. The effect of the fragmentary nature of *The Arcades Project*<sup>17</sup> is a combination of charm and disquiet at the early effects of industrial modernisation, combined with the recent memory of pre-modernity. In Benjamin's own analogy, the work was 'an experiment in the technique of awakening. ... Indeed, awakening is the great exemplar of memory: the occasion on which it is given us to remember what is closest, tritest, most obvious' (Benjamin, 1999a:388-389). Susan Buck-Morss summarises: 'The fascination of early modernity was that things which in the most recent past had been common-place or up-to-date now appeared shockingly remote and archaic: at the same time one was forced to recognize in them as one's own concern the ever-identical repetition of desire' (Buck-Morss, 1984:458).<sup>18</sup>

This gesture to an acute awareness of history in the face of its loss suggested here would inform a significant part of twentieth century Marxist critical theory,

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<sup>16</sup> *Das Passagen-Werk* (Frankfurt, [1982]); *The Arcades Project* (Harvard University Press, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> Benjamin's death in 1940 before completing his project does invite speculation as to whether the final published format was the author's intention (Buck-Morss, 1984).

<sup>18</sup> The tension between critique of and submission to "modernity" is arrestingly captured in Benjamin's later comparison between the celebrated *flâneur* and a commodity: 'The intoxication to which the *flâneur* surrenders is the intoxication of the commodity around which surges the stream of customers' (Benjamin, 1983:55).

including much of Benjamin's own later work,<sup>19</sup> fellow Frankfurt theorists Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* [1944], and, not least, Debord's work on the spectacle. What these theorists have in common is an emphasis on the production of visual commodities and on the increasing circumscription of everyday life resulting from their consumption. In *Downcast Eyes* (1993), Martin Jay demonstrates that the primacy of sight – ocularcentrism – is by no means confined to the twentieth century, nor to the mechanical (re)production of images. Yet the advent of technology to mass produce and, in so doing, to commodify representation had, Jay argues, a foreseeable consequence on critical theory in general, and on Debord in particular:

That visual experience would become a major battlefield in the service of revolution was inevitable, because of the strong link between any critique of fetishism, Marxist or otherwise, and that of idolatry. Insofar as commodities were the visual appearances of social processes whose roots in human production were forgotten or repressed, they were like the idols worshipped in lieu of the invisible God. (Jay, 1993:419)

The reference to revolution underlines a key feature of Debord's work, namely a commitment not only to critique, but also, in the tradition of Marxist criticism that his work follows, to transformation. As Marx concludes his "Theses on Feuerbach" [1888], 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it' (Marx, 1977:157).

*Society of the Spectacle* as a call to revolution broadly follows the agenda of the Situationist International (S.I.), a group co-founded by Debord that existed

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<sup>19</sup> In Benjamin's work the loss of tradition and history is most clearly articulated in his essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" [1936], in which he laments the loss of "aura" consequent to mechanical reproduction; a work's 'presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be' (Benjamin, 1999c:214).

roughly from 1957-1972,<sup>20</sup> and which acted as a catalyst for many of his later ideas. Central to the Situationist ideology was the construction of “situations” to escape physical and mental strictures of the proverbial system. One of the most influential pre-Situationist texts was “Formulary for a New Urbanism” (1953). Written by Ivan Chtcheglov (1933-1988), a Franco-Russian political theorist, the essay describes the poverty of human creativity as a result of increasingly artificial urban space:

Darkness and obscurity are banished by artificial lighting, and the seasons by air conditioning; night and summer are losing their charm and dawn is disappearing. The man of the cities thinks he has escaped from cosmic reality, but there is no corresponding expansion of his dream life. The reason is clear: dreams spring from reality and are realized in it.... A mental disease has swept the planet: banalization. Everyone is hypnotized by production and conveniences [sic] sewage system, elevator, bathroom, washing machine. (Chtcheglov, 1953)

Chtcheglov goes on to advocate ‘a complete spiritual transformation’ which will come about through ‘constructing situations.... This need for *absolute* creation has always been intimately associated with the need to *play* with architecture, time and space’ (ibid.; author’s emphases). Another key influence on the Situationists was French Communist Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991), whose *The Critique of Everyday Life* [1947] reveals several foundational concepts for Debord’s own writings, not least an emphasis on the falsity of life in the yet-to-be-named spectacular society:

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<sup>20</sup> For histories of the S.I., see Peter Wollen’s “The Situationist International: On the Passage of a Few People Through a Rather Brief Period of Time” (1993); Andrew Hussey’s *The Game of War: The Life and Death of Guy Debord* (2001a) and his “Requiem Pour un Con”, a discussion of the (mis)appropriation of the term Situationism by subversive punk groups, including The Clash and the Sex Pistols (2001b). For anthologies of Situationist texts, see Tom McDonough’s *Guy Debord and the Situationist International* (2002), and Christopher Gray’s *Leaving the 20th Century: Incomplete Work of the Situationist International* (1998). Comprehensive Situationist archives are also available at [www.nothingness.org](http://www.nothingness.org), and at [www.notbored.org](http://www.notbored.org).

We are now entering the vast domain of the *illusory reverse image*.<sup>21</sup> What we find is a false world: firstly because it is not a world, and because it presents itself as true, and because it mimics real life in order to replace the real by its opposite; by replacing real unhappiness by fictions of happiness, for example – by offering fiction in response to the real need for happiness – and so on. This is the “world” of most films, most of the press, the theatre, the music hall: of a large sector of leisure activities. (Lefebvre, 1991:35)

Following Chtcheglov and Lefebvre, then, key Situationist theories such as the *dérive* (drifting with the purpose of aimlessness),<sup>22</sup> and *détournement* – ‘re-contextualization and active plagiarism’ (Wollen, 2001:134), or the act of ‘confronting the Spectacle with its own effluvia and reversing their normal ideological function’ (Jay, 1993:424) – were conceptually designed to circumvent the metaphorical Big Brother and to restore to everyday life the one feature that urban geography and the new image culture threatened to eradicate: human agency.<sup>23</sup> By the time of *Society of the Spectacle*, however, Debord was less interested in this version of playful anarchy and

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<sup>21</sup> Lefebvre’s description clearly echoes Marx and Engels’ celebrated description of ideology as an inversion of reality, described in *The German Ideology* [1845]: ‘If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process’ (Marx and Engels, 1938:14).

<sup>22</sup> Debord explained the strategy in the second volume of the *Situationist International* journal (1958): ‘One of the basic situationist practices is the *dérive*, a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. *Dérives* involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll’ (Debord, 1958).

<sup>23</sup> *Dérive* and *détournement* are both richly allusive terms. While *dérive* translates as “drift”, the phrase *à la dérive*, “adrift”, suggests more precisely the Situationist desire to be un-anchored, in the non-conformist sense of the term. Similarly, *détournement*, typically translated as “diversion”, is strongly connotative of subversive instincts. The term’s various translations include “misappropriation”, “fraudulent misuse”, and “embezzlement”. The phrase *détournement des mineurs* describes paedophilia. In their “User’s Guide to *Détournement*”, published in the surrealist journal *Les Lèvres Nues* (“Naked Lips”, [1956]), Debord and fellow Situationist Gil Wolman explain that ‘when we have got to the stage of constructing situations – the ultimate goal of all our activity – everyone will be free to *détourn* entire situations by deliberately changing this or that determinant condition of them’ (Debord and Wolman, 2006).

took a more mature political outlook: the final chapters of his book are dedicated to the possibility of a proletarian revolution in the sense that Marx envisaged.<sup>24</sup>

It need not be pointed out that the revolution that Marx and Debord anticipated never took place,<sup>25</sup> yet these concerns, coupled with Crary's useful genealogy of the spectacle, should alert us to the problem of oversimplifying the central thesis of *Society of the Spectacle* to an uncomplicated portrayal of passivity. While the loss of human agency is certainly a potent undercurrent in Debord's insistence on modern life as a 'pseudo' experience, always implicit in the reign of the spectacle is the part of the spectator. The impetus behind Debord's critique, in other words, is not a simple description of a motionless society of watchers. It is, rather, an exposure of the way modern forms of media work in the service of consumption and alienation by informing everyday choices, decisions, and aspirations. He clarifies further in *Comments*:

The movement of technological innovation has a long history, and is a constituent of capitalist society, sometimes described as industrial or post-industrial. But since its most recent acceleration (in the aftermath of the Second World War) it has greatly reinforced spectacular authority, by completely surrendering everybody to the ensemble of specialists, to their calculations and their judgments, which always depend on their calculations. (Debord, 1988:V)

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<sup>24</sup> As Debord concludes his chapter on "Environmental Planning", 'The most revolutionary idea concerning urbanism is not itself urbanistic, technological or aesthetic. It is the project of reconstructing the entire environment in accordance with the needs of the power of workers councils, of the *antistate dictatorship* of the proletariat, of executory dialogue. Such councils can be effective only if they transform existing conditions in their entirety; and they cannot set themselves any lesser task if they wish to be recognized and *to recognize themselves* in a world of their own making' (Debord, 1995:179).

<sup>25</sup> The Situationist part in the Paris uprising of May, 1968, remains debatable: while Hussey's biography suggests that Debord and his colleagues played a decisive role in the event (Hussey, 2001a:241-249), Eric Hobsbawm describes the same occasion as a 'student rebellion ... outside economics and politics' (Hobsbawm, 1994:285), with no mention of the Situationists.

Submission to ‘spectacular authority’ speaks directly to what German sociologist Ulrich Beck terms a “risk society” (Beck, 1992), indicating the extent to which mass media manipulate consumer behaviour by exposing various threats that may or may not be avoidable, but which typically depend on scientific evidence, and which therefore consign the consumer to the authority of a field beyond lay comprehension. To distinguish between the threat of so-called natural disasters (drought, earthquakes and so on), and more directly man-made risks, Anthony Giddens introduces the distinction between ‘external’ and ‘manufactured’ risks:

Manufactured risk is risk created by the very progression of human development, especially by the progression of science and technology. Manufactured risk refers to new risk environments for which history provides us with very little previous experience.... Science and technology create as many uncertainties as they dispel - and these uncertainties cannot be “solved” in any simple way by yet further scientific advance. Manufactured uncertainty intrudes directly into personal and social life .... In a world where one can no longer simply rely on tradition to establish what to do in a given range of contexts, people have to take a more active and risk-infused orientation to their relationships and involvements. (Giddens, 1999a:4)<sup>26</sup>

Giddens’ manufactured risk, in this way, represents what Debord calls the ‘spectacular authority of ... specialists’ that is evidenced nowhere more convincingly than in the multitude of conflicting media messages – plenty of which are presented as the latest scientific evidence – on what defines a “healthy” lifestyle. In the same way as Debord’s spectacle is not a ‘collection of images, but rather a social relationship mediated by images’ (op. cit.), the authority of these messages lies not in their

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<sup>26</sup> Risk was the second of Giddens’ four part lecture series, *Runaway World*, for the annual BBC Reith Lectures in 1999 (Giddens, 1999b). Full audio and text versions of the lectures are available on the BBC website ([www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith)).

production, but in their consumption. The anxieties, confusions, and questions of responsibility that arise from the profusion of manufactured risks forcefully articulate a base of consumers who have not ceased to think, but for whom tradition, an elemental point of reference for historical societies, has been displaced by the “new”. In Debord’s summary, ‘When the spectacle stops talking about something for three days, it is as if it did not exist. For it has then gone on to talk about something else’ (Debord, 1988:VII).

Finally, the reciprocity between spectacle and spectator manifests strongly in the interactivity that characterises twenty-first century media. From blogging to appearing on reality television, never have consumers been more active. Ironically, this feature of (inter)activity has led Baudrillard to suggest that Debord’s spectacle no longer provides a relevant theoretical framework for understanding the world. In “Disneyworld Company” [1995], Baudrillard tells the story of how, in the early 80s, labourers at a metallurgy plant in Switzerland were designated ‘smurfmén’ when the plant was replaced by a themepark, Smurfland. This is the micro version of what Baudrillard charts as the Disneyfication of the world. Specifically, the term refers to the growth of the corporation that is Disney. More generally, it refers to the social, political and psychological ramifications of the type of colonisation exemplified by, but clearly not confined to, the Disney corporation. Baudrillard’s Disneyed world is one which, he suggests, overturns Debord’s society of the spectacle, not by erasing or reversing it to any pre-spectacular society, but by turning it ever-more inward; a cannibal that subsists on itself and feeds an ever-growing appetite by simply cloning everything in its path. To illustrate his point, Baudrillard recounts the story of Disney wanting to purchase 42<sup>nd</sup> street in New York, the so-called red light district, in order to leave it as it is, but now as a Disney attraction. This represents, he argues, the

integration of the real world into the imaginary, ‘where reality itself becomes a spectacle’ (Baudrillard, 2005).<sup>27</sup>

In support of Baudrillard’s thesis that modern consumption increasingly assumes the attributes of an interactive performance, the example of Smurfland can be consolidated by the entire genre of reality television which has moved from simple exposure to the performance of significant life acts on screen: marriage,<sup>28</sup> infidelity,<sup>29</sup> plastic surgery.<sup>30</sup> What is of particular interest, however, is Baudrillard’s suggestion that this new interactivity represents a significant departure from Debord’s spectacle. ‘We are no longer’, Baudrillard claims, ‘in a society of the spectacle.... It is no longer the contagion of the spectacle that alters reality, but rather the contagion of virtuality that erases the spectacle’. He qualifies further: ‘We are no longer alienated and passive spectators but interactive extras; we are the meek lyophilized members of this huge “reality show”’ (ibid.).

Baudrillard’s reading exemplifies the kind that takes little account of the nuances of Debord’s argument, nor of the historical context that leads to his work. While both theorists provide enticingly metaphorical critiques of an image-based culture, where they part intellectual company is in their different views of “reality”. Baudrillard’s key terms - simulacrum, simulation, hyperreality<sup>31</sup> – all suggest, as does his version of a Disneyed world, that it is reality itself which is under threat. Once he resigns us to being ‘interactive extras’ in a huge ‘reality show’, the idea, simply put, is

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<sup>27</sup> In point of fact, this story is a little Baudrillardified. As chilling as the idea is of prostitutes wearing Disney nametags, it is not quite accurate. What Disney did in 1993 was to buy the New Amsterdam Theatre which, true to the connotations of its name, was, indeed “red”. Yet Disney did not cryogenise this decrepitude. Instead the establishment was closed for refurbishment and re-opened in April 1997 with a new, improved, family flavor; the stage line-up since then includes *Hercules*, *The Lion King* and *Mary Poppins*.

<sup>28</sup> *Married by America* (FOX, 2002).

<sup>29</sup> *Temptation Island* (FOX, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> *I Want a Famous Face* (MTV, 2004).

<sup>31</sup> For a comprehensive review of Baudrillard’s works, see California State University’s annotated bibliography (Attias, 1996).

that our very life narratives become entangled in a state of vertigo, of postmodern instability – of Smurfdom – from which there is, he implies, no escape. After an early academic career with Marxist leanings,<sup>32</sup> this view represents Baudrillard’s later, post-structuralist phase, where he argues against reality as an autonomous category,<sup>33</sup> generally the fault of new and expanding forms of media. In “The Masses: The Implosion of the Social in the Media” (1994), he indeed stipulates that ‘we will never ... be able to separate reality from its statistical, simulative projection in the media’ (Baudrillard, 1994:114).<sup>34</sup>

Where Debord differs is that his theory of the spectacle is fundamentally an economic analysis with a strong Marxist agenda. This inclination separates him from Baudrillard because, as evidenced both by his Situationist history and the call to arms that concludes *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord’s work does not renounce reality nor the possibility of eliminating the prefix ‘pseudo’ from ‘experience’. Granted, Debord’s death a decade prior to Baudrillard’s means that he could not have witnessed the extent to which fakeness has, in the twenty-first century, become so naturalised as to fuel the contemporary search for the “authentic”.<sup>35</sup> That is not to

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<sup>32</sup> Baudrillard’s doctoral thesis, published as *The System of Objects* (1968), was supervised by Henri Lefebvre.

<sup>33</sup> This reading coincides with postmodern rejections of the Marxist metanarrative. In his *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Fredric Jameson argues against the logic of this analysis, calling the idea ‘impure’ because ‘everything significant about the disappearance of master narratives has itself to be couched in narrative form’ (Jameson, 1991:xi). More relevant to the particular tautologies of Baudrillard’s argument, Jameson also suggests when ‘any observation about the present’ articulates ‘a symptom and an index of the deeper logic of the postmodern’ – as Baudrillard’s does – the result is that the so-called postmodern condition is turned into ‘into its own theory and the theory of itself’ (1991:xiii), with doubtful progressive usefulness.

<sup>34</sup> In his review of *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003), the *New Yorker*’s Adam Gopnik humorously suggests that if ‘the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, whose books—“The Gulf War Did Not Take Place” is one—popularized the view that reality itself has become a simulation, has not yet embraced the film it may be because he is thinking of suing for a screen credit’ (Gopnik, 2003).

<sup>35</sup> The manufactured authentic has become a new best-selling commodity. Witness, for instance, Thames Town, an ‘authentic British style town’ ([www.thamestown.com](http://www.thamestown.com)) in China, which features an exact replica of a pub and a fish-n-chips shop from the seaside town of Dorset, U.K.. In addition to the example of a Canadian mall with ‘recreations of New Orleans’ Bourbon Street’, Best and Kellner also mention Las Vegas, which ‘has on display an elaborate simulation of New York City, complete with 42nd Street and the Statue of Liberty’ (Best and Kellner, 1999:136).

suggest, of course, that Debord was in any way optimistic about spectacular society, particularly if we recall his graver conclusion, in *Comments*, that no part of society escapes the spectacle because it ‘is mixed into all reality and irradiates it’ (op. cit.). But his economic analysis provides a more useful tool for thinking about the specific ideological mechanisms at work in a culture in which, as Raymond Williams (1921-1988) notes, the word *customer*, implying ‘some degree of regular and continuing relationship to a supplier’ has given way to the more autonomous *consumer*, ‘a more abstract figure in a more abstract market’ (Williams, 1983:79). As Best likewise concludes, ‘Baudrillard’s exaggerated articulation of potentially useful concepts demands that we speak not only of the commodification of reality, the dissolution of the real through the movement of the commodity form, but *the reality of commodification and the social forces behind it*’ (Best, 1994:58, author’s emphases).

Language, as always, is instructive. Part of what I believe is a misreading of Debord’s work comes down to language. The so-called passivity of the spectacle is really limited to physical immobility: to watch a screen, or to engage even in the most vigorous of virtual activities, demands sitting still. But a spectacle is by definition interactive, because it cannot exist without spectators. It is the gaze that constructs meaning: things gain substance by being looked at. In other words, the perpetuity of the spectacle depends on its continued consumption. So, while media advances may have impacted the circumstances of reality to the extent of perfecting its representation, it is simply too far-fetched to suggest, as Baudrillard does, that reality itself has ceased to exist as a definable experience.<sup>36</sup> Society changes, and change is not intrinsically bad. Marx himself recognised the enormous positive potential of

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<sup>36</sup> Philosopher Dennis Dutton concurs, in no uncertain terms: ‘[W]hen it isn’t unintelligible, almost everything Baudrillard says is either trite or somehow — vaguely or baldly — false.... Some writers in their manner and stance intentionally provoke challenge and criticism from their readers. Others just invite you to think. Baudrillard’s hyperprose demands only that you grunt wide-eyed or bewildered assent’ (Dutton, 1990).

capitalism. What defines twenty-first century “developed” economies, instead, is an increased consumption of performance: we show off our lives more than ever, because mechanisms like the internet and reality television allow us to.<sup>37</sup> And, because other people’s lives have become that much more visible, consumer desires – known in advertising language as “needs” – are constantly multiplying.

At the root of all of this, to return to Debord, is lack. What the spectacle creates most forcefully is not so much a new or different reality but rather a perceived absence of such. It creates a sense of imperfection. John Berger put it aptly in his seminal *Ways of Seeing* (1972): ‘All publicity works upon anxiety’ (Berger, 1972:143), as does a more recent suggestion that the naturalisation of the word “detoxify” implies a permanent toxicity in our lives (Bowler, 2005). The irony of the risk society that is contemporary consumer culture is that, as information proliferates and performances multiply – through blogging, talkshows, Reality TV – so do insecurities. This is the victory of the spectacle. Not the thing to be looked at, but the onlookers. The spectacle creates wants and desires. It creates consumers. Baudrillard is right to point out that consumers are more (inter)active than ever. This only means that the phenomenon Debord described in 1967 is ever more relevant. Moreover, it is the historical continuity of his work – from Marx to the present – that consolidates its usefulness for understanding the nature of our craving to consume, which is far from new, but unparalleled in the twenty-first century and, as this thesis argues, acutely manifest in food media.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Raymond Williams expressed it similarly in 1989: ‘We have never as a society acted so much or watched so many others acting’ (Williams, 1989:3).

<sup>38</sup> While I acknowledge the value and prevalence of audience-reception, or “active audience” theories (cited earlier in opposition to Baudrillard, see p.3, above) to contemporary consumer culture research, it is the particular genealogy of Debord’s work, including Marx and the Frankfurt School, that finally consolidates the usefulness of his theory of the spectacle to this thesis, focussed as it is on mechanisms of production *and* consumption. Moreover, as this chapter emphasises, Debord’s spectacle by no means precludes activity on the part of the spectator, who is now ‘more active’, to recall Best and Kellner, ‘in

What is new is the extent to which Marx's commodity fetishism has been literalised to the degree that its mysteriousness – the fundamental *de*-connection between use value and exchange value of an object – has become a powerful marketing tool in its own right, from cellphones marketed as chocolate (LG Chocolate), to toothpastes that don't only whiten teeth but promise to create happy, healthy, energetic human beings. Nevertheless, in questions of reality and counterfeit, and, certainly, in questions of consumerism, food, at least, should remind us that reality has not ceased to exist because it is something we continue to need in a fundamental sense. Yet food's enormous metaphorical potential means that the tenuous line between actual food and food media is to the great advantage of industries that stand to gain from manufacturing commodities and risks alike. If food is involved, the task of convincing consumers that they "need" something is considerably lightened. This is the story of the chapters that follow.

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what remains the spectacle' (op.cit.). See also p.19, above: 'While the loss of human agency is certainly a potent undercurrent in Debord's insistence on modern life as a 'pseudo' experience, always implicit in the reign of the spectacle is the part of the spectator'. For a useful overview of active audience theories, see Will Brooker and Deborah Jermyn's *The Audience Studies Reader* (2003); and particularly Ien Ang's "Living Room Wars: Rethinking Audiences for a Postmodern World" (2003), David Morley's "The *Nationwide* Audience" (2003), and John Fiske's "Understanding Popular Culture" (2003).

## 2. Introduction, or, Mario Batali, on the subject of cooking

The first part of this chapter serves as an introduction to the work, while the second section describes the structure of the thesis.

In 2006, a manuscript called *Apicii – De Re Coquinaria*<sup>1</sup> was restored to ensure its survival for the next millenium. Generally attributed to a Roman by the name of Marcus Apicius (*Apicii*), the text dates to the 5<sup>th</sup> Century and is, thus far, the oldest surviving cookbook. *De Re Coquinaria* was acquired by The New York Academy of Medicine in 1929, and its restoration - costing \$15,000<sup>2</sup> - was carried out in New York under the auspices of The Culinary Trust. The press release announcing completion of the project explains the manuscript's importance:

The work has proved invaluable to classical and medieval scholars and culinary historians and is still used extensively by top chefs around the world, including Mario Batali who kept a copy of the published work in his back pocket during a tour of Italy. (Young, 2006)

The existence of *De Re Coquinaria*, together with the continued interest in the manuscript, is telling of a curiosity about food that potentially dates to the beginnings of language and communication, and threatens to overwhelm now that language has become much more than the painted, written or spoken word. Language in the twenty-first century has expanded to include moving images (television, cinema, wireless

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<sup>1</sup> Also known by its various English translations (*The Roman Cookery Book*, 1958; *Cookery and Dining in Imperial Rome*, 1977; *The Roman Cookery of Apicius*, 1985; *A Taste of Ancient Rome*, 1992) and, more commonly, as the “Apicius”, I will hereafter be referring to the work as *De Re Coquinaria* (“On the subject of cooking”).

<sup>2</sup> ‘The \$15,000 needed to fund the restoration was raised with help from IACP [International Association of Culinary Professionals] members and major contributions from corporate sponsors KitchenAid and Brown-Forman’ (Young, 2006).

broadcasts, webcasts, digital billboards), disembodied voices (radio, podcasts) and the millions of digital codes that generate virtual realities (Second Life<sup>3</sup>).

That the manuscript should end up at The New Academy of Medicine, and that its reproduction should be carried in the back pocket of a celebrity chef, is a remarkable thing. On the one hand this underlines our interest in and acknowledgement of food as something of significant historical, scientific, and cultural value. By suggesting something of the way that some people once ate, the text provides insight into a previous way of life, a way of eating,<sup>4</sup> and, crucially, a way of representing that life and that food. In this way, *De Re Coquinaria* has great sociological significance.

The manuscript tells more than one story of representation. The question of whether Marcus Apicius did, in fact, compile the recipes remains debatable (Salkeld, 2006), but if his “authorship” is true, the work is a result of his desire to record – that is, to represent - the food that he made a life of enjoying; so much so, the story goes, that he committed suicide when bankruptcy forced him to abandon his expensive habits (Versfeld, 2004:57, Young, 2006). Yet another story arises out of the preservation, restoration and display of the manuscript. Where civilisation is largely measured by scientific progress, the hegemonic weight of The New York Academy of Medicine<sup>5</sup> as the home of *De Re Coquinaria* both generates and consolidates the manuscript’s worth as an artefact that is not primarily culinary nor literary, but

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<sup>3</sup> Second Life is ‘a 3D online digital world imagined and created by its residents’ (www.secondlife.com).

<sup>4</sup> As Lauren Salkeld asserts on the food website Epicurious: ‘The Apicius recipes provide a rare glimpse into the eating habits of ancient Romans – wealthy ancient Romans, to be precise’ (Salkeld, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> According to its website, ‘The Academy maintains one of the world’s largest privately owned medical libraries. The library contains over 800,000 volumes and 1,000 current journal subscriptions, as well as more than 50,000 rare and important books, manuscripts, archives and artifacts dating back to 1700 BC. The Academy’s is the second largest medical collection open to the general public in the United States’ (www.nyam.org).

medical. This evokes the popular philosophy that food is medicine,<sup>6</sup> or, in its original form, “Let your food be your medicine and your medicine be your food”. These words are accredited to the Greek physician Hippocrates (460-356BC), also known as the Father of Medicine. If Hippocrates was indeed the Father, the Academy pays homage to him by preserving, restoring and displaying the manuscript. In its present context, in other words, *De Re Coquinaria* represents a Hippocratic Oath, as it were, and validates the Academy’s very existence.

The third story of representation takes place in Mario Batali’s back pocket. Specifically, with *De Re Coquinaria* - now reproduced as a travel-size book - in the chef’s pocket. It is this story that crystallises many of the concerns of this thesis. It gestures to a history of food, a history of the representation of food and, crucially, a representation of that history. Armed with recipes from the Roman Empire, Batali, like the title of his 2005 cookbook, is *Molto Italiano* (“very Italian”). Assuming, also, that he uses the recipes in his cooking, this scenario gives credence to the claim that *De Re Coquinaria* provides an ‘insight into the roots of modern Western cuisine’ (Salkeld, 2006). What’s more, this is a story of making that history palatable to the average consumer.

Batali is a celebrity chef in all senses of the term. He is an award-winning chef<sup>7</sup> and restaurateur,<sup>8</sup> cookbook author<sup>9</sup> (including one specifically for NASCAR

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<sup>6</sup> In his discussion of the historical centrality of medical properties to Chinese food, E.N. Anderson reminds that, ‘a few remnants of humoral medicine are still with us – not just such metaphors as “cool as a cucumber” or the use of “hot” to mean “spicy” but also belief in such things as the curative value of chicken soup’ (Anderson, 1997:84).

<sup>7</sup> Batali’s awards include “Man of the Year” (GQ Magazine, chef category, 1998), “Who’s Who of Food and Beverage in America” (D’Artagnan Cervena lifetime achievement award, 2001), “Best Chef: New York City” (James Beard Foundation, 2002), and “Outstanding Chef in America Award” (James Beard Foundation, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Including, in New York, Babbo Ristorante e Enoteca, Lupo Osteria Romano, Del Posto, Esca, Otto Enoteca Pizzeria, Casa Mono, Bar-Jamón; in Los Angeles, Pizzeria Mozza, Osteria Mozza; in Las Vegas, B&B Ristorante. By 2007 Batali’s restaurants had collectively earned him 3 Michelin stars, 3 stars from *New York Times* food critic Frank Bruni, and the “Ivy Award” (Ivy Restaurant & Institutions, 2005).

fans<sup>10</sup>), food television personality, *Iron Chef* contestant, not to mention an (in)famous wearer of bright orange Crocs™, a company for which he has become a valued “brand ambassador” (Hanas, 2006).<sup>11</sup> All of this combines to give Batali the right ‘combination of earnings and sizzle’ (www.forbes.com) to make it to *Forbes* magazine’s Celebrity 100 list in 2006. This is a man who people know and, judging from his expanding empire, this is a man whose food people want to eat and watch; whose books, cookware<sup>12</sup> and wine<sup>13</sup> they want to buy, and whose Vespa<sup>14</sup> they want to catch a glimpse of in the street. Batali’s media presence, furthermore, is not confined to the U.S.; *Playboy* Brazil ran a “day-in-the-life” feature on him in April 2007. This is a man, put otherwise, who people trust. And he does not disappoint. As Robin Jenkins explains in an article titled “Keeping it Real”, the most important thing for fans waiting to have their copies of Batali’s latest cookbook signed was ‘that he was genuine’ (Jenkins, 2007). Who better, then, to signal to the public the desirability of a “classic” text like *De Re Coquinaria* and to forge a link between past and present? Indeed, as his website proclaims, ‘Through his restaurants, cookbooks, products and television shows, Mario Batali breathes the spirit of the Old World into modern day America and shows us how to revel in the inherent joys of daily life’ (www.mariobatali.com).

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<sup>9</sup> *Simple Italian Food* (1998); *Mario Batali Holiday Food* (2000); *The Babbo Cookbook* (2002); *Molto Italiano – 327 Simple Classic Italian Recipes to Cook at Home* (2005).

<sup>10</sup> *Mario Tailgates NASCAR Style* (2006).

<sup>11</sup> On 17 May 2007, Crocs, Inc. announced the official endorsement by Mario Batali of their new “Bistro” shoe, specifically designed to offer ‘high comfort to workers in the restaurant and food service industry’ (Packard, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Batali sells a range of ceramics, cookware, ‘soft grip gadgets’, ‘soft grip tools’, ‘stainless serving tools’, and ‘wooden tools’ (www.italiankitchen.com).

<sup>13</sup> In addition to owning a (La Mozza) wine-producing vineyard in Italy (Coates, 2006), Batali co-owns a wine shop, Italian Wine Merchants, in New York.

<sup>14</sup> As Ben Whitford and Nicki Goslin suggest in *Time*, ‘clearly [Batali’s] ... doing more managing than sauteing, hopping on his Vespa scooter to visit his restaurants over the course of a New York night’ (Whitford and Goslin, 2005).

The theme of the old in the new is central to Batali's persona and, indeed, to Food Studies, a relatively new and multidisciplinary field that spans the Humanities and Social Sciences. Tom Jaine of Prospect Books in the U.K. provides a comprehensive account of the ways in which food has penetrated academia and, increasingly, popular media. Previously the realm of a small number of individuals with an antiquarian interest in food – Jaine cites the example of Samuel Pegge and Richard Warner, two 18<sup>th</sup> century gastronomes who privately restored and publicised *The Forme of Cury*, a key medieval manuscript<sup>15</sup> - what we now term Food Studies has its beginnings in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with a slow but steady growth in publications covering the history of a particular consumable such as wine, bread, and the potato. In the course of the century these monographs were gradually supplemented with scholarly interrogations into the role food plays in wider, social contexts. This broadened the field to include many of the disciplines we recognise as characterising Food Studies to date: anthropology, ethnology, sociology, archeology, pre-history, economics, and medicine.<sup>16</sup> Jaine goes on to note that the period following World War 2 saw an increased interest in quantifiable studies of food, observable in France, for instance, in 'vigorous debates on diet and its nutritional value to various social classes and regions, as well as on levels of consumption' (Jaine, 2004b).

Quantifiable food is food that can be scientifically measured, typically in calories. Yet, the debates Jaines refers to were not limited to Europe, nor to the

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<sup>15</sup> According to sociologist Stephen Mennell, *The Forme of Cury* was written around 1390 by the 'master cooks of Richard II, whom they describe as "the best and ryallest viander of all Christian kings"' (Mennell, 1985:50).

<sup>16</sup> See also Peggy Grodinsky: 'Until recently, the odds of finding the words "food" and "scholarship" in the same sentence were about the same as enjoying asparagus with ice cream. But in the last several decades, food studies departments have popped up at universities across America, food scholars have launched journals, and "serious" writers, anthropologists and historians ... have turned their attention to food' (Grodinsky, 2006).

Second World War. In his suggestively titled “The Foreign Policy of the Calorie” (2007), Nick Cullather details that although the calorie had been used as a unit of measurement in Europe,<sup>17</sup> the quantification of food that we know today was facilitated by the experiments of one Wilbur Atwater in 1896. Atwater put one of his students into a calorimeter, a gadget until then used, Cullather explains, ‘to measure the combustive efficiency of explosives and engines’ (Cullather, 2007:7).<sup>18</sup> Based on food ingested and energy expended, Atwater was able to determine something resembling an R.D.A. (Recommended Daily Allowance) for the average citizen.

The social and political implications of Atwater’s conclusions were far-reaching: domestically, calorie-requirements increasingly informed the management of state institutions such as schools and factories; internationally, army rations and, as Cullather’s title implies, foreign policy. The calorie, in other words, inaugurated the politicisation of food, not least by rendering worthless foodstuffs formerly endowed with great exchange value, such as tea and coffee:

From the first, ... [the calorie’s] purpose was to render food, and the eating habits of populations, politically legible. In this sense it was one of the lesser tools facilitating a widening of the state’s supervision of the welfare and conduct of whole populations that has been referred to in different contexts as state building, modernism, or regulating the social. It was also instrumental in a transformation in the ethics of hunger ...: to be defined as a social problem, hunger had first to be precisely quantified. The calorie was also a technology for classifying food within the inventory of resources (the “standing reserve”) at the disposal of the state. As such, it had a part in an evolving developmental discourse that registered the requirements and aspirations of nations largely in numerical terms. (Cullather, 2007:4)

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<sup>17</sup> ‘The Calorie was already defined in Bescherelle’s 1845 *Dictionnaire National*. In 1863, the word entered the English language through translation of Ganot’s popular French physics text, which defined a Calorie as the heat needed to raise the temperature of 1 kg of water from 0 to 1°C’ (Hargrove, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> The online version of Cullather’s article numbers paragraphs rather than pages.

The ‘state supervision of ... whole populations’ was played out no more convincingly than through U.S. provisioning of allied forces in the final years of World War 1. And, on a national level, calorie requirements helped to demarcate the poverty line that was best avoided because, as Raymond Pearl of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration wrote in 1921, “hunger is a potent stimulus to Bolshevism”<sup>19</sup> (cit. Belasco, 2006:31). Food had officially become a form of control. It is fitting then, that following food scarcities in two World Wars, one of the first chapters of the United Nations was the Food and Agriculture Organisation (F.A.O.), founded in 1943. In Cullather’s terms: ‘The construction of a postwar international order began with food’ (2007:54).

In addition to its canonisation in international politics, interest in food manifested in two ways significant ways following the Second World War, both of which continue to this day. Out of the increased visibility of food in affairs of state burgeoned, on the one hand, intellectual enquiry and theses around the centrality of food to national agendas, including the formation of subject- and nationhood (often under the umbrella of “identity politics”), trade and economic policies. These are some of the topics that define Food Studies presently. As Jaine concludes,

It is striking that much of our current intellectual preoccupation with food is in fact contingent on other factors than a liking for the raw material or a curiosity about its origins and development. Headline concerns such as globalisation, food adulteration or genetic modification, healthful nutrition and food safety, eating disorders and gender

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<sup>19</sup> Referring to the importance of keeping their allies well-fed during World War 1, Herbert Hoover of Woodrow Wilson’s Food Administration similarly contended that, “famine breeds anarchy. Anarchy is infectious, the infections of such a cess-pool ... will yet spread to the United States” (cit. Cullather, 2007:27).

relations, national and sub-national identity have all poured their own prejudices, worries and special interests into the pot of food studies. (Jaine, 2004b)

Neither, significantly, are these concerns confined to the academic field. The other area in which food has made a forceful appearance – one which is curiously absent from Food Studies *per se* – is in popular media. Jaine’s reference to ‘Headline concerns’ such as globalisation is an index not particularly of food in media, but rather of media coverage of prevailing political discourses and, with increasing inevitability, the academic treatment of these discourses.

Food in twenty-first century media is everywhere. While the first texts dedicated to a particular foodstuff may have been overrun, briefly, by different (wartime) agendas, no time was wasted in reinvigorating the culinary monograph that continues, not only as an important field of Food Studies, but equally as a best-selling bookshop genre; from Elizabeth David’s *English Bread and Yeast Cookery* (1977), to Sidney Mintz’s *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (1986), to Mark Kurlansky’s *Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World* (1998) and *Salt : A World History* (2003).<sup>20</sup> More importantly, however, and in keeping with various other “booms”,<sup>21</sup> the postwar period inaugurated a surge of food in popular media that, more than half a century later, shows little sign of abating.

This was helped by two things: interest and technology. Notwithstanding that magazines had been printing recipes for “housewives” for many years already, the

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<sup>20</sup> To name a few “bestsellers”. A by no means exhaustive, but longer list of recent publications would include: *The Bialy Eaters: The Story of a Bread and a Lost World* (Mimi Sheraton, 2000); *True History of Chocolate* (Sophie & Michael Coe, 2000); *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Judith A. Carney, 2002); *Vanilla : A Cultural History of the World's Favorite Flavor and Fragrance* (Patricia Rain, 2004); *The Big Oyster, History on the Half Shell* (Mark Kurlansky, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> In the U.K., industrial production rose 350% in the three decades following World War 2 (Bullock and Yaffe, 1979).

fact that people should have a heightened interest in food following – and during - the war is not surprising, given its relative scarcity. This was already in evidence during the first World War when the flourishing calorie was steadily making its appearance alongside recipes in magazines like the American *Good Housekeeping* with the caution that,

Extravagant and wasteful use of food is reprehensible at any time; with the nation at war and the food-supply scarcely adequate, it is little short of treasonable. Hence it is that thriftiness and economy in their kitchens is the nation's first demand of its housewives. ... The caloric value of each recipe is carefully calculated, and this enables the menus to be carefully balanced. With the recipes you can cook without waste, for the number they will serve is always known. In a word, that strict individual economy and conservation of resources that patriotism entails is made easy by a consistent use of these pages. (Ed., 1917)<sup>22</sup>

But the years following the second World War were particularly significant for food media because they heralded a new, heightened phase of consumerism. This was based in significant part on the coincidence between the end of food rationing and the advances in trade, agriculture and food production (Scruton, 2003) triggered by the second post-war period. Industrial developments in the later part of the twentieth century, in other words, progressively made more food available to increasing numbers of people. Similarly, developments in media technology combined to make more *information* about food available to more people. Paradoxically, these developments would also be instrumental in delineating food media as being about

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<sup>22</sup> This preceding daily meal plans along these lines: '*Breakfast*: Rhubarb and Bananas; Chicken Omelet; Bran Muffins; Coffee, *Luncheon*: Stuffed Tomato Salad; Hot Corn Cake; Sea Moss Blanc Mange; TeaWafers, *Dinner*: Boiled Whitefish Egg Sauce; String-Beans; Plain Boiled Potatoes Sprinkled with Parsley; Lettuce and Radish Salad; Huckleberry Pudding' (ibid.).

much more, and less, than food. These were the beginnings of a consumer-base of “foodies”<sup>23</sup> whose interests in food lay beyond the mere eating.

Three examples describe and encapsulate this shift. The first is the U.S. magazine *Gourmet*, launched in 1941.<sup>24</sup> Albeit on the eve of war, so to speak, the magazine’s longevity speaks to the success of a then-nascent market for “good living” centred around, but not confined to food. As Ruth Reichl, the magazine’s editor since 1999, notes in her introduction to *Endless Feasts*, a collection of writings from *Gourmet* over sixty years, ‘There was almost nothing that the editors considered outside the magazine’s purview, no voice that could not be heard within its pages’ (Reichl, 2002). *Gourmet* represented a popular manifestation of one of the elements that early Food Studies texts recognised: that food, more than simply sustenance, is a way of life. But in contrast to sociological, anthropological and historical analyses of the role that food plays in broader social contexts, *Gourmet* prototyped “food” largely as a distraction from life:

War and want were far away, and the editors were certain their readers would welcome a recipe for Pheasant à la Bohemienne. (“Pluck and clean a young pheasant ... , rub it with lemon juice inside and out, then salt and pepper to taste. Sew. Truss. Melt 3 tablespoons of butter or, still better, use the butter in which a fresh goose liver, larded through and through with small sticks of raw black truffle, has been poached and then cooled”). As MacAusland announced in the debut issue, “Never has there been a time more fitting for a magazine like *Gourmet*.” Oddly enough, he was right. In fact, there’s

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<sup>23</sup> The term “foodie” was coined by Ann Bart and Paul Levy in their *Official Foodie Handbook* (1984). The term refers to someone ‘devoted to refined sensuous enjoyment (especially good food and drink)’.

<sup>24</sup> *Gourmet* was not the first “foodie” publication. It was preceded by the journal of The International Wine & Food Society, founded by André Simon (1877-1970) in 1933, and described then as the ‘world’s only association of gastronomic enthusiasts not associated commercially with the wine and food trade’ (www.iwfs.com). For the purposes of this discussion, however, *Gourmet* was the first significant *popular* media production, in the main because its readers were not required to be members of an association, and it was – and continues to be – marketed as a magazine rather than a journal.

never been a time that wasn't fitting for *Gourmet*, even when real life seemed to race in the opposite direction. (Shapiro, 2004)

The example of *Gourmet* – both as a continuing phenomenon and as a prototype for the massive food magazine industry<sup>25</sup> – underscores an important ideological pivot of food media: the political and economic luxury of indulgence. If Food Studies recognises food as essential, food media capitalise on food as an essential distraction.<sup>26</sup> This is manifested, variously, from the “good life” to obesity to a prevalent hysteria around so-called good and bad foods.

The second emblematic publication was Elizabeth David's *Mediterranean Food* [1950]. A product of years of travelling that kept David away from England for most of World War 2 (Cooper, 2000), *Mediterranean Food* appeared at a critical junction for the English media. With the press and radio still dominant, television was nevertheless an expanding industry and about to undergo its first trade conflicts as a result of new commercial interests. These conflicts were played out in the form of rivalries between commercial and public service television stations, and also between regional and national interests (Hobsbawm, 1994); divergences that were indicative of

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<sup>25</sup> In 2003, food journalist, restaurant critic and cookbook author Molly O'Neill noted that, in the previous year, no less than '145 food magazines, quarterlies, and newsletters were produced in America', and the 'number of books about food and wine sold each year continues to climb from the 530 million that *Publisher's Weekly* reported were sold in 2000' (O'Neill, 2003). Current top-rated U.S. magazines, with over 1 million monthly readers, include *Gourmet*, *Bon Appetit*, *Food & Wine*, *Cooking Light*, and *Every Day with Rachael Ray* (Sagon, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> In his 1975 introduction to Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's *The Physiology of Taste* [1825], Roland Barthes explains the primacy of luxury, or non-essential, consumption to Brillat Savarin's (B.-S.) paradigm: 'in the schema of food, B.-S. always marked the distinction between need and desire: "The pleasure of eating requires, if not hunger, at least appetite; the pleasure of the table is generally independent of both." At a period when the bourgeoisie knew no social culpability, B.-S. sets up a cynical opposition: on one side, *natural appetite*, which is of the order of need; and on the other, *appetite for luxury*, which is of the order of desire. Everything is here, of course: the species *needs* to procreate in order to survive, the individual *needs* to eat in order to subsist; yet the satisfaction of these two needs does not suffice man: he must bring on stage, so to speak, the *luxury* of desire, erotic or gastronomic: an enigmatic, useless supplement, the desired food - the kind that B.-S. describes - is an unconditional waste or loss, a kind of ethnographic ceremony by which man celebrates his power, his freedom to consume his energy "for nothing"' (Barthes, 1986:251). This distinction between wants and needs is clearly pertinent to Marx's commodity fetishism, as it is to Debord's spectacle (see p.7 ff., above).

the rapidly expanding, though tenuous, state not only of the media but also of the very categories of “national” and “local”. *Mediterranean Food* equally challenged these categories by importing, through David’s writing, “foreign” methods and ingredients to English cooking precisely at a time when post-war rationing made it virtually impossible to procure the ingredients she prescribed. Regarded by some as an audacious move,<sup>27</sup> the book nevertheless proved a great success, and David was ushered in as a pivotal figure in the national imagination.<sup>28</sup> *Mediterranean Food* unveiled a hunger for that breed of food fantasy now often described as culinary tourism. In the words of Clarissa Dickson Wright, of *Two Fat Ladies* fame:

It is this vision of a land that existed solely in Elizabeth David’s imagination which has shaped our food, our dreams, and our thinking over the past fifty years. Those who rush to buy holiday homes in France or Chiantishire (as Tuscany has now been renamed) or those endless books that have only to mention purple lavender fields or baskets of lemons to make the best-seller lists, all are searching for a place that isn’t there except in the heart of this great food writer. (Dickson Wright, 2002:iii)

Significantly, this fantasy also unleashed a very real consumer demand. As David noted in the preface to a revised edition less than ten years after the original publication of *Mediterranean Food*,

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<sup>27</sup> In her essay “John Wesley’s Eye”, published in *Spectator* in 1963, David reveals as much: ‘Hardly knowing what I was doing, I who had scarcely ever put pen to paper except to write memos to the heads of departments in the Ministry which employed me during the war, I sat down and started to work out an agonized craving for the sun and furious revolt against that terrible cheerless, heartless food by writing down descriptions of Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cooking. Even to write words like apricot, olives and butter, rice and lemons, oil and almonds, produced assuagement. Later I came to realize that in the England of 1947 those were dirty words I was putting down’ (cit. Chaney, 1998:217).

<sup>28</sup> Evidenced, not least, by the numerous publications that followed, paving the way for the “The Elizabeth David Kitchen Shop” in London (1965-1973), and her acknowledged influence on later renowned food personalities such as Claudia Roden.

So startlingly different is the food situation now as compared with only two years ago that I think there is scarcely a single ingredient, however exotic, mentioned in this book which cannot be obtained somewhere in this country .... Those who make an occasional marketing expedition to Soho or the region of Tottenham Court Road can buy Greek cheese and Calamata olives, Tahina paste from the Middle East, little birds preserved in oil from Cyprus, stuffed vine leaves from Turkey ..., Italian salame and rice, even occasionally Neapolitan Mozzarella cheese .... These are details which complete the flavour of a Mediterranean meal, but the ingredients which make this cookery so essentially different from our own are available to all; they are the olive oil, wine, lemons, garlic, onions, tomatoes, and the aromatic herbs and spices which go to make up what is so often lacking in English cooking: variety of flavour and colour, and the warm, stimulating smells of genuine food. (David, 1958:12-13)

David's observation that the main ingredients of a Mediterranean meal are 'available to all' in the U.K. bespeaks the diversity of cooking and food habits that features prominently as one description of globalisation. It points to the genesis of a modern multiculturalism that results from the movement of people and products in the latter part of the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, and not unlike *Gourmet* magazine, David's statement also articulates a classist assumption that the availability of ingredients describes an inclusive level of disposable income. Olive oil, wine, lemons and garlic, even more so now than then, are certainly available for purchase almost anywhere, and at practically any time of the year. But they are not, and were not then, 'available to all'. In short, available does not mean universally accessible. David's text in this way prefigures the ideological tensions that underpin one of the central debates around food and globalisation today, where a celebration of variety (Cowen, 2004) is often

pitted against the so-called McDonaldization (Ritzer, 1996)<sup>29</sup> of the world.<sup>30</sup> Both of these scenarios are predicated on an assumption of access.

Furthermore, the question of pluralism and diversity is closely linked to that other discursive bedfellow of globalisation: democracy.<sup>31</sup> The ostensible democratisation of food is in evidence not only in the culturally myriad food experiences available to us now in supermarkets and restaurants (including low-cost fast-food restaurants that make “dining out” accessible to a lower income demographic), but also in the array of cookbooks, television shows and blogosphere<sup>32</sup> activity that purports to make ‘available to all’ what was previously the domain of professional chefs. As *New Statesman* editor William Skidelsky puts it, ‘The good news is that, in today’s world, it is perfectly possible to pretend that you’re a chef even if you are nothing of the sort’ (Skidelsky, 2006).

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<sup>29</sup> Originally coined by sociologist Eric Seltzer to depict a society dominated by the characteristics of a fast-food industry (‘efficiency’, ‘calculability’, ‘predictability’, and ‘control’), the term McDonaldization is analogous, rather than explicitly related to food.

<sup>30</sup> In political and academic discourses, “globalisation” is a contentious term with debatable origins, causes and effects, not to mention its dissenters who argue for “glocalization”, or that transnational trends are seamlessly adapted to local needs. For the purposes of this discussion, globalisation refers to the configuration that describes a globally intersected economic system, and which has largely manifested in the second half of the twentieth century. Debord describes this system in his essay “Abat-Faim” (1985): ‘The practice of generalized hunger abatement [*abat-faim*] is also responsible for the famine [*la famine*] among the peripheral people who are absolutely at the mercy of what one dares to call the global capitalist system. The process is simple: living cultures are eliminated by the global market, and the people of so-called underdeveloped countries are magically transformed into unemployed workers in vast shantytowns, which one sees growing rapidly in Africa and Latin America. The fish that was formerly caught and eaten by Peruvian peoples is now monopolized by the proprietors of the advanced economies, who use it to nourish the poultry that they sell on the market’ (Debord, 1985). See Chapter 4 (Cookbooks) for further discussion of trends resulting from transnational exchanges of people and products.

<sup>31</sup> On the “democratisation” of globalisation, see, for example, Henry Teune: ‘Empires of conquest were a mainstay of processes of globalization until the end of the 20th century. Democracy, “everywhere” in the world then took over as a viable alternative to empires, obediences, and ideologies, becoming a threat to some, a promise for others: both as the keystone of globalization and as source of its own rewards. The promises of the new globalization—peace, prosperity, and freedom—became realizable in the last quarter of the 20th century. The rewards became credible in the 1970s when world markets began to dominate national and local ones, and when people in many “Third World” countries began to see at least a glimmer of sustained economic growth’ (Teune, 2002:1).

<sup>32</sup> Blogosphere describes the virtual space occupied by “blogs”, or weblogs; frequently updated personal and/or professional websites.

As with debates over whether globalisation represents pluralism or threatens the imposition of monoculture, neither is this new democracy without anxieties. Some of these are played out in the food world, for example, in media disputes about the copyrightability of “signature” recipes (Buccafusco, 2006), calling into question whether chefs have earned – or have the right to earn – the status of artists. These antagonisms betray a central paradox of globalisation, namely that the apparent obscuring of traditional boundaries – between countries, professions, classes – often leads to heightened competitiveness and insecurities that result in a stronger impulse to safeguard historical categories.

Historically, David’s text is situated before these conflicts emerge or manifest to a significant degree. Yet it remains pivotal precisely for this reason; because, in other words, her non-inclusive ‘all’ testifies to and prefigures the highly selective view of globalisation that informs much of its contemporary discourse, whether for or against. This is illustrative of Marxist critic Pierre Macherey’s suggestion, in “Literary Analysis: The Tomb of Structures” [1966], that meaning emerges as much from what is made explicit as from that which remains silent. Although focussed on literature, the Machereyan silence offers a useful perspective here with regard to discrepancies between “democratic” narratives of globalisation – represented here by David’s celebration of availability – and chefs wanting to safeguard the exclusivity of their creations:

The order which it [narrative structure] professes is merely an imagined order, projected onto disorder, the fictive resolution of ideological conflicts, a resolution so precarious that it is obvious in the very letter of the text where incoherence and incompleteness burst forth. (Macherey, 1981:194-195)

In sum, *Mediterranean Food* marks a paradigm shift not only because it describes and inaugurates the traffic of culinary information and products that characterises much of the developed world today, but also because of what it ignores: on publication, the non-availability of “Mediterranean” ingredients; post-publication, the non-accessibility of these “basics” to a number of people.

Finally, the success of *Mediterranean Food* anticipates the imminent fashion of a so-called Mediterranean diet, rich in olive oil, wine, pasta and so on. That this eating pattern is “healthier” has been supported by statistics of lower rates of heart disease and obesity in Mediterranean countries. But, that eating (lots of) pasta and olive does *not* miraculously lead to good health and weight loss is indicative of what is arguably the guiding strand of food marketing and consumption today; one that ignores history and context in favour of corporate concerns. The popular version of the Mediterranean diet, while a goldmine for the olive oil, wine and pasta industries, excludes what informs the historical food patterns of people in the Mediterranean, namely a Mediterranean climate, and physical labour (Nestle, 2002).<sup>33</sup> David’s book is the product of the author’s personal experience, and in the words of Marguerite Patten, the so-called Doyenne of British cookery, *Mediterranean Food* helped to bring “sunlight ... into Britain” (in Tober, 2004). Yet as a commodity it ironically stands as an important forerunner of a depersonalised, decontextualised relationship to food, or what journalism professor Michael Pollan terms the ideology of nutritionism; ‘the widely shared but unexamined assumption ... that the key to understanding food is ... the nutrient’ (Pollan, 2007).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> As culinary historian Nicola Humble puts it: ‘The Mediterranean diet was essentially a fantasy, one that promised us health and long life while allowing us to indulge in fat and alcohol’ (Humble, 2005:251).

<sup>34</sup> This is not to suggest that David herself had an impersonal, or indeed “nutritionist”, relationship to the food she wrote about, but rather to highlight how her work prefigures the extremely lucrative

Somewhat incongruously, the role of the nutrient brings us to the third and final major development for Food Media following World War 2: the rise of food television and, with it, the celebrity chef. Televised cooking was first broadcast in the U.K., and it was Marguerite Patten who featured on the BBC's inaugural magazine show, *Designed for Women*, on air from 1947 to the early 1960s. Patten had been employed as a home economist by the U.K. Ministry of Food since 1942, and had, during the war, been instrumental in teaching people how to prepare nutritious meals on rationed food: 'Our campaign was to find people, wherever they might be, and make them aware of the importance of keeping their families well fed on the rations available' (Patten, 2004a:7), including visiting schools, 'to assess the food value and vitamin content of school dinners' (2004a:8). Patten's media presence during the war was consolidated by contributing recipes to the Ministry's radio programme, *The Kitchen Front*, launched in 1940 with an appeal from the recently appointed Minister of Food, Lord Woolton (previously Frederick Marquis):

"It is to you, the housewives of Britain, that I want to talk tonight. We have a job to do, together, you and I, an immensely important war job. No uniforms, no parades, no drills, but a job wanting a lot of thinking, and a lot of knowledge too. We are the army that guards the kitchen front." (Woolton, 1940)

Recalling the earlier strategy of *Good Housekeeping* to remind its American readers that '[e]xtravagant and wasteful use of food is ... little short of treasonable' and therefore 'thriftiness and economy in their kitchens is the nation's first demand of its housewives' (op. cit.), the tone of Woolton's petition is remarkably friendly, and may account, in part, for the success of the Ministry's wartime campaigns, not least

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contemporary market for "Mediterranean" type foods and cookbooks, a majority of which are consumed out of their original contexts.

convincing people to make good use of “Dr. Carrot”, “Potato Pete”, and his signature Woolton Pie.<sup>35</sup>

The examples of *Good Housekeeping* and *Kitchen Front* as wartime efforts are important indicators of the early role of modern media in people’s nourishment choices. Patten’s career takes this to a new level with the introduction of television and, significantly, personality. As much as Woolton’s affability was instrumental to the accomplishments of his campaigns, Patten’s trustworthiness – gained through her work with the Ministry – paved the way for her television success, where she continued to advocate nutritious use of rations until the end of rationing in the U.K. in 1954. Although Patten was not the first British television cook – she had been preceded on the BBC by Moira Meighn (1936), Xavier Marcel Boulestin (*Cook’s Night Out*, 1937) and Philip Harben (*Cookery*, 1946) – she was the first whose television appearances helped to strengthen and sustain a prolific career, including authorship of over 150 cookbooks, an O.B.E. (Order of the British Empire) for “Services to the Art of Cookery” (1991), and citations as the original celebrity chef (Anon, 2007a).

Food television as a genre<sup>36</sup> was concurrently nascent with the rise of the television industry in general. Following the BBC’s first broadcast in 1936, television was introduced in the U.S. in 1939, and the audience that pioneering food television personalities appealed to grew in tandem with an increasing generalised access to this relatively new medium. Patten’s televised cooking in this way coincided with broader

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<sup>35</sup> Woolton Pie is a baked vegetable dish topped with potatoes and cheese, and served with gravy. Patten describes it as ‘an adaptable recipe that you can change according to the ingredients you have available’ (Patten, 2004a:102).

<sup>36</sup> See my entry in Greenwood’s *The Business of Food: Encyclopedia of the Food and Drink Industries*: ‘As genre, Food TV broadly designates televised programs with content relating to food, cooking and eating. Food TV can be transmitted via cable, public broadcast television or webcast (web-based broadcast). The Food TV genre includes several sub-genres: educational (“how-to”), lifestyle, game shows, Reality shows, makeover shows, travelogues, “behind the scenes”. Many of these programs showcase or are hosted by celebrity chefs’ (Hansen, 2008b).

repercussions of the new leisure activity, not least the introduction of TV dinners. In her words,

During the war years the radio had given news, information and entertainment but how much greater was the impact of television! As more and more homes had a television set, there was a noticeable effect upon the way evening meals were served and one heard a lot about TV meals served on trays so no time need be spent away from watching the magic screens. Television gradually prevented people from going to the cinema or to other outside entertainments as regularly as they once had done. (Patten, 2004c:9)

Post-war television, in other words, marks the starting point of the narrative that is a love affair with the ‘magic screen’ that, among other things, teaches you how to cook but keeps you away from the stove. It is a story that in its twenty-first century chapter has become so pervasive that the term “TV dinner” equally describes what is on the food channel as it does that frozen, microwaveable meal popularised in the 1950s.<sup>37</sup>

This semantic shift summarises one of the storylines of television’s centrality over the last seven decades; that of progressive detachment. As Patten observes, one of television’s strongest manifestations in society has been, and is increasingly so, as substitute, not only for cinema and other ‘entertainments’, but for conversation, for socialising, and for other historical means of leisure and learning. While there can be no questioning the enormous informative and educational value

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<sup>37</sup> While not the first available frozen meal, *TV Dinner* was the first brand of pre-prepared meals specifically marketed to U.S. television audiences. It was trademarked by C.A. Swanson & Sons from 1954-1962.

of a media platform that reaches millions of viewers worldwide,<sup>38</sup> the story of food television is telling of the paradoxes that attend an unsurpassed wealth of information, when global obesity levels continue to rise concurrently with the availability of potentially preventative knowledge.

That U.K. celebrity chef Jamie Oliver should echo Patten's efforts and take up a campaign to improve school food in 2005 is but one example of this paradox. Oliver's *School Dinners* manifesto describes what he thinks 'needs to happen': 'Commit to a ten-year strategic plan and fund a long-term public campaign to get people back on to a proper diet and empower/persuade (and possibly scare, if needed) the public to make better choices' (Oliver, 2006-2007c). The ethical implications of scare tactics aside for the moment, the key word in this manifesto is *back*. When exactly were 'people' on a 'proper diet'? Incongruous as it may seem, it was during the Second World War, when food was its most scarce and David's Mediterranean ingredients were nowhere to be found (outside of the Mediterranean). As Dr. Alan Borg, director of the Imperial War Museum, comments in his Foreword to Patten's wartime cookbook, *We'll Eat Again*, 'The health of the nation was surprisingly good during the war years, despite the physical and emotional stresses so many had to endure' (in Patten, 2004a:6).<sup>39</sup>

This example underlines a momentous shift that has taken place during the last half century or so with regard to the role of media in general, and food media specifically. Very briefly, this shift can be described as a move from the educational

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<sup>38</sup> The BBC statistics for 2006-2007 claim a weekly audience of more than 230 million global viewers (Moore, 2007).

<sup>39</sup> According to Humble, 'The war put paid to the internationalist, elegant cuisine that was developing for the wealthy in the interwar years, but it also transformed the diet, culinary expectations and health of the vast majority of the population. The fact is, of course, that the industrial and urban poor had been very badly fed in this country [the U.K.] for a very long time as a result of a concatenation of factors including poor wages, little time and the loss of contact with indigenous culinary traditions that was one of the results of the industrial revolution. The war vastly improved this situation, but it did so by sweeping away one of the class distinctions around food and cooking' (Humble, 2005:103).

and informational to the entertaining and vicarious. Evidence of this is suggested by the correlation between media information and consumer behaviour: the efforts of Patten and the U.K. Ministry of Food during the war led to an improved overall national health not because rationed foods such as spam, dried bananas and egg powder make for more wholesome eating, but because ‘people’ ostensibly took good advantage of information about how to make the most of these foods. Six decades later, Oliver’s manifesto in response to a ‘need’ – in this case, general poor health and rising levels of obesity<sup>40</sup> - signals some of what has been lost between World War 2 and 2005, a period which has otherwise seen unprecedented growth in virtually all sectors, notably in access to information, primarily through television and the internet, and to a variety of food products. What is lost, *Jamie’s School Dinners* suggests, is a palpable connection between knowledge (what people know to be “good” for them) and behaviour (how they eat).

It is, of course, an oversimplification of a complex issue to propose that television is the cause of obesity, an argument that most commonly points fingers at the proverbial box for breeding “couch potatoes”,<sup>41</sup> or for luring with junk food advertisements. It is neither my intention nor in the interests of this work to make such an unquantifiable assertion. What is of significance, however, is the media phenomenon that is *Jamie’s School Dinners*. Firstly, because Oliver’s campaign is a direct echo of that undertaken by Patten and the Ministry of Food, yet the conspicuous absence of acknowledging this piece of history underscores a powerful

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<sup>40</sup> As Jamie Oliver maintains, ‘With obesity costing the N.H.S. [National Health Service] more than smoking, it seems logical that a similar campaign should be appropriate’ (Oliver, 2006-2007c).

<sup>41</sup> According to Michael Gard in *Spiked*, “‘Couch potato-ism’ rests on a belief that the more time people spend using technology, particularly televisions and computers, the less time they will spend being physically active. Furthermore, “couch potato-ism” holds that because technology is becoming more sophisticated, children are less able to resist technology’s lure, and are more likely to spend more time using technology, less time doing physical activity and, therefore, more likely to be obese. In short, the belief is that more time being sedentary equals less time being active’ (Gard, 2004).

collective amnesia that all-too-often characterises modern society, where “new” is the most reliable product to sell. That is not to say that Oliver has been basking in uncontested glory; his detractors are numerous, ranging from cultural critics who accuse him of fomenting food hysteria<sup>42</sup> to mothers – dubbed the “sinner ladies” – who protested the ensuing banning of junk food in schools by selling it to children through school fences (Perrie, 2006), not to mention the ‘unexpected black market in junk food among children who are refusing to change their eating habits’ (O’Neill, 2006b). These controversies point to two elements that most of us currently have in abundance and that remain in sharp contrast to the war years: choice and responsibility.

It is a symptom of the proliferation of modern media and consumerism that the term “healthy” is one of the most semantically unstable words in the English language. Depending on decade, publication, political agenda, corporate sponsorship, to name a few contexts, the term healthy can define anything from low-fat, to low-carb, to thin, to vegetarian, to organic, to not caring about what you eat, to eating ‘more like the French’ (Pollan, 2007). Interpretation is only the first of our choices. Every version of healthy is complemented by a profusion of products on supermarket shelves (or, at the local “farmers’ market”) to populate a designated healthy eating plan. Conversely, there is also the option to be *un*-healthy, for instance by ordering one of the bigger burgers that fast-food restaurants have recently been competing to produce in a trend that is not, apparently, ‘about size or value. It’s about thumbing your nose at the food police’ (Tamaki, 2005). As one satisfied customer at Hardee’s, home of the Monster Thickburger,<sup>43</sup> emailed to the

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<sup>42</sup> Headlines speak volumes. See, for example, Rob Lyons’ “Jamie Oliver: what a tosser” (Lyons, 2006c), or Brendan O’Neill’s “Jamie leaves a nasty aftertaste” (O’Neill, 2006a).

<sup>43</sup> A ‘megaburger with 1,420 calories and 107 grams of fat’, containing ‘twice the recommended daily allowance of saturated fat, and nearly a full day’s worth of sodium’ (Wolk, 2004).

restaurant: ‘While other restaurants were a bunch of Nancy-boys and became low-carb cowards in the face of moronic “they made me fat” lawsuits, you did the AMERICAN thing by spitting in the face of lawyers, nutritionists and food-nazi types and offering a monument to Americanism’ (ibid.).<sup>44</sup>

The “made-me-fat” lawsuits raise the question of responsibility, and bring us back to the controversy surrounding *Jamie’s School Dinners*. One of the first effects of Oliver’s campaign, as evidenced by the new “underground” in junk food, was that many children refused to eat the new “healthy” school food.<sup>45</sup> This resulted in a rise in packed lunches which, according to Oliver, “are the biggest evil. Even the best packed lunch is a shit packed lunch” (cit. Lyons, 2006a). Naturally this occasioned an outcry against Oliver’s perceived condescension to parents for the quality of meals they give their children. Indeed, in the second season of the TV series, *Return to Jamie’s Dinners* (2006), Oliver is less circumspect: “I’ve spent two years of [sic] being PC [politically correct] about parents. It’s kind of time now to say, you know, if you’re giving, you know, very young kids bottles and bottles of fizzy drink you’re a fucking asshole, you’re a tosser. If you give them bags of fucking shitty sweets at a very young age you’re an idiot” (cit. Wodge, 2006).<sup>46</sup>

While Oliver’s on-screen candidness may shock, the authority that he assumes is in line with the multitude of messages that are broadcast worldwide, daily, about what, and what not, to eat. So much so, that anything is potentially “wrong”: ‘When I go grocery shopping’, notes *Washington Post* writer Candy

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<sup>44</sup> This option of counter-healthy products as a result of consumer demand was similarly the suggestion behind McDonald’s introduction of a Bigger Big Mac for the 2006 Soccer World Cup as “a limited edition burger that will offer football fans more of what they enjoy” (Shah, 2006).

<sup>45</sup> See, for instance, ongoing BBC headlines: “Fewer pupils eating school meals” (6 June, 2006); “Healthy dinners turn off pupils” (31 October, 2006); “Pupils snub healthy school meals” (1 November, 2006).

<sup>46</sup> In June 2007, U.K. celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay echoed Oliver’s sentiments when he reportedly suggested that if “kids become obese and out of control, then seriously fine the parents because they often don’t realise what they are doing” (cit. Martin, 2007).

Sagon, 'I'm paralyzed with indecision. Everything, it seems, is either ethically, nutritionally or environmentally incorrect. Guilt is ruining my appetite' (Sagon, 2006). This is the familiar paradox of plenty where too much choice coupled with too much information results, if not necessarily in guilt, at least in a profound sense of insecurity. What this insecurity calls into question is authority; who to believe and, by extension, who to make responsible for choices taken. What's more, this ambiguity extends beyond mere food choices to defining human conditions, as evidenced by the recent *Diet Nation* (2006), in which authors John Luik et al. suggest that declaring obesity an "epidemic" is less in the service of public health than a means to 'enormous commercial, financial and power-maximising opportunities for ... the medical profession, academic researchers, the public health community, the government health bureaucracy, the pharmaceutical industry, the fitness industry and the weight-loss industry' (cit. Lyons, 2007a). Medical nomenclature further empowers "sufferers" to receive medical treatment and goes some way to removing personal accountability and social stigma.

The tension between conflicting information with regards to food is a tension between choice and responsibility that undermines one of the most effective marketing tools of commercial economies: the power of the consumer. While the range of products and information suggests this power in terms of choice, the variance in what we are told we *should* be consuming more often than not puts the responsibility of that choice elsewhere. And even where relinquishing that responsibility is rejected – such as mothers refusing to let Jamie Oliver decide what their children should eat – it is a testament to the immense authority of the media that they should be demonised as "sinner ladies". Yet the greatest authority here is celebrity. Faced with his dissenters, Oliver may claim, as he did, that "[t]his is not

the Jamie Oliver show, this is not a fucking pantomime.... I'm here because I truly care" (cit. Lyons, 2006c). But it was a Jamie Oliver show – a double B.A.F.T.A.<sup>47</sup> award-winning show – which is now available on dvd from Amazon. As one reviewer observes as a “lowlight” of the show: ‘The whole sub-plot of Jamie’s life outside this project was largely pointless and made the show seem more about Jamie than school dinners – surely something he should be avoiding’ (Anon, 2006a).

There can be no doubting the enormous concrete results of Oliver’s campaign, such as revised government legislation around school food,<sup>48</sup> earning Oliver the title of U.K. Channel 4’s “Most Inspiring Political Figure” in 2006,<sup>49</sup> and marking school food as a concern in several countries around the world. This was a reality show in the sense of effecting actual changes. At the same time, however, there can be no doubting that Oliver’s established fame was a driving force behind the campaign’s impact, including its attendant controversies. A new global awareness around school food is a testament not only to the influential role of the media, but of celebrity and, indeed, of the cachet of what essayist Joseph Epstein terms celebrity philanthropy.<sup>50</sup> Final evidence of this is in the case of Jeanette Orrey who, for several years prior to *Jamie’s School Dinners* had been campaigning for much the same at a school in Nottingham (U.K.). Although Orrey did much in her local context to raise awareness about children’s nutrition (Lyons, 2005b), her wider

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<sup>47</sup> *Jamie’s School Dinners* won “Outstanding Presenter” and “Best Factual Series” awards from the British Academy of Film and Television Arts in 2006.

<sup>48</sup> Including establishment of the School Food Trust (September, 2005): ‘Its remit is to transform school food and food skills, promote the education and health of children and young people and improve the quality of food in schools’ ([www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk](http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk)).

<sup>49</sup> Viewer comments included: “An honest and inspiring endeavour, apparently unconnected to economic or political gain. How unusual is that?”; “Jamie Oliver is a hero and should be applauded for helping to save the next generation of children” (Channel4, 2006).

<sup>50</sup> According to Epstein, ‘Perhaps the only lesson to be learned from ... displays of celebrity virtue is that even the widest fame is not by itself sufficient. It isn’t enough to be everywhere known; one must also be known to be good’ (Epstein, 2006).

recognition primarily came about with the publication of a cookbook, *The Dinner Lady*, in 2005, with a foreword by Jamie Oliver.

On one level, this goes without saying; celebrities naturally have a vantage point from which to reach a wider audience. Celebrities are effective and useful philanthropists because the world pays attention to them. Yet the example of Oliver and his school dinners is instructive to this work's focus on developments since World War 2 for several reasons. Firstly, because, in contrast to Patten, whose celebrity status grew as a result of public trust – working with the ‘people’ - and in tandem with media advances, the changes Oliver effected were largely facilitated by his prior celebrity status and considerable media presence.<sup>51</sup> Secondly, and notwithstanding his detractors, whose charges are significantly minimised in the face of renewed government legislation, the fact of Oliver's campaign is telling of a general decline in health standards that are clearly not confined to the U.K.. Finally, and not unrelated, the polarised reactions to Oliver situate his voice as one among many in the media that prescribe “healthy” eating. That there are mixed reactions is an indication of the confusion and anxiety – in some cases, veritable hysteria - that results from conflicting information. In this case, Oliver's voice emerges as the loudest, silencing even mothers. He is heard not (only) because he swears, nor because of any specialised professional qualification to make him an authority on children's health, but because he is a television star. And, whether teaching or preaching, Oliver does what television stars do best: he entertains.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Oliver's *Fifteen* series, in which he trains fifteen unemployed youths with no prior experience of cooking to work in a restaurant of the same name, is another example of the same.

<sup>52</sup> Even Oliver's most vehement critics appear to have some fun at his expense, taking the time to find creative ways to rant about the ‘fatlipped mockney twat’ ([www.ubersite.com](http://www.ubersite.com)), ‘fat tongued mockney arse’ ([www.spaced-out.org.uk](http://www.spaced-out.org.uk)), ‘self centred, ego-maniac’ ([psjk.homestead.com](http://psjk.homestead.com)). Not content with only mocking his “mockney”, others can't stand Oliver's ‘smarmy TV show’, “pucka this, pucka that”, his adverts for Sainsburys, his mock cockney wanker accent - his SCOOTER, the fact that he has all his mates round to his fashionably distressed loft apartment for tapas and weak lager, “*oh look he's got a*

The fact that a food television star currently carries as much, and in several cases more, cultural and monetary wealth than “traditional” celebrities like film stars, is evidence of the momentous import of food television to contemporary leisure industries. Although food television as a genre originated in the U.K., the U.S. Food Network cable channel, launched in 1993, was the first television channel dedicated entirely to food,<sup>53</sup> and was described in 2006 as “one of the most watched television networks in the nation” (Shamion, 2006). Statistics for that year report that the channel – available in 155 countries worldwide - reached 89 million homes across the U.S., and that its website received 6 million unique visitors per month. One of the leading products of current food channels, such as Food Network and BBC Food, is the celebrity chef. This is much in keeping with food television’s genesis in America, which, contrary to the BBC’s early food programmes, already placed greater emphasis on entertainment than instruction.

The U.S. saw its first televised cooking demonstration one year before Patten’s debut, when James Beard appeared in a segment on NBC’s *For You and Yours*, called “Elsie [the Cow] Presents James Beard in *I Love to Eat*” (1946). Later dubbed the Father of American Cooking (Goufrani, 2007), Beard had a background in both acting and cooking, including running a food shop, *Hors D’Oeuvres, Inc.*, and publishing the first notable cookbook devoted to appetizers, *Hors D’Oeuvres and Canapés* (1940). Beard’s personality was central to his soon-to-be iconic status; one that endures today in the James Beard Foundation.<sup>54</sup> Beard’s declaration in an interview that “Food is

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*chinese friend and a black friend and a martian friend and they all look like male models*” Ram it’ (www.justramit.co.uk).

<sup>53</sup> BBC Food was launched in South Africa 2002 as part of BBC Worldwide. The U.K. version, UKFoodTV, a joint venture between BBC Worldwide and Flextech Television, was launched in the same year, attracting an average of 7.9 million monthly viewers. By the end of 2003, viewership had increased by 32% (www.bbcworldwide.com). BBC Food is now also available in Scandinavia and the Middle East.

<sup>54</sup> The James Beard Foundation is a non-profit organisation that yearly recognises excellence across the culinary spectrum, including Best Chef and Restaurant, Food Journalism, Broadcast Media and

very much theatre” (cit. Jones, 1990:105) anticipates and reveals the importance of performance in modern food television. It is a key feature in the obvious and historical sense of demonstration; the difference between reading a recipe in a book or magazine and watching it being cooked on television is that someone else performs. More importantly, though, performance is key to food television because its primary function is to entertain. This underlines a strong qualitative difference between performance as education – arguably the historical premise of televised cooking, as the example of Patten suggests - and performance as entertainment.

When the Food Network changed its focus in 2000 from “how-to” cooking to include more lifestyle-, game- and Reality food shows, then-president Judy Girard explained: “The more that we can convince people that we’re not a cooking channel, the better. It’s become a great experience for viewers. It’s not a passive viewing experience” (in Umstead, 2001). The subtext that television values outweigh potential educational usefulness is clear, yet there is intriguing irony in the disjunctive description of food television as non-food and non-passive. While Girard does not make explicit what constitutes the active part of food television, it is this irony, I believe, that has led more than one journalist to explore this “great experience” by submitting to an enforced period of food-watching: ‘Call it a sudden hunger to learn something new, or maybe just call it a stunt: Could I, a kitchen neophyte,’ asks John Maynard in the *Washington Post*, ‘learn anything about cooking in a week spent in the warm, comforting glow of my television? Short answer: not really’ (Maynard, 2006). Ever more the stuntman, former *Granta* and *New Yorker* editor Bill Buford watched seventy-two hours of continuous food programming and reached a graver conclusion:

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Lifetime Achievement ([www.jamesbeard.org](http://www.jamesbeard.org)). James Beard Awards are some of the most prestigious accolades in American gastronomy.

Never in our history as a species have we been so ignorant about our food. And it is revealing about our culture that, in the face of such widespread ignorance about a human being's most essential function – the ability to feed itself – there is now a network broadcasting into ninety million American homes, entertaining people with shows about making coleslaw. (Buford, 2006b)

In addition to consolidating Girard's vision of a non-educational channel, these experiments of course have entertainment value in themselves, as does reading about them. This, presumably, represents the active viewing experience, if being entertained constitutes activity. Yet Buford's comments gesture to the potent strain between knowledge and ignorance that underlies media-saturated cultures where, all too often, non-passivity manifests in the activity of *not* using available information.

Interestingly, Buford's conclusion recall Kracauer's 1927 observations about magazines (*op. cit.*), which are worth quoting here in full:

Never before has an age been so informed about itself, if being informed means having an image of objects that resembles them in a photographic sense.... Never before has a period known so little about itself. In the hands of the ruling society, the invention of illustrated magazines is one of the most powerful means of organizing a strike against understanding. (Kracauer, 1993:432)

It is a short step to apply these words to our present day context, where endless representations of food – written, visual and spoken – compete with the ignorance that Buford describes. Kracauer's analysis is striking in retrospect because of the historical constancy it suggests between the proliferation of popular media and intellectual passivity. With regard to the increased visibility of food in media, and specifically of modern celebrity chefs as a key feature of food television, this constancy

problematizes the performance that will ensure a ‘great experience for viewers’. It is in acknowledgement of performance as acting – an inherent unreality - that one of the recurring themes of food television and its personas is “keeping it real”. Jamie Oliver swears that his is not a pantomime. Mario Batali, likewise, is genuine.

The question of authenticity has become pertinent to virtually every aspect of the food industry. We apply it to the behaviour of celebrity chefs, to Reality TV, to ethnic dining, to whether the ingredients in the bottle match the nutritional information on the label, or the organic tomato lives up to its claims. More than anything, these questions reveal the centrality of artifice to contemporary life. Not (always) artifice in the sense of fake, but rather of representation. Authenticity is key because it has become so difficult to determine. As contexts and paradigms for defining the authentic shift continuously – not all so-called celebrity chefs are chefs, for instance - so keeping it “real” at once becomes increasingly urgent and increasingly vacuous.

It should, by now, and hopefully, be clear that the main focus of this work is not food, but media. It is about food inasmuch as food has taken centre stage in global media, but it situates itself on the border of the academic field known as Food Studies because its concern is less with what food signifies as how it has come to signify as much as it does.<sup>55</sup> In her anthology, *Food: What We Eat and How We Eat* (1999), Clarissa Dickson Wright cites a French baker who asked her ‘why it is that the English produce more and more food television, and cook less and less’ (Dickson Wright, 1999:7). That Wright chooses not to tell how, if at all, she answered the question relates directly to the object of this enquiry, namely the processes of

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<sup>55</sup> This stress on representation is in keeping with the media-cultural, rather than sociological or anthropological, focus of this work. While Chapter 7 surveys a range of actual eating trends, these are considered examples of Food Media because they typically generate, if they are not directly motivated by, media coverage, and are therefore equally related to representation and reality.

naturalisation by which ideological and behavioural shifts are enabled and perpetuated, largely unquestioned, by the media. In short, I want to answer the baker's question.

The story of food from World War 2 to the World Wide Web is one of progressive detachment – from history, from politics, from experience – that relates directly to industrial advances in media and technology.<sup>56</sup> On a literal level, the industrialisation of food, albeit in progress prior to the war,<sup>57</sup> has been effective in decontextualising food to the extent that it is possible to enjoy a diet derived entirely from supermarket shelves, and thereby to avoid any active engagement with the production of the foods that we consume, be it on the farm or in the factory. Although the plethora of food trends include some that exist to remedy this development, such as organic and Slow Food<sup>58</sup> movements, their effectiveness as mechanisms of redress are severely restricted by the economic luxury required not to resort to convenience foods. In this way, they represent an exclusive minority and yet another voice in the clamour to define “healthy”. But the overarching narrative here is of the commodification of politics and history, through food. The calorie is now a firmly

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<sup>56</sup> As discussion of late nineteenth and early twentieth century developments make clear, the progressive detachment that this thesis situates between World War 2 and the World Wide Web cannot be strictly confined to the post-war period. However, the end of the war did set in motion a number of advancements that are key to the concerns of this work, including the global politicisation of food through the U.N.F.A.O. (see p.33), the dramatic rise in industrial production and consumption (see p.34), media developments that facilitated popular interest in food beyond its eating (ibid.), the increased transnational exchange of information and commodities represented by David's *Mediterranean Food* (see p.37) and, not least, the rapid growth of the television industry (see p.44 ff.).

<sup>57</sup> As the Italian food writer Anna Del Conte remarked in an interview: ‘The British, she [Del Conte] thinks, lost their connection with good food through having had their industrial revolution so early. “Ours came only after the second world war; until then, people had much more connection with the land”’ (Higgins, 2006). See also Jack Goody: ‘But the real revolution in the daily food of England occurred as the result of the events and inventions of the nineteenth century. The industrialisation of production was accompanied by the industrialisation of food, which led to the ‘complete’ revolution’ associated with an industrial cuisine’ (Goody, 1982:152).

<sup>58</sup> Founded in Italy by Carlo Petrini, Slow Food, according to its website, ‘is a non-profit, eco-gastronomic member-supported organization that was founded in 1989 to counteract fast food and fast life, the disappearance of local food traditions and people’s dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from, how it tastes and how our food choices affect the rest of the world’ (www.slowfood.com).

rooted qualifier in prevalent discourses on “healthy”, and familiar to most who are exposed to food media as a required friend or enemy on food labels. Yet its ‘foreign policy’ continues to inform food aid delivered to conflict or disaster-affected regions in the world. In telling contrast to the U.K. and U.S. wartime efforts, where nutrition was marketed as enjoyment through such figures as “Potato Pete”, is the example of the Red Cross food intervention in Lebanon in 2006. While the ‘basic dry rations conform to international standards ensuring that they provide enough nutrition’, writes Andrew Shanahan in the *Guardian*, taste isn’t ‘high on the agenda when charities are preparing emergency food parcels’ (Shanahan, 2006).

Taste may very well not be on the agenda, and neither may it have any place on such agendas, but it is very much a part of the agenda in food media. The overwhelming success of food media depends in large part on the appeal to taste through representation. Be it in the fantasy meals spawned by *Gourmet* magazine, or by Elizabeth David’s evocative descriptions of Mediterranean meals, vicarious consumption has become the mainstay of food media, evidenced no more convincingly than in the popular term “food porn”. This, interestingly, is one of the few remaining connections between food in twenty-first century media and 18<sup>th</sup> Century cookbooks which, as Jaine reminds, were ‘aspirational. They draw maps of a country inhabited by finer folk’ (Jaine, 2004a). Granted, food media doesn’t draw maps of finer folk as much as thinner, fatter, healthier, or richer folk, but aspiration to difference or novelty remains a key theme, even as the experience of watching becomes ever more homogenised. As Bunny Crumpacker, author of *The Sex Life of Food* (2006), maintains,

World War II was the impetus toward the international menu. Pizza, for one, was hard to find in America before GIs returned home from the beaches and mountains of

Italy. After the war, the new prosperity meant that international travel was possible for more people than ever before, and some of their food discoveries followed them back home. More than anything else, though, television has been the great assimilator for American food, just as it has been for everything else. We watch the same shows from coast to coast and the media has become the mother of us all. (Crumpacker, 2006:20)

What is collectivised, then, is the vicariousness that defines food media and which, in addition, perpetuates the distinction between first and third in an ostensibly globalised world.<sup>59</sup>

Aspiration with regard to food extends beyond how we define ourselves in the present to how, equally, we represent and claim our histories. Mario Batali was born and raised in Seattle (Batali, 2006). The two villages subtitled in his cookbook, *Simple Italian Foods: Recipes from my Two Villages* refer, on the one hand, to the Tuscan village where he apprenticed - Borgo Capanne - and, on the other, to New York's Greenwich Village (Batali, 1998). In this way, celebrity chef Batali's predecessor is no more the author of *De Re Coquinaria*, Roman epicure, than it is James Beard, pioneer of American food television. Where memory is in constant competition with the "new", it is not history that informs us, but the other way around; we (re)claim history. Put simply, carrying *De Re Coquinaria* in his back pocket does not give Batali the stamp of the Roman Empire. Rather, it is that empire which now bears the imprint of a bright orange Croc.

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<sup>59</sup> Food writer Mark Kurlansky reiterates this point: 'Globalization has not led to equality either. Food remains classist. The poor still eat mostly carbohydrates and fats, while the rich get the protein – something that can even be seen in the difference between airline meals in first class and economy. I once had to attend a black-tie food event in New York City while on a low-carb diet. From caviar to fish, all of the deluxe fare suited my regime' (Kurlansky, 2007).

## 2.1 The Thesis

Food media is about representations of food. As much as the intersection of contemporary media problematise the clear distinction of one type of media from another, the thesis begins by examining four separate yet related aspects of that representation: recipes, cookbooks, food literature (including journalism, menus and the internet), and television. The final chapter focuses on actual eating trends that are notably inspired by, and also generate, media coverage, and it is for this reason that I include them as examples of food media. Inasmuch as categories of media intersect, it should finally be noted that the term “food”, as used in this thesis, covers a broad spectrum of discourses about food, including cuisine (generally in reference to the transformation of the raw to the cooked particular to recipes, cookbooks, and restaurants), and more general consumption: vicarious, in the case of literature and television; cultural, in the context of authenticity and identity-construction, and actual, in the case of eating trends.

### Recipes

This chapter begins with a consideration of the recipe as a literary text. The recipe also emerges as the site of the first type of celebrity chef, where written representations of food cooked by celebrated chefs function both as historical documents and, in conjunction with the technological growth of the printing industry, as media platforms for securing and spreading fame to an increasingly literate “mass” audience. The reproducibility enabled by this industrial development is furthered by new media advances in the twenty-first century that safeguard the production of recipes as a key commodity in food media. Since the production of recipes facilitates the reproduction of food, these advances also call into question the status of cooking

as art and, by extension, of chefs as artists. This is evidenced by contemporary discussions around the copyrightability of recipes and signature dishes; debates which begin to lay foundation for considering what defines the modern celebrity chef, and which also exemplify what Debord defined as the ‘abundance of dispossession’ (1995:31) fundamental to consumerist economies and exacerbated, I argue, by the mechanisms of globalisation.

### **Cookbooks**

Following from this is a brief history of cookbooks as collections of recipes, and the major pre- and post-war trends seen by the cookbook industry. Of note here is the trend of cookbooks that take the consumer “back-to-basics”. This is a vogue with multiple implications. On the one hand it responds to the removal from basics, as it were, that results from the unprecedented growth in processed foods. The assumption of ignorance, therefore, is central to the marketability of these cookbooks, and also testifies to the ‘authorized amnesia’ (Debord, 1995:196) of the spectacle, which depends on the perpetuity of the “new”. Nevertheless, the accessibility gestured by these cookbooks also corresponds to the obscuring of historical boundaries that features in contemporary discourses around globalisation and postmodernism.

Books that take you back to the basics make cooking skills available to all, yet the subsidiary of this trend, whereby a significant number of titles are accompanied by the name of a celebrity chef (*Cook with Jamie*), at once establishes chefs as culinary authorities and undermines that authority by laying bare the claims to that professionalism. This returns the discussion to the question of professional hierarchies and chefs as artists, and introduces the dialectic of the so-called democratisation of cooking. Finally, and paradoxically, back-to-basics and its twin trend, “making it

easy”, are consistent with the representation of cooking as an effortless activity that is strongly thematic to the genre of modern food television, and which literalises the detachment from human labour that is central to Marx’s commodity fetishism.

### **Beyond Recipes: Literature, Menus, and the World Wide Web**

This chapter focuses on the prevalence of food in contexts beyond recipes and cookbooks, including new and interactive media which encourage and heighten the interpellative function of the spectacle of food. The enormous range in cookbooks – including modern reproductions of “classics” from *De Re Coquinaria* to Elizabeth David’s *Mediterranean Food*, and cookbooks published by specifically non-professionals like the Prince of Wales<sup>60</sup> – challenges any neat divisions between food literature, cookbooks, and the historical authorities of cooking and writing. Beyond distinctions between writers and cooks that emerge from the question of ghostwriting in the cookbook industry, the genre of food literature now includes culinary memoirs (of kitchens, restaurants, critics), cookbooks with stories, (fact or fiction), chef biographies and, increasingly, autobiographies, food history, and culinary tourism. Many of these include recipes. In the academic context of Food Studies, food literature additionally addresses such issues as nationalism and global politics. Some of these texts are written by established culinary professionals, some by authorities in other disciplines (history, anthropology, sociology), some by literary authorities (Barbara Kingsolver, Wole Soyinka), and plenty by no recognisable authority.

This expansion of the genre known as food literature, including print and web-based food magazines, blogging, and increased food coverage in major broadsheets such as the *New York Times*, demonstrates the extreme marketability of food, and also

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<sup>60</sup> Acknowledged to be a collection of the Prince’s favourite recipes, and published under the name of his food business, the *Duchy Originals Cookbook* (Johnny Acton and Nick Sandler, 2006) was nevertheless publicised as ‘Charles’ cookbook’ ([www.femalefirst.co.uk](http://www.femalefirst.co.uk)).

the extent to which food is decontextualised by its value as social commodity. As novelist Joyce Carol Oates muses in the *New Yorker*, there is ‘too much food in most food writing now—too much food and too little that goes further’ (Oates, 2005). The trend of writing about food for the sake of food has its counterpart in the increased visibility of food metaphors in non-food contexts. From tabloid reports on celebrities - a ‘recipe for Britney [Spears] and Kevin [Federline]: Take one pop star. Add one dancer husband .... Serve with Cheetos and Red Bull’ (www.realitynewsonline.com) - to dkny’s *be delicious* perfume, selling commodities through food language appeals at once to the historical relationship between food and sex that finds full expression, in the following chapter, in “food porn”, and also underlines the specific convenience of food to an economy of broad-spectrum consumption.

The final part of the chapter furthers the consideration of language and authority in relation, firstly, to menus, and secondly, to internet activities such as blogging and online reviewing, both amateur and professional. Menus, far from being simple descriptions of food available in restaurants, are texts that make revealing assumptions about their readers. Notable are two trends: menus that name dishes, including foreign terms, without describing or translating them, and menus that abound in what one blogger terms ‘fatty adjectives’, in other words, menus that over-describe food. The first style alienates whomever is not familiar with the named dishes, while the second inhibits understanding through an excess of detail. Both trends, pretentious by glut or dearth of information, signal the exclusivity of the fashion that is “foodie-ism”, and directly contradicts the alleged democratisation of food and eating.

Key to the question of democracy is the case of internet writing, which has seen a tremendous growth in recent years. Non-professional food blogs – estimated to

number approximately 50,000 in the U.S. in 2007 – and websites have become the basis of virtual communities and ‘grass roots’ supper clubs (Sagon, 2005). Online restaurant reviewing is a central feature of amateur and professional websites alike, marking a paradigm shift from the near-exclusive authority of historical ratings systems like the Michelin Guide. The newly tenuous lines between reviewer, critic and blogger is exemplified by Frank Bruni of the *New York Times*, whose “Diner’s Journal” blog on the newspaper’s website has helped to establish him as ‘arguably the nation’s most influential food critic’ (Shott, 2007). Bruni, whose journalism background is in campaign politics, caused notable controversy after an unfavourable review, in 2007, of Jeff Chodorow’s *Kobe Club* (Bruni, 2007d). In clear acknowledgement of Bruni’s influence, Chodorow responded with a full page letter in the *New York Times* – allegedly at a cost of \$80,000 – in which he defended himself by appealing to Bruni’s lack of qualifications to certify him as a food critic. To Chodorow’s disadvantage, the media debate that ensued only reinforced Bruni’s influence, and emphasises the power of the internet as a media platform that generates authority through non-historical criteria of access and visibility. Internet search engines provide final evidence of this accessibility, where the now-standard phrase “Just Google it” applies to food and recipes as to everything else, and the appeal of virtual convenience provides another facet to the vicariousness that characterises much of the following chapter, on visual representations of food.

## **Television**

In the context of the Western transformation from producing to consuming economies, this chapter outlines the growth of food television as a genre and an industry following World War 2, as well as the rise of the modern celebrity chef as a

leading product of this industry. The shifting criteria for defining a celebrity chef are revealed in the tensions between “making it easy” and “keeping it real” that inform contemporary food programming. Fame, furthermore, and in contrast to well-known pre-World War 2 chefs who, by and large, were known for their food, emerges as being principally contingent on media visibility as well as media ratings systems that annually elect a new “best” (The James Beard “Rising Star Chef” award; *Food&Wine*’s “Best New Chef”) and thereby help to foster a cult of personality around the profession.

Yet, as much as ratings systems specifically designed to rank qualified chefs uphold the professionalism of the cooking industry, non-food specialised ratings that include chefs, such as the annual “100” generated by *Time* and *Forbes*, equally undermine that expertise by shifting the focus to more general criteria for fame, such as money and charisma. The de-stressing of food as the main route to fame emphasises the primacy of entertainment to food media, as suggested by Rochelle Brown, a former host on America’s Food Network, who said of her debut in food television: “I didn’t know about food; I was just there to make great TV” (Brown, 2003).

Because there are, by now, countless examples of “great [food] TV”, and of celebrity chefs involved in its making, this work restricts its focus to two illustrative cases beyond Mario Batali: Jamie Oliver and Rachael Ray. All three are celebrity chefs with a range of television programmes, cookbooks, and self-branded commodities. Ray and Batali have both featured on *Forbes*’ 100. Ray has also featured on *Time*’s 100, and is notable as a celebrity chef whose fame is unrelated to restaurant experience. While Batali and Ray’s media presence is arguably greater than Oliver’s, this is relative to the industry sizes of the U.S. and the U.K., respectively.

Indeed, for the purposes of this discussion, Oliver is considered a prototype of the modern celebrity chef, not least because the project was inspired by a television screening of a promotional tour of his bestselling cookbook, *Happy Days with Jamie Oliver* (2001), in which he performed to an audience of 3,000 fans in a London stadium, including the requisite screaming teenage girls. The dvd version of the tour, *Happy Days Live*<sup>61</sup> sets itself apart from traditional cooking shows because, in addition to the performance, it includes ‘footage of ... [Jamie’s] wedding and humorous segments of his daily life’ (www.dvdsources.com). These added features complement details in the show such as an on-stage broadcast of Oliver’s then-pregnant wife Jools phoning him up to ask for a snack; Oliver’s cue to cook up a little something “pukka”.<sup>62</sup> The “Naked Chef”, in other words, is a commodity that extends far beyond food: we consume Oliver’s life as much as, if not more than, his food.

While the entry of personal – private – details into televised cooking is not only commonplace in 2007, but very likely required for “great TV”, this marks a notable shift from the historical premise of televised cooking, that is, to complement the instructional medium that is the cookbook. This feature, typical of Reality television, returns the discussion to the consumer and the twin issues of representation and reality that are pertinent to any consideration of food in the media because of the necessarily detached sensory experience of watching food being prepared and eaten. Vicariousness manifests itself in the ambiguity of the word consumption: we consume images but not food, and through our enthrallment with the spectacle – in this case, the spectacle of celebrity chefs (and their lives) – we are also consumed by the images. In line with the thesis of *Television Delivers People* (1973), a short film by Richard

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<sup>61</sup> The title itself points to some of the contradictions of our time: *Happy Days* was a popular American TV sitcom in the 1970s. So, while the title of the book nostalgically alludes to the past, this is disrupted by the here-and-now qualification of *Live* on the dvd, a reproduced and reproducible commodity that is, by no means, “live”.

<sup>62</sup> “Pukka” is one of Oliver’s stock-words, generally used to indicate that something is delicious.

Serra and Carlota Fay Schoolman, which declares that the product of television is the consumer,<sup>63</sup> I argue that consumption of the consumer is played out in two ways. Firstly, by keeping us watching and secondly, through food media's sphere of influence beyond television: advertising and, more specifically, the marketing of chef-branded commodities. The enormous revenue and personal wealth generated by these commodities secures food media as a major contender in the leisure industry central to the spectacle.

To conclude the chapter on television is a discussion of "food porn". With a range of popular applications, including descriptions of food (often at name-brand establishments), references to celebrity chefs (typically women), and, more recently, to technological parallels between camera techniques used in food television and pornography, the term is remarkably multivalent but at the same time conspicuous in its disavowal of the social stigma that continues to attend non-food pornography. Here I argue that it is in recognition of that stigma that the term has the most potentially useful critical value to describe the phenomenon whereby the proliferation of conflicting messages about what, and what not, to eat produces sufficient anxieties to render the vicarious pleasure central to the act of watching the safest of all consumer options. Like actual pornography, food television stresses appearance over reality, and becomes the site of a fantasy of plenty that articulates the tension between wants and needs and that, in a risk society, ought not to be fulfilled.

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<sup>63</sup> The film features a blank screen with a rolling script which begins, 'The Product of Television, Commercial Television, is the Audience. / Television delivers people to an advertiser. / ... / In commercial broadcasting the viewer pays for the privilege of having himself sold. / It is the consumer who is consumed. / You are the product of t.v. / You are delivered to the advertiser who is the customer. / He consumes you' (Serra and Schoolman, 1973).

## Eating

These tensions are finally addressed in final chapter, which includes a review of dominant consumer trends that emerge in response to food media. At the top of this range are the increasingly exclusive options of eating in establishments branded by celebrity chefs such as Ferran Adrià's three Michelin-starred, multiple "Best Restaurant in the World" award-winning El Bulli restaurant in Spain, where reservations are recommended a year in advance and meals take up to six hours. Less exclusive are the various derivatives of the food style termed molecular gastronomy that Adrià is credited with pioneering, and which has gradually made its appearance in most cosmopolitan cities worldwide. Less exclusive still is the option of buying various Adrià endorsed products, such as Borges Olive Oil, United Biscuits' McVities, or Lavazza coffee. Adrià, furthermore, is one of an exclusive group of "superchefs" (Rossant, 2004b), a term that designates chef-entrepreneurs whose media profiles and business acumen surpass "normal" celebrity chefs. Superchefs exemplify the commodification of the chef as brand, and reopen questions of artistry and detachment following the trend of name-brand dining whereby a restaurant's chief commodity is its chef, who will more than likely not be present in the kitchen.

Following this are various manifestations of the trend towards so-called healthy eating. Some now-standard trends, such as low-fat and "low-carb", can be traced to a cyclical waning and re-emergence dependent, in large part, on market patterns. Other consumer habits are directly related to periodic food scares, such as B.S.E.<sup>64</sup> and the outbreak of E.coli<sup>65</sup> in spinach products across the U.S. in 2006, and tend to disappear with the newsworthiness of the situation. Ever more present, however, is the threat of obesity. Providing a steady supply of statistics, latest

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<sup>64</sup> Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, also known as "mad cow disease".

<sup>65</sup> *Escherichia Coli* is a foodborne bacteria associated with gastric and intestinal infections.

scientific findings, and visual representations – including reality makeover shows – obesity as a media phenomenon is a striking arbiter of what not to eat. The influence of obesity can be seen across the media spectrum, from celebrity chef activism (*Jamie's School Dinners*), to renewed government regulations (including food labelling), to the perpetual marketability of miracle diets, all of which continue to inform consumer choices. In testament to its commercial value is the term “fatonomics”, coined to suggest that the U.S. may as well capitalise on the so-called epidemic and become leaders in the weight-loss industry (Gross, 2005). Obesity, the ostensible disease of plenty, is spectacular, and its media manifestation crystallises the themes of risk, responsibility, and choice that underlie this thesis as fundamental to the construction of autonomous subjects.

Finally, and not unrelated, are the trends that explicitly set themselves apart from the media clamour surrounding obesity. On the one hand are the speed-eating competitions that ignore media recommendations about “health” as much as they do broader global politics, such as hunger. On the other hand are the more explicitly “political” trends, including organic foods and the relatively new focus on food miles (determined by the carbon emitted during the production and transportation of an item), which are set in counterculture to the processed and fast-food industries most often blamed for obesity, the general decline in health, and economic exploitation of developing countries. Examples of debates that emerge from these trends are those around the de-regulation – for reasons of health, according to new EU regulations – of Camembert cheese, invested as it is with French “nationhood”, or the appeal to eat more ‘traditional’ diets to avoid processed foods (Pollan, 2007). These inclinations exemplify the modern politicisation of food, and equally evoke the conflicts between history, tradition and modernity that disrupt seamless narratives of globalisation.

Debord's comments in his essay on hunger abatement ("Abat-Faim") are significant here:

The world's specialists in hunger (there are a lot of them, and they work hand-in-hand with other specialists, who create the impression of a banquet of abundant delights) communicate the results of their calculations to us: the planet produces enough cereals to feed everyone, but what troubles this idyll is the fact that the "rich countries" abusively use half the world's cereals as feed for livestock. But when one has experienced the disastrous taste of butchered creatures fattened on cereals, can one really speak of "rich countries"? Surely not. While a part of the planet is dying of famine, the inhabitants of these countries are not living like Sybarites: they live in shit. But the voter is flattered when reminded that, strictly speaking, he is the one who has the hard heart, because he lives so well while the graves of underprivileged countries are fattened by the cadavers of children. He loves to believe the agreeable things that he has been told. (Debord, 1985)

Political food choices, in brief, further betray the consumerist democracy promised by global regulations due to the economic luxury required to access them.

Like many commodities favoured by "foodies", organic produce is not cheap, and its consumption reflects a specific social status. The case of Walmart, the world's largest retailer, introducing organic foods in 2006 was controversial because mass availability contradicts the ethos and agricultural potential of organic food. Yet, and true to the spirit of Debord's spectacle, appearance is key, and so it is that "organic" markets continue to proliferate, making increasingly available to the average consumer products which are very questionably organic. In line with this are fashionable food choices that disclaim political or scientific awareness, such as the

widespread consumption of sushi in the face of dwindling fish populations,<sup>66</sup> or the demand for sulphite-free wines in ignorance of the fact that sulphites are a natural by-product of wine fermentation, meaning that the consumer who chooses for sulphite-free wine ironically opts for the least natural choice (James, 2004). What the examples in this chapter reveal is that one consequence of an overabundance of information is the production of *non*-awareness.

### **Conclusion**

Choice is central to food in the twenty-first century. Media representations of food – in books, on television, in the hands of celebrities, on the internet, in supermarket advertisements – bespeak an abundance of choice. For those with access, the choice is not only of what to eat, but of ideologies, philosophies and politics around food. The fact that these choices are made available through, and often informed by, media, signal a crucial shift from a past reliance on history and tradition. Similarly, relying on media for guidance on what and how to think about food emphasises the increasingly tenuous line between public and private. This ambiguity is well demonstrated by reality television, the media platform most obviously responsible for having normalised a consumer experience that is increasingly informed by engaging with other people's lives.

The extension of our spectatorship to the sphere of food aptly resurrects the subtext of the word “consume”; to waste away. Although rising levels of obesity

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<sup>66</sup> See, for instance, Kurlansky: ‘Many predictions about seafood stocks are dire. Will most of them be seriously depleted by the year 2048, as one marine biologist recently predicted? Has the number of large fish in the ocean decreased by 90% over the past 50 years, as another scientist reported? Are 31% of the 274 commercially important fish stocks in America overfished, as a 2002 U.S. government report asserted? Are 60% of the fish species studied by the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) either fully exploited or depleted, as an FAO report claims? What is clear is that popular fish such as Atlantic salmon, cod and tuna are vanishing’ (Kurlansky, 2007). When global regulatory bodies recently lowered fishing quotas as a result of declining stocks, Japan, responsible for three quarters of worldwide tuna consumption through sushi, reportedly fell ‘into a national panic’ (Fackler, 2007).

suggest that Western societies are not wasting away in any physical sense, the unsurpassed intake of media and information points to an existential consumption to the degree that life becomes increasingly artificial. The political implications of what Debord terms this 'pseudo' life manifests in the paradox of ignorance and confusion in the face of a wealth of information. This is the hazard of too much choice, and more specifically, of making choices based on the manufactured risks that stalk modern living. This is where food media stops being about food. 'How will Americans pick a president,' asks one reviewer, 'when they can't even decide what's for dinner?' (Vider, 2004).

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### 3. Recipes

“This recipe is certainly silly. It says to separate two eggs,  
but it doesn’t say how far to separate them.”  
Gracie Allen (1895-1964)

All changes in the methods of an art ...are related, essentially, to changes  
in man’s radical structure of feeling.  
(Raymond Williams, *Preface to Film*, 1954)<sup>1</sup>

This chapter begins by defining recipes as the basic components of food media. Early written recipes, typically recorded by and for professionals, initiate the codification that was continued by mass printing technology, and which, by making recipes available to a wider audience, further inaugurated a functional shift from specialised to generalised media. This dissemination also expanded the meaning of recipes, no longer restricted to utility, but now increasingly the bearers of “tradition” and “community”; external signifiers which contribute to the commodification of ideas that is one prevailing theme of this discussion. Starting with the widespread celebration of the fantasy provided by David’s post-war Mediterranean recipes, and concluding with the example of contemporary initiatives to legally safeguard recipes, the chapter argues that underlying the collectivity and accessibility that define globalised media is the ubiquity of loss; ironically enough, of tradition and of community. These are the social mechanics of the spectacle, and exemplify what Debord defined as the ‘abundance of dispossession’ (1995:31) central to consumer economies.

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<sup>1</sup> (Williams, 2001:34).

### 3.1 Texts in Context

A recipe, at the outset, is simple enough to define: a formula that details the procedure for successfully combining a number of components into a new whole. Simpler yet, a recipe is a list of ingredients and instructions. Yet, as U.S. comedian Gracie Allen's silly joke suggests, the success and meaning of a recipe depends on how it is read, understood, by whom, and for which purpose. It also depends, therefore, on who devised and/or recorded it. Historically, not all recipes are designed to be reproduced, and those that are, are not designed to be intelligible to all. As texts, recipes include historical documents of consumption, memory-aids, wish-fulfillment, and the set of written instructions most familiar as a component of cookbooks.

In addition to being defined by contexts of production and consumption, recipes as texts further represent the codification of ideas that, when in circulation as commodities, provoke questions of artistic and intellectual ownership. Inasmuch as its context dependency problematises discussing the recipe in isolation from its circumstance, the brief history of recipes that follows is by no means conclusive, but serves, rather, as an introduction to the commodification of ideas facilitated, in large part, by advances in media technology. The advent of print media, for example, made recipes more accessible to a wider readership, including the recipes of distinguished chefs and cooks. This literary celebration of chefs and their works – manifested in best-selling cookbooks as well as biographies – inaugurates the type of culinary fame that is primarily textual. The feature of heightened mass reproductivity of modern media, on the other hand, informs contemporary debates around the so-called copyrightability of recipes, disputes which necessarily overlap with and underpin subsequent discussions of authorship and performance central to the modern celebrity

chef, whose fame is less directly related to literary representations, and more to general media visibility and personal wealth.

The word recipe derives from the Latin *recipe*, “take”, representing, Jaine notes, ‘that first and vital word to every recipe’ (Jaine, 2004a:2). Its name, in this way, consolidates the written recipe as instructive and codified. As Stephen Mennell notes in his authoritative *All Manners of Food* (1985),<sup>2</sup> ‘writing down a recipe tends to enhance its prescriptive character; the imperative tone of early recipes is very striking’ (Mennell, 1985:67). With the addition of a name or title, he continues, the ‘identity of a dish and its ingredients consequently became more firmly fixed, and the scope for idiosyncratic improvisation diminished’ (ibid.). As much as they provide guidance, therefore, recipes – at least the early ones that Mennell mentions – also function to inhibit the creative process. It is this prescriptive character that leads to the characterisation of a recipe as “good” or “bad”, in other words, whether it leads to a desired result.

Yet that result – what the recipe promises – is naturally determined by more than the meticulous communication of ingredients, measurements and instructions. From the perspective of usefulness, recipes can certainly be badly written. But the success of the named dish naturally depends on other, contingent, factors, both internal and external.<sup>3</sup> R.J. Haack describes ‘causal connections’ as one contingency, whereby the success of the end product depends on fulfilling certain invariable processes: ‘That causal connections exist between different sorts of events is a necessary condition of our having any recipes at all, and recipes can only be followed if one knows that this causes that, and this brings about or results in that. We explain why the following of a recipe leads to certain results in terms of the causal

<sup>2</sup> Mennell’s volume was the first English-language book to win the prestigious *Grand Prix Internationale de Literature Gastronomique* (1986).

<sup>3</sup> Variations in altitude and humidity, for example, can adversely affect baking.

connections that are utilised in following it' (Haack, 1967:99). While this rather scientific approach leaves little room for experimentation, it is not difficult to see how the processes of beating and folding<sup>4</sup> egg whites into a soufflé will determine the success or (literal) flop of the dish.

On the subject of experimentation, philosopher Lisa Heldke distinguishes between recipes that invite alterations, and those that are circumscribed by what she terms “historical integrity”:

You can toss in anything from nuts to cheese to herbs when making bread, but if you're making Scotch shortbread, you dare not change a single ingredient. (If you add raisins to shortbread, one cookbook warns, you may make something delicious. But it won't be shortbread.) ... The example I've given is of a case in which the “historical integrity” of the product rests on the integrity of the ingredient list. (Heldke, 1988:24)

Heldke's choice of Scotch shortbread – a food labelled with a nationality – is an important indicator of what recipes signify beyond scientific formulae that depend on particular culinary skills and processes for a successful result. What makes a recipe more than simply a list of ingredients and instructions is the narrative that surrounds it, be it textual (an introductory story preceding the recipe in a cookbook, for instance, or its framing as a “serving suggestion” on a product label), personal (a memory linking the food to a particular occasion or person) or, in the case of Scotch shortbread, national or “traditional”.<sup>5</sup> Writer Susan Leonardi points out that it is precisely the narrative quality of a recipe that encourages innovation: ‘Like a narrative, a recipe is reproducible, and, further, its hearers-readers-receivers are

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<sup>4</sup> Folding refers to the process of carefully incorporating stiffly beaten egg whites into another mixture without losing the air in the whites.

<sup>5</sup> This is a good example of how recipes are defined by contexts of production and consumption (see p.74, above), and further confirms that a “recipe” is by no means easily confined to a narrow definition.

encouraged to reproduce it and, in reproducing it, to revise it and make it their own. Folktales, ghost stories, jokes, and recipes willingly undergo such repetition and revision' (Leonardi, 1989:344). Leonardi further notes that apart from the imperative tone of "take", the Latin *recipere*, "to receive", suggests an exchange, and it is this broader context that renders the recipe an 'embedded discourse' (Leonardi, 1989:340), and as such, adaptable.

In addition to the freedom to innovate implied by this interaction between reader and text is the recipe's function as an item of exchange and continuity, passing between friends and generations. In Sharon Jansen's account of her mother's recipes, which she describes as 'exercises in narration, description, analysis, even argument' (Jansen, 1993:65), she demonstrates the cultural trade that thickens the narrative value of a recipe: 'Usually my mother's recipes come folded up inside her letters, which describe the dish, when she made it, who she made it for, how they liked it. And always what they said to one another' (1993:67). While not all recipe writers or collectors may embellish to the point of recording the who-said-what context of consumption, the story of Jansen's mother – both her mother's habit and Jansen's telling of it – underlines the role of recipes in the creation and maintenance of tradition. And, where tradition is made explicit, as in a "traditional" recipe, the word itself contributes and encodes the recipe with a narrative, either real or imagined. As folklorist Lin Humphrey observes, 'In memory culture, where we find traditional recipes and food stories, "traditional foods"<sup>6</sup> may refer to either the kind of heritage or history that we actually had or the one we only wish we had' (Humphrey, 1989:163).

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<sup>6</sup> Humphrey distinguishes between private and public "traditional", where private is 'a recipe or a way of preparing a dish has been handed down in the family or that only one certain member of the family ever fixes the dish. Such dishes often involve a secret ingredient or method. A second class of traditional recipes are those that are served only on holidays and special occasions' (1989:163).

She concludes, therefore, that ‘the application of the word “traditional” to a recipe gives that food more power, more status, and more meaning’ (1989:168).

The evocative power of “tradition” points to a historical strain of recipe-as-fantasy that is often more telling of an absence than a presence of rituals. In his *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979), French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) describes the cultural value of tradition to food:

A pot of ‘home-made gherkins’, ‘made to grandma’s recipe’ and brought to the table with the appropriate verbal accompaniment ... symbolizes a squandering of time and a competence which can only be acquired by long frequentation of old, cultivated people and things, that is, a membership of an ancient group, the sole guarantee of possession of all the properties which are endowed with the highest distinctive value because they can only be accumulated over time. (Bourdieu, 1984:281)

The ‘verbal accompaniment’, as well as the titling of the food itself, be it “traditional”, “home-made”, or “my mother’s”, suggests and reinforces the role of language as context, and the social value of recipes as texts rather than performances. The fantasy attached to imagined tradition is evinced no more clearly than in the ubiquitous boxes of mass-produced desserts in supermarket freezers proclaiming that they are “old-fashioned”, or “home-made”.<sup>7</sup> In an ironic reversal of Marx’s commodity fetishism, modern marketing capitalises on the absence of ritual by replacing the actual history of a product – its mass manufacture – with a fantasy of human labour.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> As Mort Rosenblum puts it in his discussion of revised legislation around how much cocoa is necessary for a product to be declared “chocolate”, ‘Too much of what we eat is already ersatz-virtual, like “farm-fresh” Frankenstein produce or “home-baked” chemical cookies’ (Rosenblum, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> This is a notable irony of some contemporary eating trends, such as following the “Mediterranean” diet, discussed in further detail in Chapter 7 (Eating).

Recipes as wish-fulfilment also function beyond tradition by appeal to a fantasy of the exotic; the authentically other that is economically, geographically, or socially beyond reach, but desirable. Rationing in post-war Britain provided an ideal circumstance to stimulate this ideal, exemplified by the eventual<sup>9</sup> reception of the recipes in Elizabeth David's *Mediterranean Food* [1950]:

Her writings and recipes brought warmth, light and colour to a world blighted by shortages and rationing. She described how to make hitherto unheard of dishes such as paella,<sup>10</sup> polenta,<sup>11</sup> risotto<sup>12</sup> and cassoulet.<sup>13</sup> But more than this, she also explained the dishes - where they came from, who cooked them, who ate them and when. (Catterall, 1999:32)

To the innocent reader they are already redolent with the smell and taste of the wildly beautiful mountains of Crete. Knowing more of their provenance, one almost begins to believe that, like so many others in the book, these short and to-the-point recipes have such a weight of experience and history behind them that part of the spell they work upon us is at the level of the subliminal. (Chaney, 1998:153)

These examples serve to highlight the extent to which a recipe functions as multivalent signifiers according to context. A final case in point is provided by culinary historian Nicola Humble in her account of the repetition of a recipe in two different works by Ambrose Heath:<sup>14</sup> 'in both *Good Food* [1932] and *Kitchen Front Recipes and Hints* [1941] he gives a recipe for Clafoutis,<sup>15</sup> but in the former it is

<sup>9</sup> David's inclusion of ingredients that were difficult to procure initially caused some unfavourable attitudes to her book. See Introduction, above.

<sup>10</sup> A Spanish rice dish, typically incorporating poultry (chicken or rabbit) and seafood.

<sup>11</sup> A northern Italian staple, similar to cornmeal.

<sup>12</sup> An Italian rice dish, traditionally made with (shortgrain) "Arborio" rice cooked in stock and/or wine.

<sup>13</sup> A French slow-cooked stew, or casserole, made with a variety of meat and beans.

<sup>14</sup> Ambrose Heath (1891-1969) was a British cookbook author who wrote more than seventy books between 1932 and 1968.

<sup>15</sup> A baked dessert consisting of fruit topped with a cake batter.

presented as a sophisticated piece of exotica, while in the latter it is a hint for ways of eking out the sugar ration by serving a pudding of bits of fruit in Yorkshire pudding batter: the same dish, very different meanings.’ (Humble, 2005:90). Rationing further reinvigorated a tradition of mock foods,<sup>16</sup> by which people were able to imagine themselves eating something with very little relation to what was on the plate.<sup>17</sup> Not even confined to the actual eating, the importance of appearance over reality is finally expressed in the production of painted cardboard wedding cakes following Lord Woolton’s<sup>18</sup> 1940 prohibition on the use of sugar to decorate cakes (Humble, 2005:96).

In summary, written recipes, as we know them, are variable signifiers. On the most basic level, they function to codify instructions and thus to preserve the “integrity” of a dish, be it historical, national, or in the interests of exact replication. Endowed with narrative, they represent, variously, memory, tradition, or aspiration to difference. It is this narrative value of recipes that is of particular interest to the branch of Food Studies focused on “foodways”; eating patterns that contribute to or, in anthropological terms, “perform” membership of a culture or community.<sup>19</sup> Yet

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<sup>16</sup> Mock or ersatz foods typically imitate expensive dishes by substituting cheaper ingredients, for example “crabsticks” made with dyed fish meal or wheat flour, or mock cream; milk thickened with cornflour. Mock foods can also result from dietary requirements (diabetes, vegetarianism, calorie control), such as substituting carob for chocolate, or soya chunks for meat. Mock foods have a long history, with now “traditional” dishes such as the Mock Turtle Soup featured in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* dating to the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Davidson, 1999:510).

<sup>17</sup> ‘A pattern emerges of the sort of dishes for which mock versions were provided: they were, on the whole, high-status foods of significant symbolic value, notably roast birds or joints, luxurious sweet dishes, cakes and treats. They were dishes whose ritual importance was such that their appearance at the centre of a meal or festive occasion was of more importance than what they tasted like. In essence their replacements were to allow the eater to *imagine* himself eating the things he desired’ (Humble, 2005:96).

<sup>18</sup> The U.K. Minister of Food from 1940-1943. See Introduction, above.

<sup>19</sup> Early foodways studies include the work of Dame Mary Douglas, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jack Goody. See, for example, Douglas’ “Deciphering a Meal” (1971), “Food Studied as a System of Communication” (1982), *Food in the Social Order* (1984); Goody’s *Cooking, Cuisine, and Class* (Goody, 1982); Lévi-Strauss’ “The Culinary Triangle” (1997). Contemporary examples can be found in David Bell and Gill Valentine’s *Consuming Geographies: We Are Where We Eat* (1997) and Carolyn Korsmeyer’s anthology, *The Taste Culture Reader* (2005). For a bibliographical essay, see Charles Camp’s “Food and Foodways” (1982).

these meanings, so far, only emerge from the context of readership and, potentially, the performance of recipes. Additionally important, and central to the question of performance, is the provenance and purpose of a recipe. In other words, who it is written by, and for whom.

### 3.2 Consuming Recipes

Pointing to the use of ‘vulgar languages’ instead of Latin in the earliest recorded recipes, Mennell suggests that these were plausibly written ‘by practitioners for practitioners’ (1985:65). Jaine similarly draws attention to professionalism – the ability to cook already – as a prerequisite to understanding the Medieval recipe, which was not, he claims, ‘exactly encouraging to the novice cook,’ (Jaine, 2004a:2) but functioned rather as an ‘aide-memoire’ designed, most likely, ‘to help forgetful professionals’ (2004a:3).<sup>20</sup>

The enormous social and economic impact of the printing industry is clear if we purposefully neglect, for the moment, the five centuries or so between the end of the Middle Ages and the mid-twentieth century, when the likes of *Gourmet* magazine and David’s *Mediterranean Food* made their appearance. Immediately apparent is the stark difference between the recipe as a professional memory aid and as popular fantasy, of tradition or otherness. While the recipe’s function as an actual cooking guide over the course of these centuries is not to be neglected, this rudimentary contrast describes two important movements resulting from mass reproduction of the written word: from oral to written, and from specialised to generalised. Pitting early

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<sup>20</sup> Going as far back as the Roman Empire, two recipes from *De Re Coquinaria* suggest as much. For “Spoiled Honey Made Good”, the author advises: ‘How bad honey may be turned into a saleable article is to mix one part of the spoiled honey with two parts of good honey’ (cit. Hill, 1936:17), implying the economic interests of the reader of this “recipe”. Similarly, a “Cumin Sauce for Shellfish” is described simply as being ‘made of pepper, lovage, parsley, dry mint, malabar leaves, quite some cumin, honey, vinegar, and broth’ (39), with no directions nor quantities.

recipes that, broadly speaking, were useless to novices against later ones that become available – and potentially useful – to a mass of people is revealing of the progress of the media, not only as a technical device, but as a social mechanism, and helps to delineate the ideological context that spawns a market for recipes that signify much more than food.

In his *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* [1976], Raymond Williams explains that the word “communication”, from the Latin root *communis* (common), became standard in English in the fifteenth century, indicating to ‘make common to many’; communication, in other words, is the process of ‘the object thus made common’ (Williams, 1983:72). Following from this, the word “medium” has been in use since the early seventeenth century with the meaning of ‘an intervening or intermediate agency’ (Williams, 1983:203).<sup>21</sup> The standardisation of the plural form, “media”, concurred with industrial advances in the twentieth century: ‘Media became widely used when broadcasting as well as the press had become important in communications; it was then the necessary general word’ (ibid.). The role of the media – used here in its modern, plural sense – thus becomes clear in naturalising the recipe as a textual form; clearly by 1950, at the time of David’s writing, it has become, in Williams terms, ‘the object thus made common’.

The implications of this commonness are extensive. It is not until something – the recipe, in this case – has become common, or “natural”, that it can take on meanings beyond its function. While the comprehensive route of the recipe from specialised to popular text is embedded in the history of cookbooks proper,<sup>22</sup> the example of the recipes in *Mediterranean Food* – particularly in their historical context

<sup>21</sup> Williams gives an example from Francis Bacon in 1605: ‘expressed by the Medium of Wordes’ (1983:203).

<sup>22</sup> Cookbooks are examined more closely in the following chapter. However, for excellent and comprehensive histories, particularly of the European cookbook industries, see Mennell (1985), Humble (2005), and Jaine (2004a).

of following rationed wartime recipes that were necessarily practical – provides evidence of the way in which the recipe itself becomes fetishised. To recall David’s biographer Lisa Chaney, ‘these short and to-the-point recipes have such a weight of experience and history behind them that part of the spell they work upon us is at the level of the subliminal’ (op. cit.). It is of no little significance, furthermore, that central to the representation of these recipes is the alluring figure of David herself. It was not the food, but, as Claire Catterall writes, ‘her writings and recipes [that] brought warmth, light and colour’ (op. cit.) to Britain.

Of course the recipes were not David’s; they were gathered from her travels and popularised through her books. Yet that was not as important as the collective imagination of plenty that David’s work offered and represented in the face of national shortages, or very recent memories thereof. Added to this appeal is the fact that the recipes in *Mediterranean Food* are written with enough clarity of instruction not to discourage their usefulness. For example, the first recipe in the book, for “*Soupe Au Pistou*”, begins:

The origin of *pistou* is Genoese, but it has become naturalized in Nice and its surrounding country. Into 3 pints of boiling water put 1 lb of French beans cut in inch lengths, 4 medium-sized tomatoes, 4 medium-sized potatoes, chopped finely, and 3 chopped, peeled tomatoes. (David, 1958:17)

Although the kind of ‘novice’ Jaine refers to may need help peeling a tomato, the recipes are clearly written to be used, and the explanatory text suggests that they are not only directed at professionals. This accessibility – theoretical if not practical, given the scarcity of ingredients like French beans – renders the fantasy that much more immediate. More than simply a description of food in foreign lands, here was a

way that foreign foods could be recreated in the proverbial everyman's kitchen, offering a "taste" of elsewhere.<sup>23</sup>

This is where David's personality plays a decisive role. Whereas as the friendly faces of Lord Woolton's Dr. Carrot and Potato Pete<sup>24</sup> may have encouraged people to eat rationed foods, David's style was more subtle ('Chop the parsley very finely indeed', she advises for snails in garlic butter, 1958:46) and arguably more appealing to a literate readership. Interestingly, it is the noticeable yet restrained feature of David's character – 'autocratic', according to Clarissa Dickson Wright, David 'didn't suffer fools gladly and had all the precision of age and class' (2002:iii) – that consolidated the Mediterranean recipes in her collection as *David's* recipes. As Humble notes, 'It is perhaps this contrast between the strong sense of self in her writing and the simultaneous evasion of autobiographical revelation that has fuelled the cult of personality that has long existed around Elizabeth David' (2005:127). Chaney waxes lyrical in demonstration of this 'cult': 'As a result her recipes are authentic, authoritative cameos of Truth' (1998:294).

It is a remarkable thing to consider the shift from recipes as memory aids or cooking guides to 'authentic ... cameos of Truth'. This shift is facilitated, in large part, by the media, because a fantasy that is collective enough to warrant mention in virtually every culinary context regarding post-war Britain depends for its existence on being available for consumption. The reception of David's recipes – with some emphasis, here, on the possessive – illustrates the ideological context that Raymond Williams terms a "structure of feeling". In his *Preface to Film* [1954], Williams uses

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<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of the theme of authenticity in David's work, see Steve Jones and Ben Taylor's "Food Writing and Food Cultures" (2001).

<sup>24</sup> "I'll put pep in your step" was one of Potato Pete's slogans (Patten, 2004a:15). The animated figure also had a song: "Potatoes new, potatoes old / Potato (in a salad) cold / Potatoes baked or mashed or fried / Potatoes whole, potato pied / Enjoy them all, including chips / Remembering spuds don't come in ships!" (2004a:41).

the phrase in place of ‘*ideas or general life*’ (Williams, 2001:33) to account for the absences typical of historical representations. A structure of feeling, like ideology, tells more about history than abstracted facts and events:

In the study of a period, we may be able to reconstruct, with more or less accuracy, the material life, the general social organization, and, to a large extent, the dominant ideas.... But while we may, in the study of a past period, separate out particular aspects of life, and treat them as if they were self-contained, it is obvious that this is only how they may be studied, not how they were experienced. We examine each element as a precipitate, but in the living experience of the time every element was in solution, an inseparable part of a complex whole.... [I]t is a common experience, in analysis, to realize that when one has measured the work against the separable parts, there yet remains some element for which there is no external counterpart. This element ... is what I have named the structure of feeling of a period. (ibid.)

By differentiating structure of feeling from ‘*ideas or general life*’, Williams, like Marx and Debord before him, rejects the autonomy of representation and draws attention, instead, to experience. This is instructive to guarding against the ‘cult of personality’ initiated by David’s recipes and, rather, locating their reception in a specific historical context in which her personality, with all due respect for a gifted writer, is arbitrary. Veteran food writer Alan Davidson (1924-2003) suggests as much regarding the market for foreign foods that proliferated in the wake of David’s work:

Nothing can detract from Elizabeth’s position as the leading public figure in all this. Her books became the standard-bearers of these changes ... they were emblems for people who were taking a fresh look at food and cookery.... It must be remembered that to an extent this would have happened anyway. She was not the only force. There were all sorts of invisible ones at work. These shifts were going on in post-war Britain and even if

Elizabeth hadn't taken up writing on food they would have continued anyway. (cit. Chaney, 1998:341)<sup>25</sup>

The 'invisible forces' at work in following the war in Britain were certainly several, the desire for consumption not least among them; of varied food, commodities, and the exotic as a counter to the 'gray, unhappy place' (Dickson Wright, 2002:iv)<sup>26</sup> that was post-war Britain.

Situating this impulse as part of the 'complex whole' that defines a structure of feeling becomes clearer on comparison of the significance of early recipes with those in *Mediterranean Food*. Williams' remarks on the value of formal comparison between dramatic conventions are useful:

One can observe the conventions of a religious drama like the Greek, and contrast them with those of modern naturalism, and see the point of beginning of [sic] an analysis in the statements of the primary exponents of the latter.... All changes in the methods of an art like the drama are related, essentially, to changes in man's radical structure of feeling. (Williams, 2001:33-34).

In the context of form, then, early recipes are the 'primary exponents' of what we encounter, five centuries on, in *Mediterranean Food*. The stark differences – *aide-mémoire* versus wish-fulfillment – underline the fact that it was not the form of the recipe that David revolutionised. That work had been done by the printing press and, more recently, radio and television. The achievements of Marguerite Patten and

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<sup>25</sup> Humble agrees that the 'food revolution of the post-war years would probably have happened without Elizabeth David', but thinks that 'in her absence it would have happened very differently' (2005:136).

<sup>26</sup> As George Orwell put it in his "London Letter to a Partisan Review" [May, 1946]: 'Food is as dull as ever, the queues do not get any shorter, the contrast between the wealthy person who eats in restaurants and the housewife who has to make do on her rations is as glaring as it always was, and every kind of privation seems more irritating because there is no war to justify it' (Orwell, 2000d:185).

Woolton's Ministry of Food in improving British national health, largely thanks to the provision of recipes for rationed food, confirms the shift from oral to written and from specialised to generalised that comprises five centuries of printing and communication, not to mention education and literacy, on an increasingly mass scale. The recipe, by 1950, was an established medium, and it was this that facilitated their function, in *Mediterranean Food*, as wish-fulfillment. Put otherwise, the success of the ideal that David communicated – made common – depended on the form of the recipe as available and familiar. What was new was its subject matter, and her work appealed, through content and personality, to a shared desire for otherness that would flourish over the next fifty years along with the media to represent, and increasingly, to fulfill it.

The significance of this moment becomes clearer if we begin, along the lines suggested by Williams, to insert the recipe as a medium of wish-fulfillment into a 'complex whole' and situate David's work on the cusp of two structures of feeling: pre-war austerity and post-war plenty. The vicarious pleasure, or distraction, experienced through her recipes anticipates the current role of television and the internet which, despite beginnings as primarily informational media,<sup>27</sup> have become fetishised as central sites of leisure and the performance of lifestyle. It is, moreover, the increasingly common experience presented by the mass availability and consumption of television and the internet that render them central to discourses on democracy and globalisation in which access presumes equality.

Yet, that fetishism incurs loss as well as plenty is equally manifest in the abundance of choice that typifies the so-called global village. No longer is the

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<sup>27</sup> Not least in the services of political propaganda. As Jonathan Crary writes of the first broadcasts in Germany, 'According to the Nazi director of broadcasting, writing in 1935, the "sacred mission" of television was "to plant indelibly the image of the Fiihrer in the hearts of the German people"' (Crary, 1989:104).

inclination to fixate confined to tangible commodities. Now it extends, through media and marketing, to lifestyles, traditions, and histories. It is no little coincidence that current popular and academic interest in the “cultural” value of food, from Reality programmes like *You Are What You Eat*,<sup>28</sup> to “traditional” recipes on supermarket shelves or as subjects of foodways studies,<sup>29</sup> emerge in the wake of the massive shifts – technological and demographic – that begin with post-war economic booms. The charm of David’s recipes in 1950 was in their communication of another culture to displace the everyday. This is exemplary of the moment when, in Marx’s terms, the exchange value of recipes exceeds their use value, and they function as media for the consumption of culture – in Debord’s terms, ‘the participation in cultural consumption’ (1995:152) – above nourishment. Adorno and Horkheimer’s warning, in 1944, that to ‘speak of culture was always contrary to culture’ (1969:131), was portentous. The exchange value of culture gestures to its loss, and the structure of feeling heralded by David’s post-war plenty context – unparalleled today – is informed by an ‘abundance of dispossession’ (Debord, 1995:31).

### 3.3 The Copyright Debates

Nowhere is the sense of dispossession more apparent than in contemporary debates around the copyrightability of recipes and the questionable role of authorship to a recipe, dish, or other culinary creation. Starting from the premise that advances in media and literacy de-specialised the recipe and made it ‘common’, questions of

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<sup>28</sup> A British TV show focussed on diets and “make-overs” (2004, Channel 4, U.K.). Its participants are typically severely overweight, and are routinely subjected to humiliating exposure of how much “junk” they eat, and how “bad” it is for them. See also Chapter 6 (Television).

<sup>29</sup> This is particularly true of studies of immigrant foods in America. See, for instance, Gretchen Ellsworth and Molly McGehee’s “Cape Verdean Foods” in the *Festival of American Folklife Cookbook* (Ellsworth and McGehee, 1995), Nomvula Cook and Betty Belanus’ “A Taste of Home: African Immigrant Foodways” (Cook and Belanus, 1997), and Linda Brown and Kay Mussel’s *Ethnic and Regional Foodways in the United States* (Brown and Mussel, 1984).

copyright reveal an anxiety at the loss of rights and acknowledgement implicit in a media climate typified by the exchange of information. Topical disputes about recipes originated early in 2006 when the online culinary forum eGullet<sup>30</sup> posted a series of pictures of remarkably similar-looking dishes from three independent restaurants: Interlude, in Melbourne; Alinea, in Chicago, and WD-50, in New York. Exposure of the resemblances underlines the unique informational capacity of the internet. The first similarities, between dishes at Interlude and WD-50, had been noticed by Sam Mason, the pastry chef at WD-50, on the former's website. After revealing his discovery on the forum, other eGullet members – a group that includes culinary professionals and amateurs from across the U.S. and beyond – pointed to the third restaurant, now 'suggesting a substantial pattern of duplication' (eGullet, 2006). Partly motivated by the fact that Interlude had, in the meantime, removed the images from their website, the eGullet staff decided to publish comparative images of food from the three restaurants with a foreword that emphasised journalistic integrity and professional ethics:

The eGullet Society doesn't have an official position on this matter, but it's appropriate to publish the following for two reasons. First, by presumably removing the photographs from its website, Interlude has made examination of the evidence impossible, unless we bring these photos to light in a journalistic context. Second, we believe the Interlude controversy is not a simple matter of a lone Australian restaurant copying a few dishes from halfway around the world. Rather, it's one of the most significant issues facing the global culinary community today. The eGullet Society and its membership, including most of the world's foremost avant-garde chefs as well as a broad range of consumers and commentators, is a natural nexus for discussion of those issues. Of course, it is our hope that these discussions will influence the understanding

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<sup>30</sup> The eGullet Society for Culinary Arts and Letters ([www.egullet.org](http://www.egullet.org)).

of ethics in cuisine, and perhaps worldwide public policy in such matters. (ibid.)

With over a hundred responses in the first few days, and close to five hundred within a month, the online dialogue that erupted from this post ranged to include the ethical, social, legal, economic, and artistic implications of using other people's ideas, and the urgency of being credited for one's own.

Had the discussion been confined to literature, or, indeed to written recipes, questions of plagiarism and intellectual property would have been fairly straightforward. But food complicates the debate for several reasons, not least that in the relatively recent tradition of Auguste Escoffier (1846-1935) and *haute cuisine*,<sup>31</sup> the demonstration of competence in professional cooking has been in the exact reproduction of canonical dishes, or what philosopher Martin Versveldt calls 'noble classics' (Versfeld, 2004:56). Borrowing, copying, and even innovating, moreover, are the hallmarks of food in virtually every culinary tradition. As James Beard said of American food: "There really are no recipes, only millions of variations sparked by somebody's imagination and desire to be a little bit creative and different. American cooking is built, after all, on variations of old recipes from around the world" (cit. Jones, 1990:240).<sup>32</sup> Cooking, in short, is an act of reproduction. Even where a recipe is "original", contingent factors like climate, chef, time, and money render it unique.

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<sup>31</sup> "High" French cooking, *haute cuisine* was, in fact, "fathered" by Marie Antoine Carême (1784–1833), one of the last chefs in service of the French aristocracy. His cookbooks, while not the only famous works from that era, were significant because, according to Mennell, 'no previous work had so comprehensively codified the field nor established its dominance as a point of reference for the whole profession' (1985:149). But it was Escoffier who simplified many of Carême's highly sophisticated recipes, making them more accessible and, therefore, popular.

<sup>32</sup> Beard's comments are applicable to the food traditions of any country with a history of colonialism. As David Bell and Gill Valentine maintain, 'The history of any nation's diet is the history of the nation itself' (Bell and Valentine, 1997:168). It is little wonder, then, that "Chicken Tikka Masala" was declared Britain's national dish by Foreign Minister Robin Cook in 2001 (Adiga, 2006).

Adding to the complication is the disputed status of food as art.<sup>33</sup> If it is, then food is unlike other artefacts because there exists no “original”.<sup>34</sup> Recipes provide textual representations of cooked dishes, but the point of food (to be eaten), and the nature of food (perishable) means that it cannot be more than an occasion. In her legal Note on “How to Copyright a Cake” (1991),<sup>35</sup> Malla Pollack further suggests that the range of senses involved in food render it ‘a separate art. Food contains elements of color and form, as do painting and sculpture. Food also includes aromas, tastes, and textures. If food is an art form, it is a new category. ...[W]hile food may not have been so considered in the eighteenth century, it is so considered now, at least by an epicurean segment of the population’ (Pollack, 1991:7). It is, furthermore, this ‘epicurean’ group – the eGullet community, for example – that would likely be the first to confirm the other question central to that of food as art, namely, the chef as artist. As one eGullet member, incidentally an employee at Alinea, the Chicago restaurant, reported overhearing in the restaurant in response to the pictures: “The thing that bothers me the most, is that if a diner went to Interlude first and then dined

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<sup>33</sup> This is an age-old philosophical debate. See, for instance, Carolyn Korsmeyer on the historical marginalisation of food as an aesthetic category, both by early Greek philosophers, and more recently, in seventeenth century debates around still life paintings which are so life-like that they stimulate the appetite rather than the intellect (Korsmeyer, 1999:12-37, 159-161). See also video artist Martha Rosler’s 1974 “The Art of Cooking” (reprinted in Rosler, 1998), featuring a “mock dialogue” between U.S. cookbook author Julia Child and restaurant critic Craig Claiborne, in which the two discuss the status of food as art, complete with references to Immanuel Kant’s *The Critique of Judgment* (1790). This issue is taken up again in the discussion of name-branded restaurants in Chapter 7.

<sup>34</sup> Mennell introduces Benjamin’s “aura” to problematise the notion of food as art: ‘There are problems in drawing an analogy between a great dish and a great work of art – food as chefs have been of the idea – because dishes, being constantly eaten, have *always* had to be constantly reproduced.... So a dish, even one of the few whose first creator is known, possesses the quality of uniqueness only in a very limited way. All the same, Benjamin’s essay does throw light on the significance of mass-produced tinned or frozen “gourmet dishes”, which like a print of a famous painting may not only be a poor representation of the original but may be experienced in the purchaser’s own situation, probably quite incongruous with their original context and tradition’ (1985:318-319). Nevertheless, Benjamin’s reminder that the ‘presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity’ (Benjamin, 1999c:214) remains pertinent.

<sup>35</sup> Pollack explains her Note as ‘an original proposal for extending copyright protection to food’; ‘not to the appearance of the food, nor to the recipe for the food, but to the food itself’ (Pollack, 1991:2, 24). While her focus is not that of the present discussion of recipes, her work is useful for its legal insights.

at Alinea, that diner would think that *we* were copying *him*.” (“nick.kokonas”, in eGullet, 2006). The threat expressed here is the loss of artistic acknowledgment.

Pollack’s suggested distinction between the status of food as art in the eighteenth versus the twenty-first centuries is important because it is tenuous. Christopher Buccafusco, whose more recent “On the Legal Consequences of Sauces” (2006) deals specifically with the case raised by eGullet, prefaces his article with an oft-invoked quote from “culinary philosopher” Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1755-1826):<sup>36</sup> ‘Cooking is the oldest of arts’ (Brillat-Savarin, 1970:242). In the *haute* traditions of Brillat-Savarin, Carême (see n.30) and Escoffier, then, cooking certainly has been regarded as art, at least in popular and professional imaginations. Yet, the multi-sensual qualities of food aside, what Pollack and Buccafusco both draw attention to are the complications that arise from juridical perspectives on the “art” of cooking, and how these manifest at once in the status of chefs and the textual form of the recipe. In this context, Pollack usefully notes that until 1976, chefs were registered as “domestics” under the U.S. Department of Labor, whereas they are now registered as “professionals” (1991:41). Regarding copyright, what legally defines a recipe, on the other hand, is a complex set of criteria that calls into question the distinction – if any – between its purely textual form and its use for the execution of a dish. The problem, in other words, lies between authorship (text) and performance (process).

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<sup>36</sup> On publication, Brillat-Savarin’s *La Physiologie du gout* [1825] (“The Physiology of Taste”, also published in English as *The Philosopher in the Kitchen*) was recognised as being, his translator Anne Drayton states, ‘without precedent in any literature, a unique combination of recipes and aphorisms, reflections and reminiscences, history and philosophy, which raised gastronomy to the level of art’ (Drayton, 1970:12). Brillat-Savarin worked variously as a lawyer and judge, and was also appointed mayor of his home town of Belley. Shortly before retirement, Napoleon honoured him with the title of Chevalier de l’Empire ‘in recognition of the courage and humanity he had shown as Mayor of Belley at the height of the Revolution’ (Drayton, 1970:10).

Buccafusco outlines two cases to have reached the appellate court, most recently in 1998, when Godiva Chocolatier was sued for using an unpublished truffle recipe.<sup>37</sup> The court, he explains, was ‘hostile’ (2006:2) to the notion of copyrighting recipes, concluding that the “identification of ingredients necessary for the preparation of food is a statement of facts. There is no expressive element deserving copyright protection in each listing” (cit. Buccafusco, 2006:11). This ‘expressive’ element is paramount to the recognition of a culinary work as artistic, and thus copyrightable. The U.S. Copyright Office stipulates:

Mere listings of ingredients as in recipes, formulas, compounds or prescriptions are not subject to copyright protection. However, where a recipe or formula is accompanied by substantial literary expression in the form of an explanation or directions, or when there is a combination of recipes, as in a cookbook, there may be a basis for copyright protection. ... Copyright protects only the particular manner of an author’s expression in literary, artistic, or musical form. Copyright protection does not extend to names, titles, short phrases, ideas, systems, or methods. (Copyright, 2006)

There is a clear division here between recipes as ‘facts’ versus literary expressions (David’s injunction to chop parsley ‘very finely indeed’,<sup>38</sup> being a presumable case in point), the latter qualifying a recipe as an original communication. Originality, legally speaking is, after all, the *sine qua non* of copyright (Buccafusco, 2006:10). So, recipes accompanied by original textual narratives are copyrightable. Yet the legal argument

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<sup>37</sup> In the case of *Lambing v. Godiva Chocolatier*, ‘[Barbara] Lambing sued Godiva for copyright infringement for copying the recipe and design of her chocolate truffle known as “David’s Trinidad” and described in one of her unpublished books. The court was brief in its rejection of her claim’ (Buccafusco, 2006:11).

<sup>38</sup> As Daniel Rogov suggests: ‘Those who do decide to steal recipes should be especially careful when lifting recipes from people like ... Elizabeth David and others whose personality is clearly stamped on each of their recipes’ (Rogov, 2000).

adds that the recipe itself also be original; existing dishes, like apple pie, are not copyrightable because they are not ‘original to the author’ (Buccafusco, 2006:9). The recipe for apple pie, therefore, is regarded as common property, regardless of its narrative embellishments or variations.<sup>39</sup>

The particular legal lacuna that problematises the eGullet discussion, directed as it is at the performance, rather than the textual form, of a recipe, is in the final proviso that copyrighting protects only ‘the particular manner of an author’s expression in ... artistic ... form’, but does not cover ‘ideas, systems, or methods’. Were cooking recognised by the law as ‘artistic’, the idea behind a dish, as well as its method – the system of cooking it – would naturally be the main constituents of the author’s expression. ‘The important question,’ underscores Buccafusco, ‘is whether a dish, as embodied in a recipe, constitutes a protectable work of authorship’ (2006:10). Legal rhetoric provides no simple answer, and it is beyond the scope and interests of this discussion to navigate the intricacies of the law to argue in support of the copyrightability of recipes or food; if they are indeed distinguishable legal entities. Buccafusco and Pollack do so respectively, and convincingly, with the requisite legal expertise.

What is of interest is the impetus, in the first place, behind these deliberations. Curiously, one of Pollack’s motivations for copyright is that it is to the benefit of the public:

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<sup>39</sup> Pollack addresses the issue of the copyrightability of versions: ‘To hazard a guess, comparing allegedly infringing works to the archetypical cake, an otherwise identical cake with a filling made of a different type of cherries would be an infringing copy while the cake identical except for a filling made with pears would be an infringing derivative work, as would the same cake in a different shape. An otherwise comparable cake with anchovy filling would not infringe because it is too dissimilar in appeal. As with all other copyrightable subject matter, the court will have to decide at what point in variation a copy supposedly embodying the protected work is a different work, a derivative work, or a compilation including aspects of the work. This may be a practical problem, but it is precisely the problem courts handle now in copyright cases’ (Pollack, 1991:14-15).

The current lack of legal protection for culinary creations encourages a refusal to share recipes. This refusal and the underlying jockeying for prestige are so common that they are humorous. Lack of protection, however, also has serious results. A chef loses not only the direct financial benefits of licensing or selling his creation, but also the indirect economic benefit of enhancing his reputation.... Copyright protection for food items will encourage chefs to create and share original food items. As with all copyright protection, the ultimate beneficiary will be the public. Chefs will create more; their creations will not only be available for immediate use but will eventually enter the public domain.<sup>40</sup> (Pollack, 1991:3)

The good of the public aside, Pollack highlights what I believe to be the two central tenets of the eGullet debate, and, indeed, of the modern celebrity chef: income and reputation. One respondent to the forum, “saltshaker”, asked the question that underlines the potential absurdity of raising the issue at all, regardless of legal considerations: ‘In reality, who cares if a restaurant in Melbourne offers up a dish from a restaurant in New York, and pretends it’s their own? Is it really going to matter ten years from now? 5? 1? a month? If you do it well, and your own customers appreciate it, isn’t that what’s important?’ (in eGullet, 2006).

Clearly that is not all that’s important. The Interlude-Alinea-WD-50 controversy was supplemented in June 2006 with another case involving the ostensible plagiarism of dishes from the Washington restaurant Minibar by a chef – a former employee at Minibar – at the Tapas Molecular Bar in Tokyo.<sup>41</sup> Claiming that

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<sup>40</sup> The “public domain” is also a contested legal entity. See, for example, Edward Samuels’ “The Public Domain in Copyright Law” (1993), in which he concludes that ‘there is no such animal: the public domain is simply whatever remains after all methods of protection are taken into account.... The “public domain” is thus not so much a theory as a *tendency* to resolve borderline or new cases in favor of nonprotection rather than protection’ (Samuels, 1993:138).

<sup>41</sup> In 2007, a similar case was reported regarding U.K. celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay: ‘Yesterday [3 May, 2007], it was reported that his latest venture, The Narrow, in Limehouse, east London, features no fewer than a third of the dishes in a cookbook by one of his rivals. Critics suggest British Regional Food, by Mark Hix, whose company Caprice Holdings is behind The Ivy, Le Caprice and J Sheekey,

his inventions had been unrightfully used, together with his lawyer the Washington chef motivated for a license fee or removal of the dishes from the Tokyo menu (McLaughlin, 2006). Similarly discussed on eGullet, under the new heading “Further Tales of Culinary Plagiarism”, the overwhelming response was that it was an issue of credit. ‘Just to be clear on the locus of plagiarism,’ wrote Steve Shaw (a.k.a. “Fat Guy”), eGullet’s Executive Director, ‘if the ... chef had done the lobster dish with lobster – exactly the same – and said “This is a dish made at Jose Andres’s Minibar in Washington, DC, USA,” it would not have been plagiarism’ (eGullet, 2006b). But that intellectual or artistic credit is largely rhetorical compared to financial credit is evidenced by the very real legal steps taken to protect original “creations”, as recipes are wont to be termed in so-called avant-garde culinary circles.

One example of successful legal protection is Homaro Cantu, chef at Moto and operator of Cantu Designs in Chicago. At the forefront of the avant-garde chef community, to which all the suspected plagiarists and plagiarised belong, incidentally, Cantu’s “inventions” include edible paper. Diners at his restaurant are expected to eat the menu after ordering from it, and after dinner, to eat the fortune inside the cookie (Shriver, 2005). *Food & Wine* writer Pete Wells’ encounter with Cantu, detailed in his article on the “New Era of the Recipe Burglar” (2006), was on small piece of edible paper imprinted with a picture of candy floss,<sup>42</sup> and a matching flavour. More pioneering than the paper, however, and what Wells terms its ‘truly historic feature,’ was ‘the legal notice printed beneath the cotton-candy image: “Confidential Property of and © H. Cantu. Patent Pending. No further use or disclosure is permitted without prior approval of H. Cantu”’ (Wells, 2006). Although the patent on this one was ‘pending’, Wells informs that Cantu had, at the time of writing, 12 patents underway,

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features too prominently at The Narrow. Ramsay denies stealing any recipes and says he and Hix are friends’ (Thompson, 2007).

<sup>42</sup> Cotton candy.

and that the revolutionary potential of the paper included Cantu's idea to collaborate with the Red Cross to use the paper as a form of 'lightweight famine relief', provided he can discover how to "print" nutrients as well as flavours (ibid.).<sup>43</sup>

Cantu is also a member of eGullet, and his response to the "plagiarism" question coincides with Pollack's suggestion that copyrighting is in the interests of the public: 'Licencing [sic]<sup>44</sup> enables someone to recieve [sic] compensation for their ideas.... The whole point of me explaining the broadness of this printed food is to get chefs to think that maybe one of their ideas can solve a massive problem. They should be rewarded for it' ("inventolux", in eGullet, 2006). Cantu's invocation of credit – intellectual, artistic, or financial – where credit is due is entirely reasonable, particularly in the case of something with potentially far-reaching benefits beyond the culinary avant-garde community. Yet, it is a curiosity of the twenty-first century that what, for all intents and purposes, is recipe-sharing is circumscribed by legal protection and secrecy. Wells describes the Cantu behind the paper that could alleviate famine:

When you rely on your intellectual property for income, you suddenly become Bill Gates, building walls around your inventions to keep thieves away. Cantu requires almost everyone who enters his kitchen to sign a four-page nondisclosure agreement. He says he runs background checks on some potential cooks to make sure they're culinary school graduates and not corporate spies, and he uses caller ID just in case that party of two looking for a table next Thursday night is phoning from Burger King headquarters. Cantu says his closed-door policy mainly applies to big business. He's

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<sup>43</sup> Cantu had also been approached by N.A.S.A. (National Aeronautics and Space Administration), who were 'interested in the technology "as a way of printing an apple that you can hold in your hand and take to Mars," Cantu says. "We have a machine that lets you push a button and out comes a picture of an apple. What we don't know how to do yet is make it three-dimensional—how do we make an apple?" (Wells, 2006).

<sup>44</sup> Licensing, patenting, copyrighting, and trademarking are all legally distinct processes (Pollack, 1991:5, King, 2002), but are considered equivalent for the purposes of this discussion in terms of their common aim of offering a form of legal protection.

generally happy to talk techniques with fellow chefs. Sometimes, though, even they can't be trusted. (Wells, 2006)<sup>45</sup>

Be it inspired by untrustworthiness or suspicion, such an environment is telling of the tensions that underlie the accessibility that is a main feature of global communications. The result is a progressive narrowing of the ground between sharing and stealing. And, while Well's analogy may be extreme – there can only be one Bill Gates, after all – Cantu's efforts to safeguard ownership of his ideas belie any rhetoric in service of the public.<sup>46</sup>

There is no question here of the alleged right or wrong of seeking legal protection for intellectual property in the form of culinary innovations. Escoffier himself is said to have 'complained that while artists, writers, musicians and inventors were protected by law, the chef had absolutely no redress for plagiarism of his work' (Mennell, 1985:162).<sup>47</sup> The examples of Cantu and the eGullet debate, rather, are useful for delineating a present structure of feeling in which a discursive elimination

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<sup>45</sup> Katy McGlaughlin corroborates in the *Wall Street Journal*: 'Homaro Cantu ... takes several steps to protect his ideas. First, he requires all employees to sign a four-page nondisclosure agreement, in which they vow not to reveal the restaurant's secrets. He doesn't allow stagiaires ['unpaid interns'] in his kitchen' (McLaughlin, 2006).

<sup>46</sup> This correlates with Edward Samuels' analysis of the mutations of the U.S. Copyright Law in the 200 years since its inception, a period during which works in the public domain diminish concurrently with a growing emphasis on protection: '[T]he range of works that go into the public domain because of categorical exclusion from the federal act has been diminishing throughout the entire two hundred year history of copyright in this country. Only maps, charts, and books were protected by the 1790 copyright act. Through the years, the list has been expanded to include historical and other prints, musical compositions, cuts and engravings, dramatic compositions, photographs, pamphlets, paintings and drawings and statuary, lectures, motion pictures, sound recordings, pantomimes and choreographic works, computer programs, and architectural works... With each extension of the federal statute into new subject matter, there has been a diminution in works that are treated as part of the public domain, to the point where there are few subject matter categories that are automatically considered as part of the public domain' (Samuels, 1993:163-4).

<sup>47</sup> Rebecca Howard underlines the historical ubiquity of plagiarism: 'The very etymology of the word plagiarism demonstrates the antiquity of the concept: the Roman poet Martial extended the meaning of the Latin *plagiarius* (kidnapper) to indicate the theft of words as well as of slaves. Indeed, the history of Western letters from antiquity through the Middle Ages is punctuated by writers' complaints about their plagiarists' (Howard, 1995:790). And specifically to do with cooking, see C. Louis Leipoldt on South African "Cape" confectionary: 'A good example of ... plagiarism is the number of fruit or spice cakes that figured under the names of some local celebrity, but that are not justified in claiming any merit for originality' (Leipholdt, 2003:6).

of boundaries is relentlessly challenged by an apparent threat of commonality. Some of the boundaries that Cantu, together with his fellow avant-garde chefs, call into question are those between chef and innovator, food and design, and recipe and creation. Of particular interest, furthermore, is that these debates are confined to an increasingly élite group – aptly termed the ‘gastronomic cognoscenti’ by Buccafusco (2006:44) – whose ever more specialised behaviour serves to disaffiliate them from the realm of the “public”, their ostensible beneficiary. The fact that laws regarding intellectual property are in constant flux (see n.45), and that legal rhetoric is largely incomprehensible to the general public adds to this effect. Lack of understanding, however, doesn’t necessarily dissuade the consumer. On the contrary, the familiarity of symbols proclaiming a product trademarked (™), copyrighted (©) or patented (®) can add to its appeal, both in terms of safety and uniqueness. Patent attorney and law professor Eugene Quinn explains:

Enforcing patent rights can be expensive, and in many circumstances I suspect a recipe patent or food product patent would be rather narrow and afford little real protection. Nevertheless, one important reason to obtain a patent is for advertising. Once a patent is applied for you can use in advertising the coveted term “patent pending”. If a patent issues you can also advertise “try my patented recipe.” The public at large knows very little about patent law, but most recognize that to get a patent means something special (i.e., that it has somehow been anointed by the federal government). (Quinn, 1999-2007a)

Producing something ‘special’ is paramount to a market saturated with endless versions of the same product. It is also the first step to turning a commodity into something ‘mysterious’, to invoke Marx, because protection presumes the merit of secrecy.

Ambiguities of legal rhetoric notwithstanding, the move for legal protection of recipes is a vagary because it uniformly contradicts the notions of secrecy and of sharing. It is no little irony that the recipe for Coca-Cola, one of the most successful commodities in the twenty-first century,<sup>48</sup> is not under any formal legal protection, but remains a so-called trade secret.<sup>49</sup> On the subject of the eGullet controversy, culinary historian Andrew Smith duly commented that, ‘If an author doesn’t want a recipe stolen (or borrowed), then the author should do what Coca-Cola and other commercial companies do with their formula – keep them secret’ (Smith, 2007). As much as this echoes previous sentiments of the potential ludicrousness of the debate, it also draws attention to the very real dialectic presented by the fact that modern processes of production are often equivalent to their communication. Cantu, or any of his colleagues, may take steps to safeguard their creations, but they equally depend on media exposure – the literal and figurative consumption of these creations – to safeguard their profiles.

Profiles, or reputations, to use Pollack’s term, are paramount. While organizations such as Creative Commons<sup>50</sup> and Electronic Frontier Foundation<sup>51</sup> embrace the digitisation of information as a means of access and exchange, including specifically advocating against the authority of obstructive copyright laws, the question of legally protecting recipes disavows this freedom but putting the stress on personal ownership. The result is not that recipes become unavailable. Quite the reverse; in twenty-first century media culture, everything that is visible is

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<sup>48</sup> Coca Cola was ranked the number one global brand by Business Week in 2006 (Interbrand, 2006).

<sup>49</sup> Quinn defines a trade secret as ‘any valuable business information that is not generally known and is subject to reasonable efforts to preserve confidentiality’ (Quinn, 1999-2007b).

<sup>50</sup> ‘The Creative Commons, a nonprofit organization, is currently developing copyright licenses that allow creators to open up their works to the public more quickly than conventional copyright law allows, while retaining certain rights over the protected work or idea’ (King, 2002).

<sup>51</sup> Co-founded by John Perry Barlow of the Grateful Dead, the E.F.F. ‘fights to preserve balance and ensure that the Internet and digital technologies continue to empower you as a consumer, creator, innovator, scholar, and citizen’ (E.F.F., 2005).

conceptually available. Food blogs and websites, discussed in Chapter 5, provide ample evidence of this. What these debates do, instead, is to draw attention to personalities who make a display of keeping secrets. As much as this represents a form of territoriality in the face of widespread accessibility, the adage that all publicity is good nonetheless holds. In this analysis, the stamp of the law is not as relevant as the stamp of individuality; the gastronomic cognoscenti, through online debates and their media coverage, emerge as not only knowing, but more importantly, known.

David's recipes, as we have seen, were also idiosyncratic. But the otherness that they represented – both the Mediterranean ideal and its animation through David's voice – is now supplemented by the consumption of other people, specifically chefs, through their food. Eating a Cantu-branded piece of paper that tastes like candy floss may not be routine for a majority, but neither is it science fiction. The matter of copyrighting recipes is but one facet of the branding that is central to the modern celebrity chef, whose fame simultaneously relies on and is threatened by the competitiveness that underlies food as one of the most highly fetishised commodities in our present day. Branding, as becomes increasingly evident throughout this thesis, commodifies chefs as the much as their food, but suffice it for now to point out, and as a concluding remark, that some of the most famously “authored” recipes in history – C  reme's Apple Charlotte,<sup>52</sup> Escoffier's *P  che Melba*<sup>53</sup> and Parisian chef Casimir

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<sup>52</sup> A baked dessert of apple pur  e encased in a bread crust, Apple Charlotte is thought to be named after Queen Charlotte (1784-1833, wife of King George III). Some versions hold that the dish was created in tribute to C  reme's employer, Czar Alexander I (1777-1825), in which case “charlotte” evolves from “charlets”; savoury custard-baked dishes popular in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century.

<sup>53</sup> Peach Melba (a dessert of peaches and raspberry sauce with ice-cream) was created in honour of the Australian soprano, Dame Nellie Melba (1861-1931).

Moisson's *Tournedos Rossini*,<sup>54</sup> to mention a few – were created to honour *other* people.

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<sup>54</sup> Named after the Italian opera singer Gioacchino Antonio Rossini (1792-1868), *Tournedos Rossini* consists of rounds of beef fillet (“tournedos”, also known as medallions, typically wrapped in bacon to preserve their roundness), toasted bread and *foie gras* (goose liver).

#### 4. Cookbooks

[A]n apologetics of the spectacle is disseminated as the thought of non-thought, as an authorized amnesia with respect to historical practice.  
(Debord, 1995:196)

The commodity's mechanical accumulation unleashes a *limitless artificiality* in face of which all living desire is disarmed. The cumulative power of this autonomous realm of artifice necessarily everywhere entails a *falsification of life*.  
(Debord, 1995:68)

The key arguments in this chapter centre on the perpetuity of ignorance and artifice revealed by the contemporary cookbook market, and how this follows the post-war rise of celebrity and convenience cultures. After a brief history of cookbooks and the nineteenth century culinary fame exemplified by the works of Auguste Escoffier, Alexis Soyer, and Isabella Beeton, I examine the trends set in motion by “classic” works by James Beard and Julia Child, as well as the culinary tourism of armchair travel cookbooks, one of the first of which was authored by M.F.K. Fisher. Two themes emerge from these examples that are reflective of their historical context: simplicity (following the war period, people were arguably in need of cooking techniques that took them “back to the basics”), and otherness (increased touristic travel and nascent migratory patterns of globalisation entailed encounters which required normalising). Yet the continuation of these trends in the twenty-first century, and particularly in combination with celebrity-chef-branding, suggests that rather than actually teaching consumers anything, the overwhelming function of contemporary cookbooks lies in appearance rather than utility. While cookbooks fulfill a variety of roles, a majority of modern cookbooks are commodities that paradoxically sanction having to learn – or to remember – very little, and which increasingly trade on the false promise of celebrity “magic”.

#### 4.1 Pre-War: Escoffier, Soyer, and Beeton

As with recipes, secrecy and access play a central role in the history of cookbooks.

The manuscript of *De Re Coquinaria* reveals that collecting recipes dates back at least as far as the Roman Empire (27BC – 476AD). Limited literacy meant that early collections functioned primarily, as we have seen, as memory aids for professionals, and as documents of and for epicureans.<sup>1</sup> These class divisions meant that recipes, as far as the general public were concerned, were secrets. The history of the cookbook proper, on the other hand, corresponds with the development of the printing press, one outcome of which was exposure to culinary “secrets” and, through increased literacy, greater access to them. In his introduction to the first English translation of *De Re Coquinaria* (1936),<sup>2</sup> Joseph Vehling explains the trend set in motion by two of the most influential early printed cookbooks, Bartolomeo Platina’s *De honesta voluptate et valitudine* (“On Right Pleasure and Good Health”, 1474),<sup>3</sup> and Bartolomeo Scappi’s *Opera dell'arte del cucinare* (“Work on the Art of Cooking”, 1570):

The advent of the printing press changed the situation. With Platina, about 1474, an avalanche of cookery literature started. The secrets of Scappi, ‘*cuoco secreto*’ [secret cook] to the pope, were ‘scooped’ by an enterprising Venetian printer in 1570. English

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<sup>1</sup> Cathy Kaufman of The Institute of Culinary Education situates the beginning of a “gourmet revolution” in ancient Rome: ‘During the Antique Millennium, approximately 500 BC to 476 AD, a “Gourmet’s Revolution” took place: educated Greco-Roman gourmards liked to read about food. Archestratus, Athenaeus and Apicius, to name a few, wrote extensively about cooks, foodstuffs, recipes, dietary theories and gluttons. Significantly, it was patrician gentlemen who wrote about food; although some cooks were praised for working magic in the kitchen, they were often illiterate and, rightly or wrongly, were seen as greasy laborers’ (Kaufman, 2003). Archestratus, a fourth century Sicilian poet, is described by Kurlansky as ‘[p]erhaps the first true food writer’ (Kurlansky, 2002:2), not least because he was celebrated by Athenaeus, ‘a later writer’, who wrote: ‘Archestratus, in his love for pleasures, traveled over every land and sea with precision, in a desire, as it seems to me, to review with care the things of the belly; and imitating the writers of geographical descriptions and voyages, his desire is to set forth everything precisely, wherever the best to eat and the best to drink are to be found’ (cit. Kurlansky, 2002:2).

<sup>2</sup> Vehling, J.D. (1977) *Apicius: Cooking and Dining in Imperial Rome* New York [1936] New York: Schwartzbooks.

<sup>3</sup> Also translated as “On Honourable Good Pleasure and Health”, Buford names Platina’s work ‘the most influential book on cooking for two centuries’ (Buford, 2006a:108).

gastronomic literature of the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and even the 18<sup>th</sup> century is crowded with ‘closets opened’, ‘secrets let out’ and other alluring titles purporting to regale the prospective reader in profitable and appetizing secrets of all sorts. Kitchen secrets became commercial articles. (cit. Goody, 1982:147)

This commodification of ‘kitchen secrets’ suggests a remarkable continuity between early cookbooks and current deliberations around safeguarding recipes. In order, however, to understand how the latter debate has taken on juridical proportions, a cursory overview of major developments in the cookbook industry is instructive in delineating several paradigmatic shifts that reflect broader causal relationships between media and society. Leading up and including the five decades since World War 2, these shifts are informed by the strain between an ever widening and, simultaneously, an ever more exclusive market. This is exemplified by the twin trends of simplification and celebrity branding that dominate contemporary cookbooks.

Following the vogue of disclosing secrets initiated by the printed works of Scappi and Platina,<sup>4</sup> cookbooks as collections of previously inaccessible recipes became instrumental to the perception of cooking as art, and of the chef as an artist, thereby centralizing the cookbook as a medium of personal distinction. This had begun, notes Mennell, in the ‘dedication of recipes to particular noble patrons in the seventeenth century; by the eighteenth they are beginning to be attributed by name to

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<sup>4</sup> Other notable manuscripts prior to the printing press include, from France, *Le Viandier de Taillevent* (ca. 1380) and *Le Ménagier de Paris* (1393), and from the U.K., *The Forme of Cury* (ca. 1390, see Introduction, above). While these works are central to culinary history, they remain marginal to this work’s focus on the relationship between food and modern media, which is naturally inaugurated by mass printing. For historical works that discuss early manuscripts, see W. Carew Hazlitt’s *Old Cookery Books and Ancient Cuisine* (1902), Mennell’s *All Manners of Food* (1985), Kurlansky’s introduction to his anthology of food writing, *Choice Cuts* (2002), and Jaime’s lecture for the *Oxford Symposium on Food* (Jaime, 2004a). The Online Culinary History Network ([www.thousandeggs.com/cookbooks](http://www.thousandeggs.com/cookbooks)) provides an excellent database of e-texts of historical cookbooks and manuscripts from around the world.

specific cooks; in the nineteenth, the cookery book as a work of art and record of the personal achievements of the distinguished chef becomes common' (1985:68). The example of Escoffier, known as the “chef of kings and the king of chefs” (Rossant, 2004a), and one of the most highly regarded chefs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,<sup>5</sup> is a case in point. Of the five thousand or so recipes that make up Escoffier’s *Guide Culinaire* (“A Guide to Modern Cooking”, 1903), numerous dishes were already, at the time of publication, well-known and famously dedicated to patrons, such as Peach Melba. In addition to simplifying many of the elaborate recipes and cooking techniques characteristic of French *haute cuisine*, and more particularly of his predecessor Marie Antoine Carême, Escoffier had also been instrumental in re-organising the kitchens he oversaw – in London, the Savoy and the Carlton; in Paris, the Ritz – to run more efficiently by introducing the so-called brigade system by which each station is managed by a *chef de partie*, or a specialised cook (Mennell, 1985:157-159).. Escoffier exemplifies the model of distinction that derives first from practise, and whose published cookbook thereafter becomes, in Mennell’s terms the ‘record of the personal achievements of the distinguished chef’ (op. cit.). Although his renown suggests a celebrity status in his day, it is significant that Escoffier’s fame, like that of Carême,<sup>6</sup> and unlike that of a number of modern celebrity chefs, depends entirely on his professional authority, and on the *un*-commonness of that expertise. As Humble maintains of his *Guide*, ‘The logic and structure of the book do not ... render it particularly useful or practical for a domestic kitchen, making it the first of a long

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<sup>5</sup> Escoffier was awarded the French *Légion d’honneur* (Legion of Honour) in 1928

<sup>6</sup> Carême’s high profile career, which included cooking for Napoleon and Czar Alexander I, has earned him the title of the “first celebrity chef”, for instance in Ian Kelly’s biography, *Cooking for Kings: The Life of Antonin Carême, First Celebrity Chef* (2004). While Carême was certainly famous in his day, this work maintains that the term celebrity chef is ideologically circumscribed by the media visibility and branding specific to technological developments initiated in the twentieth century. If there is any historical predecessor to the modern celebrity chef, it is Alexis Soyer (see below).

line of chef's books that implicitly reproach the domestic cook with her lack of organization and high seriousness' (2005:23).<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to this trend which solidified the superior status of the chef, is the example of Alexis Benoît Soyer (1809-1858). French by birth, Soyer was the head chef of the prestigious Reform Club in London from 1837-1850, during which time, and similarly to Escoffier, he systematised the kitchen for greater efficiency. An 1858 dining guide to London listed the club:

The "Reform" is known to the world at large as being the club where the inimitable Soyer presided for so long a period. It was the clever Alexis who reformed. [sic] the antiquated excrescences and abuses of the kitchen. Can any patriot *burn* with more devoted and intense zeal for the public good than does Soyer? (Anon, 1858)

More than his work at the club, however, and as the final line of this listing suggests, Soyer's chief renown derived from his philanthropic work, including establishing soup kitchens in Ireland during the potato famine (1847), and working with Florence Nightingale in the Crimea from 1855 - 1857. This work is reflected in his publications. Soyer's first English cookbook, *The Gastronomic Regenerator* (1846), labelled by one writer as his "sexiest" book (Tober, 2005), was aimed at those who might patronise the Reform, and duly contained sections, described by an early biographer Helen Morris<sup>8</sup> as 'interesting "extras"'; on how to organise a "Kitchen for

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<sup>7</sup> Major Frances Cunynghame, author of *Reminiscences of an Epicure: Food, Wine, Smokes* (1955), concurs: 'And as for Monsieur Escoffier ... – you can read Escoffier's masterpiece of kitchen lore, just as you read Brillat-Savarin, as a literary entertainment, and very interesting it is, but who could manage to spare time and energy to-day to evolve even once a week one of the wonderful dishes that are described in it? It seems to describe a world of "good eats" quite outside the humdrum fare in one's own home, and in these days we can only touch the bare fringe of it in a restaurant' (Cunynghame, 1955:83).

<sup>8</sup> His first biography, *Memoirs of Alexis Soyer* (F. Volant & J.R. Warren) was published in the year of Soyer's death, 1958. Following Helen Morris' *Portrait of a Chef* (1938), Andrew Langley's *The Selected Soyer* (1987), and Elizabeth Ray's *Alexis Soyer: Cook Extraordinary* (1991), three further

the Wealthy”, a “Bachelor Kitchen”, and so on (Morris, 1938:51). Following this, Soyer’s work was increasingly targeted at working class readers with the aim of democratising cooking, as illustrated by his pamphlet, “The Poor Man’s Regenerator” (1847) and, one of his final books, *A Shilling Cookery for the People* (1855), subtitled ‘embracing an entirely new system of plain cookery and domestic economy’ (Soyer, 1855).<sup>9</sup> That Karl Marx was on the guest list for the opening of Soyer’s restaurant, aptly named Universal Symposium to All Nations,<sup>10</sup> is further suggestive of the chef’s political commitments.

Soyer was also an inventor of kitchen gadgets and equipment, including the so-called Magic Stove, a version of which was used by British troops during the Gulf War (Brandon, 2004:241), and condiments such as Soyer’s Relish, bottled by Crosse & Blackwell. So renowned was Soyer in his day, claims Morris, that ‘anyone who invented a kitchen appliance tried to persuade the *chef* to attach his name to it’ (Morris, 1938:56). The fact that he was sought for endorsements, and that he was the first chef to consciously exploit his name as a brand, situates Soyer as a direct precursor of the modern celebrity chef whose media visibility is paramount. Yet, as Michael Garval suggests, Soyer’s cookbooks remained key to his popularity:

While multiple factors contributed to such far-flung fame, Soyer’s publications were the most important. Long before chefs could serve themselves up to a mass public on television, Soyer’s books were both widely distributed, and offered ample opportunity

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biographies have been published since 2000: Ann Arnold’s *The Adventurous Chef* (2002); Ruth Brandon’s *The People’s Chef* (2004), and Ruth Cowen’s *Relish: The Extraordinary Life of Alexis Soyer, Victorian Celebrity Chef* (2006a). Frank Clement-Lorford’s *Alexis Soyer, The First Celebrity Chef* remains unpublished, but is available from the author on request (see [www.soyer.co.uk](http://www.soyer.co.uk)).

<sup>9</sup> The popularity of *Shilling Cookery* is clear from its sales which, according to Mennell, amounted to 10,000 copies within two months of its publication, and ‘more than a quarter of a million within a few years’ (1985:153).

<sup>10</sup> In a letter dated 23 May 1851, Friedrich Engels began, ‘Dear Marx, I saw with pleasure in the papers that the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* was represented by you in person also at Soyer’s universal press symposium. I hope you enjoyed the *homards* [lobster] *à la* Washington and the *champagne frappé*. But I am still in the dark about how M. Soyer found your address’ (Engels, 1851:361).

for self-presentation, in prefaces and title pages, frontispieces and other illustrations.  
(Garval, 2007)

Indeed, given the developments of food television and celebrity chefs as we know them, not to mention the philanthropic pursuits of Jamie Oliver, Florence Nightingale's purported remark on Soyer's death, that he 'has no successor' (cit. Morris, 1938:205) could not be more off the mark.<sup>11</sup> Yet, Soyer's fame, like Escoffier's, was still a direct result of his labour, and his publications remain markers of his achievements, as do his "Lamb Cutlets Reform", still on the menu at the club (Hix, 2006).

If Escoffier's reputation is consolidated by the professional appeal of his cookbook, and Soyer's by the accessibility of his, a third trend, involving no qualified chef, is demonstrated by a key nineteenth century cookbook: *The Book of Household Management*, by Isabella Beeton (1836-1865). Beeton, married to a publisher, had written for *The English Woman's Domestic Magazine* between 1859 and 1861, and in October 1861, her articles were collectively published under the full title *The Book of Household Management Comprising information for the Mistress, Housekeeper, Cook, Kitchen-Maid, Butler, Footman, Coachman, Valet, Upper and Under House-Maids, Lady's-Maid, Maid-of-all-Work, Laundry-Maid, Nurse and Nurse-Maid, Monthly Wet and Sick Nurses, etc. etc. – also Sanitary, Medical, & Legal Memoranda: with a History of the Origin, Properties, and Uses of all Things Connected with Home Life and Comfort*. Beeton's book typifies the trend of women – often themselves housewives – writing for women that had taken root in the

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<sup>11</sup> As *Telegraph* reviewer Lewis Jones suggests, 'If he were working today, Soyer would be a titan of television and the bestseller lists, disgustingly rich, on equal terms with models and footballers' (Jones, 2004). Humble, who dubs Soyer the "Victorian Bob Geldof" (Humble, 2006), equally notes that he was 'the equivalent of the modern television chef, with a strong media profile and a finger in every available pie' (Humble, 2005:12).

eighteenth century,<sup>12</sup> and which responded directly to the growing urban middle class<sup>13</sup> that resulted from Britain's industrial revolution. The cookery book, in this context, was 'an essential educational tool' (Jaine, 2004a:7), covering, as Beeton's title demonstrates, everything from cooking to dressing to caring for a family in a new and unfamiliar environment:

Such detailed information was eagerly received, for life for this newly urbanized middle class was full of pitfalls and confusions: the friendly ease of village or small-town life was replaced by an existence in which neighbours were unknown entities with whom you needed to tread carefully, where shopkeepers could not be trusted, where food was imported from around the world rather than harvested in the local fields, where status and the new exigencies of middle-class existence required the continual presence of servants, and where large numbers of manufactured goods were available, requiring the housewife to choose between numerous different styles of kitchen equipment, foodstuffs, furniture and clothing. (Humble, 2005:15-16)<sup>14</sup>

Beeton's book also contains recipes that were, in Humble's terms, 'of academic interest only', equally rendering it 'an arbiter of elegant living' (2005:17) that prefigures the market for "foodie" cookbooks and magazines such as *Gourmet*. In

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<sup>12</sup> Notable 18th Century books include Hannah Glasse's *The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy* (1747), characterised by Kurlansky as one 'of the most influential cookbooks ever published' (Kurlansky, 2006:71) and famously known for the recipe which begins "First take your hare..." (Jaine, 2004a:7). The popularity of Glasse's book was so great, explains André Simon, that 'the interest in cookery books appears to have been stimulated to such an extent that more cookery books than ever came forth year after year, and the majority were written by women' (Simon, 1949:119). Women writing for women on matters of etiquette was not confined to Britain. An American example corresponding to Beeton – in subject rather than popularity – would be Eliza Leslie's *The Ladies' Guide to True Politeness and Perfect Manners; or, Miss Leslie's Behaviour Book* (Philadelphia, 1864). Of greater significance in the U.S. was the publication, in 1896, of Fannie Farmer's *The Boston Cooking School Cookbook*, which was the first to list ingredients above instructions and thereby to codify now-standard procedure for recipe writing (Kurlansky, 2002:9-10).

<sup>13</sup> Mennell classifies Beeton's *Household Management* as 'the first book written unambiguously for an urban middle-class audience' (1985:213).

<sup>14</sup> The discussion of Beeton's cookbook relies on secondary sources rather than the text itself, given that the context of its market and reception is more relevant to the discussion than the recipes themselves.

function as well as aspiration, then, the explicit interaction between the cookbook and its social context illustrated by Beeton's work anticipates the home-making trend that finds fullest expression in contemporary "lifestyle" magazines, both generic (*Home & Living*) and celebrity varieties (*Martha Stewart Living*; *O, The Oprah Magazine*).

The examples of Escoffier, Soyer, and Beeton, while fractional to five centuries of printed cookbooks, are important antecedents to the patterns that shape post-war food media, gesturing as these works do to the competing themes of distinction and popularity, exclusivity and democracy, ignorance and knowledge. Humble's description of the abnormal abundance of a newly industrialised England, particularly the rise of imported and processed foods, could equally describe the gradual replacement of war-time austerity with the affluence of post-war booms. Yet, as in all historical shifts, the rapid industrial developments following 1950, in the U.S. as in the U.K., were largely informed by the shortages that preceded them. In Jessamyn Neuhaus' succinct phrasing, '[U.S. w]ar-time cookbooks ... set the stage for postwar cookery books. And war-time deprivations set the stage for postwar appetites' (Neuhaus, 1999:532). During this time, as the example of Patten and the Ministry of Food underline, there had been a strong popular reliance on media for nutritional guidance.<sup>15</sup> Lack of recent experience with a variety of ingredients, combined with the limited cooking skills necessary to endure rationed food,<sup>16</sup> meant

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<sup>15</sup> In support of a majority in need of cooking guidance, and particularly during the war, Humble notes that typical interwar publications were 'dismissively brief in their instructions', while only a few, such as that of X. Marcel Boulestin (1878-1943), 'were beginning to recognize that a whole generation of middle-class women was in need of instruction from first principles' (2005:61). That this was equally related to industrialisation is evidenced in Britain by early monographs on culinary history, such as Florence White's *Good Things in England* (1932), which attempted to 'record and present in a manner commensurate with contemporary life, traditional cooking before the industrialization of food had "completely crushed [it] out of existence"' (Chaney, 1998:383).

<sup>16</sup> Given the scarcity of ingredients, clearly what was in higher demand than sophisticated cooking skills was a measure of creativity as to what to do with rationed foods. Compared to contemporary volumes, Patten's wartime cookbooks are remarkable for their variety of recipes using very few foodstuffs, as opposed to a broad range of techniques required to cook them.

that newly available ingredients faced a market unsure of what to do with them. This situation, explains Chaney, was to the great advantage of the cookbook industry:

At all levels cookery classes became popular. So also did women's magazines and cookery books and their popularity as organs of domestic instruction, inspiration and advice had soared by the early Fifties. Just as the rapid expansion of the middle classes during the nineteenth century had left them unsure and greedy for instruction in everything from recipes to etiquette, from the likes of Mrs. Beeton, so now another age of expansion needed more of the same assurance. (Chaney, 1998:227)

It was on the wave of this circumstance that David's *Mediterranean Food* found its success, which in addition to its representation of otherness through "exotic" recipes, was one of the first paperback cookbooks on the British market (Chaney, 1998:316).

#### **4.2 Post-War: Beard, Fisher, and Child**

The cookbooks and food publications that typify the following decades reflect the steady normalisation of a fashion for otherness and simplicity after World War 2. These trends are commensurate with the movement and access central to globalization as particularly manifest in media developments, the persistent rise in convenience foods and of celebrity culture. In the U.S., this can be traced through notable publications of three authors whose works arguably represent one canon of twentieth-century American cookbooks: James Beard, M.F.K. Fisher,<sup>17</sup> and Julia Child. Beard (1903-1985), whose appearance on NBC in 1946 made him the first American television cook, published over twenty-five books in his lifetime, from *Hors d'Oeuvre and Canapés* (1940) to *Beard on Pasta* (1983). By 1959, when *The James Beard Cookbook* appeared, his popularity and media visibility was great enough to establish

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<sup>17</sup> Mary Frances Kennedy, Fisher published under the name M.F.K. Fisher.

the work as a “classic”, to be revised and reprinted four times between 1961 and 1996. The book’s significance is explained on The James Beard Foundation website:

Beard intended *The James Beard Cookbook* to have mass-market appeal to “those who are just beginning to cook and say they don’t even know how to boil water, and second, those who have been trying to cook for a while and wonder why their meals don’t taste like mother’s cooking or the food in good restaurants.” It was the first trade paperback cookbook (meaning it began life as a paperback) ever published in the United States.... Given the good press, helpful content, and the price tag—75 cents—it’s no surprise it became a classic.... The cookbook, according to Beard’s longtime friend and editor, John Ferrone, has been Beard’s best seller. ([www.jamesbeard.org](http://www.jamesbeard.org))

Here we have an initial suggestion that the lack of cooking skills previously explained as a result, in the nineteenth century, of industrialisation, and in the early twentieth, of wartime rationing, was to become a commodity in its own right. Beard’s “classic”, in other words, helped to lay the foundation for a market that, paradoxically, didn’t need to internalise cooking skills – nor, importantly, rely on history and tradition for their transmission – because of the increasing availability of affordable cookbooks that teach the so-called basics of non-professional cooking. This is not to suggest that Beard’s works were not useful, nor used. Indeed, he is credited as being ‘the driving force behind a mid-century revolution in American gastronomy’ (Friedland, 2005).<sup>18</sup> Yet, it is telling that, for all the ‘helpful content’ and ‘classic’ quality of a book such as *The James Beard Cookbook*, not least what *Publishers Weekly* termed its “chatty style” (cit. Jones, 1990:236), it did not satisfy the market. Instead, its success provided impetus for more of the same, a perpetuity evidenced now in the

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<sup>18</sup> In 1996, Beard, as the “Dean of American Cuisine”, was the subject of an audio-documentary by Melissa Waldron Lehner; *James Beard: A 20th Century Revolution in American Food* (Friedland, 2005).

unprecedented number of titles targeted specifically at those who ‘don’t even know how to boil water’, such as *The Absolute Beginner’s Cookbook: or, How Long Do I Cook a 3-Minute Egg?* (Jack Eddy & Eleanor Clark, 2003), and, more to the point, *How to Boil Water: Life Beyond Takeout* (Foodnetwork Kitchens, 2006).<sup>19</sup>

Beard’s book was also, of course, a “James Beard” cookbook, and the branding of his expertise is central at once to canonisation of his book, and to the historical limitation of its popularity. While his namesake Foundation is a testament to Beard’s undeniable influence on American culinary history, his present renown is largely among professionals and the so-called gastronomic cognoscenti, and his cookbooks are certainly no longer the bestsellers that they once were. As one of the first “back-to-basics” books written by the particular kind of celebrity – and Beard was a pioneer of the type – that owes his fame in no small part to the mass-reach of television, the passage of Beard’s 1959 cookbook to historical event rather than a mainstay of knowledge reflects the rapid turnover consequent to heightened consumerism. Even as reprints and revised editions suggest the sustained usefulness of his work, the fact that subsequent food celebrities continue to publish their own versions of the “basics” highlights the specifically generational, or transitory, appeal of name-branded publications. This trend is particularly evident in the U.K. where, following Delia Smith’s enormously successful three-volume *Cookery Course* (1978; 1979; 1980),<sup>20</sup> celebrity cookbook titles increasingly betray the commodification of ignorance, from *Gordon Ramsay Makes it Easy* (2005) to *Cook with Jamie* (2006), the latter of which is ‘set’, writes Oliver on his website, ‘to become a timeless, modern-day classic’ ([www.jamieoliver.com](http://www.jamieoliver.com)). Yet as chef Anna Trapido of the Prue Leith

<sup>19</sup> *How to Boil Water* is the title of a Food Network programme hosted by Tyler Florence. The show was first hosted by Emeril Lagasse, as one of the network’s inaugural shows in 1993 (see Chapter 6).

<sup>20</sup> Delia Smith’s *How to Cook* series (Books 1, 2 & 3; 1998, 1999, 2001) were equally successful, but as examples of this trend, they differ because they are based on television series of the same name.

College of Food and Wine notes, ‘The blurb says that it is a guide to “learning to cook properly”, but it is actually a guide to learning how to cook like Jamie’ (Trapido, 2006). Explicit celebrity branding also goes some way to explaining why it is these more recent books are no longer typically ‘cheap’ paperbacks, but increasingly substantial – and expensive – tomes.

In the five decades or so since the publication of Beard’s classic, in other words, and in spite of the unsurpassed access to information that characterises this period – particularly, as we shall see shortly, through television and the internet – a majority of people, if the market provides any indication, still don’t know how to cook. From one perspective, it is surprising that a demand continues to exist for new publications, and for books like *Cooking for Dummies* (1996), co-authored by “superchef” Wolfgang Puck,<sup>21</sup> that explicitly satirise and capitalise on this situation. On the other hand, it underlines what Debord calls the ‘authorized amnesia’ (1995:196) of the spectacle: the continued market for cookbooks that teach the basics caters, not necessarily to something forgotten, but rather to what people continue *not* to learn, because they don’t have to. And, when it comes to celebrity-branding, these books reflect that, from a marketing perspective, it is less important to communicate something new than that someone new is communicating.

One of the central ironies of this supposed democratisation of cooking, and which is manifest to an even greater extent in food television, is that the revelation of ‘secrets’ by latter day celebrities – food media “professionals” – secures their separation from the general public, whereby the personalities that are now available to bring into your home through their cookbooks become ever more fixed as sites of

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<sup>21</sup> Named ‘the original celebrity chef’ by Forbes in 2006, Puck oversees Wolfgang Puck Inc., which includes a chain of restaurants, a range of food, drink and cookware products, book publishing, media programming, franchising, licensing and merchandising ventures, including catering for the Academy Awards. Puck hosts *Wolfgang Puck’s Cooking Class* on Food Network.

pseudo-authority. It is in line with this, and not dissimilar to the effect of Batali with *De Re Coquinaria* in his back pocket, that the cover of the 2001 edition of the *Larousse Gastronomique*,<sup>22</sup> subtitled “The World’s Greatest Cooking Encyclopedia”, is endorsed by none other than Jamie Oliver, who proclaims it ‘An all-time classic cookbook....a real must for any serious chef’ (Montaigné, 2001). As one customer review duly states: ‘The cover quotes, from Jamie Oliver ... help to ease the conscience for the really serious cooks among us.....and help justify the investment, too!’ (Anon, 2007b). If it is true, then, as the James Beard Foundation website claims, that Beard’s books ‘tell us through the language of food what we had and what we longed for, who we were and whom we hoped to become’ (www.jamesbeard.org), then what they reveal is the possession of very little, and a nascent willingness to consign authority for what, and how, to eat elsewhere.

In contrast to Beard, whose media prominence preceded his “classic” publication, is the example of Julia Child (1912-2004) whose best-selling *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* (1961)<sup>23</sup> paved the way for *The French Chef* (PBS, 1962), the first televised food programme to be screened for an entire decade, and to win an Emmy Award (1966). By the time of her retirement in 2001, Child had authored seventeen cookbooks and hosted twelve of her own food shows, and her studio kitchen was bequeathed to the Smithsonian Museum of National History. Although Child was not the first to appear on television,<sup>24</sup> she is held to be ‘TV’s first food celebrity’ (Saekel, 2004) because she was the most widely watched and respected. However, and not unlike the mixed feelings that greeted David’s *Mediterranean Food*, Child’s manuscript was originally rejected for fear of not meeting a current

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<sup>22</sup> The *Larousse Gastronomique* was first published in 1938, edited by Prosper Montaigné (1864-1948), with forewords by Escoffier and Philias Gilbert (1857-1942).

<sup>23</sup> The book was co-authored by Simone Beck and Louisette Bertholle, whom Child met after moving to Paris in 1946. Given Child’s subsequent fame, however, it is generally referred to as Child’s book.

<sup>24</sup> She was preceded by Beard (1946), Florence Hanford (1947) and Dione Lucas (1948).

demand.<sup>25</sup> In the Introduction to the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of the cookbook in 2001, senior Knopf editor Judith Jones recounts:

Her first submission met rejection, the publisher's comment being, Why would any American want to know this much about French cooking? ... Yet here were all the answers. I pored over the recipe, for instance, for a beef stew and learned the right cuts of meat for braising, the correct fat to use (one that would not burn), the importance of drying the meat and browning it in batches, the secret of the herb bouquet, the value of sautéing the garnish of onions and mushrooms separately. I ran home to make the recipe - and my first bite told me that I had finally produced an authentic French boeuf bourguignon - as good as one I could get in Paris. This, I was convinced, was a revolutionary cookbook, and if I was so smitten, certainly others would be. (Jones, 2001)

Jones anticipated well, in short, when she stated in her 1960 reviewer's report that 'I think this book will become a classic' (ibid.) To be sure, the book's importance cannot be overstated, if, as the publishers proclaim – and with no little kudos to themselves – that with “its publication of *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, Knopf not only set the standard for American cookbooks but established its culinary authors as catalysts in what would become a renaissance of cooking in the United States” (cit. Grodinsky, 2006).

The example of this cookbook is noteworthy for what it reveals of its historical context, evident not so much in the book itself, but rather in how it was and continues to be represented. The 'renaissance' that Child is thought to have inspired repeatedly comes down to her ability to demystify; not only French cooking

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<sup>25</sup> 'Houghton Mifflin turned it down after hearing from a group of male editors that American women wanted quick, easy recipes, preferably including mixes. (They were half right of course but ignored Francophile cooks who wanted authentic recipes.)' (Williams, 2006a).

(Schrambling, 2004), earning her the title of ‘America’s high priestess of French cuisine’ (Williams, 2006a), but the kitchen itself (Saekel, 2004). The appeal, much like that of David’s *Mediterranean Food*, was in the perceived “authentic” accessibility of a culture previously regarded as sophisticated other. Yet retrospective accounts of the importance of Child’s book importance, such as that it ‘forever changed how America cooks’ (Saekel, 2004), overwhelmingly discount several notable factors. Firstly, that Child was not the first to “bring” French food to America through writing, nor television. That had been initiated by Dione Lucas (1909-1971),<sup>26</sup> author of *The Cordon Bleu Cookbook* (1941), and host of the CBS cooking show *To The Queen’s Taste* in 1948. Child herself, as Peggy Grodinsky notes, referred to Lucas as “the Mother of French Cooking in America” (Grodinsky, 2006).

But their respective styles aside, Lucas was disadvantaged by a historical context which lacked two factors paramount to Child’s success: a rapidly growing television audience,<sup>27</sup> and increased international travel, specifically to France, helped in some part by a widespread idolatry of Jackie Kennedy. As John Leland maintains in the *New York Times*,

Mrs. Child ... is often credited with bringing gourmet French cooking to a macaroni-and-cheese America, but this is an oversimplification.... In fact, the culinary revolution was already taking shape: Jacqueline Kennedy had a French chef in the White House, piquing middlebrow interest in Parisian cooking; postwar Americans were traveling to the Continent, tasting French food for themselves. What Mrs. Child brought were not

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<sup>26</sup> Lucas was renowned as the first woman to graduate from the *Cordon Bleu* school in Paris, and for having cooked for Hitler.

<sup>27</sup> Cable television, first known as Community Antenna Television, was launched in 1948. One decade later, there were 525 cable systems with almost half a million subscribers across the U.S.. In 2005, nearly 85% of American households subscribed to cable (Hansen, 2008b). Cultural critic Wendy Croix puts it succinctly when she states that Child’s *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* was the book that ‘made her fortune.... Television, however, made her fame’ (Croix, 2007).

so much French techniques as American bluster and self-confidence, a willingness to overlook one's own mistakes and forge ahead. (Leland, 2001)<sup>28</sup>

Inasmuch as David's Mediterranean recipes take shape in a particular structure of feeling, then, the considerable sensation around Child is as circumstantial as it is specific. The circumstance of 1960s America was simultaneously outward and inward-looking. On the one hand, increased travel, personified in the cosmopolitan figure of Mrs. Kennedy, motions to the demographic movements of an emergent "global village". On the other, television progressively made this village accessible without having to leave the home, and Child helped to do this by providing French food with an American outfit. As Child herself wrote, 'the book could well be titled "French Cooking From the American Supermarket"' (cit. Schrambling, 2004). What was specific to Child was her unpretentious approach. In Lorna Williams' words, she 'became a star, loved by the public for her lack of pretension (which in no way compromised her commitment to excellence in food and its preparation) and resolute cheerfulness in the face of culinary catastrophes: a chocolate mousse that would not budge from its mold, the collapsed apple charlotte' (Williams, 2006a).<sup>29</sup>

At the root of this appeal lie the twin factors of entertainment and appropriation that are central to removing the threat of the other. Child provided the entertainment, and she also had the expertise – from the prestigious *Cordon Bleu*

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<sup>28</sup> Food writer Regina Schrambling provides a similar account: 'While Mrs. Child has been credited with inspiring a boom in French restaurants, an explosion of fancy food markets and even the arrival of the Food Network, she insisted her original book and program benefited from "a concatenation of factors" in the early 1960's. It was an era when Jacqueline Kennedy was raising awareness of all things French, and travel to France, which used to take a week by boat, was shortened to mere hours by plane. Duncan Hines cake mixes and Jell-O salads may have been far more prevalent than chocolate mousse and vinaigrette, but Americans were ready to embrace French food, at least as it was translated by a charismatic compatriot' (Schrambling, 2004).

<sup>29</sup> As another example of these 'culinary catastrophes', Child could drop a chicken on the floor, writes Karola Saekel, and by 'dusting it off and serving it with aplomb taught home cooks to relax and seek enjoyment rather than perfection' (Saekel, 2004). Interestingly, these antics did not encourage British audiences who would 'complain', Humble tells us, 'about that "mad, drunken American woman" on their television screens' (2005:196).

school in Paris – that authorised her to translate French food to the American palate. Yet the effect of this was not so much to normalise French cooking as it was to identify a particular kind of food with the familiar face of Julia Child: ‘On a par with show-business celebrities, she became a one-name entity. “This is Julia’s *daube*<sup>30</sup> (or *terrine*<sup>31</sup> or *mousse au chocolat*)” became a common phrase for hosts complimented on their meals’ (Saekel, 2004). This underlines the burgeoning celebrity culture that would take root in the following decades and by which food, more and more, would become associated not with culture, tradition, nor, in some cases, nourishment, but with a personality.<sup>32</sup>

It is a further index of this culture that, when, some decades later, “fat” – both the noun and the adjective – began to appear as vice, Child would be greeted, no longer as the high priestess of French cuisine, but as the ‘Cholesterol Queen, all cream and butter’ (Lawson, 1990). This rebuke, as a remarkable reversal of what Child was originally celebrated for, is telling of the shifting paradigms that inform the later decades of the twentieth century, and by which a growing fear of food finds expression in the allocation of blame. Child’s subsequent disclosure that she was, in fact, an ‘assiduous calorie counter’ (ibid.) contributes to this paradigm of guilt and defence, and equally gestures to the beginnings of a tabloid atmosphere around food celebrities, manifest in the public interest in private eating habits.<sup>33</sup> Child, in this way, by embodying French food with ‘American bluster and self-confidence’ (op. cit.),

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<sup>30</sup> A slow-cooked stew, typically made with beef and red wine.

<sup>31</sup> A type of paté.

<sup>32</sup> A telling comment comes from food writer Amanda Hesser: ‘I will never get to know her [Child] by keeping up with her latest shows or by making small talk at food events. But I can through her cooking’ (Hesser, 2001).

<sup>33</sup> A good example of this is the interest in Giada De Laurentiis, one of Food Network’s leading female stars, and one subject of a *Time* article on “Two Thin Chefs” (2006): ‘De Laurentiis does eat her own food when she’s taping her show; she doesn’t spit it out after a take or force herself to vomit, as several fans have asked. But she’s not often having stuffed shells and mopped-up sauce... she has acquired “self-regulatory competence”: she can cool the gluttonous impulses activated in our lizard brains when we see food’ (Cloud, 2006).

equally personifies the so-called French Paradox;<sup>34</sup> the term that has, in later years, re-mystified French eating habits in the popular imagination as a desirable but largely unattainable way to stay “thin”. Yet, as Michael Pollan convincingly argues, ‘There is no French paradox, really, only an American paradox: a notably unhealthy people obsessed with the idea of eating healthily’ (Pollan, 2006).

Child’s place in an American food culture is not insignificant.<sup>35</sup> But the way she is represented betrays the myopic historical perspective of a consumer society intent on endowing people with more than they can possibly be. *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* may have been a groundbreaking cookbook, but that it caused a national revolution is an overstatement bordering on fiction. For one thing, the “America” that consumers and publishers alike refer to as the beneficiary of Child’s work was and is far from a homogenous entity, a fact that in the 1960s became glaringly evident in the polarised responses to the Vietnam War, not least the infamous Woodstock concert, described by history professor Theodore Roszak as ‘the biggest large-scale critique of industrial culture since the days of the Romantics in the 18<sup>th</sup> century’ (cit. Milly, 2004). Interestingly, it was this atmosphere, according to Molly O’Neill, that contributed to the respective successes of Beard and Child:

Beard’s memoirist approach to food writing lent mystique to daily life and created an emotional resonance with readers. Child was a clown who made cooking fun and, week by week, demonstrated the delight of being wholly human and less than perfect. Not one set out to be a food person. Beard imagined himself in the theater, Child wanted to

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<sup>34</sup> This concept gained particular currency with Mireille Guiliano’s *French Women Don’t Get Fat: The Secret of Eating for Pleasure* (2004), published, like Child’s work, by Knopf. Guiliano’s book very quickly ranked no.1 on dozens of best-seller lists, including *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Publishers Weekly*, Amazon.com, the *Irish Times*, *Sydney Times*, *London Evening Standard*, and the *Sunday Times* (U.K.).

<sup>35</sup> Child co-founded, with Robert Mondavi, the American Institute for Food and Wine in 1981 (Bennett, 1990), and was also active in the International Association of Cooking Professionals, which administers the annual Julia Child Cookbook Awards. Child received the French *Légion d’Honneur* in 2000, and the American Medal of Freedom in 2003.

be a spy.... Food was Plan B for all of them. Each, therefore, exuded the delight and wonder of the amateur, a feeling that resonated with the counterculture's antiestablishment, anticorporate cosmology.<sup>36</sup> (O'Neill, 2003)

Beard and Child both, in this way, initiate the appeal of the non-professional, do-it-yourself approach that dominates current cookbooks and food television to the extent that the option of becoming a professional 'food person' is an increasingly lucrative Plan A, even for the culinary amateur, that is, the non-trained chef. And from a consumer perspective, celebrity fetishism is symptomatic of industrial culture in that it functions as an everyday distraction from the very real global politics that threaten the cohesiveness of "nationhood". The growing attraction of food media as distractive rather than functional is finally underscored by the fact that, in much the same way as Beard did not, evidently, succeed in teaching Americans how to boil water, neither did Child teach "America" how to cook French food. If she had, there would be no market, less than two decades later, for books like *Wolfgang Puck's Modern French Cooking for the American Kitchen* (Houghton Mifflin, 1986), Raymond Blanc's *Simple French Cookery* (2005), or Ina Garten's *Barefoot in Paris: Easy French Food You Can Make At Home* (2005).

Exemplifying another trend is a cookbook by M.F.K. Fisher (1908-1992) who, together with Julia Child and Elizabeth David formed, according to the Harvard Schlesinger library where their collective papers are preserved, the 'leading triumvirate of English-speaking food writers' (Seltzer, 2003). Fisher published more than twenty books, and wrote regular journalistic columns, including "Gastronomy Recalled" for the *New Yorker* between 1968 and 1969. Fisher's first books – *Serve it*

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<sup>36</sup> In his account of the rise of food television, Buford cites Russel Morash, who worked at WGBH, the Boston television station that aired Child's *The French Chef*: "You have to remember the early sixties. Broadcasting was a medium of mayhem. Assassinations, war, riots. You turned on your set, that's what you saw. But if you changed the channel you could watch a soufflé being made" (in Buford, 2006b).

*Forth* (1937) and *Consider the Oyster* (1941) – were dominated by narrative rather than recipes, and established her as a largely unsurpassed forerunner of the now-current genre of food writing that is predominantly memoirist rather than instructional. In 1968, Fisher authored the first in the *Time-Life* series of 27 A4 size books on “Foods of the World”, typically authored or contributed to by well-known food personalities, including Beard and Child. In keeping with Fisher’s style, the series, as Malcolm Jolley describes it, is ‘high on narrative, and reflect the *Life* magazine ethos of the time: explaining different culinary cultures as much as showing them. They are full of full photos of natives on the land as much standard food styling fare’ (Jolley, 2006).

Fisher’s contribution to the series was *The Cooking of Provincial France*, and the fact that Julia Child is listed as a consultant underlines the different intended purposes of their respective books; whereas Child gave French food an American flair, the *Time-Life* series was to function more as a showcase for different cultures in their own “authentic” contexts.<sup>37</sup> Yet what was common to both was the impulse to demystify. As Fisher explains in her introduction:

The title of this book about the food and cooking of the French provinces has words in it with many connotations. Clearly it is about French cooking. But to nine out of ten of us “French cooking” means an elaborate and expensive way of complicating our food, or at least masking it with sauces which are rightly, but sometimes impatiently, referred to as *French* sauces. (Fisher, 1970:6)

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<sup>37</sup> The theme of authenticity in the *Time-Life* exemplifies what Giddens terms a “disembedding mechanism”, the process by which social relations are lifted from their original (local) contexts, and reconfigured spatially and temporally for modern consumption (Giddens, 1990:21).

In the same vein as Child rendering the other accessible by making it easy – “mastering” French cooking with confidence and bluster – Fisher goes on to invoke the doctrine of simplicity advocated by Escoffier, the master himself:

It is good to remember, in the kitchen or out of it, the firm advice of Escoffier, one of the greatest chefs of the last or possibly of any century in the Western world. From his little village near Nice ... he rose to be master chef of all the Ritz hotels, to teach and to practise *la haute cuisine* in its purest form , ... and still to say to all his disciples, “*Faites simples*” - Make it simple! (Fisher, 1970:7)

With each section – Hors D’Oeuvre, Soups, Poultry, and so on – accompanied by substantial narrative and photographs (including of techniques, such as how to clean offal), the book is part historical, part cookbook, and part travel guide, including “A Brief Guide to French Table Wines”, and a section on bread with colour plates but no recipes because, as Fisher states, ‘traditionally and almost universally, the French do not bake their own bread ...; and to bake it successfully without having French flour and other French ingredients on hand is most difficult’ (1970:81). In contrast to Child’s translation of French food to an American kitchen, this limitation suggests that people who read or used the book, in short, were likely to travel to France, or, if not, to limit their experience of its food to visual consumption.

*The Cooking of Provincial France* demonstrates the extent to which the culinary tourism of David’s paperback *Mediterranean Food*, with its black-and-white etchings, had been sophisticated in two decades; the evocative power of words now supplemented with visual representations in the style of *National Geographic*. The series prefigures so-called coffee table cookbooks such as the richly illustrated

Könemann's *Culinaria* series of foods from around the world,<sup>38</sup> characterised on the publisher's website as a 'Literary, Culinary, and Photographic Journey for Gourmets',<sup>39</sup> or Harper Collins' series of *The Beautiful Cookbook*,<sup>40</sup> each subtitled 'Authentic Recipes from the Regions of ...'. These books, in turn, anticipate and now complement the armchair travel popularised through televised culinary travelogues<sup>41</sup> such as *Planet Food*, described as 'Culinary voyages presented by leading chefs, exploring the rich diversity of the world's cuisine'(www.pilotguides.com).

While the inclusion of recipes in all of these examples mimics the historical functionality of cookbooks, they equally disavow that function by the deliberate aestheticisation of their subject matter, typically through key adjectives; purest, beautiful, authentic, rich. This functions to underline the exotic, or *other*, quality of 'the world', and thus to heighten the spectacular appeal central to its vicarious consumption. Moreover, and particularly in the case of *Planet Food*, presented by 'leading chefs', the potential threat of the unfamiliar is softened – made common – by the familiar, just as the recognizably local voices of Child, Fisher, and David framed the foreign for domestic consumption. As much as this problematises any purported authenticity, it is paramount to the commodification of otherness that is the central tenet of tourism, fundamentally a form of appropriation. In Debord's terms:

Human circulation considered as something to be consumed – tourism – is a by-product of the circulation of commodities; basically, tourism is the chance to go and see what

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<sup>38</sup> Including volumes on Spain (1999), the Caribbean (1999), Italy (2000), Germany (2002), Greece (2004), France (2004), Russia (2006), and compendium volumes such as *European Specialties* (1996), each typically close to 500 pages and with over 1,000 colour photographs.

<sup>39</sup> <http://217.160.173.87/wvs/koenemann/view.php>.

<sup>40</sup> Including volumes on Italy (1989), Mexico (1991), Thailand (1992), Provence (1993), Tuscany (1996), and the American South (1996).

<sup>41</sup> Though rarely remembered for as much, taking cooking out of the studio was pioneered by U.K. chef Keith Floyd, who has hosted more than fifteen different series since his BBC television debut in 1984, *Floyd on Fish*. In addition to focusing on specific foodstuffs, many of these are destination programs (*Floyd on France*, *Floyd on Spain*).

has been made trite. The economic management of travel to different places suffices in itself to ensure those places' interchangeability. (Debord, 1995:168)

The examples of the series initiated by *The Cooking of Provincial France*, and continued in *Culinaria*, *The Beautiful Cookbooks* and *Planet Food* bespeak the 'human circulation' and exposure – actual and imaginary – that is an informing principle of globalisation. Yet the fact that they are series also illustrates the extent to which that circulation results in interchangeability. A serialised product gains full value and expression not in its uniqueness, but in relation to the other units in its series.

The rise in culinary tourism through cookbooks concurs with a generalised increase in travel and cultural interchange, and in this way functions both as a reflection of this movement, and as its necessary outcome. In much the same way as Beeton's *Household Management* addressed an audience in need of instruction due to changed social configurations, international cookbooks<sup>42</sup> following the second World War equally served as a means of normalising interactions resulting from the leisurely travel that is tourism proper, and also from the post-war migratory traffic that begins to radically alter demographic landscapes of the home territory, including the growth in retail outlets of "authentic" foreign ingredients and comestibles.<sup>43</sup> Yet, the opposite pole of this global interface is crystallised in the twin trends of celebrity and simplicity – Escoffier's "*faites simple!*" horribly misunderstood – both of which underlie the *non*-movement that overwhelmingly characterises the allegedly global

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<sup>42</sup> Other notable early U.K. cookbooks that explore non-national food include Ambrose Heath's *The International Cookery Book* (1953), Patience Gray and Primrose Boyd's best-selling *Plat du Jour, or Foreign Food* (1957), and Claudia Roden's seminal *A Book of Middle Eastern Cookery* (1968).

<sup>43</sup> David's 1955 foreword to *Mediterranean Food* ("So startlingly different now is the food situation now as compared with only two years ago that I think there is scarcely a single ingredient, however exotic, mentioned in this book which cannot be obtained somewhere in this country", op. cit.) indicates the early beginnings of this traffic of people and products. See Chapter 7 for further discussion of "authenticity".

sections of the present day world, with the U.S. and the U.K. at their forefront. While convenience foods and celebrities are the two commodities that arguably connect the world above any others, their currency also discloses the length to which a majority of people interact less with the now-available world, and with each other.

To clarify this development, it is useful to look at the discursive continuity of “connectivity” that exemplifies popular discourses around globalization. In his column, “As I Please”, written during his two year editorship (1943-1945) of the left-wing weekly *Tribune*, George Orwell comments on the situation in 1944:

Reading recently a batch of rather shallowly optimistic “progressive” books, I was struck by the automatic way in which people go on repeating certain phrases which were fashionable before 1914. Two great favourites are “the abolition of distance” and “the disappearance of frontiers”. I do not know how often I have met with the statements that “the aeroplane and the radio have abolished distance” and “all parts of the world are now interdependent”. ... But what is not grasped by those who say cheerfully that “all parts of the world are interdependent” is that they don’t any longer *have* to be interdependent. In an age when wool can be made out of milk and rubber out of oil, when wheat can be grown almost on the Arctic Circle, when atebri<sup>44</sup> will do instead of quinine and vitamin C tablets are a tolerable substitute for fruit, imports don’t matter very greatly.... So long as the world tendency is towards nationalism and totalitarianism, scientific progress simply helps it along. (Orwell, 2000c:145-147)

Here Orwell describes nineteenth and early twentieth century industrial developments that, by eliminating the need for international trade that served to justify erstwhile colonial exploits, destabilise the rhetorical desirability of

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<sup>44</sup> Atebrin (quinacrine), was developed by German scientists in the 1930s as an alternative to quinine for the treatment of malaria. It was used successfully by the Australian army during World War 2, but eventually discontinued for fear of high toxicity levels leading to psychosis and skin disorders. See, for example, Tony Sweeney’s *Malaria Frontline: Australian Army Research During World War II* (2003).

interdependency. He also satirises the fact that as much as colonialism was grounded in nationalism – the expansion of empire – so is this one consequence of its successor, globalisation, whereby advances in domestic industries facilitate independent sustainability more than ever before, albeit in the form of artificial substitutes, such as vitamin tablets for fruit. While Orwell’s irony risks oversimplifying the phenomenon he describes, his comments are noteworthy because they occur at the historical juncture at which, in a nascent post-war order, the hierarchical connotations of colonialism are progressively replaced by the more democratic associations of globalisation: the “abolition of distance”; the “disappearance of frontiers”, and so on.

Food is particularly telling of the very real links between colonialism and globalisation, both in terms of the industrialising processes central to both, and to the commodification of otherness that paradoxically articulates a definition of self. Jack Goody’s description of the nineteenth century ‘revolution’ of food in England is revealing of this tension:

The industrialisation of production was accompanied by the industrialisation of food, which led to the ‘complete revolution’ associated with an industrial cuisine. Originally middle-class, it extended rapidly with the expanding economy leading to the ‘bourgeoisification’ of the whole culture of food, accomplished through the vigorous support of the mass media. This process of change was dependent upon the mass importation not simply of luxuries but of staples. That is to say, it depended upon the development of overseas production by means of colonial expansion and the advent of bulk transport to make that produce available. (Goody, 1982:152)

Where Orwell draws attention to the potentially limited need for imports due to advances in domestic industries, Goody highlights the process by which foreign foods

– both staples and ‘luxuries’ – become naturalised once available and, often enough, adopted as local. This is the familiar dilemma behind the notion of an autonomous national cuisine, whereby, as David Bell and Gill Valentine express it, the ‘history of any nation’s diet is the history of the nation itself’ (Bell and Valentine, 1997:168). This history necessarily involves interactions with other nations,<sup>45</sup> emphasising the tenuousness of the category national and of its infancy, if it exists at all. In answer to the question of how long it takes to ‘create a [national] cuisine’, historian Rachael Laudan duly answers, ‘Not long: less than fifty years, judging by past experience’ (Laudan, 2001:40).

Globalisation, then, manifests in two noticeably conflicting strains when it comes to food. On the one hand, it furthers the mechanisms of industrialisation set in place by colonialism, which, in conjunction with post-war booms, have made possible the dramatic rise in convenience foods. Orwell was naturally ignorant of the extent to which leading industrialised societies would continue to exploit lesser developed countries to perpetuate national industries, such as U.S. chocolate producers<sup>46</sup> and, most infamously, Coca Cola.<sup>47</sup> Neither do his remarks adequately describe the mutual dependence that has become indispensable to transnational corporations that dominate global markets. Yet his comments inadvertently and somewhat ironically anticipate

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<sup>45</sup> U.K. chef Nigel Slater acknowledged as much in a 2006 interview: “The British, you must remember, are great magpies – we’re the thieves of the culinary world. I mean we’ve been all the way around the world 10 or 15 times and we’ve stolen all the best ideas. We’ve taken Hamburg, all of Chinese food, a bit of Indian, a bit Italian. It’s all part of our very mixed pot that we call British cooking” (in Roberts, 2006a).

<sup>46</sup> Following a 1998 UNICEF report claiming child slavery and trafficking in numerous West African countries, including the Ivory Coast (producer of 43% of the world’s cocoa) Fair Trade – an organisation which petitions on behalf of small-scale producers, and against economic and social exploitation generally – have been lobbying for major U.S. chocolate companies such as Mars, Inc., to protest these conditions, with little result. According to its statistics, ‘America is the world’s largest chocolate consumer. In 2000, the U.S. imported 729,000 tons of cocoa beans/processed products, ate 3.3 billion pounds of chocolate and spent \$13 billion on it’ (Fairtrade, 2007).

<sup>47</sup> Civicus, the World Alliance for Citizen Participation, reported in 2003 that villagers were without water in Kerala, India, ‘as a result of Coca-Cola’s operations’ (Naidoo, 2003). Coca cola has also been accused, according to Mark Thomas in *New Statesman*, of involvement with mercenaries in Colombia to ‘kill, kidnap, torture and disappear [sic]’ company trade unionists in that country (Thomas, 2004).

one of the leading contemporary “foodie” vogues, namely the reassertion of specifically “local” and “traditional” foods (and drink) under the banner of *terroir*,<sup>48</sup> a term which originally referred to wine, soil, and climate, but which now broadly suggests authenticity and an elevated cultural value, typically with a corresponding price. *Terroir* – or *terroirism* to its detractors – is the dogmatic tenet of the Slow Food movement, which in its ideological disavowal of foods labelled convenient, fast, or any similarly perceived threats to the preservation of cultural autonomy, including imported goods, represents one strain of nationalism that is a direct result of globalisation, its conceptual other.

The three post-war cookbooks reviewed so far each reflect and exemplify key developments of and reactions to globalisation that remain central to the production, consumption and media representation of food. Most recently, Fisher’s *The Cooking of Provincial France* – particularly evidenced by the non-translatable sections on geographically circumscribed French wines and bread – anticipates the foregrounding of the authentic central to culinary tourism which finds its most assertive expression in the exigencies of movements like Slow Food, which is ‘as much’, writes Laudan, ‘if not more about the invention of culinary patrimony as it is about its preservation’ (Laudan, 2004:140).<sup>49</sup> But while invention suggests fantasy, these perspectives at the

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<sup>48</sup> *Terroir*, originally used in reference to soil and wine, is the controlling factor of the French *Appellation Controlée*, by which wines are approved and graded according to their geographical provenance (the guiding principle behind, for instance, that only sparkling wine from the Champagne region in France may be labelled Champagne). In Laudan’s analysis, the term has always functioned as a marketing strategy intended to capitalise on the loss of tradition incurred by industrialisation: ‘[T]he French Terroir Strategy was a brilliant marketing device that satisfied modern yearnings for a romanticized past by advertising tradition and exploiting modern methods of production and distribution. By proclaiming that certain foodstuffs or meals were inextricable tied to particular places and to mythic histories, the promoters created scarcity and high prices. Wealthy urban gourmets or would-be gourmets snatched up the products or went off to the country to enjoy local bounty’ (Laudan, 2004:138).

<sup>49</sup> Echoing Eric Hobsbawm and Terry Ranger’s notion of “invented traditions” (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983), Andrew Smith has coined the term “culinary fakelore” to describe ‘invented stories that serve purposes other than historical accuracy’ (Smith, 2000). He gives a variety of motivational factors, including ‘journalistic enrichment’, ‘culinary jingoism’, and ‘commercial promotion’, each of which is

same time respond to real market developments: readers of the *Time-Life* cookbooks, as much as those of the *Culinaria* series, or indeed those who watch *Planet Food*, unlike the readers of David's *Mediterranean Food* in 1950, are not limited to being vicarious consumers. The relative financial accessibility of international travel, combined with the availability of foreign foods and ingredients – be they through supermarkets run by immigrants, or imported to “delis” where the bread might be flown in from Paris that morning for higher-end consumers – means that the exotic other is ever more accessible; a direct result of the developments in ‘bulk transport’ mentioned by Goody. The touristic attraction of ‘the world’ as presented in a handsome series, however, underlines the perpetual distance between the spectacle and its consumer, where aesthetic value precedes usefulness and taste is manufactured rather than registered, just as a package proclaiming a cheese to be “imported from Italy” justifies its precedence over a no-name factory brand and, like Jamie Oliver's blurb on the *Larousse*, justifies the investment too.

The popularity of Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, together with its hit television series *The French Chef*, similarly signals the cultural desirability of the other, but through a more explicit appropriation guided, in contrast to Slow Food's stress on conservation, by adaptation. Beyond modern cookbooks and television shows with an analogous undercurrent of the artificially authentic, this version of post-war cosmopolitanism manifests in the present-day variety of foreign dining available in major cities.<sup>50</sup> Many of these have little in common with their original

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potentially applicable to *terroir* and Slow Food. Culinary fakelores are revisited in Chapter 7 in the context of media-generated health myths.

<sup>50</sup> In the *New Criterion*, Anthony Daniels reports on a conversation with Najam Sethi, a Pakistani journalist: ‘For Sethi I conceived a great respect. It was not that I agreed with everything he said, much to the contrary; he illustrated his belief in the possibility of genuine multiculturalism by reference to the different kinds of restaurants to be found in most large cities nowadays. (I have always suspected that, at root, multiculturalism means, at least for westerners, tapas today, tom kha kai tomorrow, and tarte tatin the day after. This is to take the idea that we are what we eat a little too seriously’ (Daniels, 2005).

counterparts, and some have no originals, such as the “Chinese” fortune cookie, invented in California.<sup>51</sup> But in the same way that the history of the fortune cookie is hardly secret, Child was far from furtive about translating French cooking to a domestic context. On the contrary, this was perhaps her greatest appeal; she made her subject matter accessible through her distinctively American personality. In addition to this uniquely American representation of French food, Child represented, and visually for the first time, the most engaging aspects of three of the most representative pre-war food personalities: the professionalism of an Escoffier, the democracy of a Soyer, and the trustworthiness of a Mrs. Beeton.

The oldest of the three, *The James Beard Cookbook* heralds the name branding and simplicity that are arguably the strongest vogues in food media today, and which underlie the detachment that paradoxically describes a prevalent obsession with all things food. Beard’s was one of the first cookbooks to explicitly cater to the lack of skills resulting from the post-war industrialization of food, and the permanence of both markets emphasises the extent to which the cookbook specifically, and food media generally, caters to appearances and entertainment over pragmatism. The constancy of the “convenience” genre, as well as its striking adaptability to virtually any socio-historical context, is well illustrated across the decades. In the 1960s, Peg Bracken’s *I Hate to Cook Cookbook* (1960)<sup>52</sup> indulged the growing women’s liberation movement by challenging the historically patriarchal role of women in the

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<sup>51</sup> ‘Fortune cookies...are a true California Cantonese invention, created by a noodle company in Los Angeles .... They were unknown in Asia until American tourists began to demand them in the past decade or two’ (Anderson, 1988:213). See also Vincent Cheng’s “A Four-Legged Duck?” (2007), in which he argues that Chinese restaurant food in the U.S. essentially American, and Gish Jeh’s “A Short History of the Chinese Restaurant”: ‘After the Second World War, mainstream Americans, too, began to see the Americanness—eureka!—of some “Chinese.” And Chinese Americans celebrated this: On a menu from the 1950s, a man smilingly paints characters on his “Chinese Easter Eggs.” By this point, though, Chinese restaurants were about more than East Meets West. They were sites where not only Chineseness but ethnicity in general was made and made fun of’ (Jeh, 2006).

<sup>52</sup> Followed, amongst others, by the *I Hate to Housekeep Book* (1962), and *I Still Hate to Cook Book* (1967), aimed, in Bracken’s terms at ‘those of us who want to fold our big dishwater hands around a dry martini instead of a wet flounder, come the end of a long day’ (cit. Inness, 2006:67).

kitchen.<sup>53</sup> According to Sherrie Inness, author of *Secret Ingredients: Race, Gender, and Class at the Dinner Table* (2006),

convenience food literature made it clear that women should develop their own interests; this was a small step toward second-wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, which emphasized that women had to cultivate themselves as individuals who possessed concerns other than purely domestic ones. (Inness, 2006:19)

The incongruity of a cookbook that contests the expectation to cook stresses the importance of façade, or in Humble's terms, finding ways to ways to 'deceive and cheat' (1996:16), a theme furthered in the 1970s by self-explanatory titles like Delia Smith's *How to Cheat at Cooking* (1971), with its shortcuts to create the ever-important appearance of knowledge.<sup>54</sup> In the 1980s, by contrast, Erin Pizzey's *Shut's Cookbook* (1981) abandons any pretence, and wholeheartedly embraces the convenience of fast-food, particularly when it comes to children. As Pizzey explained, "Don't force your children to eat your carefully prepared home-made stews when what they really want is fish fingers and beans.... Remember that kids get addicted to hamburgers for years of their lives. They don't like them home-made; they like them

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<sup>53</sup> A key text for this movement was Betty Friedman's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), in which she argues that the socio-economic context of the 1960s, including mass media advertising, fabricated and perpetuated the patriarchal stereotype of woman as wife and mother.

<sup>54</sup> In line with this sketch of cookbook trends since 1950, Mennell similarly notes that in 'the first half of the twentieth century, the preoccupation is mainly with economizing in the cost of ingredients, but since the Second World War the concern has been particularly with savings in the cost of labour, and thus especially with "convenience foods"' (1985:190-191). Corresponding in terms of simplicity, but far removed from convenience foods, was the manifesto of *nouvelle cuisine* popularized in the 1970s as a lighter, "healthier" alternative to the richer *haute cuisine*. The manifesto, written by Henri Gault in 1973, stressed both simplicity and individuality, thereby prefiguring some of the contemporary debates around "ownership" of food and chef artistry. However, as Gault concluded in 1995, the movement's success was limited because, 'along with the authentic cooks, a crowd of mountebanks, antiquarians, society women, fantasists and tricksters did not give the developing movement a good reputation. Furthermore fashions, mannerisms and trickery attached themselves to this new culinary philosophy: miniscule portions; systematic under-cooking; ...inopportune marriages of sugar, salt and exotic spices; excessive homage paid to the decoration of dishes and "painting on the plate"; and ridiculous or dishonest names of dishes' (cit. Davidson, 1999:542).

from the take-away, so don't whine – get them a take-away when you can afford it" (cit. Humble, 2005:197). And even where actual cooking did remain central, the 80s cookbook was circumscribed by what Alan Davidson, editor of the *Oxford Companion to Food*, explains as the 'general attitudes' of the publishing industry at the time: "please take out the background information and simplify the recipes – you know, adapt it all for use in a typical ... kitchen" (Davidson, 1994:5).

### 4.3 "New" Books

The examples reviewed so far, while few, sketch a distinctive path towards the twenty-first century, where the cookbook industry, in increasing competition with food television, is dominated by volumes proclaiming to make cooking simple, plain, and easy, if not marketed outright for dummies.<sup>55</sup> To be sure, if there is one "secret" that prevails in current cookbooks, it is simplicity. But simplicity, in food media, is a highly complex signifier. On the one hand, it suggests convenience, but not the convenience of pre-packaged, processed foods that was celebrated following the war and that has been vilified in recent decades by the escalation of obesity and other "lifestyle illnesses".<sup>56</sup> The simplicity of the cookbook is the antithesis of convenience or fast foods, yet it paradoxically owes its demand to those industries for perpetuating a market that either does not know how to cook, or that shuns complexity. The simplicity of the cookbook is also about appearances; of performance, as we have seen, and of ownership. Lucy Phillips reports in the *Independent* on a 2006 survey which reveals that the average U.K. household owns cookbooks comprising over one thousand recipes, of which approximately thirty-five will ever be tried. 'Britons own a

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<sup>55</sup> While there are clearly exceptions to this generalisation, including the proliferation of cookbooks purporting to give "authentic" recipes for ethnic and exotic cuisines which neither simplify nor rely on convenience products, this discussion centres on the demonstrable availability of, and demand for, simplicity.

<sup>56</sup> See Chapter 7 for an overview of the health risks related with obesity.

total of 171 million cookbooks', she continues, 'but 61 million will never be opened, with almost two-thirds of people admitting that they keep them for show rather than practicality' (Phillips, 2006). The same survey revealed that Delia Smith, 'with her no-nonsense recipes' (ibid.), was the national favourite.

The abundance of information, likely simplified, represented by 171 million cookbooks is quite something to consider. For a population of 60 million, that's an average of two cookbooks per person. On the one hand, this suggests that access to kitchen secrets is as coveted now as it was in the fifteenth century when Platina published *De honesta voluptate et valitudine*. On the other hand, it highlights the difference between having information and using it, and that one result of the enormous post-war industrial and economic advances is the persistent commodification of artifice. It is no coincidence that the 1950s marked the beginnings of what Roland Barthes, in his 1957 essay on food styling in *Elle* magazine, called "ornamental" or "idea" cookery, by which the photographic representation of food – typically glazed or coated as per the vogue then – created 'objects at once near and inaccessible, whose consumption can perfectly well be accomplished simply by looking' (Barthes, 2000b:79). While cookbooks through the decades reveal and reflect socio-economic fluctuations, they equally manifest an undeviating focus on display over function, and one that ironically mystifies food and cooking as much as it purports to demystify it. While serving the ostensible purpose of making skills and knowledge available, cookbooks for the non-cook and the culinary tourist alike rest on the assumption that cooking is necessarily complex, particularly *other* cooking. And so, real knowledge, like the photographs from *Elle*, remains 'at once near and inaccessible', and justifies the need for ever more books, and ever simpler books, to explain the same thing.

It is far from this work's intent to presume that cookbooks never serve any real function, nor to suggest, in quite as certain terms as Humble does, that the 'reason so few people cook from today's cook books is because they are not supposed to do so' (2005:247).<sup>57</sup> But it is significant that in a global economy predicated on access, or to use a phrase despised by Orwell, "the disappearance of frontiers", there exists such a stark gulf between the accumulation and use of information. The appeal of simplicity, and the heightened appeal, equally, of owning cookbooks rather than cooking from them, is symptomatic of the detachment that informs this economy with its stress on ease and convenience, with consequently little time for labour. As *Food&Wine's* Daniel Patterson laments, 'As our interest in cooking has become more voyeuristic than pragmatic, the recipes that we do follow have become automated in their simplicity, largely a way to get as quickly and mindlessly as possible from one place to another. In our single-minded pursuit of the destination, we've lost our love of the journey' (Patterson, 2006).

Another factor that accounts for having and not using, to amend Debord's description of a 'generalized shift from *having* to appearing' (1995:17), is the paralysis that results from too much choice. The 1960 introduction to Peg Bracken's *I Hate to Cook Book* provides a potent comment on the plethora of "basic" cookbooks that populate bookshelves, be it in the home or in bookshops:

[W]orst of all, there are the big fat cookbooks that tell you everything about everything.

For one thing, they contain too many recipes. Just look at all the things you can do with a

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<sup>57</sup> Elise Bauer, host of the popular Simply Recipes blog, might concur with Humble. In a post on the *Time-Life* series "The Good Cook" (initiated in 1979, and edited by Richard Olney, the series, in contrast to "Foods of the World", offered volumes on specific foods, such as eggs, cheese, wine, and fish), she praised the books for providing 'detailed instructions that are hard to find in more recent cookbooks' (Bauer, 2004). Yet the vastness of the cookbook industry, including new editions of volumes like *Larousse Gastronomique*, preclude such categorical generalisations, which similarly ignore justifiable revisions to "basic" cooking in keeping with new products and techniques.

chop and aren't about to do! What you want is just one little old dependable thing you can with a chop besides broil it, that's all. (Bracken, 1960:viii).

Food writer Elisabeth Luard's thoughts on current tomes, almost five decades later, throw the relevance of Bracken's protest into particular relief:

What's it all about? Are none of us capable of poaching an egg without a manual the size of a house? I blame Gordon Ramsay - I mean, how much effing instruction do you need to cook lobster? (Luard, 2006)

Here Luard identifies a key explanation for the current abundance of choice, namely celebrity chefs.<sup>58</sup> In his article on the U.S. cookbook industry in 2006, Mike Dunne cites publishing analyst Michael Norris, who reported that the market for cookbooks 'is continuing to grow', and that it is 'led by small but powerful brands' such as U.S. celebrity chef Rachael Ray, author of three of the top ranking cookbooks on Amazon.com (Dunne, 2006b).<sup>59</sup> 'Whether any become family heirlooms or wind up at a yard sale', Dunne concludes, 'remains to be seen' (ibid.). This final question, very likely rhetorical, is especially telling of fashion as the main attraction of celebrity. Fashion, by definition, is fleeting and, as Stephen Bayley suggests, 'unnecessary' (Bayley, 1999:44).

The fact that owning a celebrity branded cookbook is fashionable highlights, once again, that its primary value lies in appearances. Furthermore, in an age preoccupied with authenticity, the fact that many of these cookbooks are not even

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<sup>58</sup> See also Chapter 5 (Beyond Recipes) for other factors leading to the abundance of recipes in today's market, such as new generations becoming interested in cooking, requiring publishers to "renew" cookbooks periodically to appeal to a younger demographic.

<sup>59</sup> Steven Shapin draws a similar conclusion in the *London Review of Books*: 'What's all this fuss about cooks and chefs? The how-to-cook sections of bookshops are as big as the how-to-be-successful-in-life sections; it's no longer clear where one ends and the other begins. Many of the books sell themselves not so much as sources of practical information – how to make a wild mushroom risotto – but as windows onto both the skills and the emotional life of a celebrity cook' (Shapin, 2006).

authored by their “authors” thickens the centrality of artifice. In his commentary on what he terms the ‘murky world of culinary ghostwriting’ for the *Financial Times*, Richard Ehrlich explains:

Some of the most famous cookery writers in the US and the UK couldn’t publish a usable book without extensive help. It’s hard to understand the reticence about owing up to ghostwriting. If tennis players aren’t assumed to be good writers, why should we expect that skill of cooks? The problem is that in our celebrity-obsessed age, readers of cookbooks don’t just want recipes that work. They also buy into a dubious notion of personality. They’re not just looking for minestrone, they’re looking for X’s minestrone. Eager to have their kitchen touched by his magic, they probably don’t realise that authorship of the recipe is sometimes debatable. This question wouldn’t make a bit of difference if the personal imprimatur of the celebrated author weren’t the unique selling point of the recipe. (Ehrlich, 2006)

Ghostwriting reiterates some of the central issues to do with copyrighting recipes, namely the anxieties that attend an “age of access”, to borrow Jeremy Rifkin’s term. Rifkin designates an age of access as one where the main commodity on offer is experience rather than service (Rifkin, 2000). Particularly germane to digital access and the internet, Rifkin’s notion is also useful to the context of modern cookbooks. Debates on the copyrightability of recipes mainly focus on the “rights” of the producer; the chef. Cookbooks, by contrast, reflect the consumer perspective, or experience, because their demand reveals what people “need”. What people need, the cookbook industry tells us, are a lot of books that represent people who may or may not have written them; books that will never be used but are good for show; books filled with authentic images of places and food that can be consumed ever

more perfectly ‘simply by looking’ than when Barthes described “idea cookery” in 1957.

Most tellingly, people need books that validate their incompetence by taking them back, again and again, to the “basics”. This, for a considerable segment of the market, constitutes the consumer experience. In her discussion of post-war cooking literature, Neuhaus suggests that cookbooks from that time ‘reveal more than the growing popularity of canned soup in the postwar period. Recipes and rhetoric from 1950s cookbooks illustrated the anxieties of a middle class caught in the throes of huge cultural change’ (Neuhaus, 1999:537). I would suggest that this is true even more so now, although anxieties about cultural change in a globalised world might be rephrased as an anxiety about and expression of *loss* of “culture”, where the appearance of culinary knowhow – represented by the accumulation of books that teach the basics, visit the sights, and deliver celebrity “magic” – reveals the poverty of community and tradition, or, in Debord’s terms, the ‘limitless artificiality’ (1995:68) that attends modern consumerism.

These first two chapters have discussed recipes and cookbooks as the two basic components of food media, that is, the written and visual representation of food. Already apparent is the difficulty of considering either of these in isolation: recipes gain meaning in contexts of narrative, history, and possession; when recipes are collected in cookbooks, these texts, similarly, are distinct as products of specific socio-historical contexts, as well as broader structures of feeling, or ideological frameworks. Culinary texts, then, like the food they represent, rarely operate on an exclusively functional level. This becomes all the more apparent in the next chapter, which focuses on the representation of food – and food personalities – in texts beyond recipes and cookbooks *per se*.



## 5. Beyond Recipes: Literature, Menus and the World Wide Web

What spectacular antagonisms conceal is the unity of poverty. Differing forms of a single alienation contend in the masquerade of total freedom of choice by virtue of the fact that they are all founded on real repressed contradictions.  
(Debord, 1995:63)

This chapter examines three textual sites where food prominently signifies much beyond its nutritional value. I argue that in the circuit of commodity and information exchange, food literature (including journalism), menus, and the World Wide Web increasingly operate as interpellative mechanisms that constitute the consumer as subject in communities that are virtual – used here in the broad sense of imaginary – and in this way, function to conceal a loss of the real. Food literature includes popular and academic work, and magazines. It also comprises food-based rhetoric in journalism that, by explicitly disassociating food from its material signified, serves to heighten its fetishistic value. Menus, as textual representations of the establishments that issue them, open the discussion to some of the discursive antagonisms between access and exclusivity that underlie the modern restaurant industry. This subject is finally crystallised by the internet, which not only makes information common, but builds virtual communities, and by that token, threatens historical categories of class and specialisation. The fact that this new commonality is not universally celebrated echoes several of the main concerns of the foregoing chapters, specifically the anxieties surrounding the loss of distinction in a global economy. Food language beyond recipes and cookbooks also sets the scene for the vicarious consumption of food on television in the following chapter, which in turn betokens the real and conspicuous consumption that is the subject of the final chapter of this thesis.

## 5.1 Food Literature

The examples of M.F.K. Fisher and Elizabeth David make it clear that narrative and personal style have for a long time precluded recipes from being ‘mere lists of ingredients’, to use the phrasing of the U.S. Copyright Act (op. cit.). Examples of works by James Beard and Julia Child equally suggest that the force of personality, or more accurately, public persona, can provide as strong a selling point for a cookbook as its functionality. Yet each of these examples remains within the genre of the cookbook because of their common and overriding aim to provide reproducible recipes, albeit combined with narrative or personal flair. Food, or gastronomic, literature, on the other hand, focuses more on the evocative power of descriptions of food. But, as with all classifications, neat categories are elusive, and it is symptomatic of the recognition of food’s extraordinary multivalency that “food literature” today not only includes cookbooks, particularly historical and narrativised works such as those by David and Fisher, but also memoirs, history, tourism, nationalism, science, fiction, and business guides. Some food literature contains recipes; plenty does not, and where it does, recipes function more often than not as narrative props rather than pragmatic devices. Recipes in food literature are not primarily for cooking, but to make descriptions of food more “real”; as anthropologist David Sutton suggests, citing Traci-Marie Kelly, ‘the reader is not supposed to stop reading and actually make the recipe that has been provided, but rather to experience the verisimilitude of the text through reading the recipe’ (Sutton, 2001:112).

One of the earliest U.K. publications to combine narrative with recipes was *Me - In the Kitchen* (1935) by Naomi Jacobs (1889-1964),<sup>1</sup> a book which, according to Humble, ‘challenges the traditional format of the cook book to the extent of

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<sup>1</sup> Jacobs also published under the pseudonym Ellington Gray (1889-1964).

refusing to separate recipes typographically, instead weaving them more or less seamlessly into the flow of her prose' (2005:56). The title of this work, specifically the word "me", is significant to the genre of food writing that is as biographical as it is culinary, and to the fascination with personality that becomes prevalent from the second half of the twentieth century and lays the groundwork for the professional celebrity chef. In the U.S., and arguably worldwide, this genre was consolidated, as we have seen, by M.F.K. Fisher, whose work remains a benchmark for present-day writers. In a 2007 review on N.P.R. (U.S. National Public Radio), writer Kate Christensen, whose online biography describes her as 'the author of four novels, most recently *The Epicure's Lament* and *The Great Man*; both contain recipes, most of which were invented on the page and tried out later', eulogised Fisher's *Consider the Oyster* (1941):

I reread MFK Fisher's masterpiece for maybe the 15th time on a recent afternoon. It's short enough to read in one sitting, but I warn you: Make sure you have immediate access to oysters afterward. She practically commands you to go straight out and order a dozen or two raw ones on shaved ice and wash them down with a thin, cold white wine, no matter what the month. And MFK Fisher is not a writer whose suggestions ought to be taken lightly. It's filled with recipes so direct and concrete, you can taste them as you read. (Christensen, 2007)

Fisher's books, containing blurbs from some of the world's most esteemed writers, including W.H. Auden's "I do not know of anyone in the United States who writes better prose",<sup>2</sup> are engaging pieces of literature precisely because Fisher was a writer with a passion for food, rather than a cook who also wrote books. Being a talented writer and a cook, to recall Richard Erlich's comments on culinary ghostwriting – 'If

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<sup>2</sup> On the cover of the North Point Press 1989 edition of *The Gastronomical Me* [1943].

tennis players aren't assumed to be good writers, why should we expect that skill of cooks?' (op. cit.) – is far from given.

Another notable U.S. food writer was A.J. Liebling<sup>3</sup> (1904-1963), whose literary reputation was largely thanks to his press critiques in the *New Yorker* column, “The Wayward Press”,<sup>4</sup> from 1945 until his death. So influential was his writing that *Slate*'s David Schafer claimed in 2004 that ‘Liebling invented, almost from scratch, the journalistic genre of literary press critic, but because he wrote as well as he did, he seems to have closed the door on the way out. Liebling’s literary vision is too vivid to imitate, and it’s hard to imagine someone trumping it’ (Schafer, 2004). Liebling also worked as a war correspondent, and duly spent time in Paris during the early 1940s, recollections of which were published shortly before his death in *Between Meals: An Appetite for Paris* [1962]. Like Fisher’s work, Liebling’s prose is lionised as an appetite stimulant; as one review of *Between Meals* warns: ‘Beware, it will send you straight to the nearest restaurant’ (www.longitudebooks.com). And, like Fisher, whose memoir *The Gastronomical Me* [1943] begins, ‘The first thing I remember tasting...’ (Fisher, 1989:3), Liebling situates the reader as a witness to another life:

In the restaurant on the Rue Saint-Augustin, M. Mirande would dazzle his juniors, French and American, by dispatching a lunch of raw Bayonne ham and fresh figs, a hot sausage in crust, spindles of filleted pike in a rich rose sauce Nantua,<sup>5</sup> a leg of lamb larded with anchovies, artichokes on a pedestal of foie gras, and four or five kinds of cheese, with a good bottle of Bordeaux<sup>6</sup> and one of champagne, after which he would

<sup>3</sup> Abbott Joseph, Liebling published under the name A.J. Liebling.

<sup>4</sup> “The Wayward Press” rubric still exists in today’s *New Yorker*, after being discontinued following Liebling’s death in 1963. It was reinstated in 1999 (Schafer, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Similar to *béchamel*, or white sauce, but enriched with cream, cognac and crayfish tails.

<sup>6</sup> Wine from the Bordeaux region in France.

call for the Armagnac<sup>7</sup> and remind Madame to have ready for dinner the larks and ortolans<sup>8</sup> she had promised him, with a few langoustes and a turbot – and, of course, a fine civet<sup>9</sup> made from the marcassin, or young wild boar.... (Liebling, 2004:6)

The voyeuristic aspect of this work is central to food literature. Whereas Elizabeth David's work may have been 'redolent with the smell and taste of the wildly beautiful mountains' (Chaney, 1998:153) of the Mediterranean, the absence of directly imperative language of recipes ('Into 3 pints of boiling water put 1 lb of French beans cut in inch lengths', op. cit.) in Liebling's writing heightens the vicarious quality of his descriptions.

David also wrote literature without recipes, the first of which, an essay entitled "Two Cooks", was published in the *Wine and Food* quarterly<sup>10</sup> in 1951. 'In keeping with the style of the elite and influential journal', her biographer Chaney claims, 'Elizabeth's essay was a true piece of gastronomic literature. For one so relatively inexperienced, her sense of concision and humour were already beautifully honed. And with these tools she used the vehicle of her own experience of a small Mediterranean island to give the outlines of a philosophy of taste' (Chaney, 1998:83). Using food to describe a 'philosophy', interestingly, is commonly represented as the guiding principle behind these early writers; of Fisher's *Consider the Oyster*, Christensen similarly suggests: 'If there is a philosophy implicit in these pages, it is

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<sup>7</sup> Brandy, or *eau-de-vie*, from the Armagnac region in France. Armagnac is produced from the same grapes as cognac, but undergoes a different kind of distillation (column still) to cognac (pot still).

<sup>8</sup> A small bird from the bunting family. In French gastronomy, the ortolan is typically drowned in Armagnac, roasted, and eaten whole. One ritual involves covering the diner's head with a cloth, explained either as a way to hide the sight from God (Kiley, 2006), or to optimise the smell of the delicacy.

<sup>9</sup> Stew. *Civet de marcassin* is a classic French dish similar to *boeuf bourgignon* (beef braised in red wine), but with venison.

<sup>10</sup> Journal of the International Wine and Food Society, 'the world's oldest and most renowned gastronomic society' ([www.iwfs.com](http://www.iwfs.com)). The I.W.F.S. is based in London.

that great pleasure in food is there for the taking. Food is not a metaphor for life. It is life, and eating is an art' (Christensen, 2007).

These “philosophical” readings are of interest for two reasons. The first derives from the one striking commonality between early so-called food writers: Fisher, Liebling, David, and not to forget Julia Child, each spent time abroad, and some of their most celebrated works are based on these foreign encounters. The timing of their publications coincides with the end of wartime rationing, and, as demonstrated by the example of Child’s *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, with a burgeoning travel industry and heightened interest in things “Continental”, particularly France. In the case of Liebling, David Remnick suggests in the *New Yorker* that his move follows an established American trope – exemplified in films by Howard Hawks’ *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), and in books by Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer* (1934)<sup>11</sup> – by which ‘the most tantalizing means of indulging a youthful desire for escape and re-creation has been the sojourn in Paris’ (Remnick, 2004). George Orwell’s essay “Inside the Whale” [1940], in which he names Miller ‘the only imaginative prose-writer of the slightest value who has appeared among the English-speaking races for some years past’, is germane to the appeal of the unfamiliar that informs the reception of mid-twentieth century food literature:

Exile is probably more damaging to a novelist than to a painter or even a poet, because its effect is to take him out of contact with working life and narrow down his range to the street, the cafe, the church, the brothel and the studio. On the whole, in Miller’s books you are reading about people living the expatriate life, people drinking, talking,

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<sup>11</sup> Miller (1891-1980) was an American author and painter. *Tropic of Cancer* was his first novel, followed, among others by *Black Spring* (1936) and *Tropic of Capricorn* (1939). His relationship to French erotica writer Anaïs Nin (1903-1977) is the subject of the 1990 film *Henry and June* (dir. Philip Kaufman).

meditating, and fornicating, not about people working, marrying, and bringing up children. (Orwell, 2000:496)

While the writings of Liebling, Fisher, and David are far from the notoriously sexual frankness that describes Miller's bohemian 'sojourn' in Paris, Orwell singles out one of the most compelling factors about each of these writers, namely their representation of life less ordinary; it may not have been without marriage and children,<sup>12</sup> but it was far from the daily realities of America and England, respectively.

The second point of interest is that, from a culinary perspective, their descriptions of that life were in direct contrast to the austerity of wartime rations and, equally, to the convenience foods that came to dominate post-war plenty in those countries. With descriptions like one by Fisher, written in 1949, of a dinner of 'thin strips of veal that had been dipped in an artful mixture of grated parmigiano<sup>13</sup> and crumbs', accompanied by Tio Pepe,<sup>14</sup> Swedish glasses and a bottle of 'Chianti, "stra vecchio"<sup>15</sup> (Fisher, 2002:43), it is not difficult to see the sensual appeal of being an onlooker rather than a potential recreator of the food, as in the case of recipes, particularly if ingredients were hard to find. Neither is it difficult, to further the point of food as metaphor, to extend sensuality to sexuality, explaining Mark Kurlansky's choice to include the above description in the section on "Food and Sex" in his anthology of food writing, *Choice Cuts* (2002). Yet, for all the celebrated suggestiveness of Fisher's writing, her own response to the general reception of her work is noteworthy:

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<sup>12</sup> All three writers were married; Liebling and Fisher three times each, and Fisher had two daughters.

<sup>13</sup> Parmesan cheese.

<sup>14</sup> Spanish sherry.

<sup>15</sup> Chianti is an Italian wine varietal; 'stra vecchio', meaning extra old, indicates a vintage bottle.

Very nice people have told me, for a long time now, that some things they have read of mine, in books or magazines, have made them drool. I know they mean to compliment me.... They are grateful to me, perhaps, for being reminded that they are still functioning, still aware of some of their hungers. I too should be grateful, and even humble, that I have reminded people of what fun it is, vicariously or not, to eat/live. Instead I am revolted. I see a slavering slobbering maw. It dribbles helplessly, in a Pavlovian response. It drools. And drooling, not over a meaty bone or a warm bowl of slops, is what some people have done over my printed words. This has long worried me. I feel grateful but repelled. They are nice people, and I like them and I like dogs, but dogs must drool when they are excited by the prospect of the satisfaction of alerted tastebuds, and two-legged people do not need to. (Fisher, 1990:273)

So clear in Fisher's writing, in fact, that her distaste in this extract is as palpable as the virtual command to go eat oysters her reviewer Christensen perceives after re-reading *Consider the Oyster*, some sixty years after its publication.

These responses, including warnings that Liebling's book will 'send you straight to a restaurant', are telling of the extent to which food media, in the many decades after the fact of these early writers, has become linked to direct consumption, and this is one of the major shifts that has occurred since the end of World War 2. Fisher famously stated that, "I do not consider myself a food writer" (cit. Lopate, 1995:545). She was not; she wrote, as Liebling did, in a realist trope, and it was their gift for realism that accounts for the redolence of their work.<sup>16</sup> Yet it is in line with the growth of a major industry around food literature that they have been christened food writers, and certainly not until after 1950, when the term first made its appearance in

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<sup>16</sup> Several critics suggest that food in Fisher's writing functions primarily as metaphor (Lopate, 1995), used, variously, to stage 'the complexity of her psychological responses' (Derwin, 2003) and to deal with grief (Lazar, 1992). While I don't dismiss these readings, their metaphorical investment in food paradoxically renders it arbitrary and thereby detracts from any "real" value of her descriptions; one of the inadvertent and unfortunate consequences, I believe, of over-reading.

print,<sup>17</sup> a moment which represents, according to O'Neill, the 'best evidence that food had arrived, ... the anointing of its own specialist' (O'Neill, 2003). The arrival of food – and its specialist – means two things. First, it creates a new site of authority, and begins to explain the inclination to define as "philosophy" what are fundamentally realist(ic) descriptions. Secondly, responses to these descriptions, such as 'being reminded ... of what fun it is, vicariously or not, to eat/live', or, as Janice Albert puts it, being introduced through Fisher's writings to 'food as a source of pleasure' (Albert, 2007), indicate the degree to which food is generally not a source of pleasure, and how little fun it is, or can be, to eat and to live.

Needing oysters or a restaurant after reading a book also suggests the Althusserian interpellation that is effected by modern food writing, or more accurately, the modern consumption of what has been deemed food writing, as a direct result of the commodification – and fetishism – attached to food and its media representation in this century. To recall, Althusser proposed the term interpellation to designate the process by which people are "hailed" into particular ideological positions through so-called Ideological State Apparatuses (I.S.A.s); any institution that plays a part in socialising human beings. This mechanism is particularly evident in media and advertising which explicitly guide consumers to specific behavior, namely spending, through the personal "address".<sup>18</sup> So, in the same way that suturing

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<sup>17</sup> O'Neill explains that the 'term "food writer" first appeared in the *Times* on March 12, 1950. Given the intimate connection between food writing and the food industry, it may be no coincidence that the phrase made its debut in a story by Jane Nickerson about a press trip to the manufacturing plant of Tabasco sauce in Louisiana. Interestingly, Nickerson was the one of the first to apply news-side ethics to the food report' (O'Neill, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> Terry Eagleton provides a useful summary of the way interpellation works: 'It is as though society were not just an impersonal structure to me, but a "subject" which "addresses" me personally – which recognises me, tells me that I am valued, and so makes me by that very act of recognition into a free, autonomous subject. I come to feel, not exactly as though the world exists for me alone, but as though it is significantly "centred" on me, and I in turn am significantly "centred" on it. Ideology, for Althusser, is the set of beliefs and practices which does this centring' (Eagleton, 1983:172).

in film theory<sup>19</sup> functions to make the spectator the subject of a film, interpellation, according to Althusser, “acts” or “functions” in such a way that it “recruits” subjects among ... individuals (...), or “transforms” the individuals into subjects’ (Althusser, 1971:174).

Modern readings of Fisher and Liebling intimate this process by stressing the need to consume, and thereby detracting from the literary qualities of their work. That is not to say that Liebling or Fisher represent, respectively or collectively, an I.S.A., or mass advertising. On the contrary, it is precisely Fisher’s aversion to the ‘drooling’ that her writing occasions – and that Christensen verifies – that signals the ideological shift between 1941 and 2007, when it has become “natural” to be ‘commanded’ to go and eat something by what we read or see in the media. That this is, according to Fisher, fundamentally a *mis*-reading of her work thickens the instance of interpellation, which is similarly based on misrecognition:

Indeed, what is really in question in this mechanism of the mirror recognition of the Subject and of the individuals interpellated as subjects, and of the guarantee given by the Subject to the subjects if they freely accept their subjection to the Subject’s ‘commandments’? The reality in question in this mechanism, the reality which is necessarily *ignored (méconnue)* in the very forms of recognition (ideology = misrecognition/ignorance) is indeed, in the last resort, the reproduction of the relations of production and of the relations deriving from them. (Althusser, 1971:182-183)

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<sup>19</sup> Stephen Heath explains filmic suturing as ‘a stitching or tying as in the surgical joining of the lips of a wound. In its movement, its framings, its cuts, its intermittences, the film ceaselessly poses an absence, a lack, which is ceaselessly recaptured for – one needs to be able to say ‘forin’ – the film, that process binding the spectator in the realization of the film’s space’ (Heath, 1981:52). In this way, suturing functions to eliminate any potential threats to the spectator’s identification with the diegetic space in which the film’s narrative unfolds. This is traditionally accomplished by keeping the camera unseen, so as not to draw attention to the film as a construction.

The example of Christensen's review of Fisher, tellingly under N.P.R.'s weekly "You Must Read This" rubric, exemplifies the ideological context in which the media issues "commandments", and here Terry Eagleton's reminder that interpellation is 'far more subtle, pervasive, and unconscious than a set of explicit doctrines' (1983:172) is useful; 'it is the very medium', he continues, 'in which I "live out" my relation to society, the realm of signs and social practices which binds me to the social structure and lends me a sense of coherent purpose and identity' (ibid.).

Contemporary food media, into which these works are retrospectively placed by their continued publication and readership, issue a 'realm of signs and social practices' which induces readers to derive "philosophies" from descriptions of food. These philosophies are then translated into a 'sense of coherent purpose and identity' by stimulating actual consumption or, at the very least, making the idea of actual consumption increasingly compelling. That said, there is no reason that realistic descriptions of food should not make us hungry, inasmuch as well-crafted portrayals of grief can make us sad. This is the strength of good writing. Yet when it comes to the point that food in literature is fictionalised as a philosophy to eat, and more specifically, to eat *now*, it is an indication of Althusser's misrecognition because what is 'ignored' is the historical context of the work; Fisher's dinner of veal in parmesan is not only remarkable because she writes well and makes it sound delicious, but also because it was in 1949, and not in America, where Chianti *'stra vecchio* was very likely hard to find. Now, however, the less ordinary aspects of Fisher's and Liebling's work have become ordinary, and as a result we fictionalise philosophies to make up for that loss. In this system, Althusser's 'relations of production' refer to an economy with the single philosophy of consumption, and the 'relations deriving from them' are fundamentally a form of alienation whereby food, as indeed "foodie" books, provides

some kind of ‘coherent sense of identity and purpose’. Christensen’s response to a historical work, in other words, reveals a present structure of feeling and the extent to which modern media “hail”, or interpellate, consumers.

The more ordinary aspect of food literature is clear, on the one hand, from the number of authors who have recently been included in the pantheon of “food writers”, despite the infancy of the term. Kurlansky’s anthology, subtitled *A Savory Selection of Food Writing* (2002), for example, includes, besides David, Fisher and Liebling, writers as diverse as Herodotus,<sup>20</sup> Christopher Columbus,<sup>21</sup> Anton Checkov,<sup>22</sup> and John Steinbeck.<sup>23</sup> And, beyond retrospective appellation, a whole new generation of food writers have appeared, whose works, according to Regina Schrambling, ‘sell like Big Macs’, meaning firstly, that ‘Fisher, Elizabeth David and A.J. Liebling are no longer seen as the only real writers in food town’, and secondly, that ‘we’ve worked up a voracious appetite for the Next Big Thing: serious – and seriously readable – food literature’ (Schrambling, 2005). ‘Serious’ food literature includes memoirs from the likes of celebrity chefs Anthony Bourdain<sup>24</sup> and Marco Pierre White,<sup>25</sup> former *New York Times* food critic Ruth Reichl,<sup>26</sup> and Bill Buford, whose *Heat* (2006) is part memoir of a kitchen “slave”, part Mario Batali exposé.<sup>27</sup> This is but a small sample of the more than half a billion books on food, including cookbooks, consumed yearly in

<sup>20</sup> A 5<sup>th</sup> century Greek historian. Kurlansky includes his piece on “Egyptian Dining”.

<sup>21</sup> “On Pineapples” (1493). Believed to be born in Genoa, Italy, Columbus (1451-1506) is credited with discovering America.

<sup>22</sup> “On Oysters” (1884). Russian playwright and short story author (1860-1904), Checkov is perhaps best known for *Uncle Vanya* (1899).

<sup>23</sup> “On Starvation in California’s Harvest” (1938). American author (1902-1968), Steinbeck’s works include *Of Mice and Men* (1939) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940).

<sup>24</sup> *Kitchen Confidential: Adventures in the Culinary Underbelly* (2001), listed as a *New York Times* bestseller. Bourdain is a New York chef and restaurateur, and host of television series *A Cook’s Tour* (Food Network) and *Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations* (Travel Channel).

<sup>25</sup> White is a U.K. chef and restaurateur. He was the youngest chef in the world, and the first British chef, to be awarded three Michelin stars.

<sup>26</sup> *Tender at the Bone: Growing Up at the Table* (1998); *Comfort Me with Apples: More Adventures at the Table* (2001); *Garlic and Sapphires: The Secret Life of a Critic in Disguise* (2005). Reichl is editor-in-chief of *Gourmet* magazine.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Though not always on the scene, Batali is the central puzzle of the book, and as such, Buford sets out to understand him’ (Dickerman, 2006).

the U.S. (O'Neill, 2003). It is a significant sample, however, because these are some of the bestselling titles.

These books are interesting for what they reveal of market demands. In Bourdain's *Kitchen Confidential*, he presents himself, in interviewer Jessica Crispin's apt phrasing, as a 'macho, chain-smoking hedonist' (Crispin, 2006). Marco Pierre White, who in *New York Magazine* is named 'perhaps the first celebrity bad-boy chef' (Ozersky and Maurer, 2007), uses his memoir, *Devil in the Kitchen: Sex, Pain, Madness and the Making of a Great Modern Chef* (2007)<sup>28</sup> to take credit for creating 'the monster', as he calls notoriously enraged celebrity chef and erstwhile protégé Gordon Ramsay. The memoir includes a picture of Ramsay in tears, allegedly after being shouted at by White. Reichl's final book exposes the 'secret life of a critic in disguise', as *Garlic and Sapphires* (2005) is subtitled. *Washington Post* reviewer Jonathan Yardley describes it as 'funny – at times laugh-out-loud funny – and smart and wise. Maybe a bit too much food talk, but that isn't what matters, which is Reichl, and she's a gas' (Yardley, 2005). Buford's work, finally, is 'one of the most satisfying restaurant memoirs' *Slate's* Sara Dickerman has read, but 'unlike Anthony Bourdain's gonzo cook-and-tell ... Buford's book does not linger too long on swagger and pulsing testosterone' (Dickerman, 2006). Steven Shapin gives a pointed analysis in the *London Review of Books* of Buford's motivation behind the book, which involved several years as an apprentice at Babbo, Batali's New York restaurant, and months in Italy where Batali himself had apprenticed:

He [Buford] wants the magic, and he knows that it can't be had through the reading of books and the watching of television shows, but only through the laying on of hands. ...

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<sup>28</sup> *The Devil in the Kitchen* is the American edition of the book. In the U.K. it was published as *White Slave: The Autobiography*.

Yet what Batali was selling – what makes him a ‘brand’ and his bizzness<sup>29</sup> such a good one – is the Idea of Authenticity, of high-priced rusticity, of nona’s casalinga<sup>30</sup> cooking. Batali was the access point for Buford’s adventures into kitchen-authenticity, but the only thing the ‘writer guy’ meant to sell was the book that described it, flesh made word again. The thing had come full circle. (Shapin, 2006)

The ‘full circle’ Shapin refers to is the fact that Buford was such a successful apprentice that Batali offered him the chance to open his own restaurant in which he could sell, as Batali does, the ‘Idea of Authenticity’.

Similarly to the appeal of Liebling, Fisher, and David, then, one current vogue of books centres on personality. A significant difference, however, is that an overriding appeal of the personalities in a majority of new books is of their behavioural antics – personable or not, as in the case of “bad boys” Bourdain and White – rather than through an engagement with food, arguably the motivation behind apotheosising Fisher and David as food “philosophers”. In an interview on food website *Gremolata*, award-winning Canadian writer Gina Mallet<sup>31</sup> sketches the difference:

I realized ... that the subject of food was personal and inexhaustible, and the whole library of books about the French and food, Alice Toklas’ cookbook,<sup>32</sup> Julia Child, MFK Fisher, Elizabeth David were portraits of people as much as descriptions of food. I should have said characters because food mags etc [sic] today are packed with people

<sup>29</sup> An ironic reference to an Italian character in the book whose comments on culinary stardom Buford transcribes as, ‘I have a bad bizzness. I am not interested in a good bizzness . . . I do not want to be Mario Batali’ (cit. Shapin, 2006).

<sup>30</sup> Dialect Italian meaning “grandmother’s home-cooking”.

<sup>31</sup> Author of *Last Chance to Eat: The Fate of Taste in a Fast Food World* (2004), which won the James Beard Award for “Writing on Food”, ‘earning the book bragging rights to the title “Best Book on Food in 2004”’ (www.gremolata.com).

<sup>32</sup> Alice B. Toklas (1877-1967) was the life partner of Gertrude Stein (1874-1946). *The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook* (1954) is a memoir-cum-cookbook based on her life with Stein in Paris, and famously contains a recipe for hash brownies.

but they're not characters, they're mostly cut outs or celebs without much to say about anything. (Gremolata, 2006)

This fascination with 'people' rather than 'characters' is further evidenced by the market for culinary biographies, both of contemporary celebrity chefs, for example Ramsay,<sup>33</sup> Jamie Oliver,<sup>34</sup> and Nigella Lawson,<sup>35</sup> and of bygone "celebrities", such as Câreme,<sup>36</sup> David,<sup>37</sup> and Soyer, who has no less than seven biographies dedicated to him, the last three of which were published after 2000.<sup>38</sup>

Culinary celebrity, in this way, increasingly depends on media representation and the construction of personas with debatably ambiguous relationships to their real life referents, and with a consequently decreased focus on their relationship to food. Public interest in the lives of chefs and food personalities, including the move to retroactively identify "celebrities", highlights one of the central incongruities of the vast industry that is food media. On the one hand it bespeaks a 'serious' historical curiosity which links directly to the increased intellectualization of food. Beyond reviews of many of these works in respected periodicals such as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*,<sup>39</sup> this relatively new intellectual respect for food is visible in the growth of general interest publications on food history and culinary tourism, many

<sup>33</sup> Neil Simpson, *Gordon Ramsay: The Biography* (2006). Ramsay has also published several autobiographical works: *Roasting in Hell's Kitchen: Temper Tantrums, F Words, and the Pursuit of Perfection* (2006); *Humble Pie* (2006); *A Bigger Slice of Pie, A: Raw, Rare to Well Done* (2007).

<sup>34</sup> Stafford Hildred, *Jamie Oliver: The Biography* (2001); Gilly Smith, *Jamie Oliver: Turning Up the Heat* (2006).

<sup>35</sup> Gilly Smith's *Nigella Lawson: The Unauthorised Biography* (2005) was republished in 2006 as *Nigella Lawson: A Biography: A Very British Dish*. Amazon reviews range from 'Awful. Do not waste your money on this book' (Fiona, 2007) to 'Recommended with confidence' (Baron, 2005).

<sup>36</sup> Ian Kelly, *Cooking for Kings: The Life of Antonin Câreme, the First Celebrity Chef* (2004).

<sup>37</sup> Lisa Chaney, *Elizabeth David* (1998); Artemis Cooper, *Writing at the Table: Elizabeth David, the Authorized Biography* (1999).

<sup>38</sup> See Chapter 4 (Cookbooks), n.9, above.

<sup>39</sup> According to Doug Brown, this is a nationwide U.S. trend: 'Newspapers around the country are dedicating top staffers to the food beat, and they are hungry for well-reported stories with timely angles' (Brown, 2004). U.K. publications like the *Times*, *Guardian* and *Observer* similarly have regular food sections, as do an increasing number of newspapers worldwide. As Catterall puts it, 'no Sunday supplement is complete without its celebrity restaurant reviewer' (Catterall, 1999:24).

of which exemplify what Alison James terms “gastro-nationalism”; ‘Through the invocation of sets of inflexible cultural stereotypes, particular foodstuffs are linked to particular localised as well as nationalised, or, indeed, globalised identities’ (James, 1997:74).<sup>40</sup> Other specialised publications include books targeted at CEOs, such as restaurateur Danny Meyer’s *Setting the Table* (2006), ‘part memoir, part business guide [that] offers up lessons for those who run global conglomerates’ (Pellettieri, 2006); books on the politics of food choices, such as Michael Pollan’s *Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (2006),<sup>41</sup> and works by non-“food writers” Barbara Kingsolver<sup>42</sup> and 1986 Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka.<sup>43</sup> More directly related to the academic field of Food Studies, finally, are scholarly journals

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<sup>40</sup> An early anthropological example comes from D.E. Allen in *The Making of the Modern British Diet* (1976): ‘The South is a land of mixtures, or experimental mingling – jelly and blancmange together as a single dish, for example – and of subtler flavours: saltier bacon, more pungent types of cheese, more bitter marmalade, dry wines, even spinach. All in all, the South is more *specialised*: life there has evolved more distinctions, sprouted more branches and twigs. It is also more “personalised”: bacon sold in ready-cut strips,... butter in separately wrapped slabs.... It prefers things to be distinctive, to provide means of standing apart from the generalised, anonymous mass. It is, in short, more middle class’ (Allen, 1976:139). Modern publications that invoke nationalism through food include Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney’s *Rice As Self: Japanese Identities Through Time* (1993) and Steven Kaplan’s *Good Bread is Back: A Contemporary History of French Bread, the Way It Is Made, and the People Who Make It* (2006). Cookbooks, similarly, become statements of identity politics, such as Diane Spivey’s *Peppers, Cracklings, and Knots of Wool Cookbook* (1999), which ‘tells a story; a story of Africa’s culinary and cultural contributions to ancient, magnificent civilizations, both at home and on numerous foreign shores, and how these contributions continue to mark our cuisine today’ (Spivey, 1999:5).

<sup>41</sup> Following seminal work by Sidney Mintz and Mary Douglas, notable authors who focus on the politics, culture and history of food include Marion Nestle (*Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*, 2002; *Safe Food: Bacteria, Biotechnology, and Bioterrorism*, 2003; *What to Eat*, 2006), Warren Belasco (*Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry*, 1990; *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*, 2001; *Meals to Come: A History of the Future of Food*, 2006). Commenting on these sorts of works as reflections of an increasing market for ‘solid reportage, fearless analysis, [and] independent opinion’, O’Neill suggests that when writers like Pollan do not consider themselves food writers, it is ‘a sad commentary on the trajectory of the genre over the past decade’ (O’Neill, 2003).

<sup>42</sup> Kingsolver’s *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* (2007) ‘expresses the basic tenets of Slow Food International and sustainable agriculture ...and for some of her readers this is just reiteration. But she succeeds in dramatizing her own family’s story so that these ideas come to life, anecdotally and charmingly’ (Maslin, 2007).

<sup>43</sup> *Salutation to the Gut* (2002) is described in the *African Review of Books* as a vivid rendition of ‘Soyinka’s gastronomic cultural nationalism’ (Adeoti, 2006).

like *Gastronomica* and *Food, Culture and Society*,<sup>44</sup> the latter published under the aegis of the *Association for the Study of Food and Society* (A.S.F.S.).<sup>45</sup>

Contrary to this is the increasingly tabloid culture that attends food media, expressed by consumer interests in rivalries between “bad-boy” celebrity chefs, and by which publications focus progressively less on history or news, and more on entertainment and distraction. Two accounts of the changing face of food journalism in major newspapers, notably the *New York Times*, are revealing of this shift:

In 1940, for instance, the *New York Times* Index listed a total of 675 stories about food. Of those, 646 were news stories and the remaining twenty-nine, or 4 percent of the total food editorial that year, were “foodie” stories. This percentage remained constant through the 1950s, but in 1960 news stories about food slipped to 91 percent while “foodie” stories rose to 9 percent. Ten years later, the percentage of “foodie” stories rose another point to ten. By 1980, 36 percent of the food stories ... had no news hook. (O'Neill, 2003)

“It was a huge day at the *Times* when salsa overtook ketchup as the No. 1 condiment. They made that a page-one story. That says a lot about how journalism has changed. The sense of what has a claim on reader interest and what qualifies as news has changed remarkably in a short amount of time.” ... Food “has become more of an entertainment now,” says [Stephen] Proctor, now deputy managing editor for news at the *San Francisco Chronicle*. “It has become much more of an essential focus of our

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<sup>44</sup> The first scholarly journal on food was *Petits Propos Culinaires*, journal of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery, initiated in 1975 (Chaney, 1998:431). *Food, Culture and Society* (Berg Publishers, edited by Warren Belasco) has been published since 1996; prior to 2004 it was known as *The Journal for the Study of Food and Society*. *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* (University of California Press, edited by Darra Goldstein), has been in publication since 2001.

<sup>45</sup> Another important international association is the Research Centre for the History of Food and Drink, hosted by the University of Adelaide.

life. A newspaper usually reflects what the culture is doing, and I think that's why you're seeing so much more devotion to food journalism." (Brown, 2004)<sup>46</sup>

In magazines, this market is reflected in the vast food magazine empire, with leading U.S. publications *Cooking Light* and *Bon Appetit* selling over a million monthly copies (Sagon, 2005), not to mention the 'famously extravagant' (Shapiro, 2004) *Gourmet*, including its 2006 cookbook of the same name, compiled by now editor-in-chief Ruth Reichl. Similarly plentiful are 'those endless books', as Clarissa Dickson-Wright termed them, 'that have only to mention purple lavender fields or baskets of lemons to make the best-seller lists' (2002:iii), typically with alluring titles such as *Falling Cloudberry: A World of Family Recipes*, by Tessa Kiros (2004), or *The Saffron Pear Tree* (2005), in which South African author Zuretha Roos 'weaves together family anecdotes and quirky memories with recipes that sustained three generations of her family' (Ord, 2005). Genres are further obscured by cookbooks with fictional narratives,<sup>47</sup> and fictional works featuring historical personalities, like Roger Williams' *Lunch with Elizabeth David* (2000), described by Amazon's editorial review as a 'delightfully inventive ragout of fiction and historical fact', not to mention books by celebrity wives: Jools Oliver's *Minus Nine to One: The Diary of an Honest Mum* (2005), or Tana Ramsay's *Family Kitchen* (2006), the *Observer* review of which absurdly included the information that the author suffers from polycystic ovaries, and that 'Gordon [Ramsay] has a low sperm count' (Cooke, 2006).

The incongruity of these two strains of literature emerges partly from the fact that distinctions between publications of academic and popular interest are hardly

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<sup>46</sup> As further evidence of the newly elevated currency of food journalism, Jonathan Gold of the *L.A. Weekly*, a 'free tabloid-style publication' (Cohen, 2007) was awarded the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for Criticism. Gold was the first food writer to be recognised with a Pulitzer award (ibid.).

<sup>47</sup> For example Lynn Bedford Hall's, *Foxtrot and Figjam: Tales of Love, Life and Food in the Karoo* (2003), set in the fictional South African town of Corriebush. Hall's book won "Best Illustrated Book" in the International Gourmand Awards in 2004.

discernible in retail outlets, where *Lunch with Elizabeth David* and *Omnivore's Dilemma* are likely to be shelved in an ambiguously named "food" section, along with Tana Ramsay's *Family Kitchen*, all of which have received reviews in major periodicals. Added to this is the popular appeal of historical works, such as Ian Kelly's *Câreme* biography which sold, according to Maya Baran of Houghton Mifflin, under 'general media interest' (in Schrambling, 2005). Yet, with its subtitle of *First Celebrity Chef*, this is little surprise, and suggests the extent to which retroactively naming celebrity chefs is itself a mechanism of interpellation. In the same way as the figure of Batali's back pocket heightens the appeal of *De Re Coquinaria*, the work significantly described by its first English translator as 'possibly medieval forgery' (cit. Goody, 1982:103), framing historical figures in a modern taxonomy works as a form of appropriation that disavows any historical – and logical – inconsistencies between past and present. Put otherwise, designating an eighteenth century chef "celebrity", a term now exemplified by media empires selling the Idea of Authenticity, generates a mythical lineage by creating, as Debord argues that written representations do, an 'impersonal memory' (1995:131).<sup>48</sup> Myths function, he suggests, to make history 'private property' (1995:132), and slotting *Câreme* into the genre of celebrity biographies that sell 'like Big Macs' serves as a central expression

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<sup>48</sup> Other examples of the commodification of history through mythical lineage, true to Debord's thesis that '[b]ecause history itself is the spectre haunting modern society, pseudo-history has to be fabricated at every level of the consumption of life' (1995:200), include the rhetoric of a 2007 advertisement for Knorr stock cubes (*Food & Home Entertaining*, June 2007): 'The Ancient Romans inspired philosophers, mathematicians and, just recently, moms.... The authentic flavours of this rich Italian tradition and the time tested values of the Mediterranean way of life can now be found at a retailer near you', and the copy for Parmalat's Bulgarian Yoghurt: 'Did you know, way back in the third century BC, Bulgarian travellers accidentally discovered yoghurt when the sun's heat fermented milk being transported long distances by camel. Little did they know that their nutritious discovery was also bursting with valuable bacteria – healthy, natural antibiotics that boost *your* digestive and immune systems' (my emphases).

of the fetishism that surrounds food by commodifying personalities to be consumed with the instant gratification of the most standardised product in the world.<sup>49</sup>

The fast food appeal of a number of food media publications – also evidenced by the sheer amount of new titles every year – is complemented by regular republications of “classics” or “best of” anthologies (*The Best of Mrs Beeton's Easy Everyday Cooking*, 2006; *South Wind Through the Kitchen: The Best of Elizabeth David*, 1998), as well as regular media inquiries into books that have ‘stood the test of time’ (Schoen, 2006); that ‘never seem to go out of style’ (Dunne, 2006b), or into what makes a classic, like Irma Rombauer’s *The Joy of Cooking*, first published in 1931 and still a best-seller on its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2006.<sup>50</sup> Informing these “new-old” publications is a strain between, on the one hand, what one New York bookshop owner calls a ‘brisk trade in nostalgia’ (Moskin, 2006) for the so-called mother books – early twentieth century guides to ‘everything from training servants to raising children’ (ibid.) – re-issued without revision, and, on the other, the need to update according to the market. One example of this is the U.S. *Better Homes and Gardens Cook Book*, a bestseller since 1930. According to publisher Jan Miller:

“We can’t assume anything like we could 40 or 50 years ago. Old recipes said things like ‘cook until done’ or ‘make a white sauce.’ You can’t say that in recipes today because people don’t know what ‘done’ means or what a white sauce is. Now recipes have to say specific things like ‘cook for an hour and a half or until the center reaches

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<sup>49</sup> The *Economist*’s Big Mac Index, invented in 1986, and ‘arguably the world’s most accurate financial indicator to be based on a fast food item’ ([www.economist.com](http://www.economist.com)), is based on the concept of burgeronomics, or that a dollar should be worth an equal amount in all countries. The Big Mac Index compares prices of McDonald’s Big Macs in approximately 120 countries to ascertain the value of currencies compared to the dollar. As Bell and Valentine note, the Big Mac functions a ‘sign as well as a commodity’ (Bell and Valentine, 1997:11, authors' emphasis).

<sup>50</sup> Susan Leonardi argues that the 1963 edition of *The Joy of Cooking*, edited by Rombauer’s daughter Marion Becker, is ‘to the detriment ... of the appeal and usability of the recipes in the book’ (Leonardi, 1989:341) because Becker removed many of her mother’s narrative elements.

165 degrees on an instant read thermometer,’ or ‘cook until the corners bubble and turn brown.’ We have to give very detailed directions”. (in Schoen, 2006)

Repackaged historical publications, then, share a market with *Cook with Jamie*, or *Gordon Ramsay Makes it Easy*; a market, in other words, that appears to know very little. And for those who have no interest in the nostalgic value of a mother-book, nor in celebrity-branding for basic techniques, is Harold McGee’s popular science-cum-cookbook, *On Food and Cooking* (1984).<sup>51</sup>

McGee’s gift is to make the chemistry, history and context of food so clear and compelling that his chapters can be read as easily as a novel. But Cook’s Library’s [Ellen] Rose said he was also capturing a new and growing audience of young cooks who want not just recipes but real understanding of how cooking works. “It’s really caught on with the young Hollywood actor set,” she says. “A whole slew of twentysomethings want to learn how to cook, and they buy that book.” (Schrambling, 2005)

McGee’s book, moreover, was a guiding work for the self-taught U.K. celebrity chef Heston Blumenthal (Stacey, 2006), owner of The Fat Duck, voted the 2005 “Best Restaurant in the World”.<sup>52</sup>

To summarise, there exists a vast range of literature on food, including new and revised cookbooks, works of fiction and non-fiction, authored by professionals and amateurs, of popular and academic interest, not to mention their appeal to Hollywood stars and celebrity chefs. Taken collectively, the prolific genre of food literature paradoxically signals and perpetuates the estrangement from food that takes root with post-war economic booms and the rise of a convenience culture. The

<sup>51</sup> A substantially revised edition was published in 2004.

<sup>52</sup> Blumenthal’s first television series, *In Search of Perfection* (BBC), premiered in 2007.

marketability of culinary memoirs, for instance, be they penned by modern or bygone celebrities, or, indeed, by no public figure, points to this detachment by selling – making common – a history and tradition scarcely encountered outside textual representation. In his discussion of memoirs with recipes, Sutton suggests that ‘it is not writing itself that is problematic, it is writing that leaves the realm of family possession and becomes one more commodity in a sea of alienated products that threatens to remove cooking from the contexts of embodied knowledge and local transmission. Perhaps this is why a number of “customer reviews” of these books on Amazon.com note that they have given these books as gifts to family and friends (...), thus reinscribing the commodity in the circuits of gift exchange’ (Sutton, 2001:156). More to the point than ‘*re*-inscribing’, I would suggest, is the fact that contemporary food media *represents* the ‘embodied knowledge and local transmission’ that once was the realm of history and tradition. This becomes all the more apparent in the context of virtual communities generated by food websites and weblogs, but in the case of the cookbook as commodity, online media retailers such as Amazon.com serve the distributive function not of gift exchange, but of transacting “memories” and “philosophies” for cash.

The significance of distinguishing food literature from other genres that arguably merit the same structural analysis – general biographies, philosophies, including the entire genre of “self-help” literature, and so on – is the ambiguity of the signifier “food”. Because it stands for as much as it does, from ingestion to life itself, and because its vicarious consumption potentially links to actual consumption, as we saw with Christensen and Fisher’s oysters, food in media occupies the unique position of reflecting society as much as creating it. In *The German Ideology* [1845] Marx and Engels wrote that, ‘As individuals express their life, so they are’ (Marx

and Engels, 1938:7). We express life as much through what we consume as through what we produce, and it is significant that when it comes to food literature, the overwhelming trend is the consumption of representations. Food literature, and particularly the strain of culinary memoirs represented by generic tales interwoven with ‘Family Recipes’, typically involves someone else’s food and histories, and the extent to which they are appropriated – regardless of the author’s intention – underlines the exchange value of memory and tradition.

Exchangeability implies proximity and access; we consume other people’s life stories, as we consume the lives of celebrities, because they are made available to us. Yet exchangeability equally implies distance and detachment from the self, because it signals a demand for other people’s stories to manufacture or validate a “philosophy” of eating, and by metaphorical extension, of life itself. The currency and translatability of food that is particular to modern media is evidenced by the obscuring of traditional generic boundaries, between, for instance, cookbooks and memoirs, and equally by the ever widening of the field of “food writers”, including authors historically recognised simply as authors, of fiction or otherwise. This prevalent focus on food – a situation in which almost any writing that mentions food qualifies as food literature, and in which anyone who writes about food qualifies as a food writer or gastronome<sup>53</sup> – gestures, ironically enough, to its opposite, namely a deficit of meaning. The warning that to ‘speak of culture was always contrary to culture’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1969:131) might equally be applied to food in

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<sup>53</sup> Mennell explains that, historically, a gastronome differs from the epicure, gourmet or gourmand, all of which describe people who enjoy food, by being the one to write about it: ‘The gastronome is more than a gourmet – he is also a theorist and propagandist about culinary taste’ (1985:267). He notes the “Founding Fathers” as Alexandre-Balthazar-Laurent Grimond de la Reynière (1758-1838), author of *Almanach des gourmands*; *Manuel des amphitryons* (1808); *Journal des gourmands et des belles* (1806-08), and Brillat-Savarin (1755-1826), suggesting that ‘[v]irtually everything of the sort written since quotes or harks back to these two authors in one way or another’ (ibid.), and concludes that the ‘dandy is to matters of dress what the gastronome is to matters of eating’ (1985:272).

this decade, where the ubiquity of its representation betrays a void of experience that is continually filled with fabrications. Even Buford, who went in search of the “authentic”, only learnt, in the end, how to manufacture it. As Shapin sombrely concludes, ‘while our current obsession with cooks and chefs is undeniable evidence of an upsurge of fascination with the kitchen arts, it is also testimony to their decline’ (Shapin, 2006).

The curiosity of this situation is that it inadvertently gives credence to metaphorical uses of food, such as Schrambling’s review of new food literature in 2006, titled “The hungry mind”. As irresistible as metaphor is,<sup>54</sup> and notwithstanding the likeliness of it being meant in jest, as is her description of culinary memoirs that ‘sell like Big Macs’, these analogies are apt because the popularity of all things food heightens the appeal of the metaphor, or indeed the potential of an Althusserian interpellation, and also because they effectively describe the commodification of lack and artifice that is central to food media. The present and growing market for food literature, both old and new, confirms that the consumer mind is, in fact, “hungry”, but it is a hunger unlikely to be sated because the perpetual supply of media stimulates rather than satisfies, and it does this by providing a series of fashionable ideologies – ‘food as a source of pleasure’, for instance – with little more durable substance than a Big Mac. That food literature acts as a distraction from the everyday is simply and elegantly demonstrated by the fact that if food really was a source of pleasure, it would likely be experienced as such without the help of a book.

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<sup>54</sup> Examples abound: ‘For more culinary history, and something to wash down your Roman Bortsch’ (Salkeld, 2006); ‘Newspapers around the country are ... hungry for well-reported stories with timely angles’ (Brown, 2004); ‘this is a book worth savoring’ (Charles, 2002); ‘Money was flowing like wine, and nobody was minding the cellar’ (Weiss, 2005).

## 5.2 Language and Menus

Food and eating as metaphor have a long history, of course, manifested most obviously in Brillat-Savarin's famous aphorism, 'Tell me what you eat and I will tell you who you are' (1970:13), and after that, in adages such as "food for thought", having "eyes bigger than your stomach", not to forget the symbolic value of bread ("breadwinner"; "dough"; "the best thing since sliced bread").<sup>55</sup> The inevitability of metaphors – many of them now dead and clichéd – is partly due to that inextricable link between food and life. Barthes' comments in his essay "Towards a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption" [1961] are instructive in this context:

To eat is a behaviour that develops beyond its own ends, replacing, summing up, and signaling other behaviours, and it is precisely for these reasons that it is a sign.

What are these other behaviours? Today, we might say all of them: activity, work, sports, effort, leisure, celebration – every one of these situations is expressed through food. We might almost say that this "polysemia" of food characterizes modernity; in the past, only festive occasions were signaled by food in any positive or organized manner....[F]ood is becoming incorporated into an ever-lengthening list of situations....[and] is also charged with signifying the situation in which it is used. It has a twofold value, being nutrition as well as protocol, and its value as protocol becomes increasingly more important as soon as the basic needs are satisfied, as they are in France. In other words, we might say that in contemporary French society, food has a constant tendency to transform itself into situation. (Barthes, 1997:25-26)

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<sup>55</sup> For further examples, see Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney's *Rice as Self: Japanese Identities Through Time* (1993): 'As rice stands for food in general in both the Chinese and Japanese cultures, so does bread in the United States in expressions such as "Give us our daily bread," "breadwinner," "bread-and-butter issue," and "bread line." "Slice [sic] bread" is a metaphor for a great invention because of the cultural importance of bread; "a bread box" is a colloquial measure of a small space. Similarly, "dough" is a slang expression for money, a dominant symbol of power and status in the United States.... Equally numerous expressions include *pain* in French, which occupies three columns in Robert's dictionary' (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1993:116-117).

The key idea in this extract is of what food represents ‘as soon as the basic needs have been satisfied’, or when, to invoke Barthes’ reading of Brillat-Savarin, need gives way to desire.<sup>56</sup> Barthes’ nutrition versus protocol corresponds, in this way, to Marx’s use versus exchange value, where food is fetishised once it is no longer a basic requirement, and it need hardly be stated that what Barthes described as characteristic of France in 1961 is manifest more than ever in the present day, and on an increasingly global level.

Barthes further, and quite rightly, suggests that advertising rhetoric provides a rich site of analysis – he gives the example of the word ‘crisp’ in the U.S., which ‘designates everything that crunches, crackles, grates, sparkles, from potato chips to certain brands of beer’ (1997:23) – yet food as situation is equally expressed in menus. As textual representations of restaurant dining – actual food ‘situations’ – the language of menus reveals the expectations of establishments as well as consumers. A significant trend current in restaurant dining, particularly in restaurants operated by celebrity chefs and/or with significant media visibility, is one which offers, true to Rifkin’s “age of access”, not just a meal, but an experience.<sup>57</sup> One way this is implemented is through *prix fixe* (fixed price) or so-called tasting menus, typically at the discretion of the chef.<sup>58</sup> As Thomas Keller of New York’s acclaimed restaurants Per Se and The French Laundry explained in an interview, “I think that’s true with any restaurant, when you start talking about the amount of expense, that it becomes

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<sup>56</sup> See p.37, above.

<sup>57</sup> At the cooking school I attended in Denmark (Dalum Technical College, Odense, 2003-4), it was impressed on students that restaurants were all about experience, not “just” food.

<sup>58</sup> Tasting menus involve a sequence of many small dishes. One of the most extreme versions of tasting menus, consisting of thirty to forty different courses, is at the multi-award winning El Bulli restaurant in Rosas, Spain, run by “superchef” Ferran Adrià. Tasting menus are derivative of dining *à la russe*, the system of serving courses in the sequence printed on a menu, as opposed to the buffet style of *service à la française* (see Chapter 3, Recipes, above). Cathy Kaufman suggests that tasting menus serve the chef before the customer: ‘The current passion among chefs and gourmets alike for the tasting menu, in which the patron surrenders all choice to the chef and dines on a varying number of petite plates in an order dictated by the kitchen, could be seen as the ultimate mark of regard for the chef’ (Kaufman, 2003).

a special occasion restaurant.... We want to give somebody an experience, and this [*prix fixe*] is what we feel the experience should be. That in itself is defined as a special occasion or special experience” (in McBride, 2006a).

Experience suggests two things: firstly, and most obviously in the case of ‘special experience’, that it should differ significantly from the everyday (and thereby justify the ‘amount of expense’). Secondly, the success of the ‘experience’ depends on a set of a set of shared values between restaurant – or chef – and customer. The menu is the first place that this set of values manifests, by issuing, to recall Eagleton’s summary of Althusser, ‘the realm of signs and social practices which binds me to the social structure and lends me a sense of coherent purpose and identity’ (op. cit.). As Oates describes the New York restaurant world of ‘costly dining’, people ‘are not waiting for their selves to be lost or exchanged; they are waiting to be affirmed, even enhanced, and they do it even at the risk of humiliation. Not *Enter and become another!* but *You belong here* is what we want the maître d’ to tell us. (And the illusion that we want the chef to give us is not *I work for you* but *I feed you from love.*)’ (Oates, 2005: author's emphases).

One way that a menu creates a sense of “belonging”, is to reproduce key terms that correspond to general trends, be they organic, exclusive, or local; anything, in short, to suggest a shared ideology. Journalist Bonnie Powell, for example, recalls dining in a San Francisco restaurant and being ‘delighted to see the menu crowded with pedigreed protein. Choices included pasture-raised lamb ..., grass-fed steak ..., and a pork chop from White Marble Farms. The menu was typical of Bay Area restaurants that take pride in buying top-quality ingredients, organic and sustainable where possible’ (Powell, 2006). The primacy of appearance is stressed by what Powell discovered when she later researched White Marble

Farms, namely that their pork is far from ‘organic and sustainable’.<sup>59</sup>

Notwithstanding that the restaurant owner was ‘outraged’ (ibid.) at the discovery – not, notably, at being discovered, though it is difficult to imagine that Powell should have clearer access to information about the provenance of ingredients than the restaurant itself – and immediately discontinued their partnership with said supplier, what is significant here is Powell’s initial ‘delight’ at having her own ideology reinforced by the menu. Further, it is safe to assume that Powell’s independent research is far from the norm, and had she not uncovered what she did, the restaurant, and its customers, would be none the wiser. In addition to exemplifying the importance of labeling, albeit misleading, to “ethical” consumer choices which belongs to the discussion of eating trends (Chapter 7), this case underlines the extent to which menu language “speaks to” consumers.

Designing menus, indeed, exists as a professional undertaking. In 2006, *Time* featured an article on Gregg Rapp, a “menu engineer” based in California, and who operates nationally and globally to ‘transform innocent lists of meals into profitable, user-friendly sales tools’ (Miranda, 2006). Twenty-five years in the business, Rapp’s service includes a money-back guarantee – never used, apparently – that his menus will increase turnover. Besides colour, design, and layout, language is operative:

The adjectives lavished on a dish can be as important as the names of the ingredients.

What would you rather eat [sic] plain grilled chicken or flame-broiled chicken with a garlic rub? Scrambled eggs or farm-fresh eggs scrambled in butter? “Think ‘flavors and tastes,’” Rapp says, repeating a favorite mantra. “Words like crunchy and spicy give

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<sup>59</sup> ‘White Marble Farms is a brand of Sysco, North America’s largest food services distributor. The pork comes from Cargill Meat Solutions, America’s second-largest meat processor. It is bred to ensure tender meat marbled with just enough flavor-boosting fat. But these pigs never see a pasture. They’re raised indoors in confinement barns, just the way most commercial pork is produced, except in smaller numbers. Aside from genetics, they’re conventional pigs wearing a lip gloss of sustainability’ (Powell, 2006).

the customer a better idea of what something will be like.” Longer, effusive descriptions should be reserved for signature items. Especially the profitable ones. (ibid.)

One example of such an ‘effusive’ description comes from the menu of a 2005 James Beard Foundation dinner: ‘a hollow sphere of watermelon and saffron frozen in liquid nitrogen ... and Chino Farms Carrots and Venezuelan Chocolate with chocolate crepe, milk jam sauce, Indonesian long pepper ice cream, chocolate caramel sauce, cherry vinegar, and microbasil’ (Anon, 2005a). Of note here is the way that provenance and ingredients themselves come to take the place of more ‘flavor and taste’ adjectives like crunchy and spicy. The item was posted on the food blog Transfattyblog under the heading “Fatty Adjectives”, and, noting that the watermelon dish was ‘basically a hollow popsicle without the stick’, the author concluded that ‘[i]t’s not complexity I’m opposed to, but the flaunting of complexity itself as a feature’ (ibid.). Yet complexity, to return to the menu engineer’s advice, is clearly a profitable feature, and particularly in terms of signature dishes which depend in significant measure on some form of originality. Menus function as a site of that originality through unconventional language use, such as relying on food to describe food (milk jam sauce). That language is necessarily complicit in the creation of culinary signatures is clear if we remove the fatty descriptors and find something resembling carrots and chocolate with a pancake, sauce, ice cream, vinegar and herbs; something, in short, with decidedly less panache.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Isaiah Berlin’s comments on “General Education” are illuminating in the context of fatty adjectives, particularly once they are removed to reveal the centrality of language to culinary “innovation”: ‘Pretentious rhetoric, deliberate or compulsive obscurity or vagueness, metaphysical patter studded with irrelevant or misleading allusions to (at best) half understood scientific or philosophical theories or to famous names, is an old, but at present particularly prevalent, device for concealing poverty of thought or muddle, and sometimes perilously near a confidence trick’ (Berlin, 1975:291). Dublin restaurant critic Trevor White has little time for pretentious menu-language: ‘It’s dinner you’re after, not Dylan Thomas. Flowery descriptions that are hard to understand can usually be translated thus:

At the other end of the ‘costly dining’ spectrum is the menu that describes as little as possible, such as Bruce Robertson’s menu for his Cape Town restaurant, The Showroom. An open-plan and open-kitchen concept, with glass walls providing diners visual access to the car showroom adjoining the restaurant, a prevalent theme of The Showroom is transparency. As wine consultant and journalist Jean-Pierre Rossouw described it shortly after its launch, ‘Part of the concept of Bruce Robertson’s new restaurant, The Showroom, is explained by the name – everything is on show, including and especially himself’ (Rossouw, 2006). Robertson, who apprenticed at several distinguished London restaurants, including The London Ritz and Pétrus (with Marcus Wareing<sup>61</sup> and U.K. celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay),<sup>62</sup> debuted as executive head chef at the internationally renowned Cape Grace hotel.<sup>63</sup> He explained the choice of menu for his own restaurant as catering to ‘locals’: “I want to avoid the menu stress, so no lengthy descriptions. I’m looking after locals now, so there’s not too much of that stuff that stands high on a plate” (in Maxwell, 2006:97). Accordingly, the menu includes little or no description; dishes are named, and accompaniments listed, as the following sample indicates, taken from starters, mains, and desserts, respectively.<sup>64</sup>

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“Watch us rip you off.” Contrary to culinary wisdom, reading a menu should not require a PhD’ (White, 2006).

<sup>61</sup> Wareing was voted Restaurateur of the Year at The Tatler Restaurant Awards (2004), and received his second Michelin star for Pétrus in January 2007.

<sup>62</sup> In addition to the London Ritz and Pétrus, The Showroom website lists The Lanesborough Hotel (Hyde Park), ‘Oxo fine dining on the Thames’, and ‘a senior with Anton Mossiman [sic]’ (Robertson, 2007). Mosimann, who received an OBE in 2004, heads the Mosimann Academy in London, and also caters to the royal household. Locally, Bruce Robertson is Vice-Chancellor of the Cape Town directory of *Chaîne de Rôtisseurs*, ‘an international gastronomic society founded in Paris in 1950. It is devoted to promoting fine dining and the pleasures of the table through the social interaction, hospitality and expertise of its members’ (www.chaine.co.za).

<sup>63</sup> Former guests include singer Beyoncé and former U.S. president Bill Clinton (Runnette, 2007). While under Robertson’s direction, the Cape Grace’s one waterfront restaurant was reviewed by *New York Times* critic Frank Bruni who described it as, if not one of the cities finest restaurants, ‘certainly one of the most ambitious’ (Bruni, 2006).

<sup>64</sup> With thanks to Bruce Robertson for donating a menu for research purposes. The menu referenced in this discussion was one of the first, from 2006. With allowances for seasonal variations and

Mussel chowder: clam toast, lemon beignet and micro basil;

Market fish: wine mash, saffron fennel and garden chard;

The glass fromage: fresh, mild and strong.

This menu is of interest for several reasons. Firstly, although sparseness of detail implies simplicity and therefore minimal ‘menu stress’, it simultaneously alienates the diner who may not understand *fromage* (cheese), or *beignet* (doughnut). Robertson’s ‘locals’, in other words, belong to a specific social class; one that identifies, among other things, with French terminology. So, the menu immediately establishes a relationship between diner and chef: one of equality, for the cognoscenti, and a hierarchy of authority for those who need to ask. Second, and in keeping with the previous ‘effusive’ example, the uniqueness of Robertson’s food emerges from the descriptive use of nouns (clam toast, saffron fennel, wine mash) to signal his unusual combinations. This adaptation of word classes is further demonstrated by descriptions of sauces, the range of which functions as a highlight of The Showroom “experience”:<sup>65</sup>

Harissa: breathtaking, warm and light;

Shanghai Cashew Pesto: oriental, basil and roasted;

Aïoli: creamy, garlic and smooth;

Bordelaise: thyme, marrow and silky;

Perigueux: bold, silky and white truffle.

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new/revised items, the 2007 menu follows the same basic format, including many of the same dishes and sauces.

<sup>65</sup> Diners are encouraged to choose a sauce which is not traditionally paired with a chosen main course, for instance basil pesto with beef fillet. In Robertson’s words, “I’m trying to bridge a gap with sauces” (in Maxwell, 2006:97).

Noteworthy is the fact that the sauces – twenty-one in total, on the first menu – are the only items on the menu that are not “signature”. Instead, they comprise a range of “classics”, and Robertson’s version of the classics is to provide non-descriptive descriptions, where word sequences force adjectives to function as nouns (thyme, marrow and silky), and nouns to function as adjectives (creamy, garlic and smooth). Noteworthy in this context is the first example, for harissa. While the inclusion of at least one ingredient in the other sauces hint at their general flavor, the adjectives ‘breathtaking, warm and light’ suggest very little of the combination of spices (typically chilli, coriander, cumin, garlic and tomatoes) that make up this North African spice paste.

In his discussion on “The Aesthetics of Kitchen Discourse” (1995), Gary Fine identifies what he terms the ‘sociolect’ of food professionals; a specialised vocabulary, in other words, that lacks an ‘intellectual grounding... and to outsiders may sound vague, as meanings are not constituted by past experience’ (Fine, 1995:215). If the description of harissa, including the use of French terminology, belongs to such a sociolect, this transliteration of kitchen discourse to the menu is in keeping with The Showroom’s theme of transparency. Yet the access implied by this transparency – patrons can see the kitchen, including the Lamborghini humorously listed on the menu (‘gallardo, 5 litre v10 and very sexy’) – is at the same time limited, if not by a glass wall and the ZAR2,8m required to buy the Lamborghini, through the use of French terminology, for one, which retains a lineage with *haute cuisine* and its historical class exigencies. Given that French is not even one of the eleven official languages of South Africa, Jack Goody’s analysis of French-derived vocabulary in some of the earliest British cookbooks (*The Book of St. Albans*, 1486, and *Boke of*

*Keruyng*, 1508) provides an interesting parallel with the élitist connotations of Robertson's menu:

Many words were of French derivation, 'traunche' from *trancher*, 'tayme' from *entamer*, showing that their origin and use was to be found in the households of the rich. At the same time, the element of play is clearly present in this as in some other schema consisting of categories or objects, schema that develop the overlapping, polysemic usages of everyday speech into an elaborate yet simplified system of patterned correspondences. The result is less a guide to understanding than a display of esoteric verbal ingenuity of a kind that is dependent not only on specialist activity associated with the leisure class but in some degree upon the use of the written and especially the printed word. (Goody, 1982:138)<sup>66</sup>

The 'esoteric verbal ingenuity' that Goody refers to, furthermore, is evidenced by the vague descriptions of sauces, which, in order to be understood, rely on prior knowledge – the diner that chooses harissa will need to know what it is already – or on relinquishing authority to the chef and the "experience" of the establishment.

The two contradictory strains of access and exclusivity that inform the example of The Showroom menu extend to restaurant culture in general. Access is inclusive and economic; as disposable income rates rise globally,<sup>67</sup> so dining out –

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<sup>66</sup> Bunny Crumpacker similarly underlines the historical affectedness of French in culinary discourse: 'Most English words for farm animals are derived from the Anglo-Saxon: cow, pig, sheep. But once we're talking about food (...), words for the same animal come from the medieval French.... [v]eal, beef, pork, mutton.... The aversion to speaking of our domestic animals as food is a long-standing one. So is snobbery on the menu' (Crumpacker, 2006:12). White has less tolerance yet: 'Presenting an English-speaking diner with a menu in French is the antithesis of hospitality. Worse still is the fraudulent use of foreign words to describe dishes. Chefs: change "stew" to "daube" and double the price!' (White, 2006).

<sup>67</sup> According to the International Monetary Fund's 2006 analysis, South Africa's G.D.P. grew by 4.9 % in 2005 and 'continued to grow strongly in 2006'; lower interest rates resulted in a 23% credit increase in the private sector, constituting 68% of disposable income in 2006 (I.M.F., 2006). Similarly, in their report on income levels in the U.S. from 1929-2003, Paul Gomme and Peter Rupert of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland give evidence for a general rise in standards of living over the last 75 years, not only in the U.S., but 'across some of the richer countries, [where] average incomes are growing closer over time. Economic growth since 1929 has made all U.S. states richer, and the gap between the

even the ‘costly’ variety – has become more available to the average middle-class consumer, not to mention more desirable, particularly in the case of restaurants with high media visibility generated by prominent reviews, guides, profiles on “lifestyle” shows, and so on. One result of this, and in keeping with prevalent food trends of simplicity (as in celebrity cookbooks) is a relative decline in the institutional pretentiousness – dress-codes, for example – that historically demarcated restaurants according to class, arguably the cause of what John Lanchester terms ‘restaurant-fear’.<sup>68</sup> Robertson intimates this inclination by denouncing “that stuff that stands high on a plate”. Exclusivity, on the other hand, is signalled by the perpetuity of discourses and behavior that challenge the apparent democratization of food and restaurant culture with its attendant threat to historical structures of structures of class, professionalism and specialization. The “transparency” of The Showroom is exemplary, in the end, of this exclusivity; what is transparent, and indeed commendable in a culture informed not only by anxieties around the democratizing forces of globalization, but also a resistance to acknowledging as much, is Robertson’s disavowal of classlessness. As he concluded his interview, “It’s about class, darling. I’m not classy.... But I love class!” (in Maxwell, 2006:98).

Robertson’s playful liberties – be they with language, food or his restaurant – are undeniably part of his appeal because, with himself at the centre of his figurative showroom, they express a unique persona, if not personality. Yet restaurants that function as personal expressions are under the same “threat” as recipes which, as we

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poorest and the richest states has narrowed substantially. The ratio between the average income of the poorest state and the richest in 1929 was 4.23 but by 2003 it was 1.84. So, while the rich have gotten richer, the poor have gotten richer at a faster rate’ (Gomme and Rupert, 2004).

<sup>68</sup> In his discussion of the growth of so-called family restaurants – he gives the example of Harvester’s in the U.K.; Spur would be the South African equivalent – John Lanchester identifies the denial of ‘restaurant-fear’ as their main impulse: ‘The emphasis is so assertively unpretentious that it’s almost hysterical; it is about fear, in the same way as positive thinking self-help books are about failure’ (cit. Bell and Valentine, 1997:124).

have seen, can occasion the extreme possessiveness of copyright action. In June 2007, the *New York Times* reported on the case of Rebecca Charles, owner of the Pearl Oyster Bar, filing a lawsuit for theft of intellectual property against Ed McFarland, owner of Ed's Lobster Bar, accusing him of copying "each and every element" of Pearl Oyster Bar, including the white marble bar, the gray paint on the wainscoting, the chairs and bar stools with their wheat-straw backs, the packets of oyster crackers placed at each table setting and the dressing on the Caesar salad' (Wells, 2007).

Notwithstanding Charles' acknowledgement that her restaurant had been 'inspired by another narrow, unassuming place', and that her "signature" Caesar salad had been learnt from 'her mother, who extracted it decades ago from the chef at a long-gone Los Angeles restaurant', the case was one of personal affront: "My restaurant is a personal reflection of me, my experience, my family," she said. "That restaurant is me" (ibid.).

Exclusivity, in this context, is synonymous with uniqueness, and it is a subject matter that arises throughout food media in the tensions that underlie questions of rights; who has them and who abuses them. Rights, moreover, evoke questions of reality and counterfeit that are manifest in the quest for culinary authenticity; if Charles' restaurant is "her", then her reproduction without consent – if Ed's Lobster Bar indeed is a copy, a charge which McFarland naturally denied<sup>69</sup> – is a "fake". Bourdieu's analysis of substance and form, what he terms 'the two antagonistic approaches to the treatment of food and the act of eating', are pertinent here, and worth quoting in full:

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<sup>69</sup> "I would say it's a similar restaurant," he [McFarland] said, "I would not say it's a copy" (Wells, 2007).

Substance – or matter – is what is substantial, not only ‘filling’ but also real, as opposed to all appearances, all the fine words and empty gestures that ‘butter no parsnips’ are, as the phrase goes, purely symbolic; reality, as against sham, imitation, window-dressing; the little eating-house with its marble-topped tables and paper napkins where you get an honest square meal and aren’t ‘paying for the wallpaper’ as in fancy restaurants; being as against seeming, nature and the natural (pot luck, ‘take it as it comes’, ‘no standing on ceremony’), as against embarrassment, mincing and posturing, airs and graces, which are always suspected of being a substitute for substance, i.e., for sincerity, for feeling, for what is felt and proved in actions; it is the free-speech and language of the heart which makes the true ‘nice guy’, blunt, straight forward, unbending, honest, ‘straight down the line’ and ‘straight as a die’, as opposed to everything that is pure form, done only for form’s sake; it is freedom and the refusal of complications, as opposed to respect for all the forms and formalities spontaneously perceived as instruments of distinction and power. On these moralities, these world views, there is no neutral viewpoint; what for some is shameless and slovenly, for others is straightforward, unpretentious; familiarity is for some the most absolute form of recognition, the abdication of all distance, a trusting openness, a relation of equal to equal; for others, who shun familiarity, it is an unseemly liberty. (Bourdieu, 1984:197-199)

The key-words here, true to Bourdieu’s main interests, are distinction and power, and his suggestion that there exists no neutral viewpoint in their pursuit is particularly apt in the climate of territorial defence that prevails among chefs, from copyrighting recipes and restaurants – Pete Wells notes that ‘legal experts believe the number of cases will grow as chefs begin to think more like chief executives’ (Wells, 2007) – to unashamedly targeting exclusivity, like Robertson, who incidentally lists not wallpaper, but a ZAR45.000,00 painting on his menu.<sup>70</sup> Of

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<sup>70</sup> Under Starters, “Briel’s Oyster” can be ordered ‘fresh and just shucked’ (R16 each), ‘or on canvas’ (45 000.00).

particular interest, however, is that Bourdieu's non-neutral viewpoint is far from fixed; McFarland, it turns out, was Charles' sous-chef for six years. Similarly to the recipe debates which all involved former colleagues, then, there is no question here of strangers stealing from one another. On the contrary, the Charles-McFarland case demonstrates the substitution of one type of familiarity, 'a trusting openness, a relation of equal to equal', replaced by its extreme opposite, 'an unseemly liberty'. What is at stake, to summarise Bourdieu in his own words, is that 'social identity is defined and asserted through difference' (1984:171) and it is my contention that these safeguarding activities, including the culinary creativity behind "signature" food and the quest for authenticity, result from globalisation as the single biggest threat to difference.

### **5.3 Freedom and the World Wide Web**

One measure of the interconnectedness that characterises globalised societies is the high availability of and access to print and online media. In the context of restaurants as expressions of difference, the Charles-McFarland example is supplemented by the growing number of public disputes around restaurant reviews, similarly centred on freedom of expression, and what Bourdieu would term the 'unseemly liberty' taken by reviewers who may or may not be qualified to publicly state their views. In February 2007, for example, the *Irish News* received a court order to pay damages amounting to £25 000,00 to an Italian restaurant owner in Belfast for a negative review published in 2000 (BBC, 2007). Following this, a review in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 2003 of a meal that 'jangled like a car crash' was ruled as defamatory in June 2007 because the restaurant had closed three

months after the review was published (McMahon, 2007).<sup>71</sup> Of note in both these cases is the attention to the influence of media pronouncements, deflecting focus, in other words, from the quality of the establishment itself. According to the owner of the Sydney restaurant, ‘customers had been put off by [the reviewer’s] words’ (ibid.), and not, apparently, by anything to do with the restaurant itself.

The most notorious disputes have arisen from the reviews of *New York Times* food critic, Frank Bruni, published on his blog, *A Diner’s Journal* (dinersjournal.blogs.nytimes.com). Bruni’s February 2007 review of Jeff Chodorow’s<sup>72</sup> newly opened *The Kobe Club* gave the restaurant zero out of four stars.<sup>73</sup> Chodorow responded with a full-page “Letter to the Editor” in the same periodical, costing somewhere between forty (Shott, 2007) and eighty (Karni, 2007) thousand dollars. Citing Bruni’s previous journalistic experience as a political correspondent in Rome, Chodorow called into question the reviewer’s culinary credentials, referring to him as ‘your “critic”’, and further suggested that the review was ‘personal’, thereby discrediting Bruni’s professionalism:

I don’t know what I actually did to engender these personal attacks on me.... For a publication that prides itself on integrity, I feel your readers should be better informed as to this VERY IMPORTANT fact, so that they can give your reviews the weight, or lack thereof, they deserve. (Chodorow, 2007)

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<sup>71</sup> White recounts similar cases, including a sixteen-page lawsuit filed by U.S. restaurateur Phil Romano in 2004 against a reviewer who had given his restaurant 3½ out of 5 stars (White, 2006).

<sup>72</sup> Jeff Chodorow was best known for what he terms his ‘ill-fated collaboration with Rocco DiSpirito on the TV show, *The Restaurant*’ (Chodorow, 2007), which resulted in a failed restaurant and famously led to court disputes between the two, where Chodorow, the financier, was accused by DiSpirito of “cooking the books” (Landman, 2004).

<sup>73</sup> An extract from the review: ‘Strings of leather that look like fugitive shoelaces dangle here, there and everywhere, creating sinister-looking canopies and screens. Black-painted bricks in some areas and chains along one wall bring to mind a torture chamber.... But more of the food was disappointing, sometimes even infuriating, be it a rubbery roasted pork chop, perhaps left too long in its brine; limp iceberg lettuce, propped up insufficiently by blue cheese; those mashed potatoes, gluey; or a crème brûlée in dire need of a crunchier hood’ (Bruni, 2007d).

Like the Sydney and Belfast cases, Chodorow's response highlights media influence and, more ironically, Bruni's influence. As former *New York Times* food critic Mimi Sheraton put it, 'Chodorow, of course, was an idiot to have run such an ad. For one thing, it does worlds of good for the critic, indicating he or she has a strong following, and that his or her words can make or break a dining place – in itself a measure of proven dependability' (Sheraton, 2007).

Bruni's lack of professional credentials, indeed, form part of his appeal because it renders his viewpoint more representative of the average restaurant-goer than of the so-called cognoscenti. Chris Shott, who aptly names him the 'democrat of the dinner table' (Shott, 2007), suggests that this trait is 'appealing to many, just as it enrages others' (ibid.). A final example of this, and one which crystallises the two types of familiarity outlined by Bourdieu, comes from Gordon Ramsay, who was similarly under Bruni's scrutiny when he opened his New York restaurant, Gordon Ramsay at the London. In the weeks before its opening, Ramsay, who reportedly invested \$7.2 million in the launch (Rayner, 2006b), gave Bruni his full approval:

"*The New York Times* is a different sort of thing to what goes on in Britain... There's real integrity to it. He [Bruni] even goes to the lengths of being made over, so people won't spot him. He goes in disguise. I've been told this by other chefs in New York. It's definite." (in Rayner, 2006b)

A few months later, and following Bruni's two-star review of his restaurant, Ramsay changed his tone dramatically:

"The fat, lazy thing about Frank Bruni was all the little seedy, undercover blog bullshit.... I don't give two fucks about it. Never have; never met the guy; not even

remotely interested. I'm being judged on my persona<sup>74</sup> as opposed to my food, and you know what? Fuck it." (in Thompson, 2007)

Gone is the 'integrity' previously applauded, and in its place, a suggestion, echoing Chodorow, that Bruni deals in deceit rather than opinion, adding no little irony to the fact that Ramsay himself has repeatedly been accused of fakery in his television shows.<sup>75</sup>

These examples collectively point to a mounting anxiety around professional boundaries, liberties, and expectations that are primarily challenged by the internet, typified as it is by being unrestricted and, in large measure, uncensored. According to Philip Baltz, C.E.O. of a restaurant Public Relations firm, the internet "has completely changed the way we do things.... Bloggers are now a very important part of the media landscape because a lot of diners get their information from them" (in Salkin, 2007),<sup>76</sup> leading to a situation which, in reporter Allen Salkin's terms, leaves 'ethical standards all over the map' (ibid.).<sup>77</sup> High profile restaurateurs, moreover, are not the only targets of bloggers; one reader responded to Salkin's article by likewise isolating liberties taken by bloggers who 'indulge in sarcasm or single out individual servers

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<sup>74</sup> To Ramsay's credit, Bruni does begin his review by invoking Ramsay's 'foul mouth and foul temper' television persona, noting his surprise to find the restaurant 'cooly, even icily, elegant' (Bruni, 2007b). But the review certainly focuses on food, for example, 'there were a few off-putting concoctions, like a cloying, gummy wedge of turbot poached in St. Émilion and a bizarre appetizer combining delicate little langoustine tails with indelicate nuggets of boneless chicken wing, crusted with hazelnuts and sweetened with maple syrup. Eric Ripert, meet Colonel Sanders' (Bruni, 2007b).

<sup>75</sup> Ramsay was sued in 2006 for fabricating scenes in his U.K. restaurant makeover Reality show, *Kitchen Nightmares* (Anon, 2006b), and again in 2007 in connection with the U.S. version of the programme (Pilkington, 2007a). In July 2007, the *Times* revealed that a fishing scene in Ramsay's *The F Word* had been manipulated to make it appear that Ramsay was the one who caught three fish he went on to grill, whereas they had in fact been provided by a 'local expert' (Booth, 2007).

<sup>76</sup> Pete Snyder, C.E.O. of New Media Strategies, similarly concludes that online restaurant reviews are "throwing the balance of power in the restaurant industry off kilter" (in Dunne, 2005).

<sup>77</sup> Mario Batali adds to the debate: 'Many of the anonymous authors who went on blogs rant their snarky vituperatives from behind the smoky curtain of the web. This allows them a peculiar and nasty vocabulary that seems to be taken as truth by virtue of the fact that it has been printed somewhere.... But the blog is now a new partner, and this bit of shoddy journalism will be picked up and promulgated by the rest of the gray zone and march its merry way toward the center of the road. Eventually these blog posts become factual information lost in the sauce' (Batali, 2007).

for harsh criticism. Most bloggers would be annoyed’, she concluded, ‘if the server from last night’s meal showed up at their office and critiqued them’ (Orman, 2007). Yet, as defensible as such a critique is from the perspective of a personal affront, it fails to take into account – as do Ramsay and Chodorow – that a noteworthy attraction of and principle behind food blogging is less the ability to “target” people than it is to make use of a public platform for personal expression that bypasses the historically facilitating agency of a publisher or literary and culinary qualifications.

To be sure, the desire and ability to express oneself publicly in a non-professional capacity is the overwhelming commonality between food bloggers and visitors to food websites alike,<sup>78</sup> who repeatedly represent the new media as a means to creating “communities”. *Cooking Light*, one the best-selling U.S. food magazines,<sup>79</sup> for instance, has spawned ‘an enthusiastic, [sic] community of readers through the message boards on its Web site’ (Sagon, 2005), some of whom also get together for what Sagon calls ‘grass roots’ supper clubs. While Bob Tedeschi notes that magazines like *Cooking Light* have ‘long histories of connecting readers through contests, schools and reader-submitted recipes’ (Tedeschi, 2007), the unique capacity of the internet for connecting people with no geographical proximity has led top food sites to generate platforms specifically for social networking – ‘looking for friends’, in Tedeschi’s terms – rather than simply sharing recipes, such as “My Epi” on top food site Epicurious.com, ‘a set of online tools perhaps best characterized as Facebook<sup>80</sup> for foodies’ (ibid.).

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<sup>78</sup> Visitors to U.S. food websites in May 2007 approximated 50 million, equivalent to ‘one-third of active Internet users’ (Tedeschi, 2007).

<sup>79</sup> Monthly sales in 2005 amounted to 1.7 million copies, ‘the largest circulation among the country’s top monthly food magazines’ (Sagon, 2005).

<sup>80</sup> Facebook is ‘a social utility that connects you with the people around you’ (www.facebook.com). After setting up an online profile, people can search for each other by name and create “networks” of Facebook “friends” who will be updated of any profile changes or additions.

Food blogs, estimated at close to fifty thousand in the U.S. in 2007 (Sylva, 2007), are similarly applauded for generating virtual camaraderie. Cate O'Malley, who manages the food and wine blog compendium, Well Fed Network, attributes the attraction to the "independent perspective that might not show up in a magazine.... There is also a great sense of sharing and community" (ibid.). Elise Bauer, host of the Simply Recipes blog, winner of Well Fed's "Best Blog Overall" in 2007, and featured as one of *Time's* "50 Coolest Websites" in 2006, concurs: "Blogging is extremely easy. It doesn't cost anything. There is this whole community aspect, too. It's not just having your own soapbox. It's connecting with other people who have the same passions you do. Food and cooking is about sharing. Food is a happy thing. It's writing about something you love" (ibid.).<sup>81</sup> Evidence, finally, that Bauer's comments are representative, is in the reception of two best-selling "blooks"; blogs that have been turned into books:<sup>82</sup> Clotilde Dusoulier's *Chocolate and Zucchini* (2007), and Julie Powell's *Julie & Julia* (2005), based on working her way through Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* over the course of a year, and winner of the 2006 Lulu Blooker Prize.<sup>83</sup>

Far, then, from what Ramsay characterises as this "little seedy undercover blog bullshit", blogs and food websites represent an increasingly lucrative leisure industry, not only in terms of creating "communities" for consumers, but also for advertisers, who find that the 'online atmosphere is friendlier for marketers who want to blur the line between advertising and editorial' (Tedeschi, 2007). In addition to the

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<sup>81</sup> After some initial anxiety about family recipes being used by stranger, Bauer's mother Alice conceded what she sees as the usefulness of Simply Recipes: "We're improving the planet.... We just like to make very good food. We're not trying to be real chefs" (in Dunne, 2005).

<sup>82</sup> According to Lulu, 'the world's fastest-growing provider of print-on-demand books', blooks are 'the world's fastest-growing new kind of book and an exciting new stage in the life-cycle of content, if not a whole new category of content.' (Lulublooker, 2007).

<sup>83</sup> In November 2007, *Variety* reported on the planned filmic dramatisation of *Julie & Julia*, with Meryl Streep starring as Julia Child (Siegel, 2007).

potential threat to print media that is now curbed, to some extent, by the book industry (Dunne, 2005),<sup>84</sup> the issue of sharing and adaptation – two central concerns in the copyrighting debates – also jeopardises the role of food professionals beyond high profile restaurateurs. Regarding consumers’ “urge to make a dish their own” through alterations which they then blog about, Zanne Stewart of *Gourmet* confesses that since “Gourmet has 8 test kitchens and 11 food editors....[it] makes me a bit sad, considering how much work went into the original” (in Barbour, 2007). Tanya Steel of Epicurious concurs: “It’s not this top-down authoritarian voice, the way it used to be in the ’80s.... We were the experts then, and had all the answers. Now it’s much more grass-roots. People are finding and talking to each other” (ibid.).

There can be no doubting that internet activity demonstrates that people are finding and talking to each other, validating Baudrillard’s claim that consumers have become more interactive than ever (op. cit.). What is more, the food media industry in general – evidenced in this chapter by the ambiguously named genre of food literature, menus as representations of restaurants, and blogging – generates products that also “talk” to people ideologically, from M.F.K Fisher to Frank Bruni’s stars directing you to an oyster bar. The Althusserian interpellation that operates behind these impulses is at once personal and communal; the unique allure of the internet, for instance, lies in its provision of a previously limited agency, whereby the potential social and economic empowerment of a highly frequented blog is as valid a route to culinary celebrity as a highly rated television programme. Furthermore, the accessibility of the internet for both producers and consumers challenges historically demarcated lines of labour specialisation, such as who has the “right” to publicly voice an opinion.

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<sup>84</sup> Amanda Hesser also notes that U.S. cookbook sales in fact increased by 8% from 2005-2007 (Hesser, 2007).

Nevertheless, one result of this new democracy of expression is the anxiety demonstrated by public disavowals of entitlement, whether from celebrity chefs or restaurateurs who defend their property as representations of self. At the other end of this spectrum is the avowal of entitlement, such as the transparent “classiness”, or exclusivity, of The Showroom. Common to all these examples is the centrality of representation; the assertion of social identity, to recall Bourdieu, through difference, and, paradoxically, a shared reliance on media to do so. To conclude, this dependence is nowhere clearer than in the example of Google cooking,<sup>85</sup> the search engine that generates recipes based on ingredients entered by users. As Andrea Sachs reported of her “Dinner with Google” in the *Washington Post*:

Printout in hand, we cooked, ate and delighted in a concoction we never would have conjured without Google. Then, dessert caught my eye – a blackening banana sitting on the countertop, one day away from the compost heap. So I dashed to the computer to cook it. (Sachs, 2005)

Albeit tongue in cheek, Sachs captures the curious antagonism between the distinct and the universal that emerges from a globalised economy, where accessibility to a massive collective resource signals the autonomy of the consumer. Cooking on a computer also, and finally, anticipates the detached activity that describes watching food on television, the subject of the chapter to follow.

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<sup>85</sup> “Google cooking” was coined by software engineer Judy Hourihan in 2002. Hourihan explains her motivation: “Why am I looking through cookbooks when I can just sit at my computer and Google it?” (in Sachs, 2005).

## 6. Television

‘I know better than you do that a veritable freedom of expression has never existed on the Radio-Television, no more than in the press. But even though the juridical conception of freedom of expression is overtly denied by current power, one can only suppose that someone who conserves the least sense of intellectual dignity would react to this situation with an absolute boycott of this Radio-Television and its lackeys.’  
(Letter from Guy Debord to the President, Inter-Union Liaison Committee of Press-Radio-Television, 11 October 1960)

The TV and its use has become a normal part of domestic life, and nightly TV viewing has become an established part of the evening’s activity for most Western countries..... But the cost of this coverage is TV’s normality: TV belongs to the everyday, to the normal backdrop of expectations and mundane pleasures.  
(John Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, 1982)<sup>1</sup>

This discussion is not about the development of television as a technological or social mechanism, but about food television as the primary medium and platform for the rise of the contemporary celebrity chef as the culmination of the spectacle that is food media. The two are not isolated; the history of both indicates that the growth of food television concurs with television generally, and therefore the two share – with a range of other commodities – the stages of scarcity, availability and plenty that describe the decades from the Second World War to the present day.<sup>2</sup> There are three main, and related, narratives in this chapter. The first concerns the process of naturalisation by which, despite a relatively short history, food television has become as “normal” as John Ellis suggested of television generally in 1982. Secondly, it is only once the medium is ‘thus made common’, to recall Raymond Williams’ definition of communication, that consumers no longer question its logic and authority, and it is within the logic of widespread vicarious consumption that celebrity chefs – specifically, in this discussion, Jamie Oliver and Rachael Ray – have come to have more influence on consumers than democratically elected politicians. The final

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<sup>1</sup> (Ellis, 1992:160).

<sup>2</sup> In his *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty* (2000), Ellis characterises the development of broadcast television as a move from scarcity to availability to plenty (Ellis, 2000:46,15, 176); a description which is arguably pertinent to most commodity forms, including information.

part of the chapter is on food porn. Here I argue against its popular manifestation as a celebration of vicariousness and suggest, instead, that the term's critical value lies in articulating its silence around the stigma attached to non-food pornography. Food porn does not only describe unreal food, but a base of consumers whose real lives are increasingly governed by fantasies of cooking and eating. Food television safeguards and perpetuates those fantasies.

### 6.1 The Fall and Rise of Food Television

In May, 1955, *Time* ran an article headed "Cooking for the Camera", which reviews a cooking show by Dione Lucas – 'the Mother of French cooking in America', to recall Julia Child's appellation (op. cit.) – and, at the same time, laments the "decline" of TV cooking:

It is a measure of how TV cooking has declined that Dione Lucas does not have a horde of imitators. Gone are the old days when TV cooking simmered along on full-length programs over most stations around the country and the meringue melted under hot lights. ... Today the lights are not so hot, but neither is the outlook for TV cooks.... The trouble seems to be that the TV brass just does not believe that housewives are interested in good cooking. Where TV cooking has survived, it generally aims at a mass audience that will buy sponsored gastronomic monstrosities (e.g., prewhipped cream).... But Chef Dione Lucas remains a purist. She calmly refuses the customary TV gimmicks, chats informally with a sprinkling of wit and common sense as she displays her skill with a skillet. Last week she demonstrated paupiettes de veau<sup>3</sup> Fontage and the unexpurgated chicken marengo (...).<sup>4</sup> Chef Lucas makes it look easy, but any housewife ought to know better. (Anon, 1955)

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<sup>3</sup> Veal rolls.

<sup>4</sup> '[T]wo small chickens are browned in sweet butter; a hen lobster is sautéed, then shelled; chickens and lobster are flamed in cognac, sprinkled with an aromatic sauce of tomatoes, mushrooms, shallots, tarragon and dry vermouth, garnished with fried eggs on croutons and slices of truffles' (ibid.).

This piece of journalism is remarkable for several reasons. For one, and most obviously, the empires presently commanded by celebrity chefs, who owe significant thanks to television for their fame, disprove to a positively absurd degree the prediction that the ‘outlook for TV cooks’ was pessimistic. At the same time, the article underlines some of the central – and often conflicting – tenets of television cooking, namely the tensions between performance and instruction, between the professional and the amateur, and between, finally, representation – the ‘TV gimmicks’ – and reality. These tensions are intimated in the distinction between ‘good cooking’ and television cooking. Good cooking, exemplified by the ‘purist’ Lucas, is polarised against the ‘gastronomic monstrosity’ the author declares pre-whipped cream to be, and which is favoured by a ‘mass audience’. Pre-whipped cream, the ultimate convenience food, looks easy and is easy. Good cooking, by implication, is difficult, and the housewife that ‘ought to know better’ when Lucas makes chicken Marengo look easy emerges as the unwitting target of this journalist’s critique.

As cookbook trends of the time indicate, women in the 1950s were ambiguously situated between being targets of aggressively marketed processed foods to make life easier and, at the same time, being expected to perform some likeness, at least, of cooking. ‘Serving your family food straight from the can or the package’, explains Neuhaus, ‘seemed to indicate an unwomanly interest in providing for your family; hence a proliferation of recipes which “doctored up” processed foods and which required additional kitchen work in order to serve the very foods that were supposed to be more convenient’ (1999:533).<sup>5</sup> So, by reference to the housewife who,

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<sup>5</sup> Notwithstanding the potential use of convenience foods as an ingredient in a more complex dish (for instance, dehydrated soup mix as a base for a stew), Sutton points to another connotation of “fast” foods: ‘In the past, one of the latent purposes of cooking’s taking a long time was to prove women’s fidelity and faithfulness to their families and their daily chores. As [Renee] Hirschon notes, “proper

if media trends are reflective, was likely *not* to ‘know better’ than to assume Lucas’ food was easy, the *Time* article is a comment on the rise of convenience foods as much as it is on the state of television in 1955, by which time two-thirds of households in the U.S. had television sets (Adema, 2000:113). Prevailing television, like convenience food, it suggests, are characterised by imitation; the ‘decline’ in TV cooking, in other words, represented by Lucas not inspiring a ‘horde of imitators’ means there is little market for her level of difficulty, professionalism and “purism”.

Already implicit is a correlation between on- and off-screen cooking, by which market trends – evidenced by the kind of television cooking that ‘survived’, and is based on imitation – indicate not only what people will watch, but also what they buy, and therefore, how they eat. The culture of convenience food, finally, is inadvertently complemented by the language of the article, which is striking in its forgetfulness: ‘the old days’ and the ‘customary TV gimmicks’ of television cooking, in 1955, were less than ten years old, following James Beards’ debut on NBC in 1946. The technology of television itself, as we have seen, had only been refined in 1927. Contrary to the purpose of reporting its decline, then, the article gestures deftly to the rise and currency of television cooking, demonstrated no more convincingly than in representing it as if it had always existed. When a cultural form, and particularly one with a very short history, appears as natural, it is evidence of the ‘authorized amnesia’ (Debord, 1995:196) of the spectacle; the ‘non-thought’ (ibid.) on which a consumer and convenience culture relies in order, paradoxically, to keep introducing, and selling, the “new”.

What remains ambiguous in this article, and some five decades later, is the meaning of the seemingly simple phrase ‘television cooking’, which, like its relative

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food” took hours to prepare; food that could be prepared quickly was referred to as “prostitute food,” because it implied that women were saving time in the kitchen to pursue illicit activities’ (2001:132).

“TV dinner”, bespeaks ease and expediency. It does so by implying detachment from the labour of cooking: literally, by watching or accessing a pre-prepared meal; abstractly, as a prevalent theme of televised cooking, informed as it is by making things look easy. This antagonism between ease and difficulty, indeed, is central to the discussion that follows because, as already apparent with recipes, cookbooks, and the internet as the ostensible democratisers of expertise, the industry of food television strains between “making it easy” and “keeping it real”. Entertainment as its guiding principle is clear from the success with which food television overwhelmingly manages to conflate the two, more often than not through the facilitating figure of a celebrity chef, a term as potentially oxymoronic as Reality TV.

Pauline Adema, one of the first – and still one of still few<sup>6</sup> – scholars to write critically about food television, locates what she terms the ‘vicarious pleasure’ of modern food television ‘in the ambiguity of modernity, a symptom and consequence of real and perceived time pressures, increasingly complex social networks, and an ongoing hunger for comfort and security, traditionally sated in the home kitchen and encoded in home-cooked food’ (Adema, 2000:113). She further invokes Lawrence Levine’s analysis of popular culture, taken from his *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (1998), in which he recounts, along the lines of Walter Benjamin’s discussion of “aura” (Benjamin, 1999c), how the lithographical reproduction of original paintings, previously the realm of the wealthy and now accessible to a mass market, encouraged a “pseudo-culture” by which people

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<sup>6</sup> Recent research includes L. Brost’s unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, “Television Cooking Shows: Defining the Genre” (2000), Mark Meister’s “Cultural Feeding, Good Life Science, and the TV Food Network” (2000), and Cheri Ketchum’s “The Essence of Cooking Shows: How the Food Network Constructs Consumer Fantasies” (2005). As their titles suggest, each of these works focus on the U.S. Food Network and therefore do not address food television in its global context. Much earlier, and unspecific to food television but closer to the Debordian concerns of this thesis, are Martha Rosler’s video productions from the 1970s (*A budding gourmet*, 1974; *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, 1975; *Losing: A Conversation with Parents*, 1977). For discussions of Rosler’s work see Annette Michelson’s “Solving the Puzzle” (1998) and Alexander Alberro’s “The Dialectics of Everyday Life” (1998).

could pose as being “cultured” without the experience and lineage historically required to be so.<sup>7</sup> Using the example of Emeril Lagasse, one of the U.S. Food Network’s most viable “stars”,<sup>8</sup> Adema goes on to propose food television as suggestive of a similar phenomenon:

Emeril and other chefs are now empowering people to speak the languages of cooking and cuisine. Yet, food shows that demystify traditionally elite foodways are threatening the social hierarchy in which food serves as cultural capital.... As more people become familiar with gourmet food, flavors and preparation techniques, the value of gourmet food and cooking as cultural capital decreases. Emeril literally and linguistically deconstructs what have traditionally been elite foodways. (Adema, 2000:117)

Lagasse, furthermore she argues, and typical of modern celebrity chefs, is also a ‘maker and marketer of commodities’; one consequence of his ostensible empowerment of audiences, therefore, is that by encouraging them to buy his branded products, ‘he hooks them more completely into the culture of consumption’ (ibid.).<sup>9</sup>

In addition to what we have already seen of Mario Batali, the examples of Jamie Oliver and Rachael Ray consolidate and develop Adema’s arguments about Lagasse and food television. Their collective and respective successes represent the strengths of the industry, not least its perpetual youth, despite its by now considerably

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<sup>7</sup> Levine’s thesis echoes Thorstein Veblen’s early twentieth-century theory of “conspicuous consumption”. Coined in *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (1899), Veblen used the term to describe the process by which people – particularly those he identified as the ‘servant classes’ (Veblen, 1912:68) of the emerging leisure sector – spend money, often beyond their means, on commodities that serve more in the way of display than of utility. I return to conspicuous consumption later in this chapter.

<sup>8</sup> Dubbed the “Frank Sinatra of cooking” by *Time* in 1996 (Adema, 2000:115), Lagasse, who joined Food Network in its inaugural year as the host of *How to Boil Water* (1993), hosts some of the network’s highest rated shows (*Essence of Emeril*, 1996; *Emeril Live*, 1997). With a dedicated Emeril store on the network’s website, Lagasse ‘typifies the symbiotic relationship between Food TV and the modern celebrity chef. He is at once his own brand and a product of Foodnetwork’ (Hansen, 2008b).

<sup>9</sup> By now typical of celebrities, Lagasse also endorses other products, for instance Crest toothpaste, which created an advertisement featuring the chef uttering his signature exclamations – “Bam!”, “That really kicks it up a notch” - while using the toothpaste. As Rob Walker explains, ‘Emeril at this point is not so much a man as a signifier, living shorthand for the notion of flavor’ (Walker, 2003).

longer history than in 1955. This is not only figurative; a brief history of the rise of food television, including some of its leading figures, demonstrates the extent to which contemporary celebrities are typically younger than in the ‘old days’, suggesting a shift in criteria for identifying the sites of authority that celebrity chefs occupy. These shifts coincide, as do the other food media trends reviewed so far, with generalised societal shifts following World War 2, and, specifically with regard to celebrity culture, as historian Amy Henderson notes, with ‘America’s change-over from a producing to a consuming society’ (Henderson, 1992).

The change-over was not, of course, only in America. Food television, it will be remembered from the example of Marguerite Patten, originated in the U.K., which in 1936 saw the first television broadcast ever, and also the first televised cooking. On screen was Moira Meighn, author of *The Magic Ring for the Needy and Greedy*, a cookbook with recipes for using a Primus stove. Meighn is rarely cited as the first television cook because her appearance was short-lived, yet the coincidence of education and product placement through television would prove a durable premise for the industry. The following year the BBC introduced the first cooking series to feature a professional chef: X. Marcel Boulestin (1878-1943), in *Cook’s Night Out* (1937). Boulestin, a Frenchman, was already renowned as the chef-proprietor of *Boulestin’s*, the Covent Garden restaurant he opened in 1927. The war naturally interfered with the development of the genre, and it was not until 1946, when Philip Harben (1906-1970) appeared on *Cookery*, that we can locate the genesis of an enduring industry. Harben, who like Patten focused on teaching people how to cook with rationed ingredients, remained a regular on British television until the end of his third series, *What’s Cooking?*,<sup>10</sup> in 1956. Mennell maintains that Harben’s ‘dynamic

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<sup>10</sup> Also known as *Cooking Nook*.

style did a great deal to create a sense of excitement about cookery in Britain' (1985:258) and further suggests, similarly to the cases of Patten and Child, that Harben's popularity was circumstantially related to the rise of television (1985:346).

Another significant and early food television personality<sup>11</sup> was Fanny Cradock (née Phyllis Primrose-Pechey, 1909-1994). Co-author of one of Britain's first newspaper restaurant columns, "Bon Viveur" in the *Daily Telegraph* (1950-1955), Cradock hosted numerous programs from 1955 (*Kitchen Magic*) to 1975 (*Cradock Cooks for Christmas*), typically together with her husband Johnnie. The Cradocks were famously glamorous, often cooking in full evening wear,<sup>12</sup> and their equally dressed food exemplified Barthes' "ornamental cookery".<sup>13</sup> As Simon Swift concluded in the *Guardian* after experimenting with one of Cradock's cookbooks for a week,

It is dawning on me that Cradock couldn't cook. Her food, like her own persona, is about disguise. Fanny wasn't her real name; she didn't grow up in a French chateau but in Leytonstone; she wasn't married to Johnnie until two years after her cookery show ended. (Swift, 2006)

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<sup>11</sup> Requirements of focus preclude discussion of the entire "canon" of significant food television pioneers, such as Graham Kerr (a.k.a. "The Galloping Gourmet"), one of the first male celebrity chefs after Beard, and Keith Floyd, noteworthy for taking food television out of the studio. For a more comprehensive account, see my entry on celebrity chefs in Greenwood's *The Business of Food: Encyclopedia of the Food and Drink Industries* (Hansen, 2008a).

<sup>12</sup> In Stephen Bayley's description, 'Fanny's fur stoles, décolleté necklines and playful tyranny over her dinner-jacketed husband brought a comedy of cordon bleu manners to millions of homes' (Bayley, 1999:44).

<sup>13</sup> Humble maintains that 'it would seem that many suburban British housewives did attempt to cook some at least of the sort of glamorous dishes photographed in magazines and flamboyantly demonstrated by Fanny Cradock, but such dishes fitted into an area of the lives that if not actually belonging to the realm of fantasy was pretty close to it. Entertaining in these years existed as a sort of media-inspired dream world, divorced from the practices of everyday life, where ordinary people acted out a simulacrum of elegant living' (2005:151).

Swift's research followed the release of BBC4's biopic, *Fear of Fanny* (2006), which testifies to her legacy, and equally to the retrospective fascination with personality that informs new biographies of past celebrities.<sup>14</sup>

The drama, according to the *Observer*'s Ben Dowell, who names her 'one of TV's first celebrity chefs and ... one of the most famous, flamboyant and formidable cooks ever to grace the small screen',<sup>15</sup> provides 'the first in-depth profile of the woman credited with introducing a new wave of more sophisticated foods to Britain' (Dowell, 2006); a profile which includes the fact that 'her explosive, unpredictable personality was largely due to an addiction to appetite-suppressing and mood-enhancing amphetamines' (ibid.). These details, giving some credence to her reported declaration that, "I have always been extremely rude, and got exactly what I wanted" (cit. Dowell, 2006), reflect the market for "bad-boy" celebrity chefs and the cult of personality that describes one significant trend of consumer interaction with food television personalities. That this trend, finally, is by no means confined to past celebrities is demonstrated by the fact that, in addition to print editions, current celebrities Gordon Ramsay, Nigella Lawson and Jamie Oliver are also the subjects of televised biographies on The Biography Channel (A&E Television Networks, U.K.), along with film stars (Brad Pitt) and musicians (Rod Stewart).

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<sup>14</sup> The BBC has also produced a drama based on the life of Isabella Beeton, *The Secret Life of Mrs. Beeton* (2006), which similarly stresses a "secret" personality. According to BBC4's Janice Hadlow, "Most people would expect Mrs Beeton herself to be dumpy, matronly and middle-aged.... Far from it. She was a sassy, feisty young journalist and editor whose personal life was riddled with tragedy and a dark secret that led to her untimely death aged 28" (in Gibson, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Pile likewise declares Cradock the first celebrity chef in the *Telegraph*: 'It was the theatricality that mattered. This was showbiz. For the first time, personality was more important than recipes, and so the modern celebrity chef was born' (Pile, 2006). *Fear of Fanny*, he goes on, documents the 'monstrous behaviour of this woman, who was the first and greatest TV celebrity chef' (ibid.).

## 6.2 Jamie Oliver

Arguably the most famous U.K. product of food television is Jamie Oliver. While Ramsay, Lawson and Oliver are all now “regulars” on the U.S. Food Network, Oliver was the first British “import” to the channel, and so represents the first with a global media profile based on television. Oliver was valued at £58m in 2006,<sup>16</sup> with revenue generated from his globally bestselling cookbooks (nine by 2007, translated into 21 languages), award-winning television shows (ten by 2007), directorship of eighteen private U.K. companies, an advertising deal with the leading U.K. supermarket Sainsbury’s<sup>17</sup> (Hickman, 2006b), his branded cookware (made by Tefal), tableware (made by Royal Worcester), and foodstuffs, including what he calls his ‘own little gizmo’, the Flavorshaker™ (www.jamieoliver.com). His profits of £453,000 in 2003 multiplied by almost fifteen in one year, to £7.1m in 2004 (Hickman, 2006b).

Like Lagasse who embodies the “self-made” narrative, rising ‘from working class to stardom’ (Adema, 2000:116), fame came serendipitously to Oliver after being spotted on television; he had been in the background during the filming of a documentary in the London restaurant The River Café, where he was working at the time, and subsequently got an offer from the BBC to star in his own show (Kalbacker, 2002). Oliver was twenty-two at the time, and the result was *The Naked Chef* (1999), based on the idea ‘to strip food down to its bare essentials – to prove that you didn’t need to dress up ingredients or buy a load of fancy gadgets to make something really tasty’ (Oliver, 2006-2007). Oliver’s subsequent celebrity status has been largely

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<sup>16</sup> Ramsay’s worth was estimated at £67m, and therefore ‘leads the way’ (Skidelsky, 2006) financially, but with fewer books and television appearances, Ramsay’s media profile is less significant to this discussion than Oliver’s.

<sup>17</sup> Following declined sales in 2004, Sainsbury’s pledged to lower prices and signed an advertising deal with Jamie Oliver: ‘Some 8,000 prices have been lowered and Mr King said the store’s advertising campaign, fronted by TV chef Jamie Oliver, was paying off. The number of out-of-stock items is down 75% on a year ago. Figures published ... yesterday showed Sainsbury’s market share at 15.7%, up from 15.5% a year ago’ (Finch, 2005).

generated and facilitated by his increasingly charitable – or, in Epstein’s terminology, celebrity philanthropic (Epstein, 2006) – inclinations.

In 2002, he established the Fifteen project, involving the (on-screen) training of fifteen unemployed youths (16-24 years old) to work (off-screen) as chefs in a restaurant of the same name. The project was the subject of Channel 4’s *Jamie’s Kitchen* (2002), and is now established in Amsterdam, Cornwall and Melbourne, with the London kitchen continuing with a yearly intake of fifteen new recruits (Oliver, 2006-2007b). The project, and more specifically the television series, was marked by several controversies, such as drug use among the trainees,<sup>18</sup> and Oliver purportedly mortgaging his house without his wife’s knowledge; one of several domestic – private – incidents which formed part of the show. According to his interviewer Simon Hattenstone, Oliver ‘milked his domestic situation for all it was worth, too. Great TV, ... [Oliver] thinks, must be real and must take things to the brink – even if that means his own marriage’ (Hattenstone, 2005). The chef corroborated: “The thing about good documentary is that watching it should never be comfortable. It will never ever be a balanced, honest, fair documentary if you’re comfortable. And I wasn’t comfortable in *Kitchen*” (ibid.).

Oliver’s discomfort aside, the drug issue led to the formation in 2002 of Cheeky Chops, a charity which ‘provides training and mentoring for disadvantaged young people’ (BBC, 2005), and the project saw Oliver awarded with an M.B.E.<sup>19</sup> in 2003 for ‘services to the hospitality industry’ (Tweedie, 2003). His philanthropic

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<sup>18</sup> Cannabis, according to the Fifteen’s training and development manager, “caused poor attendance, lateness, lack of motivation, difficulty in retaining information and insecurity” (BBC, 2005). ‘Presumably’, continues the BBC report, ‘this was behind the restaurant being described in 2005 by Harden’s London restaurants guide as “amateurish”, and with a rating of “the worst of 32 eateries”’ (ibid.). A review in the U.K. food magazine *Olive* in June 2007, however, puts paid to that judgment: ‘The food was perfect, the service friendly and super-efficient. We left feeling as if a little bit of the Jamie fairy dust had rubbed off on us’ (Ratcliffe, 2007).

<sup>19</sup> M.B.E. (Member of the British Empire) is the lowest ranking of the knighthood, or Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, bestowed by the queen.

pursuits continued in 2005 with *Jamie's School Dinners*, based on preparing healthy meals for primary school pupils at 37p per meal, the then government average. Besides two B.A.F.T.A. awards,<sup>20</sup> Oliver's efforts resulted in the state pledging an additional £280 million to improve school food over the following three years, under the aegis of the Feed Me Better campaign. In concurrence with Oliver being voted Channel 4's "Most Inspiring Political Figure" in 2006<sup>21</sup> – a remarkable turnaround from having been nominated one of Channel 4's "100 Worst Britons" in 2003 – conservative politician Boris Johnson named the chef "a national saint" (in Henley, 2006). In November of that year Oliver appeared on the cover of the U.K.'s *Good Housekeeping* as the first man on the magazine's cover since 1937, when King George VI was photographed with Queen Elizabeth to commemorate the former's coronation. Oliver used the occasion to suggest, in his featured interview, that women going to work have contributed 'to the breakdown of British family life' and the loss of a national food culture (McIntyre, 2006).

Like *Jamie's Kitchen*, Oliver's private life, in which his wife does not go out to work, features significantly in his *School Dinners*. Hattenstone questioned Oliver about one scene in which he shows his wife a tabloid publication declaring her husband an adulterer. She breaks down; 'the most compelling television', in Hattenstone's words, 'and pure voyeurism':

[Oliver:] "That bit where Jules<sup>22</sup> was crying was incredibly powerful television. When we got the footage, she was, 'I don't want it in, I don't want it in', and I just thought ... I don't think anybody has ever filmed somebody seeing something about them that is

<sup>20</sup> "Most Outstanding Presenter"; "Best Factual Series" (2005).

<sup>21</sup> In a poll conducted by BBC Food in more than 100 countries in 2005, Oliver was also voted the "World's Favourite TV Chef" (Anon, 2005b).

<sup>22</sup> While her book *Minus Nine to One* (2005) is published under the name Jools Oliver, she is often referred to in print as Jules.

totally untrue and so close and personal live on telly, and, of course, she burst into tears and said, ‘I’m not having anybody touching my beautiful family and kids, it’s not fair.’” He quotes her with pride....What Jools actually said was, “I will not have it.... It is a dirty, disgusting intrusion into my perfect family.” I think she was referring to the newspaper headline, but it could just as easily have been to her husband’s own camera crew. ... He felt it was important to show the world the effect such malicious gossip had on his family, he says. (Hattenstone, 2005)

This rather intriguing labyrinth of public versus private, and the real posed against the staged, all in the name of ‘powerful television’ is telling of the climate not of voyeurism, but rather, I maintain, of exhibitionism that informs contemporary media. Seeing things that are ‘totally untrue and so close and personal live on telly’ are not as far from the norm as Oliver imagines; indeed, this is the principle of a whole genre of Reality TV notoriously dubbed “degratainment”,<sup>23</sup> epitomised by shows like *Jerry Springer* and *The Weakest Link*, the appeal of which is, in large measure, watching people being humiliated – or humiliating themselves – on national television.

This is where Baudrillard might claim, as he did using the example of Smurfland, that Jools Oliver crying on television represents the moment ‘where reality itself becomes a spectacle....We are no longer alienated and passive spectators but interactive extras; we are the meek lyophilized members of this huge “reality show”’ (Baudrillard, 2005). More to the point, however, is Debord’s central thesis, namely, that the spectacle, beyond simply images, is ‘a social relationship between people that is mediated by images’ (1995:4). The importance of distinguishing

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<sup>23</sup> The term was coined by Robert Chua, founder of CETV (Chinese Entertainment Television). Chua, who believes in “healthy, socially responsible programs” (Kan, 2003), designed and launched the TV game show *Everybody Wins!* on Shanghai Oriental TV in 2003. Since 2005, Chua has been on the board of directors for USA’s NATPE (National Association of Television Program Executives). For discussions of Reality TV as a genre see, for example, Annette Hill’s *Reality TV: Factual Entertainment and Television Audiences* (2005), *Restyling Factual TV: News, Documentary and Reality Television* (2007), and Mark Andrejevic’s *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched* (2003).

between the theoretical frameworks proposed by Baudrillard and Debord here lies in the question of agency. While Baudrillard appears to suggest agency by stressing interactivity, his relegation of ‘alienated and passive spectators’ to ‘meek lyophilized members’ does little to support his contention and only succeeds, in the end, in describing a situation in which people – be they spectators or ‘members’ – are victim to an organizational structure beyond their control.

Although the narrator of *Jamie’s Kitchen* ominously warns, in the first episode, that the “price to be paid” for the “chance of a lifetime” offered to the fifteen interns is the “ritual humiliation of the Naked Chef”,<sup>24</sup> it is not my intention to suggest that Oliver’s shows are designed to humiliate people.<sup>25</sup> But that that they do, and none less than his wife, point to an important fact. What this example has in common with Reality TV is, precisely, that it is not voyeuristic, because it is authorised. Oliver, to recall, ‘felt it was important to show the world the effect such malicious gossip had on his family’ (op. cit.). Why, one may ask, does ‘the world’ need to see this? If it makes for compelling television, then surely it is not in Oliver’s interests to put an end to his wife’s distress. One of Hattenstone’s observations provides a compelling answer: ‘He seems to think of himself in the third person as a product, not as a person. And Oliver the businessman realises that Oliver the product sells best when humanised’ (Hattenstone, 2005).<sup>26</sup> This is in keeping with the paparazzi connotations of the

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<sup>24</sup> All references to *Jamie’s Kitchen* are taken from the Fresh One/Channel4 dvd edition (Scott and Oliver, 2002).

<sup>25</sup> While the interns do certainly undergo humiliation in the series, it is more often self-induced or instigated by one of the other instructors at the catering college than by Oliver himself, whose dealings with the trainees are remarkably sympathetic. Some programs on food television, however, clearly are designed to humiliate, several of Gordon Ramsay’s included, and BBC’s *You Are What You Eat*, featuring obese Britons who willingly undress in front of the camera and spread a table with everything they typically consume in a week, for the purpose of being maligned by the celebrated Dr. Gillian McKeith, health advisor to ‘Hollywood celebrities, European nobility and royalty and world class athletes’ ([www.health4youonline.com](http://www.health4youonline.com)).

<sup>26</sup> Humble reaches a similar conclusion about celebrity chefs in general: ‘What we see increasingly with successful television cooks is an awareness of themselves as commodities, a willingness to package their personalities in neat boxes’ (2005:241).

incident; while Oliver “needs” people to see the effects of a malicious tabloid culture on his family, he equally consolidates the representation of his private life as central to his public persona. Images mediate the relationship between Oliver and his public, and equally between Oliver and his wife, whose vulnerability he ostensibly protects by insisting on its exposure.

If exposure reflects the ‘humanised’ commodity that is Jamie Oliver, it is indexical of a poverty of off-screen social activity that there exists an ever-greater market for this product; one that constitutes engaging with other people’s lives through television and other media. By no means limited to Jamie Oliver, this is the structure of feeling that a significant number of Reality and “food” programmes share and represent. So it should come as little surprise that what this example – only one of countless that can be gleaned from Oliver’s, and numerous other celebrity food shows – also has in common with Reality TV is that it is not (mainly) about food. Interest in Oliver’s life does not overwhelmingly reflect an appreciation of his food, for the simple reason that most of his fans and detractors alike – barring the few who actually eat at his restaurant – don’t have access to his food. What the millions of consumers responsible for Oliver’s global success have access to are representations of his food, through television, cookbooks, kitchen commodities, and food products with his face on the labels. These are the kinds of images that mediate the increasingly “social” relationship between star and fans.

And, while Fanny Cradock and Julia Child may equally have appealed to audiences by putting a familiar face to non-familiar foods, the personalised product represented by chef-branded commodities is reflective of the stress on consumer “experience” in the twenty-first century, and media technology facilitates the process by continuously providing more ways for consumers to “interact” with their favourite

celebrities. So, in addition to kitchen commodities, fans can keep up with Oliver by reading his online “diary”, where each post is affectionately signed “love Jamie Oxxx” ([www.jamieoliver.com](http://www.jamieoliver.com)) and, as of 2005, get recipes and ideas delivered straight to their Vodafone 3G cellphones, wherever they may be: “whether you’re in the bus queue or wandering around the supermarket with no idea what to cook tonight, I’ll always be on hand to deliver some inspiration”, Oliver promises (cit. Rossant, 2005c). The appeal of the bigger than life personality – the one that is everywhere and talks directly to “you” – is confirmed by “Jamie Oliver Live” in Sydney in September, 2006, where he performed three shows to sold out venues, with tickets ranging from 85,00 to 95,00 Australian dollars (AUD).<sup>27</sup> Of veritable rock concert proportions, the performance began in darkness, followed by neon projections of random letters from Oliver’s name, finally coming together to spell “Live”. The introductory soundtrack was a rendition of Robbie Williams’ 1998 song, “Let Me Entertain You”.

The spectacle of such a performance is no longer remarkable, with entertainers continually outdoing themselves in competition with each other and in upkeep with an ever-increasing range of special effects. What is remarkable is that the performer is a chef.<sup>28</sup> That said, Jamie Oliver is an exceptional case because this kind of performance is not (yet, at least) the norm among celebrity chefs. But neither, in a celebrity culture, is it sufficiently anomalous to be considered extraordinary; something which the anonymous 1955 reviewer of the “decline” in television cooking surely would have concluded. Yet the case of Jamie Oliver is extraordinary in many ways, and not only because the spectacle he provides is bigger than most, but because

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<sup>27</sup> Approximately USD 64,00-71,00; ZAR 468,00-523,00 (based on the daily average Interbank exchange rates, 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> September, 2006, [www.oanda.com](http://www.oanda.com))

<sup>28</sup> The show did include live musical performances from Oliver’s band, Scarlet Division, for which he is the drummer, but it was primarily a cooking spectacle.

his career singularly encapsulates the contradictions and ambiguities central to the food media industry – entertainment against education, professionalism versus amateurism, representation against reality – that are central, in turn, to what Adema calls ‘the ambiguity of modernity’ (op. cit.).

*Jamie’s Kitchen* is illustrative. A documentary on the making of “real” chefs by a celebrity chef, the show’s premise is empowerment. In the initial episode we witness Oliver’s first misgivings as he realises his trainees are under some delusions about the hard work that goes into professional cooking. He speaks to the camera: “it’s not all about ... you know, what they see of me, you know, TV chefs and book tours and all that; ... that’s rubbish, it never happens. It’s gonna [sic] be really hard work”.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, however, the project is designed to circumvent the historical route to professionalism by shortening the typical three years of training to just one.<sup>30</sup> This theme of the “real” world versus television is prevalent throughout the series, with malingering trainees repeatedly being warned, in the words of one instructor, “In the trade, this would have been stopped a long time ago” (Ep.2). The diegetic world of *Jamie’s Kitchen*, indeed, balances precariously between the television show as an intrusion on his own life (Narrator: “This is meant to be Jamie’s holiday; a few precious days with wife Jules and baby Poppy. But now he’s going to have to rush straight back to the college, leaving her holding the baby”, Ep.3), and the priority of the project in that life, for instance when he sneaks off in the middle of the night – fully aware that Jules would “kill” him if she knew – to mentor three truants

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<sup>29</sup> He repeats as much in the fourth episode: “[They think] it’s all lovely, it’s all good... But you know what, cooking in the real world, when the shit hits the fan, it’s horrible. I can’t think of anywhere worse. It scares me”.

<sup>30</sup> As Oliver tells the trainees on their first day at London’s Westminster Kingsway College: “Welcome to my old college; this is where I spent three years of my life, doing what you guys are going to do in a year” (Ep.1).

who had been placed on nocturnal bakery duty. Seeing positive results on the second night, a tired Oliver concludes, “Knowledge is a lovely thing to give people” (Ep.3).

Oliver gives more than knowledge; the fact that thirteen of the fifteen original trainees had not only skills but also employment after one year with the chef literalises the empowerment that Adema credits television chefs with providing. But more than these students, and more than any viewers who take away real knowledge from food television, is the empowerment of the celebrity. Oliver may have said, as he did, that “It’s not for me, I’m getting nothing out of this.... It’s completely for them” (Ep.3). Had that been entirely true, it wouldn’t have been made for television, and neither, by that token, would it have been *Jamie’s Kitchen*. This is part of the humanised product, and it is in recognition of the chef as powerful commodity that professional rivalries exist whereby chefs routinely – and publicly – criticise one another for “selling out”.<sup>31</sup> A case in point was when Clarissa Dickson-Wright called Oliver a ‘whore’ (Bloomfield and Carrell, 2004) for endorsing, as part of his contract with Sainsbury’s, a brand of farmed salmon that he wouldn’t apparently consume himself, nor serve in his restaurant.<sup>32</sup> The *Guardian*’s Mark Lawson, who described the chef as a ‘media saint’ after the success of *Jamie’s Kitchen*, and compares him to Richard Branson, suggests that Oliver’s appeal lies in his transparency:

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<sup>31</sup> Other examples include Raymond Blanc’s declaration that chefs on television represented a professional disgrace by providing “sensational rubbish” for “morons”. Following the news that Blanc was to star in his own Reality show, *The Restaurant* (BBC2, 2007), Ramsay responded by calling his colleague a “two-faced French twat” (Taylor, 2006). Marco Pierre White also recently retracted his claim that “As a TV chef, you dilute your currency” after agreeing to take over from Ramsay as the host of the U.S. TV game show *Hell’s Kitchen* (Johnson, 2007). Ramsay and White are famously antagonistic, such as when Ramsay admitted to stealing a reservation book from his own restaurant and blaming White (Barnes, 2007). Oliver had his own say about colleagues during his interview with Hattenstone: “[Q]uite a lot of the chefs I grew up adoring, a lot of them turned out to be fucking arrogant little shits” (Hattenstone, 2005).

<sup>32</sup> The farmed salmon in question was the cheapest available in U.K. supermarkets in 2004. The fish farming industry was blamed by environmentalists for destroying Britain’s ‘sensitive marine environment’, and scientists had also suggested that the industrial fish could increase the risk of cancer (Bloomfield and Carrell, 2004).

Forget what Jamie can do with a chicken or a handful of scallops. It is his personal recipe that everyone in the media and business will be desperate to understand and copy. It shouldn't be possible to be at the same time the face of Sainthood and the face of Sainsbury's but he has managed it.... Objectively, his supermarket ads should be ridiculous: a multi-millionaire encouraging the public to buy cheap food. And yet they work, presumably because Oliver manages to come across as decent, fun and real.

(Lawson, 2002)

Not all celebrity chefs can boast the philanthropic streak that Oliver does, and which similarly informed his campaign to improve school food in the U.K., but this extract ends on the word that most do boast, and which increasingly sells as a commodity in its own right: 'real'.<sup>33</sup>

What is in evidence, so far, is the enormous shift that has happened between 1955 and 2007 where the outlook for 'TV cooks' is not only massively lucrative, but their 'television cooking' has expanded beyond television to the stage, the internet, to supermarkets, and to personal cell phones. Yet this only describes the situation in which chefs have become, as William Skidelsky puts it, 'the new aristocrats - or at least the new plutocrats' (Skidelsky, 2006). In order to understand why this is so, and why, furthermore, the word 'real' has taken on such significance when quite plainly much of what we see on television – or even on stage for that matter – is a construct, we need to look to the consumer, and to remember Cullather's suggestion that, 'The construction of a postwar international order began with food' (Cullather, 2007:55). To recollect, Cullather was referring to the politicisation of food whereby the calorie

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<sup>33</sup> Witness the preview for BBC Food show *Safari Chef*, featuring chef Mike Robinson stalking the bush with a rifle, then crouching over a pot on burning coals. In the accompanying voice over, Robinson tells us, "You don't hunt, you don't eat: this is a *real* food programme; none of that pre-preparing stuff".

became instrumental to quantifying national resources and in determining international politics.<sup>34</sup>

The postwar order of food is equally visible in the industrial, social and economic advances, including the rise of the celebrity chef, that characterise the decades following the war and up to the present day. These changes are already visible in the cookbook industry, and beyond that, in the wide-ranging field of food literature, both of which reflect and respond to shifting food “cultures”. These cultures include the commodification of artifice that takes root in the rise – and initial celebration – of convenience foods, designed to make life easier by decreasing time and, through the economic advantages of mass industrial production, money spent in the kitchen. The economy of time, to be sure, is central to the shift from a producing to a consuming society. Capitalising on the adage that time is money, lack of time – the only commodity that cannot be bought, nor manufactured – is continually recompensed by time-saving devices, convenience and fast foods included; the process by which, as Debord described it, ‘The reality of time has been replaced by the advertisement of time’ (1995:154).

One consequence of the ostensible empowerment represented by saving time is that “saving” labour amounts, not only to loss of labour, but also to the loss of *knowledge* of labour. This, I believe, accounts for Adema’s ‘ambiguity of modernity’ (op. cit.), which is another way to articulate the progressive detachment from labour, time, and history that exemplify the modern consumer economy with its stress on eternal youth – “youth-capital”, in Debord’s words (1995:160) – and the new. Cookbooks that keep taking people “back to basics” represent one strain of commodity that accommodates and perpetuates the lack of knowledge and memory

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<sup>34</sup> Cullather goes on to suggest that ““food” lost its subjective, cultural character and evolved into a material instrument of statecraft’ (2007:3).

that result from a convenience culture aimed at simplifying life. Television is another. Debord made no secret of his misgivings about the medium in the letter that prefaces this chapter. In *Society of the Spectacle*, he continues: ‘the time-saving constantly sought by modern society, whether in the speed of vehicles or in the use of dried soups, is concretely translated for the population of the United States in the fact that the mere contemplation of television occupies it for an average of three to six hours a day’ (1995:153).

That was in 1967, and Debord understandably took little account of food television, the site which today perfectly crystallises ‘the paralysis of history and memory’ (Debord, 1995:158) that is central to spectacular society. This is evident in the manufactured culture that emerges, to recall Adema, from the likes of celebrity chef Lagasse empowering people to ‘speak the languages of cooking and cuisine’ (op. cit.). Adema was speaking of what she termed ‘traditionally elite foodways’, that is, the language of cooking – or “secrets” – historically reserved for chefs. Referring to the array of celebrity branded commodities on the market, Skidelsky corroborates Adema’s analysis:

The good news is that, in today’s world, it is perfectly possible to pretend that you’re a chef even if you are nothing of the sort. ... Armed with tools such as these, all of us can feel better about the fact that we are not Gordon Ramsay. (Skidelsky, 2006)

Skidelsky’s comments underline the currency and desirability of “being”, or pretending to be, a celebrity chef. Yet he equally intimates the two things on which the market for these products pivot: lack and dissatisfaction. The average modern consumer lacks not only the history and language of a traditionally elite food culture

and the training required to be a professional chef, but also, and more importantly, any food culture with roots in lived history and tradition.

This claim may seem incongruous in the face of the current plethora of available food “cultures” variously packaged as ideologies and principles, including those that disavow convenience and lay stress on reclaiming history and tradition, such as Slow Food. Yet it is my contention that the rise of the celebrity chef is directly linked to the postwar economy of plenty that begins by compensating for a real lack – wartime shortages – and concludes by manufacturing another lack in its place. It is the lack on which an economic order based on consumption depends, and food media, particularly television, is its logical culmination because it provides endless representations of the one commodity – food – that people can never get enough of, and because it caters so relentlessly to what people have lost thanks to six decades of convenience. The paradox of food media is that it caters to loss on the premise of empowerment, and this is nowhere more evident than in the figure of the celebrity chef as dispenser of expertise and authority. The issue of representation is paramount; one of the marked differences between previous “celebrities” (Child and Cradock) and those on our screens today (Oliver and Lagasse) is that the latter are increasingly, to return to Adema’s apt phrasing, ‘makers and marketers of commodities’ (op. cit.). Put another way, the naturalization of the media phenomenon that is the twenty-first century celebrity chef is testament more to the demand for the ‘humanised’ product – the commodity with a face – that constitutes consumer experience in an age of access than it is to any inherent use value in the figure.

The example of Oliver, albeit exceptional, should highlight that it is far from my intention to disavow the actual reach of the celebrity chef. Yet Oliver’s various triumphs – social, political, and economic – should equally highlight another

important point. The existence of a market for representations of food and for food-related products with “personalities” suggests and confirms the superfluity – or, to invoke Marx, the exchange, rather than use value – of food. In Kurlansky’s summary, ‘Those with the luxury not to hunger for food hunger for celebrities – the royalty of our age’ (Kurlansky, 2007).<sup>35</sup> The celebrity chef, in this analysis, emerges as the embodiment of the popular fetishism of food, and within this system, Oliver’s feats are not extraordinary at all. Indeed, in a world order that revolves literally around food – politically, socially, and economically – and that is at the same time predicated on consumerism, it makes perfect sense that the most inspiring political figure be the celebrity chef. It is the literal and figurative conflation of food consumption and economic consumerism that enhances the so-called celebrity capital of the chef who, unlike other public figures with enormous cultural and economic influence such as film stars<sup>36</sup> and footballers, has the potential to influence the most mundane and necessary of daily tasks. As Oliver responded to the question of whether he found it strange to be involved in an election issue following his school food campaign, “Yeah, it was weird. But I’m not surprised, because if you can’t feed our kids properly at school, why on earth would you have the right to take our tax or send our troops to war?” (in Hattenstone, 2005).

On the one hand, then, the chef is the “natural” beneficiary of an economic system which inclines to food as its number one and, as becomes increasingly evident with eating trends proper, its most ambiguously loaded commodity. Yet this is where the term celebrity chef becomes potentially oxymoronic, because the fetishism that attends celebrity culture threatens the specialisation of labour historically definitive of

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<sup>35</sup> Kurlansky echoes Barthes’ claim that food ‘has a twofold value, being nutrition as well as protocol, and its value as protocol becomes increasingly more important *as soon as the basic needs are satisfied*’ (op. cit., my emphases).

<sup>36</sup> George Clooney and Angelina Jolie, for instance, both of whom use their celebrity capital to speak out against human rights issues.

the professional chef; what Adema referred to as the ‘social hierarchy in which food serves as cultural capital’ (op. cit.). When chefs “empower” a mass audience through television, that hierarchy is replaced by a global uniformity, and it is the weight on appearance over substance – exemplified in celebratory style by Bruce Robertson’s restaurant, *The Showroom* – that accounts, I maintain, for professional rivalries and anxieties, from auteur-chefs trying to copyright “signature” creations to television personalities accusing colleagues of whoring themselves. Added to this, as we shall see shortly with the example of Rachael Ray, is the fact that professional training is no longer the prerequisite to becoming a celebrity chef.

To return our focus to the consumer, however, the naturalisation of a celebrity culture around chefs, or the “‘spontaneous’ consent’ (Gramsci, 1971:12) that escalates its hegemonic status, while indicative of a culture of plenty, is at the same time suggestive of discontent as a central tenet of consumerism. This is not least evident in globalised societies where “culture” and traditions themselves are interchangeable as daily commodities, as manifest in the currency of the real and authentic which only attests, in the end, to the prevalence of the unreal and the inauthentic.<sup>37</sup> One measure of this is the extent to which food and branded commodities – restaurants included – allow consumers to ‘pretend’ that they are celebrity chefs or, indeed, that they have a little of ‘Jamie’s fairy dust’, to use the phrasing of one eager reviewer of *Fifteen*, who ate in the restaurant on a day when Oliver wasn’t even in the kitchen (see n.18). This bespeaks, once again, the mechanisms of interpellation, whereby products with personalities, including the

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<sup>37</sup> Buford provides a telling anecdote about Mario Batali which underlines the ambiguous correlation between the real and the represented in the context of a television celebrity: ‘I was put in mind of a story Mario had once told me, of the first time he’d been spotted on the street, stopped by two guys who recognized him from television, immediately falling into the “Hey, dude, wow, it’s, like, that guy from the Food thing” routine, and Mario, flattered, had thanked them courteously, and they were so disappointed – “crushed” – that he now travels with a repertoire of quick jokes so as to be, always, in character’ (Buford, 2006a:158).

celebrity chef, “hail” the consumer into finding some ‘coherent sense of purpose and identity’ (Eagleton, 1983:172). Lack and dissatisfaction constitute ‘the reality which is necessarily *ignored*’ (Althusser, 1971:182) in this process, for the simple reason that looking to someone or something for a sense of self accentuates – as much as it distracts from – a void. Having said that, not all consumers disavow their insufficiencies. As U.K. actress Arabella Weir put it: “All that plethora of cookery shows really does is make me feel insecure.... They don’t make me think, ‘Oh, what a great thing to do with scallops and chives,’ I just think, ‘Oh God! I’m just a fat oaf who lives in a horrible kitchen!’” (in Pears, 2006).

To conclude the discussion on Oliver, the consumer perspective that consolidates the oxymoronic quality of the term celebrity chef is finally evident in the media controversy that erupted in 2005 after the chef slit a lamb’s throat as part of his then-latest series, *Jamie’s Great Italian Escape* (2005). Though visibly uncomfortable with the task, Oliver justified himself: “A chef who’s cooked 2,000 sheep should kill at least one, otherwise you’re a fake” (in Robertson, 2005). Besides the concern that the animal had not been stunned first and that the killing was therefore “inhumane” according to EU regulations, an overriding concern was that children should see an animal slaughtered on television. In this instance, however, fellow chefs came to Oliver’s defense, including Dickson-Wright:

“If I had my way it would have been shown at 6pm, when as many children as possible would have been watching. For once, I think Jamie is right to remind us of one of the most basic fundamentals of life: if we want to eat meat, an animal has to die.” (cit. Rossant, 2005b)<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Singer Morrissey, formerly of The Smiths and a supporter of the U.K.-based Animal Rights Militia, publicly criticised Oliver and Dickson-Wright for this incident (Cullen, 2006), and also used the occasion of a 2006 concert in Wembley Stadium to pronounce “only three things wrong with modern

Gennaro Contaldo, Oliver's former mentor, agreed: "People who go into supermarkets don't believe that this happens. It's not something where you press a button and you get a lamb. I respect and support Jamie in full" (cit. McIntyre and Sealey, 2005).<sup>39</sup> By drawing attention to the gulf between professional exigencies – what to do not to be a 'fake' – and the detached experience that constitutes a substantial portion of consumer interactions with food, this incident also describes the prevalent preference for neat packaging that effectively conceals the history and labour behind a product.<sup>40</sup> It remains to be seen, finally, whether "celebrity" or "chef" prevails in Oliver's new series, *Jamie at Home* (Channel 4, 2007). The advertisement for the show, scheduled to premiere in August 2007, features Oliver in a vegetable garden. He begins his promotion with an incantation by now customary to food media: "So I say to the guys at Channel 4, look, we've got to take things back to basics, you know, keep them simple..."

### 6.3 Rachael Ray

In keeping with the topics of advertising, simplicity, and specialisation, but now from an American perspective, is the example of a teaser for Rachael Ray's new talk show, *Rachael Ray*, which premiered in September 2006. In terms of media profile, Ray – not a professionally trained chef, and one who famously recommends processed and

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England... one: Jamie Oliver; two: Jamie Oliver; three: Jamie – [mimics shooting a gun] boom! – Oliver". The clip was posted on YouTube by "nate47" (Nate47, 2006).

<sup>39</sup> U.K. TV chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall also uses his television shows to challenge the detached consumer experience of shopping in a supermarket. According to Emma Brockes, Fearnley-Whittingstall finds something 'profoundly wrong ... with the disconnect that has developed between what we eat and our knowledge of where it comes from, an ignorance exploited by the supermarkets and resulting in great swathes of people having almost no sense of what real food should taste like' (Brockes, 2006).

<sup>40</sup> Daniel Patterson similarly traces what he terms the current 'hands-free approach to cooking' to the postwar convenience culture, when 'processed foods soared in popularity, and supermarkets began to sell meat and fish as disembodied, plastic-shrouded parts' (Patterson, 2007).

convenience foods – is one of America’s leading celebrity chefs. With salary of \$6 million<sup>41</sup> in 2006, she was ranked as number 81 on *Forbes*’ “Celebrity 100”<sup>42</sup> and included under Artists and Entertainers in *Time*’s “100: The People Who Shape Our World”. The story of Ray, or Ray-Ray, as her fans call her,

is a quintessentially self-made American success story. Small-town girl and specialty food buyer hits upon the idea to teach “30 Minute Meal” classes as a way of moving the merchandise. The classes lead to TV appearances, which lead to cookbooks and a Food Network gig, which lead to guesting on “Oprah” and subsequent total media domination. Ray has no formal culinary training, and a brash willingness to embrace pre-washed produce and canned broth. She has boasted that she’s completely unqualified for every job she’s ever had. Unsurprisingly, she pisses a lot of people off. (Williams, 2006b)

Ray, like Oliver, has a prolific product range. Between 1999 and 2006, she authored 12 cookbooks (1999-2006),<sup>43</sup> launched a magazine (*Every Day with Rachael Ray*, 2005), and hosted four food television series for Food Network.<sup>44</sup> She also endorses a range of knives (Füritechnics) and cookware (Anolon), and, in collaboration with NASA, has presented ‘shuttle astronauts [with] some delicious ideas for dining in space’ (McDaniel, 2006). In an article in the business section of the *New York Times*,

<sup>41</sup> *Forbes* estimates include ‘dollars earned solely from entertainment income. Management, agent and attorney fees have not been deducted. Estimates by *forbes*; sources include Billboard, Pollstar, Adams Media Research, Nielsen SoundScan and Nielsen BookScan. Rankings are generated by combining earnings with other metrics: Web mentions on Google press clips compiled by LexisNexis; TV/radio mentions by Factiva; and number of times a celebrity’s face appeared on the cover of 26 major consumer magazines’ (www.forbes.com).

<sup>42</sup> Three other celebrity chefs were ranked by *Forbes* in 2006: Wolfgang Puck (89; \$16m); Emeril Lagasse (94; \$10m), and Mario Batali (97; \$5m).

<sup>43</sup> *30-Minute Meals* (1999) *Comfort Foods* (2001); *Veggie Meals* (2001); *30-Minute Meals 2* (2003); *Get Togethers: Rachael Ray 30 Minute Meals* (2003); *\$40 a Day: Best Eats in Town* (2004); *Rachael Ray’s 30-Minute Meals: Cooking ‘Round the Clock* (2004); *Rachael Ray’s 30-Minute Meals for Kids: Cooking Rocks!* (2004); *Rachael Ray’s 30-Minute Get Real Meals: Eat Healthy Without Going to Extremes* (2005); *Rachael Ray 365: No Repeats: A Year of Deliciously Different Dinners* (2005); *Rachael Ray’s Express Lane Meals: What to Keep on Hand, What to Buy Fresh for the Easiest Ever 30 Minute Meals* (2006); *Rachael Ray 2-4-6-8: Cooking for Couples or Crowds* (2006).

<sup>44</sup> *30-Minute Meals* (2001); *\$40 a Day* (2002); *Inside Dish* (2004); *Tasty Travels* (2005).

tellingly titled “Rachael Ray Gives the Gift of Time” (October, 2006), David Carr reveals that at the time of writing, Ray’s *30 Minute Meals* was the highest rated show on Food Network, with 11 million weekly viewers. Her appeal, he concludes, is that ‘Ms. Ray’s recipes may call for store-bought turkey loaf but she is really trafficking in the ultimate modern luxury: time’ (Carr, 2006).

Time and convenience, similarly, form a central premise of *Rachael Ray*<sup>45</sup> which, just one month after its debut, earned Ray the title of television’s “Q” queen, that is, ‘the most likeable U.S. television host’, outranking Oprah Winfrey by five places (U.P.I., 2006).<sup>46</sup> The *Forbes*’ 2007 listing duly ranks Ray number 66, with a salary now at \$16 million.<sup>47</sup> The transcript that follows is one of a series of ten 29-30 second spots that were aired prior to the show:

(SS: side shot; MS: medium shot; CU: close up; MCU: medium close up; FS: front shot; BS: back shot; italics denote different voices)

	Shot	Dialogue	Comment
1	SS (low angle) RR sitting at table, opening out arms as she speaks	RR: Everyone says when they start a new	
2	Front view MS, moving/unsteady camera	daytime show, “Oh, you’ve never seen anything like it and I watch them all and I’m like “yeah, I’ve seen a lot like it”	smile 1
3	MS Black woman with child in carrier	<i>Daytime TV needs Some</i>	
4	RR flopping onto red couch	<i>body who is not afraid to be different</i>	smile 2
5	MS Black child	<i>I love RR</i>	
6	Zoom in on RR laughing face	<i>she’s real</i>	smile 3
7	Different angle, closer	<i>fun</i> (higher octave) <i>down to earth</i>	smile 4
8	Angle White woman (chef)	<i>she’s special</i>	
9	Angle CU RR hugging child	<i>She’s got</i>	smile 5
10	MS RR (from behind) walking onto TV set, waving at live audience	<i>the magazine, the</i>	

<sup>45</sup> Reuters correspondent Ray Richmond describes the interactive component of the show: ‘Interstitials leading in and out of the commercial breaks feature viewer questions and revelations such as the best way to toss a salad if you lack a salad spinner: Put it in the washing machine and hit “Spin.” Seriously’ (Richmond, 2006).

<sup>46</sup> The “Q” rating is ‘basically a measure of a television star’s appeal or likability to the audience’. The survey was conducted by the syndication company King World, and used a sample of 1,800 viewers (U.P.I., 2006).

<sup>47</sup> *Forbes*’ 2007 list included four chefs besides Ray: Lagasse (87; \$9m); Puck (88; \$13m); Paula Deen (99; \$4m), and Bobby Flay (100; \$2m).

11	FS (behind cameras) RR on set, zoom in	<i>TV shows</i>	
12	Zoom in (angle) on face with smiling RR	<i>the cookbook</i>	smile 6
13	MS RR on red couch	<i>she's like</i>	smile 7
14	MCU face (new angle)	<i>your best girlfriend</i>	smile 8
15	CU woman on right of frame	<i>she is the best thing</i>	
16	Pan/zoom left to RR sitting on edge of a stage, laughing	<i>to happen to daytime TV</i>	smile 9
17	BS RR on a chair, lifts up child, smiling	Everybody wants	smile 10
18	High angle, RR left in frame, in a clothes shop, tries on hat	me to keep being me and that's all	smile 11
19	MCU walking on street, now serious	I know how to do, is have a good laugh	no smile
20	MCU angle, laughing		smile 12
21 (29 secs)	Fade over, RR logo	<b>“Everyone needs a little R and R. Rachael Ray”</b>	

In the space of 29 seconds, we see Ray smiling twelve times, over fifteen shots (75% of the whole). During most of these fifteen shots we hear voices of other women, praising Ray. There are eleven different voices, but we see only three of the figures who speak. Besides Ray, we see a black woman with a baby on her breast, we see a 9-10 yr old child and we see a white woman in a chef's jacket. This covers the broad spectrum of consumers in terms of race, age, and occupation (the professional and the nurturer). Each of the disembodied voices could belong to any of these women. That Ray, by implication, is for everyone is consolidated by the different voices: “Daytime TV needs some body who is not afraid to be different”; “I love Rachael Ray”; “she's real”; “fun”; “down to earth”; “she's special”; “she's got the magazine”; “the TV shows”; “the cookbook”; “she's like your best girlfriend”; “she is the best thing to happen to daytime TV”.

In the final shots, Ray explains what it is that makes her different: “Everybody wants me to keep being me and that's all I know how to do, is have a good laugh”. Significantly, this is the only shot where she is not laughing or smiling, suggesting this is the moment that she should be taken seriously. The other nine teasers each follow a similar pattern: a moment or two of “intimacy” or “confession”, Ray in a

private moment, behind the scenes, interspersed with everywoman's face and voice. Some also feature men. One, titled *Just Add You* breaks the footage with bright orange screens proclaiming: "No Artificial Ingredients"; "Never Frozen"; "100% Natural". In short, the show, which features cooking as much as talking, caters to all the prevalent consumer anxieties about the artificial, in food as in life. In a compelling demonstration of the commodification of lack, the trailer exemplifies the strengths of advertising because it sells itself in its entirety as indispensable before it is even available. Yet its promises are those of every single new talk show. Some glimpse into "reality": no artificial ingredients; fresh (never frozen); 100% natural. The final line, "Everybody needs a little R&R", also underscores that the product on offer is not talk, nor food; the commodity is Ray herself.

From one perspective, consumers need Rachael Ray as much they need daytime television, which is not at all, and it is tempting here to invoke Adorno and Horkheimer's suggestion that 'the triumph of advertising in the culture industry is that consumers feel compelled to buy and use its products even though they see through them' (1969:167). But such a critique neglects the extent to which media in the twenty-first century, and particularly food media, as demonstrated by the representative case of Jamie Oliver, are increasingly constitutive of people's life choices, above and beyond what Thorstein Veblen identified in 1899 as "conspicuous consumption" (Veblen, 1912).<sup>48</sup> The example of Ray is striking for what it suggests of a paradigm shift whereby, in a virtual reversal of the principle of conspicuous consumption as a (false) display of wealth and status, the stress is now on an unrelenting display of lack of wealth, status and, that historical marker of the leisured

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<sup>48</sup> With clear echoes of Marx's commodity fetishism, Veblen's focus on display rather than function is also the basis of Debord's critique of the 'generalized sliding of *having* into *appearing*' (Debord, 1995:17), which becomes all the more acute with technological sophistications – films, television, and so on – that aid advertising by making it possible to represent to consumers in visual form what they could have, or "be".

classes, time. Her annual \$16 million aside, Ray and her 30-Minute, \$40 a day meals embodies each of these features, making her the ‘most down-to-earth TV star on the planet’ (Peysner, 2005), and the ‘most accessible celebrity ever’ (Stein, 2006). It is the transparency of the celebrity chef who professes her lack of qualifications that is the triumph in advertising for the brand that is Rachael Ray; consumers don’t need to ‘see through’ the product, because everything is laid bare, including her personal life. As one blogger noted approvingly of the show, ‘she has segments like “outing” her closet where she shows hideous items from her closet. She even outed her husband as a pretty man by bringing in his dop kit<sup>49</sup> and showing us all the creams and such he uses daily.... She *is* the girl next door’ (Corrie, 2006: author's emphasis).<sup>50</sup>

Similarly to Oliver, the strong relationship between food and consumerism works to Ray’s great economic advantage because, in addition to its entertainment value, her unaffected ‘girl next door’ style validates and perpetuates the lifestyle choices that people make, particularly those – like using convenience foods – that lay outside what Adema terms ‘traditionally elite foodways’. Understandably, and to return to some of the anxieties resulting from the proverbial “disappearance of frontiers” that Orwell identified as discursively central to globalisation (op. cit.), Ray occasions substantial hostility,<sup>51</sup> including a dedicated online “Rachael Ray Sucks

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<sup>49</sup> A toiletry or accessory bag, typically for men.

<sup>50</sup> Ray stresses accessibility as central: “We’re making accessible television, that involves travel and everyday tips and what to have for dinner all in one show... When we have experts on, they’re your next-door neighbours” (in Huff, 2006). Executive producer Janet Annino explains the choice as fundamental to Ray’s “grassroots” character: “She has to be by the people. That’s who she is. You’ve got to let her be her. If I take that away, I’ve failed her” (ibid.). Bob Tuschman, head of programming at Food Network when Buford interviewed him in 2006, confirmed as much: “What makes Rachael Ray so exciting to people is that she speaks their language, shops at the same places they shop, and uses the same ingredients” (in Buford, 2006b).

<sup>51</sup> Juliette Rossant underlines the obvious in her review of *Chefography*, Food Network’s televised biographies of their leading food personalities: ‘The very name *Chefography* is a bit misleading. Is Sandra Lee a chef? Is Rachael Ray?’ (Rossant, 2007).

Community”.<sup>52</sup> In her “Defense of Rachael Ray”, *Slate*’s managing editor Jill Pellettieri responds:

It’s easy to see why: Ray rejects specialty ingredients, elaborate recipes, and other foodie staples. But she deserves our respect. She understands how Americans really cook, and she’s an exceptional entertainer.... Her Super Sloppy Joes<sup>53</sup> certainly aren’t haute cuisine, but that’s no reason for highfalutin chefs to knock her. Consider what Ray brings to the table: Creativity, adeptness, speed. Her skills are as estimable as those of any Michelin-star-winning chef, and they’re far more practical. (Pellettieri, 2005)

The practicality of Ray, combined with ‘understanding’ Americans is paramount, and provides the link between on- and off-screen cooking. Fellow celebrity Wolfgang Puck likened her influence to that of Julia Child;<sup>54</sup> “completely different personality, but the message is the same. The message is, she’s not élitist. She gives confidence to people to go into their own kitchens” (in Stein, 2006). Getting people to go into their own kitchens accounts for Mario Batali’s claim, in his 2006 profile on her for *Time*, that, ‘In fewer than five years, Rachael Ray, 38, has radically changed the way America cooks dinner’ (Batali, 2006b).

While Beard and Child before her have similarly been credited with “revolutionising” the way America eats, the enormous reach of modern day media compared to their postwar capacity is enough to invalidate the comparison.

Viewership of the Food Network alone multiplied from 6.5 million in its inaugural year (1993), to 88 million subscribers in 2006 (Dziemianowicz, 2006). Ray’s

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<sup>52</sup> Moderated by “Azraelle”, the virtual community has been in existence since 2003 (See Azraelle, 2003-2007).

<sup>53</sup> A Sloppy Joe is a sandwich typically consisting of pan-fried minced meat (ground beef) seasoned with various condiments (for example, Worcestershire sauce), and served in a bun.

<sup>54</sup> Child is often mentioned in comparison or contrast to Ray. Alison Arnett, for instance, claims that ‘Ray has a winning smile, and a breezy way of telling her viewers how easy it is to cook. But Julia Child and her “Mastering the Art of French Cooking” she is not’ (Arnett, 2006).

success, in this way, testifies to a curious but significant media phenomenon whereby consumers are empowered as agents in their kitchens, but contrary to the example of Lagasse who empowers his fans by enabling them to appear knowledgeable, this agency is defined by lack of skills and knowledge. Like the perpetual cookbooks that take you back to basics, Ray empowers consumers by validating their limitations in the kitchen. Chef and fellow television personality Bourdain articulates the extent of her reach:

Complain all you want. It's like railing against the pounding surf. She only grows stronger and more powerful. Her ear-shattering tones louder and louder. We KNOW she can't cook. She shrewdly tells us so. So...what is she selling us? Really? She's selling us satisfaction, the smug reassurance that mediocrity is quite enough. She's a friendly, familiar face who appears regularly on our screens to tell us that "Even your dumb, lazy ass can cook this!" ... Where the saintly Julia Child sought to raise expectations, to enlighten us, make us better – teach us – and in fact, did, Rachael uses her strange and terrible powers to narcotize her public with her hypnotic mantra of Yummo<sup>55</sup> and Evoo<sup>56</sup> and Sammys.<sup>57</sup> (Bourdain, 2007)

While Bourdain's cynicism is in keeping with his "bad boy" public persona, he draws attention to the commodification of ignorance as a central form of distraction from the political realities of everyday life. As *Time*'s Joel Stein, who describes Ray as 'antisnob and utterly nonaspirational', phrased it: 'In a time of war and a struggling economy, this domestic goddess is a down-home Martha Stewart<sup>58</sup> – REAL SIMPLE<sup>59</sup> without the complexity' (Stein, 2006).

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<sup>55</sup> Ray's term for "delicious".

<sup>56</sup> Extra virgin olive oil.

<sup>57</sup> Sandwiches.

<sup>58</sup> Since the publication of *Entertainment* (1989) – the best-selling U.S. cookbook since Child and Beck's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* – Martha Stewart was for many years considered the

If the example of Jamie Oliver demonstrates the political reach of a celebrity chef, Rachael Ray exemplifies the diversion – understood both as entertainment and distraction – that consolidates the appeal of the figure. The distraction is all the more powerful because it parades as central to real life; an effect achieved jointly by the increasingly requisite “reality” component of food television, and the fact that these representations can and do inform the way people actually eat and behave. In the case of Ray, this is finally verified by the inclusion in the 2007 edition of the *Oxford American College Dictionary* of “EVOO”, Ray’s favoured acronym for extra virgin olive oil. According to editor Erin McKean, “In order for a word to go in the dictionary, it has to be useful to people. It’s not just enough to be a fabulous celebrity to get your word in the dictionary; you have to make a word that people like to use” (in Lucianovic, 2006). Early examples of television cooks emphasise that personality has always played an important role, whether to entertain or to educate people. Yet the modern food television celebrity typifies the advertising trend of selling an entire lifestyle:<sup>60</sup> emulation is no longer confined to reproducing a dish demonstrated on screen, but now extends even beyond chef-branded commodities in the kitchen to include ideologies – ‘the girl next door’, for instance, which in Bourdain’s vernacular translates to ‘mediocrity’ – and everyday language.

As with the case of Oliver, this interpellation indicates more about the consumer than it does anything inherent in the product, in this case, of the celebrity chef. In his book *Beyond Words: How Language Reveals the Way We Live Now*

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American “guru” of home-making. She was famously accused of and convicted for insider trading, leading to a five-month jail sentence (September 2004 – March 2005).

<sup>59</sup> *Real Simple* is a U.S. lifestyle magazine, subtitled “Life Made Easier”.

<sup>60</sup> As Christen Pears suggests, ‘Viewers are no longer tuning in to watch food being prepared, they’re buying into a lifestyle, whether it’s Jamie’s loft and scooter existence, or Nigella [Lawson]’s middle class, urban domesticity’ (Pears, 2006). Ketchum similarly contends that, ‘Lifestyles are achieved through one’s adornment, speech, forms of leisure, and eating, but one must be schooled. The [Food] network’s new focus on lifestyle programming provided this instruction and enhanced its performance as the new century began’ (Ketchum, 2005:219).

(2006), John Humphrys describes the kind of advertising that prevails in a consumerist economy:

The new geography of the universe has you at the centre of it and around you is a comfort zone in which you should feel good about yourself... Meanwhile, life itself has been replaced by lifestyle. (Humphrys, 2006)

The lifestyle that Ray sells is a zone which relies for its comfort on ease and convenience, and the standardisation of a celebrity acronym that reflects as much<sup>61</sup> gives some credibility to Bourdain's use of the word 'narcotize' (op. cit.).<sup>62</sup> But this does not indicate that Ray wields any 'strange and terrible powers'; rather, it describes the desirability of a comfort zone for its ability to detract from what lies beyond its frame, namely potential discomfort, particularly, as Stein noted, in 'a time of war and a struggling economy' (op. cit.). Unease, it will be remembered, is what characterises Beck's risk society, and Giddens' comments are usefully recollected in this context:

In a world where one can no longer simply rely on tradition to establish what to do in a given range of contexts, people have to take a more active and risk-infused orientation to their relationships and involvements. (Giddens, 1999a)

The risk society is the world outside the comfort zone that Ray endorses, and in a literalisation of the detachment from labour and history that packaged foods

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<sup>61</sup> Following the launch of her "EVOO" brand of olive oil, Ray claimed that, "I first coined 'EVOO' on my cooking show because saying 'extra virgin olive oil' over and over was wordy, and I'm an impatient girl – that's why I make 30-minute meals!" ([www.famousfoods.com/rarayexviolo](http://www.famousfoods.com/rarayexviolo))

<sup>62</sup> Though unrelated to food media, Humphrys similarly suggests that '[o]ur society, which treats us so much as an audience to be entertained and as consumers to be led to market, often uses language as an anaesthetic' (Humphrys, 2006).

represent, actively engaging with Ray – as her fans do by cooking, eating and speaking like her – equally offers a detachment from political life that appears valid because it centres on food and “real” life. The potentially ‘risk-infused’ aspect of celebrating life Ray-style is that her approach flies in the face of professionalism and the current vogue against convenience culture, often itself earmarked as a “risk”. Yet measured against these uncertainties, Ray represents safety and transparency, and in this schema, consumers certainly do “need” her to authorise their choices, particularly those people who don’t like to be reminded that an animal has to die to become meat. Given that non-engagement with politics is one feature of childhood,<sup>63</sup> Stein’s comment that ‘Ray is our nation’s kindergarten teacher’ (Stein, 2006) may have more substance, in the end, than a reference to the fact that children like her too.

To summarise, this chapter has so far focused primarily on the two cases of celebrity chefs Jamie Oliver and Rachael Ray. As personalities whose popularity is, if not exclusively due to, then certainly spread through, television, they illustrate the extent to which *Time*’s 1955 prediction for ‘TV cooks’ was mistaken. Yet together, they equally demonstrate the strains between performance and instruction, the professional and the amateur, and knowledge and ignorance that informed that early commentary on the difference between ‘television cooking’ and ‘good cooking’. In

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<sup>63</sup> In his Situationist text, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (1967), Raoul Vaneigem articulates children as the only members of society who are ‘free’, because their lives exist outside the time-constraints of modern-day life: ‘The child’s days escape adult time; their time is swollen by subjectivity, passion, dreams haunted by reality. Outside the educators look on, waiting, watch in hand, till the child joins and fits the cycle of the hours. It’s they who *have time*’ (Vaneigem, 1967). In his *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947), Lefebvre similarly describes the entrance into political life as a ‘drama of youth’ which mirrors the contradictions of a capitalist society: ‘More biological than truly human, this organization [capitalism] smothers the individual, dividing him and stunting his development at the very moment it is striving to create him as a human individual.... These contradictions are at the same time a measure of greatness, the richness and the suffering of the age in which we live. We are all familiar with the drama of youth destroyed by this arrested state of the human being, as also with that drama of more mature, more conscious years, acted out within the asphyxiating straightjacket of fragmented activities’ (Lefebvre, 1991:150).

this way, the careers of Oliver and Ray suggest a notable continuity in reflections on the role of television, and particularly on the representation of something “real”, such as food, on television. One major difference between the ‘old days’ of televised cooking and now is in the saturation of off-screen life by on-screen representations, most obviously in the form of chef-branded commodities, but just as importantly in the adoption of celebrity lifestyles beyond recipes and products. While the 1955 *Time* reference to Dion Lucas not having ‘a horde of imitators’ presumably referred to a lack of similar television shows, imitation of modern food celebrities extends beyond the screen to consumers, and reinforces the interpellative function of television as a representational medium that informs “real” life choices. The influence of food television beyond food underlines the spectacular quality of a society in which social relationships, to return to Debord, are increasingly mediated by images.

Humble recounts the event of the ‘publishing phenomenon’ that was British television chef Delia Smith’s cookbook and television series *Winter Collection* (1995), which resulted in a ‘famous food shortage, as the fresh cranberries she mentioned ... sold out all over the country: in Sainsbury’s sales of cranberries increased by 200 per cent’ (2005:236). While this counts as evidence of the educative, or imitative, function of food television, where consumers are not only tuning for entertainment but also reproducing what they see, the extremism of a ‘food shortage’ also testifies to the vast reach of the food media industry, where even someone like Smith, the so-called Volvo of British cooking – ‘reliable but unadventurous’ (Pears, 2006) – can induce a nationwide desire for a non-staple, in

other words non-necessary, food like cranberries.<sup>64</sup> Given, however, that recurrent and actual food shortages are a rare phenomenon in developed and globalised societies, this example, together with those of Ray and Oliver, also highlight how many consumers are *not* rushing out to buy everything they see prepared on food television. This returns the discussion to what Adema noted as the vicariousness central to the viewing experience of food television.

Complementary to the size of an industry that can inspire a cranberry shortage, or, indeed, the standardisation of a new word, is the difficulty of neat generalisations when it comes to food television,<sup>65</sup> as it is with food literature. Not all celebrity chefs, for instance, are television chefs; out of the fifteen chefs officially designated by Juliette Rossant as exceeding “normal” celebrity status in her *Super Chef: The Making of the Great Modern Restaurant Empires* (2004),<sup>66</sup> less than a third are television personalities.<sup>67</sup> Yet these are the some of the chefs, as we shall see in the following chapter, whose trade in name-brand dining exemplifies the conspicuous consumption of a celebrity culture that relies for its currency on media representation, if not directly on television appearances. Neither, to return to some of

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<sup>64</sup> Smith’s influence on commodity purchases is reminiscent of the effect of Oprah Winfrey on the sales of books she reviews for her book club. Between 1996 and 2002, all 46 books reviewed became bestsellers, resulting in the Association of American Publishers honouring Winfrey for her “unique contribution to American literary life” (DiCarlo, 2003).

<sup>65</sup> Not all ‘food television’, indeed, is transmitted on television, for instance TasteTV: The Indie Food Channel, an amateur web-based channel launched in 2004 by TCB [Tokyo, Chicago, Barcelona] CAFÉ Publishing & Media ([www.tastetv.com](http://www.tastetv.com)). TasteTV is available online or through VOD (Video on Demand). Ellis’ statement, in 1982, that ‘Broadcast TV is a notoriously difficult phenomenon to write about’ (Ellis, 1992:2) due to its already extensive range, is infinitely multiplied with the proliferation of new media in the twenty-first century.

<sup>66</sup> The official definition of super chefs, according to Rossant, is that their ‘businesses reach geographically outside one city and beyond restaurants into other businesses. They are celebrated for their cooking talents and bedazzling, media-savvy ways. They manage large businesses, building brand names and personal wealth unheard of before among chefs. Their business empires are enduring’ (Rossant, 2004b:6). Super chef-empires are further discussed in Chapter 7.

<sup>67</sup> Other celebrity generating systems include the Michelin Guide (launched in 1903, and still recognised as one of the world’s most influential culinary ratings systems (New York (2006) and San Francisco (2007) versions testify to its global recognition), *Food & Wine*’s annual selection of “Best New Chefs” and “Next Culinary Stars”, the James Beard Awards, *Nation’s Restaurant News*’ “MenuMasters Awards” and, non food-specific, *Time*’s “100 People Who Shape Our World”, and *Forbes*’ “Tastemakers” and “Celebrity 100”.

the ambiguities of ‘television cooking’, and which the examples of Ray and Oliver already intimate, is all food television tidily classifiable as either entertainment or education, a case in point being the hit Reality series *Top Chef* (Bravo TV),<sup>68</sup> lauded here by Frank Bruni:

For all its generically hyped-up drama, cheesy gimmickry and abject fealty to the tropes of reality television, “Top Chef” really is about cooking: what goes into it; what comes out of it; what reliably succeeds in the kitchen and on the plate; what predictably doesn’t. (Bruni, 2007c)<sup>69</sup>

It is by this token, moreover, that not all television chefs are celebrity chefs. Stephen Pile suggests that it is because the role of the celebrity is ‘primarily iconic that we only ever have one chef of each type’ (Pile, 2006),<sup>70</sup> thereby placing an ostensible limitation on the prospects of stardom. Yet another telling limitation, and one that equally explains the appeal of a Reality show that ‘really is about cooking’, is that one of the results of the recent increase in “lifestyle” afflictions such as obesity is that food itself is fettered as highly as, if not more than, personality.

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<sup>68</sup> *Top Chef* is hosted by Padma Lakshmi, famously the wife of Salman Rushdie, and has an estimated 2 million weekly viewers (Bruni, 2007c).

<sup>69</sup> Garth Jowett, director of the University of Houston’s School of Communication, contends that the ambiguous line between entertainment and education constitutes the Food Network’s primary achievement: “[P]eople kid themselves into thinking that watching it is an educational experience. So while most people see the experience of watching TV as a guilty pleasure, they feel justified watching these programs” (in Slatalla, 2000)

<sup>70</sup> Pile accordingly arranges U.K. celebrity chefs according to “type”: ‘Gary Rhodes was the Eighties incarnate (lean, hard-working, with a sleek, spiky image) and in a Nineties obsessed with sex, Nigella Lawson was an inevitable post-feminist backlash, pouting libidinally into the fridge. Jamie Oliver is Blairite New Britain. . . . Rick Stein was really about the Cornwall boom that has also seen the expansion of Newquay airport, while Gordon Ramsay embodies Angry Britain, and the Two Fat Ladies prefigured the obesity timebomb’ (ibid.).

## 6.4 Food Porn

Beyond the obvious historical relationship between food and sex,<sup>71</sup> it is in keeping with the sexual connotations of fetishism that the term “food porn”, also known as “gastro porn”, has become naturalised to media representations of food. While there is some academic dispute about the origins of the term, some of its early uses in print include a cookbook review, in 1977, in the *New York Review of Books*, by Alexander Cockburn: ‘True gastro-porn heightens the excitement and also the sense of the unattainable by proffering colored photographs of various completed recipes’ (Cockburn, 1977).<sup>72</sup> As implicit here as it is explicit in non-food pornography is the commodification of fantasy that is already evident in postwar cookbooks in the form of exotic travel, ingredients, and expertise. O’Neill charts the overtly carnal fantasies attached to food media to the 1980s, when generalised affluence was countered by an increased fixation on appearance, or, on what *not* to eat: ‘The pursuit of lean body mass was, after all, second only to the pursuit of lucre in the early 1980s. Treadmills and StairMasters gobbled rare leisure hours, liquid diets were vogue, and both anorexia and bulimia were on the rise. Food writing became voyeuristic, providing windows into a world of unattainable bodies and unimaginable disposable income and time, an unreal world’ (O’Neill, 2003).<sup>73</sup> In this trajectory of the desirable but

<sup>71</sup> As Goody observes of Ghanaian dialects LoDagaa and Gonja, ‘The word for eat (...) is frequently used for sex, and covers much of the semantic field of the word ‘enjoy’ in English’ (1982:114). The mouth’s erogenous functionality accounts for numerous similar examples of eating-related vocabulary in the sexual discourses of most languages, not to mention received ideas about the aphrodisiac qualities of various foods such as oysters and chocolate. See also Korsmeyer: ‘A common denominator in all the associations of female bodies and edibles is the ambiguous meaning of “appetite”, which connotes both sexual and gustatory craving for satisfaction, an association that appears to be more or less universal across dramatically different societies; indeed, the ambiguity of words referring to gustatory and sexual appetites is found in vastly different languages’ (1999:168).

<sup>72</sup> According to Andrew Smith, “food porn” was first included in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1991 (Smith, 2006). A more recent definition is provided by Neil Olonoff, creator of “Foodie Craze”, ‘the fun trivia game for food lovers’: ‘Gastroporn. (noun) The suggestive pictures and prose used to describe recipes in upscale cookbooks or menu items in fancy restaurants. Adjectives used include *succulent, mouth-watering, tantalizing, tender, juicy, and melt-in-your-mouth*’ (Olonoff, 2005).

<sup>73</sup> One of the books reviewed by Cockburn as ‘gastro-porn’ was the now-regarded classic *Cuisine Minceur* (1977) by Michel Guérard. The tradition of *minceur* – “thinning”, or low calorie foods –

inaccessible, O'Neill continues, 'the birth of food porn was all but unavoidable' (ibid.), and it is in testimony to the mounting guilt assigned to certain foods that the U.S. Centre For Science in the Public Interest (C.S.P.I.) launched, in the 1990s, a monthly Nutrition Action Health Letter which pits food labelled as "Right Stuff" against "Food Porn", accompanied by icons of thumbs up and thumbs down, respectively.<sup>74</sup>

More representative of contemporary food porn citations, however, is a remarkable absence of the social stigma and guilt that continues to inform the consumption of non-food pornography.<sup>75</sup> "Porn" in the food world, on the contrary, is an explicit celebration of vicariousness, and functions as a central principle of food television.<sup>76</sup> In response to a declaration by Nick Thorogood, the founder of UKTV's food channel, that "We were dealing with vicarious food porn" (in Pile, 2006), Pile concludes: 'Make no mistake, watching it is a substitute for doing it' (Pile, 2006). The appeal of watching rather than doing similarly accounts for the Food Network's key demographic – in stark contrast to the 1955 housewife – of what Frederick Kaufman calls the 'eighteen-to thirty-five-year-old male can't-cook-

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followed the vogue of *nouvelle cuisine* popularised in the 1970s by, among others, Guérard and Paul Bocuse. See also p.133, above.

<sup>74</sup> An example is of the September 1998 edition, in which Subway's six-inch "subs" with 'a sixth the fat (and half the calories) of a Whopper' is pitted against Burger King, which the 'Food Porn Department would like to take this opportunity to thank ... for supplying us with a steady stream of candidates', including their *cini-minis*, 'four tiny cinnamon rolls served warm with "Icing Dip" on the side [which] pack 550 calories, 26 grams of fat, seven grams of saturated fat, and nine teaspoons of sugar. And that doesn't include the damage to your heart from their trans fat' (C.S.P.I., 1998). Presumably Arizona's Heart Attack Grill would be a prime contender for the C.S.P.I., with its menu of Bypass Burgers (single, double, triple, quadruple) and Flatliner Fries, which supply, according to their logo, a "Taste Worth Dying For", not to mention waitresses dressed as "naughty nurses". Owner Jon Basso explained: "Essentially, it's nutritional pornography. It's so bad for you it's shocking" (in Lee, 2006).

<sup>75</sup> It is not the intention of this work to contribute to debates on the moral questions attached to pornography. For the purposes of this discussion, it suffices as evidence of a general stigma towards the industry that pornography remains, if not illegal, then a major contributor to the black market in many Western countries, the U.S.A. included. According to the policy statement for the International Committee for Prostitutes' Rights, moreover, 'like prostitutes, pornography workers are stigmatized as whores, denied recourse after abuse and are often blamed for abuse committed against them' (cit. Pheterson, 1989:196).

<sup>76</sup> While this section focuses on television as exemplary of the visual appeal of food porn, its theoretical principles and implications similarly extend to cookbooks and food literature.

won't-cook crowd' (Kaufman, 2005). In this scenario the presenter is key, and Joe Dziemianowicz's suggestion that the channel's success is due in no small part to 'the network's emerging lineup of under-40 faces – eye candy hired to teach America to boil, baste and bake' (Dziemianowicz, 2006) is persuasive.<sup>77</sup>

This is where the 'girl next door' persona of a figure like Rachael Ray takes on unambiguously different proportions, and while Bourdain suggests that '[l]ike the best of pornography, the best of food porn depicts beautiful "objects" arranged in ways one might never have previously considered; star chefs, like the porn stars before them, doing things on paper which few amateurs would ever try at home' (Bourdain, 2001), when it comes to food television, the 'it' that Pile refers to watching or doing inclines less vaguely to sex than to cooking:

She lights cast a soft glow as the camera zooms in on a throbbing, quivering hunk of flesh. The star – a petite, bedroom-eyed brunette – hovers over it, her eyes fixated as she licks her red, glossy lips. She takes the meat between her lips as she moans and squeals with delight. As the juices begin to run down her chin, she wipes her mouth with the back of her hand: "Delish!" .... Ray-Ray is the queen of all things edible and all things subliminally genital. On "Thirty Minute Meals by Rachael Ray," repetitive closeups of chopping, stirring and pounding motions abound. The camera guy always seems to have a frenzied obsession with culinary closeups, similar to the good ol' "quintessential crotch shots" of your average porn flick. In her fantasy world of fun, family and hard-core gastroporn, the food picks up where the sex leaves off.... Not only is she the ultimate homemaker, but her girl-next-door good looks and orgasmic facial expressions have created a hypersexualized gastronomical fantasy world for viewers. Aesthetic conventions and sensory desires intersect to feed an ongoing stream

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<sup>77</sup> In a *New York Times* article headed "Frump Free Cooking", Elaine Louie suggests that it's not only the faces but also the tight-fitting clothing of the under-40s that creates the appeal: 'Flip through the channels or scan the bookstores and the look is there in all its glory: sort of tight, sort of low-cut, definitely sexy. It's the new uniform of women who work with food' (Louie, 2007).

of tantalizing images. Not to mention, she embodies one of porn's most endearing female archetypes (think girl next door and pizza delivery man). (Miller, 2006)

The connections between food television and pornography, as this description implies, are equally convincing from the perspective of “eye-candy” and the technical similarities between the two genres. In an entertaining article for *Harper's* magazine, “Debbie Does Salad” (2005), Kaufman recounts attending a day of shooting food television with Barbara Nitke, a photographer with experience of more than 300 pornographic films. Nitke confirmed the photographic devices common to both, particularly the use of sound – ‘the clicks and the snaps and the little crunchy edges of things’ (Gladstone, 2005) – slow close-ups, and repetitive cuts to extend the “climax” of a sequence.<sup>78</sup> And, while the chef's physical appeal – including its potential adaptability to an archetypal narrative – is paramount, a substantial portion of the pornographic feature remains in the food itself. As Kaufman concluded, ‘Ped[estal camera] two zoomed in on the onion-gilted sirloin beef, now topless and glistening tumescent, the better to penetrate the mind's eye’, confirming one of Nitke's earlier claims: “It's hard not to think of flesh when you're looking at these close-ups” (in Kaufman, 2005).<sup>79</sup>

If it is true that the sophistication of technology to enhance the quality of representations of food naturally inclines to pornography, then this goes some way to

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<sup>78</sup> Referring to a shot of television chef Tyler Florence with a raw chicken breast, Nitke identified “the quintessential pussy shot. The color of it, the texture of it, the camera lingering lovingly over it” (in Kaufman, 2005). When the dish is finally eaten, she described its representation as, “Classic porn style. They're stretching the moment out, the orgasmic moment. In porn they'll take a cum shot and run it in an endless loop” (ibid.).

<sup>79</sup> Buford similarly explains food television in terms of making the food “flesh”: ‘The point is to get very close to what you are filming, so close that you can see an ingredient's “pores” (...), which then triggers some kind of Neanderthal reflex’ (Buford, 2006b). Kaufman explains this ‘Neanderthal reflex’ as a result of what Michael Gershon of Columbia University's Department of Anatomy and Cell Biology has identified as a ‘brain in the gut’; a series of sphincters which controls the passage of food to intestines, regulates blood pressure and so on. This ‘enteric brain’ accounts for our so-called gut feelings (Kaufman, 2005).

explaining how the term has gained its popular currency. Not only is food media routinely described as porn – U.K. chef Nigel Slater, according to Humble, has a ‘virtually pornographic recipe for Purple Figs with Honey’ (2005:234), and the website [www.foodporn.com](http://www.foodporn.com) has recipe sections headed “amateur”, “asian”, “barely legal”, “hardcore”, “lebanese” and “self-pleasuring” – but food personalities increasingly contribute to and perpetuate the association. Rachael Ray, for instance, posed provocatively for *FHM* (October, 2004) in a series of pictures which included licking chocolate off a wooden spoon, wearing little but a bra and a very short skirt.<sup>80</sup> When Giada de Laurentiis, another of Food Network’s regular “hotties”, to borrow a term from “B-Side”, the moderator of a website called TVgasm, joined the channel, “they said just put yourself on tape — they didn’t care if I made a peanut butter jelly sandwich, they just needed to see how I looked on camera” (cit. Park, 2006). Accepting this requirement, in short, does little to discourage further similar representations, like those of TVgasm, who under their “Giada Watch 2006: SpaghITTI-gasm”, posted a series of pictures from one of her shows with alternative captions, such as, ‘Giada ensnares the pasta with her fatal tongue of culinary seduction’ (B-Side, 2006). Food writers similarly embrace the term, like Ann Bauer who, in recognition of how she capitalises on a market defined by vicarious appetites, calls herself a ‘restaurant slut, purveyor of food porn, author of articles that liken sea scallops to blossoming roses and lamb tartare to velvet and tiny chocolate truffles to

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<sup>80</sup> Nigella Lawson, similarly, posed for *GQ* (November, 2001) with what Stephen Vider calls ‘sultry wet hair and bared shoulders’ (Vider, 2004). Lawson’s shows are typically described in terms of their sexual- and sensuality. According to John Seabrook in *The New Yorker*, ‘Making food provides Lawson with an elaborate double-entendre. She seldom wields a knife; the spoon is her utensil of choice (unless she can just use her hands), and, instead of cutting, she stirs and enfolds. In the first episode of her new show, the camera follows an egg yolk as it slides from its shell and into her palms while the egg white runs through her fingers. A microphone picks up the noise as she squirts ketchup into her “tangle” of meat and veg. When the dish is done, you half expect her to reach for a cigarette’ (Seabrook, 2006). J.M. Hirsch likewise suggests that ‘it’s hard to discount Lawson’s flirtatious ways with the camera, the knowing, sidelong glances, the slow bites. Overstressed or not, food and sensuality blur a bit on Lawson’s set’ (Hirsch, 2006).

explosions that move in waves of flavor over the tongue.... I've advised my readers to close their eyes and let the silken heft of whipped cream and mascarpone drizzled with banyuls fill their mouths. But even as I set down the words, I'm checking my watch' (Bauer, 2006).

But, technological enhancements that make explicit the formal associations between representations of food and pornography<sup>81</sup> only illuminate a side of food porn that typically remains silent in its popular manifestation; as much as pornography centres on creating or representing fantasy, its industry also relies on the non-satisfaction of that fantasy in order to keep consumers coming back for more.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, the critical usefulness of comparing food media to pornography recognises, as early citations did, the non-reality, rather than the eroticism, inherent to both genres. As Buford concluded after his 72-hour food television vigil: 'It's not erotic, I can confirm – that's not why it's called food porn. It's just unreal. You will never meet a Playmate of the Month; you will never eat the red, juicy tomato that you see on "Barefoot Contessa"'<sup>83</sup> (Buford, 2006b). It is beneath the overt celebration of the unreal – the literalisation of the chef as pornstar;<sup>84</sup> the confession of the food slut; the de-historicised, de-stigmatised pandering of the term itself<sup>85</sup> – that a less auspicious

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<sup>81</sup> A final example comes from Andrew Shanahan's review of online food stores, revenue from which is projected at £6 billion by 2010 in the U.K.; sales which rely in large part on appealing to vicarious appetites. Shanahan describes the leading contenders: 'And now for some serious food porn. It's difficult to visit the sites of these world-class food companies without wanting to lick the monitor' (Shanahan, 2007).

<sup>82</sup> Pertinent in this context is Adorno and Horkheimer's sombre analogy between the 'culture industry' and 'erotic films': 'To offer and deprive them [consumers] of something is one and the same' (1969:141).

<sup>83</sup> *Barefoot Contessa* is the screen name of Food Network host Ina Garten.

<sup>84</sup> Taking the idea to its logical limit is the dvd *Cooking with Pornstars* (2001), reviewed online by "Lynus" as, 'not some symbolic or allegory title meant to mean something deep down inside (ahem!) – no, *Cooking With Porn Stars* is just as it sounds – cooking...with....porn....stars. Yep, that's right – three infamous porn stars strut around their kitchen as naked as they can be with an apron on – and cook various dishes right before your eyes' (Lynus, 2002).

<sup>85</sup> The term porn has also been used in reference to representations of weather, when the *Independent* was accused of 'climate porn'; the use of 'cataclysmic imagery' that makes people feel 'helpless' (Black, 2006). Deputy editor Ian Birell responded: 'If our readers thought we put climate change on our

veracity emerges, namely of a profoundly ambiguous relationship with food. The *Sydney Morning Herald's* Richard Glover satirises the vogue of sexualising food:

The way some of my friends talk about food, you'd think it was better than sex. Most of them have long since stopped buying *Playboy* and *Penthouse*; instead they subscribe to *Gourmet Traveller* and *Delicious*. I hear they sit up in bed with their partners, reading these magazines, pointing out the weird new techniques, and having a good hard look at the pictures. (Glover, 2002)<sup>86</sup>

The substitution of food for sex, like the substitution of watching for doing 'it', bespeaks an anxiety about the actual ingestion of food as much as it describes its opposite, namely a delight in food. Commenting on the historical affinities between food literature and pornography as dwelling on the 'pleasures of the flesh', Mennell rightfully reminds that in 'gastronomy, however, vicarious enjoyment is more definitely intended to be a prelude to, not a substitute for, direct and actual enjoyment' (1985:271-272).

Where direct and actual enjoyment of food is most explicitly problematised is in the eating disorders that continue to manifest as the unspoken tenets of a cultural obsession with food.<sup>87</sup> In her "Anorexia Nervosa: Psychopathology as the Crystallization of Culture" (1993), Susan Bordo cites an example from Cherry Boone

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front pages for the same reason that porn mags put naked women on their front pages, they would stop reading us' (ibid.).

<sup>86</sup> In a slightly different, but nevertheless related context in that it remarks on the discursive prevalence of food over sex, Sutton cites Jeremy MacClancy's *Consuming Culture* (1992), in which MacClancy argues that, 'Psychobabble about your sexuality has become *démodé*; instead foodies score conversational points by name-dropping the best restaurants or by describing their latest visit to one of the culinary paradises' (cit. Sutton, 2001:118).

<sup>87</sup> See also Belasco's dating of the increased media visibility of eating disorders to the postwar decades: '[O]ne analysis of the measurements of Playboy centerfolds and Miss America contestants found a statistically significant decrease in bust and hip sizes between 1959 and 1978. Moreover, the gap between women considered most beautiful and their contemporaries was widening.... In line with the thinning down, the five most popular women's magazines published twice as many articles on dieting in the 1970s as in the 1950s.... Anorexia nervosa and bulimia, virtually unreported before 1960, became familiar news topics in the 1970s' (Belasco, 2007:177).

O'Neill's confessional *Starving for Attention* (1982), in which O'Neill describes a nocturnal binge from the dog's bowl: 'I started slowly, relishing the flavour and texture of each marvellous bite. Soon I was ripping the meagre remains from the bones, stuffing the meat into my mouth as fast as I could detach it'. When her boyfriend Dan discovers her and responds with a look of 'total disgust', Boone submits: 'I had been caught re-handed...in an animalistic orgy on the floor, in the dark, alone. Here was the horrid truth for Dan to see. I felt so evil, tainted, pagan.... In Dan's mind that day, I had been whoring after food' (cit. Bordo, 1997:233). The shame and guilt that inform Boone's admission – not only of eating, but of being caught eating – are perhaps the most useful adjectives to describe a culture that conceals a strongly disordered relationship to eating under the playful banner of food porn as the culmination of the enduring success of televised, or unreal cooking, and the pornographic apotheosis of the modern celebrity chef. Finally, and to introduce the final chapter on bona-fide eating trends, is a pertinent question posed, in 1943, by C.S. Lewis:

You can get a large audience together for a striptease act – that is, to watch a girl undress on the stage. Now suppose you come to a country where you could fill a theatre by simply bringing a covered plate on to the stage and then slowly lifting the cover so as to let every one see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon, would you not think that in that country something had gone wrong with the appetite for food? (Lewis, 1977:86-87)



## 7. Eating

When he buys an item of food, consumes it, or serves it, modern man does not manipulate a simple object in a purely transitive fashion; this item of food sums up and transmits a situation; it constitutes an information; it signifies.  
(Barthes, 1997:21)

In consumer capitalism, the working classes abandon the union hall for the shopping mall and celebrate the system that fuels the desires it ultimately cannot satisfy.  
(Best and Kellner, 1999:134)

This chapter is about eating. It is about real eating, in the real world, but it is also about food media, because the specific kinds of eating I discuss are as manifest in media as they are in real life. Their media representation means that these eating trends are also to a large extent induced by media, and it is here we witness the most palpable examples of the relationship between appearance and reality in the spectacle. Because they are so visible, these trends are also extreme, and the narrative that strings together the seemingly disparate phenomena of name-brand dining, the obesity “epidemic”, speed-eating competitions and a variety of “healthy” eating trends (including organic, local, and ethical food choices) in this chapter is not intended to impose structural coherence where there is none. Rather, the movement of the discussion testifies to the economic, political and experiential gulfs between these trends. What they do have in common is the guiding argument of this chapter, namely that consequent to the interaction with the spectacle that following any of these trends represents – each of which promise some form of “agency” – is a systematic narrowing of broader political engagement. When it comes to inform personal choices, the wealth of food as represented in twenty-first century media reflects the poverty of experience and critical faculty that results from repeatedly being “hailed” by media, and responding.

## 7.1 From Production to Consumption

When C.S. Lewis asked, in 1943, whether something might be wrong with a nation's appetite if people could watch a mutton chop or a 'bit of bacon' with as much gusto as watching a striptease, it was a hypothetical question because of its historical circumstance. Nearing the end of World War 2, media representations of food were significantly present, but, as demonstrated earlier with the example of Elizabeth David's *Mediterranean Food* (1950), consumption patterns bestrode the two structures of feeling – and economic contexts – represented by wartime austerity and post-war plenty. The relationship between economics and taste is important: 'Taste is *amor fati*, the choice of destiny', wrote Bourdieu, 'but a forced choice, produced by conditions of existence which rule out all alternatives as mere daydreams and leave no choice but the taste for the necessary' (1984:178). The end of the war significantly corresponded with changing conditions of existence, namely the beginnings, in Western societies, of the transformation from producing to consuming economies. The rise in visual food media, particularly food television, suggests that this moment also heralds the naturalisation of the daydream that was incongruous to Lewis; a vicarious appetite for representations of food that bespeaks a fascination bordering on anathema. As Carolyn Korsmeyer stresses, 'Both gustatory and sexual desire may be portrayed as playful and witty and teasing. Both may be somewhat menacing.... In and out of representation, both appetites may be overindulged or denied, reaching the extremes that Aristotle identified as types of vice: concupiscence and gluttony, asceticism and anorexia' (1999:177).<sup>1</sup>

'In' representation, the vice of overindulgence is epitomised by the legendary and morbidly obese figure of Mr. Creosote in *Monty Python's The Meaning of Life*

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<sup>1</sup> Korsmeyer's comments are specifically related to her discussion on food in "art" – still life paintings, and so on – but they are equally relevant to representations of food in the media.

(1983),<sup>2</sup> who orders everything on the menu “all mixed up ... in a bucket”, as the waiter helpfully recommends. He later demands another bucket to vomit it all up, and finally explodes after eating a wafer-thin mint, dousing the restaurant and its patrons with everything recently ingested, and an organ or two. In contrast to the general delight and applause at the in-house pianist’s ditty – “Isn’t it awfully nice to have a penis? / Isn’t it frightfully good to have a dong? / It’s swell to have a stiffy / It’s divine to own a dick, / From the tiniest little tadger / To the world’s biggest prick” – the disgust registered by fellow diners at the contents of Creosote’s gut spread across the restaurant provides a pertinent comment on the social mores not only of restaurant dining, but of eating in general, and which are the subject of this final chapter.

The primary focus of this thesis, so far, has been on the increasing currency of media representations of food – personified, finally, in the modern celebrity chef – as one manifestation of post-war abundance and economic accessibility. This discussion follows by considering the effect of these media representations on actual eating trends, the dominant forms of which – from name-brand dining to “healthy” eating habits – each occupy an extreme on the economic and social spectrum of food consumption. The centrality of media remains key to all these trends, as does the tendency to endow food with values beyond simple nourishment. Food choices signify, as Barthes suggested, and the broad range of twenty-first century food significations paradoxically extends the narratives of detachment that begin to manifest with processes of mid-twentieth century industrialisation and the rise of convenience foods. They do this, as we shall see, by signifying the central tenet of consumerism, namely the abundance of more than what Bourdieu called ‘the

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<sup>2</sup> The skit-show *Monty Python’s Flying Circus* was created by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin. It was first broadcast on the BBC in 1969, before the collective went on to produce several feature-length films, including *And Now For Something Completely Different* (1971), *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975), *Monty Python’s Life of Brian* (1979) and *Monty Python’s The Meaning of Life* (1983).

necessary' (op. cit.). Conflicting media messages about what is necessary, often communicated through the evaluative terms of what is "good" or "bad", similarly problematise the autonomy of choice and responsibility that inform an uncomplicated relationship to food. The result of this is a base of consumers – high- and low-income alike – who, like Mr. Creosote's fellow diners, prefer not to be reminded that, fashion or philosophy aside, eating remains a basic, and fundamentally carnal, activity.

As a measure of the nascent shift from production to consumption, Samuel Barton of the Industrial Services Company reported in 1943 in the U.S. *Journal of Marketing* that average monthly household incomes increased by 11.1% in 1941, and 22.8% in 1943. He also noted differences in consumption patterns in high and low-income families whereby, compared with 1935 when the study was initiated, the 'upper classes' had decreased spending on specific items he labels "upper class commodities" (meats, butter, canned soup) and increased consumption of "lower class items" (lard, margarine, canned milk). The pattern was the reverse for lower income families, suggesting a pattern of conspicuous consumption which would prove durable. Barton attached appropriate historical significance to the phenomenon he was describing:

At the present time several millions of families are being introduced to frozen foods, margarine, vitamins, prepared flour mixes, and canned milk for the *first* time.... Since, for many products, war time conditions are apt to continue for several years after the war, the present shifts and trends of the market must not be considered as a short spell of abnormality but rather as an important marketing era which will not only last several years, but which will also have permanent effects on post war consumer markets.

(Barton, 1943:53, author's emphasis)

The permanence of this effect is confirmed by a 2007 commentary from Jonathan Shaw, managing editor of *Harvard Magazine*. Shaw underlines that the shift from a productive to a consumerist economy is not only complete, but more importantly, based on consumption beyond productivity and means:

Consumerism is as American as cherry pie. Plasma TVs, iPods, granite countertops: you name it, we'll buy it. To finance the national pastime, Americans have been borrowing from abroad on an increasingly stunning scale. In 2006, the infusion of foreign cash required to close the gap between American incomes and consumption reached nearly 7 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), leaving the United States with a deficit in its current account (an annual measure of capital flows to and from the rest of the world) of more than \$850 billion. In other words, the quantity of goods and services that Americans consumed last year in excess of what we produced was close to the entire annual output of Brazil. "Brazil is the tenth largest economy on the planet," points out Laura Alfaro, an associate professor ... at Harvard Business School (HBS). "That is what the U.S. is eating up every year – a Brazil or a Mexico." (Shaw, 2007:40)<sup>3</sup>

The lure of spending beyond income, indeed, is paramount to the conspicuous consumption of a spectacular society which, in Debord's terms, reveals the 'modernization of sales techniques by being payable on credit' (1995:152). More than simply being urged to buy commodities, it is the availability of credit that hooks consumers, to recall Adema's phrase, 'more completely into the culture of consumption' (op. cit.). As Best and Kellner explain, 'it appears in the society of the spectacle that a life of luxury and happiness is open to all, that anyone can buy the sparkling objects on display and consume the spectacles of entertainment and

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<sup>3</sup> According to the U.K. Office of National Statistics (O.N.S.), 2006 estimates of government deficit was of £35.4 billion, equivalent to 2.7 % of G.D.P.. Figures for the end of 2006 show the U.K. general government debt to be at £571.8 billion; 43.5 % of GDP (O.N.S., 2007).

information.... [Those] who can't afford to live out their commodity fantasies in full are motivated to work harder and harder, until they are trapped in the squirrel cage of working and spending, spending and working – and increasingly borrowing money at high interest rates'<sup>4</sup> (Best and Kellner, 1999:140).<sup>5</sup>

## 7.2 Branded Dining and the Artist-Chef

What the average consumer can actually afford remains tellingly absent from the trend of restaurant dining that focuses increasingly on the personal wealth of the celebrity chef. Name-brand dining justifies its exorbitant prices – between \$100-800 per person – with the star quality of the chef-as-auteur, whose status facilitates the new vogue of franchised high-end restaurants that trade on the name, rather than the presence, of the chef.<sup>6</sup> The practice is not confined to this century. Between 1980 and 1985, French-born chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten, for example, opened ten restaurants around the world. By August 2005, his fifteen establishments included his signature 3-Michelin starred Jean-Georges at the Trump International Hotel and Tower (New York), and Vong (New York, 1994; London, 1995; Hong Kong, 1997;<sup>7</sup> Chicago 1999). Beyond establishments in Singapore, and China, Vongerichten's recent ventures have included expansion to Mexico City, and finally, to the venue that

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<sup>4</sup> At the time of writing (1999), Best and Kellner report that credit card debts had increased by 47% 'in recent years, as credit cards are easier to get and interest payment rises. By the mid-1990s, the average debt per household was over \$3,000, up from barely over \$1,000 per household in 1985 (...). Near the end of the decade credit indebtedness reached \$1.2 trillion, growing at a 9% annual rate and generating negative saving rates two months in a row for the first time on record (...)' (ibid.).

<sup>5</sup> Modern mechanisms of credit further what Adorno and Horkheimer recognised in 1944 as a metaphorical enslavement to capitalism resulting from the transition – already in evidence then – from producing to consuming economies: 'Whereas today in material production the mechanism of supply and demand is disintegrating, in the superstructure it still operates as a check in the rulers' favor. The consumers are the workers and employees, the farmers and lower middle class. Capitalist production so confines them, body and soul, that they fall helpless victims to what is offered them....[T]he deceived masses are today captivated by the myth of success even more than the successful are' (1969:133-134).

<sup>6</sup> See fn. 18 of this chapter for a comparison between chef-branded and celebrity-endorsed commodities.

<sup>7</sup> Voted "Best Restaurant in the World" in 1998.

has proved the greatest attraction for celebrity dining: Las Vegas.<sup>8</sup> That this style of enterprise has now become commonplace is asserted by chef and food writer Mark Bittman:<sup>9</sup> ‘In a world where \$100 a person now seems moderate, catching a glimpse of your favorite chef, the man whose name is on the marquee, is just a tad more likely than seeing Tom Cruise in the flesh at a screening of *M:i:III*’ (Bittman, 2006).

Celebrity-chef branded establishments have become so lucrative, indeed, as to spawn a new profession: in 1994 the first celebrity chef management contract was negotiated by Adam Block, dubbed ‘the alchemist who can help chefs make big money’ by chef and writer Michael Ruhlman (2006).<sup>10</sup> The contract was between the Las Vegas MGM Grand and Chicago-based award-winning chef Charlie Trotter; the first to lend his name to a restaurant while retaining no ownership.<sup>11</sup> The trend was quickly established. It is now common, explains Ruhlman, for a ‘marquee chef’ to receive between 3-5 percent of turnover ‘in return for opening the restaurant and spending as little as two weeks a year there; in Las Vegas, such a restaurant brings in between \$10 million and \$18 million annually, netting the chef between \$300,000 and \$900,000, an enticing secondary income, with the promise of a percentage of the profits if the restaurant succeeds’ (ibid). Decreased time requirements in one venue

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<sup>8</sup> Wolfgang Puck, named the ‘original celebrity chef’ by *Forbes* Magazine, was one of the first “names” to appear on the Las Vegas culinary scene when he opened his restaurant Spago in 1992. Puck’s success is credited with sparking the Las Vegas celebrity-chef “craze”, visible, for instance in the MGM Grand, which now features restaurants almost exclusively credited to award-winning and celebrity chefs: Craftsteak (Tom Colicchio, James Beard award-winner); Nobhill and SeaBlue (Michael Mina, James Beard award-winner); Joël Robuchon and L’Atelier de Joël Robuchon (Joël Robuchon, “Chef of the Century”); Emeril’s (Emeril Lagasse); Wolfgang Puck’s Bar and Grill (Wolfgang Puck).

<sup>9</sup> Bittman is the author of the popular *New York Times* weekly column, “The Minimalist”. He is also a best-selling cookbook author, notably of *How to Cook Everything* (1998), which by 2007 had been reprinted fourteen times, and sold over one million copies.

<sup>10</sup> Ruhlman is the author of *The Making of a Chef: Mastering Heat at the Culinary Institute* (1999), *The Soul of a Chef: The Journey Toward Perfection* (2001), and *The Reach of a Chef: Beyond the Kitchen* (2006).

<sup>11</sup> Specifics of Trotter’s deal included ‘a six-figure signing bonus and a percentage of sales or commensurate salary for the next 10 years (even if the restaurant closed, which it did after 15 months), a financial windfall for Trotter. All of this was unheard of in an industry where a chef who earned \$150,000 a year was doing well’ (Ruhlman, 2006).

naturally allow for a secondary income to be supplemented by a third and fourth, which goes some way to explaining the rapid proliferation of restaurants branded by chefs whose regular presence in the kitchen is logistically impossible.<sup>12</sup>

Paying high prices that contribute to the personal wealth of chefs who are not in the kitchen raises several controversies, one of which is the obvious ethical question of the pursuit of wealth, on the one hand, and of artistry, on the other.

Hannah Beech reflects in *Time*:

The worry, of course, is that this rapid expansion will dilute the purity of the Jean-Georges [Vongerichten] brand. At what point will this meticulous chef, who sketches diagrams of each dish so that chefs across the world can recreate his techniques and presentation, overstretch his culinary kingdom? ... So heavily marketed are celebrity chefs that the likes of Gordon Ramsay<sup>13</sup> or Mario Batali are probably more recognizable globally than the new Prime Minister of Japan.... But when does high-end cuisine give way to pure commerce? In a world where celebrity cooks must focus so much time on polishing their fame – think of all those TV shows now dedicated to foodies – will the food suffer? (Beech, 2007)<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Not all branded restaurants follow the pattern of Trotter's management contract; several multi-restaurant chefs are owned by the chefs themselves. Yet, for the purposes of this discussion, the distinction between a marquee chef or an actual owner of several self-branded restaurants remains less relevant than the implications of selling branded – specifically “auteur” branded – food that is unlikely to have been prepared by the chef whose name justifies the price.

<sup>13</sup> By December 2006, Ramsay owned 9 restaurants in London, and one in New York. He is the marquee chef of The Gordon Ramsay in Tokyo, and Verre in Dubai. Expansion plans in 2006 included restaurants in Paris, Prague, Amsterdam, Ireland, Florida, Los Angeles, Singapore and Australia (Hickman, 2006c). Ramsay's flagship London venue, Restaurant Gordon Ramsay, was rated as the third most expensive eatery in the world in 2006, where a meal (including tip and one drink) averaged at £108 (Roberts, 2006b). In October 2007, Ramsay was awarded two stars for his New York restaurant, bringing his total Michelin stars to 11. Restaurant Gordon Ramsay is the only three-Michelin starred restaurant in London (Pilkington, 2007b).

<sup>14</sup> Hungarian food critic Egon Ronay takes a less sympathetic view: ‘For a growing number of chef-proprietors fame wasn't enough.... A growing number of money-hungry tycoon-chefs must have known that the same high culinary standards cannot be achieved by all their branches. So the all-important “G” word has changed from Gastronomy to Greed. I was disappointed to find a chef on the Sunday Times Rich List. Surely such a list will not become more important than the culinary bibles?’ (Ronay, 2007).

In his discussion of the restaurant empire created by celebrated nine Michelin-starred Alain Ducasse,<sup>15</sup> Bittman provides a response that is as cynical as it is persuasive:

‘The flash of the Ducasse operations helps draw people for whom the food is less than primary.... Add to that the appeal of the Ducasse name; the draw of the restaurant-as-shop; the exemplary, overly fussy service; and the bustling, semi-exposed kitchen, and you have a memorable experience – food television brought to life. Even the outrageous prices add cachet.<sup>16</sup> With all that, who needs great food?’ (Bittman, 2006).

Proposing that the experience of a Ducasse “operation” simulates – makes real – the experience of watching food television inadvertently addresses the objection Bittman himself raises by suggesting that no matter how well trained the staff at a branded restaurant may be, ‘when a great chef puts his hands on the food, it’s better than when one of his students does it. That’s why we think they’re geniuses, or at least artists. Yet now, we’re being asked to accept imitations as being equal to the original’ (Bittman, 2006).<sup>17</sup> The element of deception intimated by being made to accept that which is not real, or “original”, ironically highlights the parallels between food television and name-brand dining, both of which trade on the inevitably vicarious quality of representation. The chef-branded restaurant, put otherwise, corresponds to the humanised commodity represented by television celebrity chefs such as Jamie Oliver and Emeril Lagasse.

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<sup>15</sup> Ducasse oversees over 30 dining establishments across the world, and is typically cited as the ‘rare exception’ (Carpenter, 2005); the one chef who could succeed in not ‘diluting’ his brand because he was awarded three Michelin stars for three different restaurants in different locations (New York, Monaco, Paris), suggesting continued excellence in cuisine despite the chef’s absence (Rayner, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> According to a *Forbes/Zagat* survey in 2006, the Alain Ducasse restaurant in Paris was the second most expensive restaurant in the world, with dinner for one averaging at £125 (Roberts, 2006b).

<sup>17</sup> Gordon Ramsay’s response to a similar query underlines his self-perception as a brand before a chef: “People ask me who does the cooking when I’m not there and I tell them it’s the same people who do the cooking when I am there. I remember being asked that question by a journalist in a very expensive Armani suit. I asked her whether she thought Giorgio had stitched every single seam on her suit. Obviously not” (in Rayner, 2006). Ramsay’s 2006 plans included installing an £80,000 webcam system in his kitchens; “That way I’ll be able to see what’s going on in all my restaurants around the world. We’ll have clocks up for the different time zones, too. It will look like a f\*\*\*\*\*g investment bank in there” (ibid.).

If, as we have seen, the increasingly “reality” component of food television – in combination with the opportunity to buy and own chef-branded commodities – personalises one consumer interaction with celebrity chefs, chef-branded restaurants provide the ever more personal experience of actually eating food which is potentially prepared by a ‘great chef’; it is the perceived signature of the artist chef that paradoxically validates its commodification. And, as much as fellow chefs and writers query the ethics of rapid expansion, the success of these operations confirms the overwhelming suspension of disbelief from a consumer perspective. Inasmuch as the unreality of “food porn” does little to detract from its appeal, the very plausible likelihood of Ducasse not being in the kitchen does not, apparently, blight the Ducasse experience.<sup>18</sup>

The challenge of negotiating the chef as artist and the commodification of that artistry as a necessarily impersonal phenomenon importantly rests on the collaboration between chef and consumer. As Frank Bruni suggests, the current and unparalleled reverence for chefs is as telling of consumer demands as it is of chefs themselves:

It’s partly our fault. It’s largely our doing. Chefs and restaurants wouldn’t behave the way they do if we penalized them for it, instead of readily demonstrating our fealty. We take the 9:45 p.m. reservations (no exaggeration there). We agree to call a second time to confirm. We buy the books and watch the television programs, granting our culinary

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<sup>18</sup> In *The Little Book of Plagiarism* (2007), Judge Richard Posner provides an interesting comment on the practice of ghostwriting (in legal, political and celebrity spheres) that is analogous to the question of name-brand dining: ‘In both cases ... that of the judge and that of the politician or celebrity, there is a defensible rationalization for any deceit involved in their use of ghostwriters. (This is another way of saying that the public is not really fooled.) The judge by signing “his” opinions and the politician by being identified as the author of “his” book - even the movie star whose celebrity persuades the credulous that he might have something worthwhile to say about public issues - are affirming their commitment to the contents of the work. (...) Their assertion of authorship is the equivalent of a celebrity endorsement of a product’ (Posner, 2007:25-26). The Ducasse empire, in this way, functions more as a collection of Ducasse endorsed products, than as Ducasse-chefed restaurants.

heroes the celebrity that they then lord over us. Those of us who love restaurants – of course including critics, of course including me – talk and write about chefs the way movie lovers wrote and talked about directors in the 1970s, ascribing outside authority to them, treating them as mystically endowed *auteurs* rather than what they really are: key – but by no means solitary – figures in an ultimately collaborative process. (Bruni, 2007a)

Interestingly, this critique of ‘ascribing outside authority’ formed the basis of erstwhile critiques of the *auteur*-system<sup>19</sup> itself. Referring to the fact it denied the fact that film-making – not unlike restaurant cooking – is typically the result of teamwork rather than the efforts of one person (a feat which would require extraordinary and outsized capabilities in both professions), André Bazin famously warned that *auteurism* risked becoming little more than an ‘aesthetic personality cult’ (Bazin, 1985:257), and posed the pertinent question, ‘*Auteur*, yes, but *what of?*’ (1985:258, author's emphases).<sup>20</sup> The perceived idealism of a theory which apotheosises individuals by removing them from their productive contexts was compounded by the Romantic connotations of the artist as removed from society. This was particularly evident once the theory was appropriated and translated to an American context,

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<sup>19</sup> The *auteur* theory was developed and popularised by the so-called Young Turks of the French New Wave cinema (including François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, André Bazin) in the journal *Cahiers du Cinéma*. These film-makers rejected the post-war “quality” cinema then current in France – typically large scale studio productions of classic literary texts – in favour of *auteurism*, that is, the intensely personal films that they each strove to make. In Truffaut’s words, ‘The film of tomorrow appears to me as even more personal than an individual and autobiographical novel, like a confession or diary. The young filmmakers will express themselves in the first person and will relate what has happened to them.... The film of tomorrow will not be directed by civil servants of the camera, but by artists for whom shooting a film constitutes a wonderful and thrilling adventure’ (Truffaut, 1978:19). In addition to retrospectively identifying *auteurs* from what was known as the Golden Age of French cinema (Jean Renoir, Robert Bresson, Jean Cocteau), the *Cahiers* team also canonised as *auteurs* some American directors (Nicholas Ray, Orson Welles), and Alfred Hitchcock. For useful histories, see Susan Hayward’s *French National Cinema* (1993), John Caughie’s *Theories of Authorship* (1981), and Jim Hillier’s *Cahiers du Cinéma, Vol. 1 - The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave* (1985).

<sup>20</sup> French director Roger Leenhardt similarly dismissed the theory in a *Cahiers* article featuring “Six Characters [directors] In Search of Auteurs”: ‘The notion of the total *auteur* is a myth all the same, because the director’s craft requires specific capabilities which are not the same as those of a writer’ (Bazin et al., 1985:38).

notably by U.S. film critic Andrew Sarris, who contended in 1962, and somewhat sentimentally, that true *auteurs* were like ‘a few brave spirits [who] had managed to overcome the gravitational pull of the mass of movies’ (Sarris, 1981:65).

This figurative removal of the artist from society, and by implication, from a socio-historical framework, represented one of the fundamental contradictions of *auteurism* because it revealed the theory to be reactionary rather than progressive.<sup>21</sup> Bruni’s analogy between *auteurs* and twenty-first chefs is useful because it equally highlights the central contradiction of name-brand dining, specifically the tension between chefs who are under increasing pressure – thanks to heightened competition as well as the homogenising effects of globalisation<sup>22</sup> – to stand out as artists, that is, by producing food with “personality”, yet the currency of this particular trend renders it increasingly mainstream. The commodification of personality is nowhere more evident than the ‘chef bonanza’ (Ruhlman, 2006) in Las Vegas, the city that epitomises everything that is most extravagant – and by that token, most unnecessary – about consumerism.

I believe it is true, to return to Bruni’s claim, that consumers are largely responsible for this development, and it is important to keep this in mind precisely to avoid the ‘aesthetic cult of personality’ that Bazin cautioned against, and which is increasingly in evidence when it comes to celebrity chefs. It will hopefully be an unnecessary reminder that the purpose of this work is not to evaluate the capabilities nor, indeed, the “greatness” of any the chefs under discussion, but rather to examine

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<sup>21</sup> See also John Hess, who argued in 1974 that *auteurism* represented ‘a justification ... of a culturally conservative, politically reactionary attempt to remove film from the realm of social and political concern, in which the progressive forces of the Resistance had placed all the arts in the years after the war’ (cit. Caughie, 1981:37), and Diana Holmes and Robert Ingram: ‘In some ways, the *politique des auteurs* merely perpetuated a long-established literary tradition, that of the individual creator, no more than another manifestation of the Platonic notion of the gifted few scattering pearls of wisdom to the many’ (Holmes and Ingram, 1998:25).

<sup>22</sup> This is particularly evident in the debates around the copyrightability of “signature” creations which reappear in various locations around the world, as discussed in Chapter 3.

the intersection of media and celebrity status, a juncture which returns us perpetually to the consumer and how media representations are instrumental in manufacturing demands and desires that have little to do, in the end, with the product – in this case of branded dining – and more to do with the accumulation and display of what Bourdieu terms ‘cultural capital’ (Bourdieu, 1984). Similarly to the mechanisms of interpellation illustrated by food television, literature, and cookbooks, these demands reveal, instead, an underlying and perpetual need to identify sites and figures of authority. Ascribing this ‘outrageous authority’, in other words, is as instrumental in providing a certain identity for the consumer – this is Bruni’s ‘fealty’ – as it is in consolidating the iconic status of a particular chef.

### **7.3 Molecular Gastronomy**

The example of what is popularly known as “molecular gastronomy” is revealing of the role of the consumer in creating and sustaining an idolatry that remains at odds with the food and its creators. In 2006, chefs Ferran Adrià, Heston Blumenthal, Thomas Keller, and Harold McGee issued a “Statement on the ‘New Cookery’”, in which they referred to a ‘new approach to cooking [that] has emerged in restaurants around the globe, including our own. We feel that this approach has been widely misunderstood, both outside and inside our profession. Certain aspects of it are overemphasized and sensationalized, while others are ignored. We believe that this is an important time in the history of cooking, and wish to clarify the principles and thoughts that actually guide us’ (Adria et al., 2006). Significantly, three of these chefs are the names behind restaurants that have consistently been rated in the top tier of *Restaurant Magazine*’s annual “World’s 50 Best Restaurants” since its inception in 2002: Adrià’s El Bulli (Las Rosas, Spain) won the first year, and again in 2006;

Keller's The French Laundry (California, USA) held first place consecutively in 2003 and 2004, and Blumenthal's The Fat Duck (Berkshire, U.K.) was rated number one in 2005.<sup>23</sup>

The 'new approach to cookery' is one that is characterised by innovation, or the unfamiliar; Blumenthal, for instance, is famed for his snail porridge (Fort, 2005), while Adrià is known for producing dishes which appear to defy physics, such as hot ice-cream and 'a pea soup that's mysteriously cold on the bottom and hot on top' (Von Bremzen, 1999). The molecular gastronomy label derives from the fact that much of the experimentation for these dishes is carried out in scientific laboratories rather than in kitchens.<sup>24</sup> The term was not a media invention; it was collectively established by French chemist Hervé This and physicist Nicholas Kurti (1908-1998)<sup>25</sup> in 1998<sup>26</sup> to describe the field that began with This' compilation of what he termed "cooking precisions" – "rules" collected from various historical and contemporary culinary sources which he then set about to verify or discredit scientifically (McGrane, 2007).<sup>27</sup> The popularisation of This' work, in conjunction with chefs such

<sup>23</sup> Since 2002, these three restaurants have generally occupied the top three positions: 2002, El Bulli (1), The French Laundry (3); 2003, The French Laundry (1) El Bulli (2); 2004, The French Laundry (1), The Fat Duck (2), El Bulli (3); 2005, The Fat Duck (1), El Bulli (2), The French Laundry (3); 2006, El Bulli (1), The Fat Duck (2). In 2005 and 2006, The French Laundry was also voted the "Best Restaurant in the Americas" (50Best, 2007). All three restaurants also have 3 Michelin stars. Most recently, The Fat Duck was named Britain's Best Restaurant by the 2008 U.K. *Good Food Guide*'s 'inaugural gastronomic top 40' (Kühn, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> A visit to Adrià's *taller* (Spanish for "laboratory") is one of the highlights of the documentary on the chef and his restaurant, *Decoding Ferran Adrià* (2005), produced and hosted by Anthony Bourdain (Miller, 2005). El Bulli is closed for six months of the year, during which time Adrià and his team innovate in the *taller*.

<sup>25</sup> Kurti was Hungarian-born, but spent most of his professional life as a Professor of Physics in Oxford.

<sup>26</sup> There is some discrepancy as to the historical origins of the term. Some popular accounts, for instance, locate its genesis in the '1980s' (King, 2004), while Adrià et al. claim, in their "Statement", that the term was coined in 1992 (Adria et al., 2006). This was the year of This and Kurti's first international workshop on "Molecular and Physical Gastronomy", also the title of This' PhD thesis in 1995. According to This, it was not until after Kurti's death in 1998, however, that the phrase was shortened to "molecular gastronomy" (This, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> This has collected over 20,000 of these precisions since 1980 (This, 2004), and remains the only person with a PhD in Molecular Gastronomy (McBride, 2006b). Blumenthal, however, was awarded an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Science by The University of Reading for 'dedicated research and commitment to the exploration of culinary science' ([www.fatduck.co.uk](http://www.fatduck.co.uk)).

as Adrià who themselves were experimenting with novel – and scientific – methods of cooking, led to the popular dissemination of the term. In *Christian Science Monitor*, for instance, Émilie Boyer King suggests that as a ‘result of this crossover between science and cooking, outstanding restaurants around the world are serving unusual dishes such as tobacco-flavored ice cream made with liquid nitrogen and sardines on sorbet toast. Utensils such as blowtorches, pH meters, and refractometers, which were previously relegated to science laboratories, are now creeping into the kitchen’ (King, 2004).

While King’s account of utensils may be correct, and Adrià’s work in his *taller* confirms as much, what remains notable is the professional disavowal of the term. When Adrià, variously described as the ‘Salvador Dali of the culinary world’ (Von Bremzen, 1999), the ‘Pablo Picasso of cuisine’ (Gold, 2006),<sup>28</sup> and, according to colleague Joël Robuchon, the ‘best cook on the planet’ (in Pollard, 2005),<sup>29</sup> was asked in an interview why the term molecular gastronomy disturbs him, he explained: “Well, for starters, it doesn’t exist. That’s the biggest lie out there in terms of cooking. What is molecular cooking?” (in Raisfeld and Patronite, 2006). He reiterated elsewhere: “Come on. It doesn’t mean anything. People think Ferran Adrià and they think chemist” (in Gold, 2006). His colleague Blumenthal, described as the ‘foremost practitioner of what’s known as molecular gastronomy’ (Stacey, 2006) agrees that the term is meaningless and believes, furthermore, that it creates ‘artificial barriers’: “Molecular makes it sound complicated, and gastronomy makes it sound élitist”

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<sup>28</sup> In an article that revealed the relative inexpensiveness of dining at El Bulli compared to other Michelin-starred and media-hyped restaurants – a complete dinner with wine for €250 – suggesting that Adrià would ‘starve’ if he only cooked for a living, John Carlin describes him in the *Observer* as the ‘David Beckham of the food business’ because of his numerous extra-restaurant endeavours, including ‘supermarket’ cookbooks, a hotel in Andalucia, numerous fast food outlets (“Fast Good”), endorsed products, and a branded range of cutlery and crockery (Carlin, 2006).

<sup>29</sup> In the words of Stephen Pollard, who reportedly waited five years to eat Adrià’s food, ‘To describe El Bulli as “a restaurant” is like calling Shakespeare “a writer”’ (Pollard, 2005). A five-year wait is not unfeasible, according to Carlin: ‘For every table that is available, there are 400 requests. Over 800,000 people call or email for a table each season’ (Carlin, 2006).

(Rayner, 2006c); “Anyway, I’m not a scientist,” he told Caroline Stacey from the *Independent*, “I’m a chef, but I’ve got an inquisitive mind” (in Stacey, 2006).<sup>30</sup>

The mind that inquires beyond traditional cooking techniques apparently provides the strongest incentive for representing these chefs as something beyond traditional chefs, and their food as straddling an unspecified boundary between cooking, science, and art. As Stacey indicates with suggestive punctuation: ‘It’s the sheer wonder of this and other “dishes” that have made Heston [Blumenthal] famous’ (ibid.). The spectacular quality of food labeled as molecular gastronomy emerges in part from the historical short-sightedness of the debates that materialise from contemporary queries into food as art or science,<sup>31</sup> which, as we saw in Chapter 3 (Recipes), can be dated historically to the beginnings of Greek philosophy and its distinctions between artefacts that appeal to the “higher” (intellect) and “lower” (gut) senses (Korsmeyer, 1999:12-37),<sup>32</sup> and which was arguably popularised by texts such as Brillat-Savarin’s *The Philosopher in the Kitchen* (1825). McGee confirms the historical continuity: “When I give a talk on the state of cooking today, I point out that you can find books on the chemistry of food and cooking that go back centuries. The

<sup>30</sup> Blumenthal’s latest undertaking involves what he calls “sensory design”. Working in collaboration with Sony, he aims to develop “a directional speaker to push sound at diners in a particular way while they are eating” (in Rayner, 2006c). Other ideas include an online sweetshop: when diners book a table at the restaurant, they will be sent the address of a personalised website, and an atomiser which they spray and smell while logging onto the ‘virtual’ sweetshop. When they arrive at The Fat Duck, the same smell (of sweets) will be sprayed around the entrance to the restaurant, and diners will finally leave with a real bag of the virtual sweets they chose online (ibid.).

<sup>31</sup> For the first time that it went to a chef, Adrià was awarded the Raymond Loewy Foundation’s Lucky Strike award in 2006 (previous recipients include fashion designers Karl Lagerfeld and Donna Karan). He was also invited to participate in the 2007 *Documenta*, a five-yearly exhibition in Germany reputed as ‘one of the biggest events in the contemporary art calendar’ (Keeley, 2007). At the press conference, Adrià presented an “appetiser” of things to come; ‘a cryptic slideshow that offered up such unusual specialties as algae brittle or chocolate with wasabi – not as culinary exhibits but rather as painterly compositions’ (Gardner, 2006). Enthused blogger “Chubbyhubby” responded to the news: ‘For perhaps the first time, a chef has been elevated to the status that he deserves. He’s being considered a true artist and being exhibited alongside other creative geniuses from other disciplines’ (Chubbyhubby, 2006). Adrià’s initial public recognitions as scientist or artist rather than chef came in the form of being ranked in *Time*’s 100, under Innovators (2000), and under Artists/Entertainers (2004).

<sup>32</sup> Korsmeyer further explains that Dutch 17<sup>th</sup> still life paintings were routinely invalidated as art because their lifelikeness appealed to the appetite rather than the intellect: ‘Inasmuch as they may do so, this is another feature of the representation of food that disqualifies it from the higher ranks of art, for it sacrifices the appeal to the intellect and the ennobling of the spirit’ (1999:159).

idea that it is something new is just an indication of how short our memory is” (in McBride, 2006b).<sup>33</sup>

A collective short-term memory, as we have seen with numerous generations of back-to-the-basics cookbooks, is one characteristic of a consumerist economy that depends for its perpetuity on the “new”. And an interest in providing the new, or something that contrasts with the everyday, is one perspective that these chefs do share. Adrià explains his inclination:

“Eating well is something you can do at home. The point about what we offer is that it is more than eating; it is an experience. What’s radical about us rests not on what we serve, but on how and where. In the West, where the problem of hunger has been solved, where obesity is now the issue, the trend has to be more and more about the pleasure of eating, the fun, rather than seeing it as simply a way of satisfying our appetites. At El Bulli we try and take this idea to the nth degree”. (in Carlin, 2006)

Thomas Keller, who similarly rejects the term molecular gastronomy in favour of “personality cuisine” (Gold, 2006) and who, like Adrià, prefers the *prix fixe* (tasting menu) as a means to providing an “experience” for diners, rationalises his style by isolating choice as the essential “problem” in (Western) society:

“If you come in tonight, you should have enough confidence in this restaurant, in this staff, in the chefs in this restaurant, and their ability to procure the best ingredients, and say, ‘okay, the chef is cooking for you tonight.’ You would say, ‘fine.’ .... I think people have become accustomed to having way too many choices in our society and our cultures. It becomes confusing....I think that a lot of people just want to be in

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<sup>33</sup> Hervé This concurs with the chefs’ “Statement”: “These chefs are right. They do not do molecular gastronomy, because molecular gastronomy is science, not cooking. Some can apply the results of molecular gastronomy, some just change the ingredients, methods or tools, and it’s only modernization of culinary techniques” (in McBride, 2006b).

control of what they're eating....But what is the definition of pure luxury? Not to be in control. To go into an environment, and trust the environment, and just enjoy it". (in McBride, 2006a)<sup>34</sup>

Adrià and Keller's collective emphasis on restoring or creating the pleasure of eating as, variously, 'luxury', or 'experience', coincides with the rejection, in their "Statement", of their 'new approach to cookery' as fashion: 'We do not pursue novelty for its own sake.... We believe that cooking can affect people in profound ways, and that a spirit of collaboration and sharing is essential to true progress in developing this potential' (Adria et al., 2006).

Their various accolades aside, there can be little doubt that their food certainly affects people in 'profound ways'. Keller, for instance, is described by "Chantrelle", the host of foodporn.com, as 'the God of Cookery', responsible for 'the most decadent FoodPorn experience I've ever had' (Chantrelle, 2004), while Ruhlman rates his meal at The French Laundry as 'right up there with losing my virginity, if not actually divine in some small way' (cit. Edge, 2006). These transcendent, if not pornographic, responses, which to some degree verify the stated ambitions of the "new cookery", also underline the extent to which the luxury of the commodity that said cookery represents is based on the fantasy of eliminating the threat of the real. The real, in this case, includes the fact that the 'problem of hunger' is far from 'solved' – Adrià may

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<sup>34</sup> Keller has also been under public scrutiny for his "satellite" restaurants beyond The French Laundry; Per Se (New York) and Bouchon (Las Vegas). He responded to interviewer Anne McBride: "I think it's time that we understand that chefs aren't necessarily in their kitchens all the time, or down in the markets buying the food all the time. It doesn't mean that they're not doing their job. It doesn't mean that they've cashed in, or sold out as some media says. It doesn't mean that it's a negative thing. I think it's an extraordinarily positive thing to be able to say that we are establishing a framework" (in McBride, 2006a). As to whether the food in all locations remains Thomas Keller food, he replied unambiguously that his chefs de cuisine certainly have freedom to put their own 'imprint' on the food; "there's a lot of flexibility in that, a lot of tolerance in that, ... as long as they're working within the philosophy of Thomas Keller" (ibid.).

be correct to suggest that fewer people are indeed hungry in the ‘West’,<sup>35</sup> yet the obesity that he names as an ‘issue’ remains, fundamentally, a question of hunger. Similarly, the eradication of choice does not abolish the problem of ‘having way too many choices’. Rather, it overrides and detracts from the more primary question of the autonomy of choice. It is not the abundance of choice itself that is problematic – the availability of choice remains one of the basic luxuries of consumerism – but more, I would argue, that people have less confidence in their own choices; a development that largely results from the plethora of conflicting media messages that contribute to the manufacture of a risk society.

In this system, Keller is certainly right to highlight trust as an increasingly rare and fleeting experience. Yet the trust that he and Adrià expect from diners by asking them to relinquish their freedom of choice in return for “experience” functions as persuasively to further a detachment from political realities as the persistent representation of these chefs as “molecular gastronomists”. In both cases, from the perspective of chef and consumer alike, attention is consistently diverted from food as nourishment in a collaborative process of fetishism. The vogue of high-priced name-brand dining – including the franchised versions where diners are further asked to trust imitations as originals, to recall Bittman’s objections – functions, in this way, simultaneously to complement the increased spending power of the average (Western) consumer, and also to uphold, in appearance, at least, the economic class distinctions that belie the discursive uniformity of globalisation.

It is a final irony of this trend that, true to the ‘collaboration and sharing’ of the “Statement”, Adrià has a ‘fleet of disciples’ (Gold, 2006) in the USA, including Grant Achatz of Alinea (Chicago), Wylie Dufresne of WD-50 (New York) and José

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<sup>35</sup> Despite low statistics relative to the rest of the world, hunger continues to exist in the U.S.; according to the United States Department of Agriculture (U.S.D.A.) in 2007, ‘2.9% of households had at least one member who went hungry at least once the previous year’ (Cloud, 2007).

Andrés of Minibar (Washington), ‘some of who have worked under him and many who simply emulate his style’ (ibid.). These chefs, unsurprisingly known as the ‘key American practitioners of molecular gastronomy’ (Hayes, 2007), are behind the three establishments that were implicated, it will be remembered, in the copyright debates, each as ostensible victims of unlicensed imitation. In an oft-quoted turning point for Adrià’s career, he attended a lecture by Jacques Maximin in 1987, one of France’s most celebrated chefs. Adrià tells the story of someone asking Maximin what defines creativity. “And he just said, ‘Not to copy’” (in Gold, 2006).

#### 7.4 Authenticity

Imitation, or duplication, whether sanctioned or not, remains key to the quest for “authenticity” that characterises a substantial portion of modern eating trends, and to which name-brand dining is a relative late-comer. When the *Observer*’s Jay Rayner visited what he calls Las Vegas’ ‘extraordinary restaurant scene’ (Rayner, 2006), he commented that the food in Keller’s restaurant, Bouchon – ‘an exact replica of a French bistro’ – was ‘pure Paris’ (ibid.).<sup>36</sup> The world-renowned status of a chef like Keller naturally adds cachet to the exactness of his replica, not least due to the authority of imitation that derives from The French Laundry having been ranked in the ostensibly global taxonomy of the “World’s Best Restaurants”. Yet interest in authenticity, as we have seen from the example of M.F.K. Fisher’s contribution to the *Time-Life* Series “Foods of the World” (1968), coincides with the genesis of culinary tourism that emerges, on the one hand, from increased post-war foreign travel, and on

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<sup>36</sup> The popular mythology of anything French as connoting sex and the illicit, as well as food, is to the advantage of popular renditions of food porn. In a 2006 *Observer* article on whether restaurants have become the ‘new bedroom’, John Sutherland and Stephanie Merritt conclude that the best establishment to inaugurate an affair ‘will have to be Gallic-flavoured, of course. Where sex meets food, one country rules. The key loan words tell their own story - affaire and restaurant. French is the language of gastro-naughty’ (Sutherland and Merritt, 2006).

the other, from the more permanent movement and displacement of people as a feature of modern globalisation.

Key to questions of authenticity is the notion – and often enough, in Orientalist<sup>37</sup> fashion, the construction – of otherness. In her edited volume, *Culinary Tourism* (2004), Lucy Long describes the touristic gaze:

This gaze is distinctive from “everyday looking” in that it attends to difference (...). It notices contrast and distinctiveness; it shifts objects and actions out of the common and mundane world, enabling or encouraging viewers to recognize their power as symbols, entertainment, and art.... Sightseeing is only a partial engagement with otherness, whereas culinary tourism, utilizing the sense of taste, smell, touch, and vision, offers a deeper, more integrated level of experience. It engages one’s physical being, not simply as an observer, but as a participant as well. A key concept in these definitions is the idea of tourism being voluntary; becoming a tourist is a choice, and with that choice there is an implied openness to the new. (Long, 2004:21)

While Long specifically addresses the trend of travelling with a culinary agenda, her remarks equally apply to the qualitative criteria applied to the generalised experience of eating “other” food, be it at home, in a restaurant, or in a different country. Cultural authenticity, in this way, serves a comparable function to the misnomered molecular gastronomy by appealing to a sense of the non-everyday.

Common to both is the apparent empowerment of the consumer by means of choice. Although the diner may concede the choice of *à la carte* in a Keller or Adrià restaurant in the name of ‘luxury’ or ‘fun’, the choice to go there nevertheless

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<sup>37</sup> Specifically, Orientalism refers to a construction of the East from a Western perspective; in Edward Said’s terms, ‘a way of *coming to terms* with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience’ (Said, 1991:1, my emphases). Orientalism, in this way, is as revealing of the describing subject as it is of the object of description. Generally the term is useful in contexts beyond the “Orient” to signal representations of other cultures based on stereotypes rather than fact.

represents an economic luxury, just as the self-appointed evaluation of authenticity in a culturally diverse establishment sanctions (the inevitably hierarchical) definition of self through difference. As Jennie Molz suggests in her discussion of Thai restaurants,

the diners themselves also construct a definition of authenticity, albeit a definition that continues to be constrained by Western stereotypes of Thai-ness and otherness, as well as by personal taste preferences. By looking at these constraints we can understand the cultural code with which diners are “reading” or understanding the authenticity of their culinary experience. What this code reveals is not necessarily a depiction of Thai culture and cuisine, but rather a Western picture of what Thai-ness should be. (Molz, 2004:62)

The Orientalist underpinnings of this process of (mis)recognition are not, furthermore, confined to the traditionally “Western” agency of representation; it is a symptom of the permanence of the demand for authenticity that the historical other appropriates and thereby perpetuates what Eric Hobsbawm and Terry Ranger term ‘invented traditions’.<sup>38</sup> The case of the Californian fortune cookie (see Introduction, above) is a case in point, as is Jeffrey Pilcher’s example of restaurants in Mexico City, ‘virtually every one’ of which, he writes, ‘has concocted some version of the “traditional” rose-petal mole featured in Laura Esquivel’s novel *Like Water for Chocolate*.<sup>39</sup> That she invented this recipe, like all the others in the book, and that diners who had never

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<sup>38</sup> In the introduction to their co-edited *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), Hobsbawm defines the subject of the book as “‘traditions’ which appear or claim to be old [but] are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983:1).

<sup>39</sup> Esquivel’s *Like Water for Chocolate* (1989) was a world-wide best-selling novel in the tradition of South American “magical realism”, but with a strong culinary component; the narrative is interwoven with recipes with “magical” properties. The novel was made into a film in 1993, which won 11 awards from the Mexican Academy of Motion Pictures, and was the top earning foreign film in the USA at the time of its release.

heard of it before began demanding it in fancy restaurants, demonstrates still another modern construction of 'authenticity' (Pilcher, 2004:87).<sup>40</sup>

Still another modern construction of authenticity, but now more directly linked to consumption in the home, is the proliferation of food "fraudsters" facilitated by the availability of ready-made meals in supermarkets. According to Maxine Frith in the *Independent*,

One third of 16 to 24-year-olds have committed "food fraud" by claiming to have cooked something from scratch when in reality they simply pierced a clingfilm lid, turned on the microwave and disposed of the packaging.... Overall, one in 10 of the 1,000 people questioned admitted that what their friends, family and loved ones believed was a signature dish, regularly made by their own hands, had actually come out of a carton.... The survey found that one in 10 young people never cooked a proper meal for themselves because they did not know how. Other research revealed that 60 per cent of 12-year-olds have never boiled an egg and only 38 per cent knew how to cook a jacket potato. ... ready meals in the United Kingdom reached a record £900m last year, up 5 per cent on the previous year. (Frith, 2006)

The question of what people eat in the privacy of their homes, including what children eat – and are allowed to eat – informs the remainder of this chapter. The thread that follows from the discussion of restaurant dining, and which is equally pertinent to so-called food fraud, is the stress on appearance. While the example of cookbooks from the 1950s onwards already suggest the vogue of using convenience foods as a façade for a lack of cooking skills, surveys into children's culinary knowledge and abilities,

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<sup>40</sup> As already suggested by the discursive non-stability of "authenticity", as well as the currency of invented traditions, criteria for recognising the authentic does not necessarily appeal to (historical) tradition. As Sutton argues, 'The stress on authenticity is an interesting feature of current culinary discourse. A dish can be authentically Chinese simply by being what Chinese eat, as opposed to adulterated *faux*-Chinese (Chow mein being a prototype of this). And it is this sense of "authentic" as opposed to traditional that tends to appeal to Western consumers of "exotic" cuisines: hence the appeal of restaurants where "X people actually go to eat"' (Sutton, 2001:146).

such as that reported by Frith, are more directly reflective of a contemporary emphasis on “health” than on the gendered expectations of the immediate post-war period. Such a survey would be unlikely, in other words, were it not for the ubiquity, on the one hand, of television chefs demonstrating the “ease” of doing it yourself and, on the other, of media messages warning about the dangers of obesity as a result of poor eating habits and knowledge.<sup>41</sup>

### 7.5 Obesity

In the context of the U.K., Humble maintains that the recent emphasis on cooking for and with children – demonstrated to spectacular extent by Jamie Oliver’s *School Dinners*, and his Feed Me Better campaign – reflects ‘a prevalent anxiety about the culinary abilities of the population as a whole.... This concern has been responsible for the main direction taken by food writing in the last fifteen years, as it has moved away from showy, complex food for special occasions and towards basic guides to cooking from first principles and many and various attempts to woo the young in particular into the kitchen’ (2005:232-3).<sup>42</sup> Underpinning this focus on children is a multitude of factors that call into question the autonomy, namely the choices and responsibilities, of the consumer. Indeed, the issue of health, and more specifically the global obesity “epidemic”, significantly challenges historical boundaries between

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<sup>41</sup> Frith cites a further survey by researchers at Stirling University (U.K.), who ‘have identified the present generation of adolescents and young adults as “life incompetent”; unable to cook, sew or perform basic household tasks’ (Frith, 2006).

<sup>42</sup> Another manifestation of this trend is the steady increase of child-celebrity chefs, such as Gio Tramonto, son of Chicago-based chefs Rick Tramonto and Gale Grand: ‘Though most of his playmates have yet to stretch their talents beyond microwaving frozen pizza and chicken nuggets, Gio is one of a growing number of kids inspired by charismatic TV chefs. That Gio’s mom is herself a celebrity chef hasn’t hurt either’ (Kamps, 2002). Also Chicago-based, sisters Isabella and Olivia Gerasole host the website Spatulata.com, ‘in which they teach other kids cooking lessons via streaming video. With the *Spatulatta Cookbook* coming out ... [in September 2007], the Gerasole sisters are the biggest stars of the kid cooking world – for now’ (Dickerman, 2007b).

public and private because what remains ambiguous is who is, or should be, responsible.

Beyond Jamie Oliver's result of getting the U.K. government to pledge £280 million to improving national school food, including banning "junk" food from school canteens and vending machines – a development increasingly in evidence in the USA, as we shall see shortly – this ambiguity of responsibility is further reflected in the undercurrent of guilt targeted at parents for neglecting their children's health. Mother and journalist Sarah Ebner responds in the *Guardian*:

I don't need any more guilt in my life. Trying to combine work and bringing up children is quite enough, thank you. But now I find added guilt coming from all directions, and on one topic: what am I feeding my children? Even without the government - and Jamie Oliver - warning me, I realise that it's important for children to eat well. I recognise that we are living through an obesity epidemic. I cook for my children whenever I can. But that's just it. "Whenever I can" appears not to be good enough.... The phrase "bad mother" is never far from your mind if you work and aren't with your kids all the time. The food issue just makes it worse.... Parents aren't stupid – we know that vegetables are healthy and sweets aren't – but most of us will not have the time or the money to rustle up some couscous with feta and cherry tomatoes for our kids' lunchboxes (as recommended, again, by [Jamie] Oliver). (Ebner, 2006).

Without questioning the validity of Ebner's objections, it must be remembered that the experience of guilt, of course, can be manufactured as readily as the accusation intended to provoke it. This public defence of an apparently private issue – what a parent chooses to feed her child – therefore highlights not only the very public discourse around private eating habits, but also, and more crucially, the hegemonic consent to this development, and the culture of blame that defines it. The act of

publicising her protestations, in short, ironically represents Ebner's concession to defeat of what is currently "expected" of her as a parent, and her experience of guilt inadvertently indicates her subscription to those standards, be it intentional or not.

The obesity epidemic that Ebner refers to, and that is potentially countered by what she loosely terms 'eating well', is an extraordinarily complex subject because it exists on a multitude of levels, not least the liminal space created by its dissenters, who argue that the term "epidemic" is sensationalist and based on flawed statistics.<sup>43</sup> What remains constant, however, is its media presence, and it is the flood of media messages, including their various injunctions on the urgency of intervention, that arguably create and sustain the public hysteria that subsists around obesity; an atmosphere in which Ebner could well find herself labeled "sinner lady", as were the mothers who protested the U.K. ban on junk food in schools by selling it through the fences (Perrie, 2006). The questionable nominal status of obesity corresponds to the ambiguity around its causes and solutions, all of which contribute to the manufacture of a generalised climate of uncertainty and the increasing "risks" of modern living.

Media representation is not confined to popular press. According to a report released by the World Health Organisation (W.H.O.) in 2000, obesity is 'a serious disease'; 'not just an individual problem. It is a population problem, and should be tackled as such'; 'a chronic disease', and 'a global problem'(W.H.O., 2000:4).

Although the same report details that 'clinical evidence of obesity can be dated as far back as Greco-Roman times' (2000:2), most statistical evidence situates the

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<sup>43</sup> In addition to John Luik et al.'s *Diet Nation* (2006), see, for example, J. Eric Oliver's *Fat Politics: The Real Story Behind America's Obesity Epidemic* (2005), in which he argues that statistics based on Body Mass Index (B.M.I.) measurements are unsound because they fail to take muscle mass into account. The Center for Individual Freedom (C.F.I.F., 'a non-partisan, non-profit organization with the mission to protect and defend individual freedoms and individual rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution' ([www.cff.org](http://www.cff.org)) argues a similar case with the examples of film stars Russell Crowe and Tom Cruise, both of whom are considered overweight according to the B.M.I. index (C.F.I.F., 2002).

beginnings of the current epidemic to the 1980s;<sup>44</sup> significantly also the period, to recall O'Neill, that inaugurated the conversely ambiguous relationship to food in the form of a heightened focus on slimness and dieting (op. cit.).<sup>45</sup> In the U.S., for instance, according to the Andy Coghlan in *New Scientist*, 'adult obesity rates doubled between 1980 and 2000, and the incidence of overweight<sup>46</sup> has doubled among children and tripled among adolescents since 1980' (Coghlan, 2007). Dr. Cynthia Ogden of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (C.D.C.) translates the figure of obese adults in the USA— 'defined as having a Body Mass Index [B.M.I.] of 30 or more' – into 31 percent, approximating 60 million people (Tanneer, 2006). In Canada, similarly, 'obesity rates for children have tripled in 25 years, and the level of people either overweight or obese has grown 70 per cent' (Coghlan, 2007), while the *Scotsman's* Toby McDonald reports, under the ominous heading "'Fat Map' Highlights Our Obese Islands", that the average B.M.I. in Scotland is 27.1, and a 'study by National Audit Office in 2002 estimated obesity costs the N.H.S. £500 million a year in the U.K.' (McDonald, 2007).<sup>47</sup> Finally, the Australian Government's

<sup>44</sup> Journalist and author Gary Taubes concurs that the U.S. obesity epidemic "originates" in the early 80s, but locates an obsession with exercise and leanness some years before: 'In 1977, the *New York Times* was covering the "exercise explosion" that had come about because the conventional wisdom of the sixties that exercise was "bad for you" had been transformed into the "new conventional wisdom—that strenuous exercise is good for you." When the *Washington Post* estimated in 1980 that 100 million Americans were partaking in the "new fitness revolution"—coincident with the start of the current obesity epidemic—it also noted that most of them "would have been derided as "health nuts"" only a decade earlier' (Taubes, 2007b).

<sup>45</sup> Were it the aim of this work to theorise about the causes of obesity and other forms of disordered eating, it is tempting to postulate that, three decades into the post-war period, the 1980s focus on body image represents the negative culmination of the post-war plenty that began as a patriotic celebration of abundance. Belasco explains: 'Even in 1954, a year of exceptionally dismal long-term forecasts, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's animal research chief in Beltsville, Maryland, boasted that Americans consumed five times the animal foods available to the world's "average citizen". Thanks to agricultural research, a *Life* editorial exulted in 1955, "nearly all Americans not only enjoy a national diet but a *luxury* diet"' (Belasco, 2006:47).

<sup>46</sup> According to its September 2006 factsheet (No.311), W.H.O. 'defines "overweight" as a B.M.I. [Body Mass Index] equal to or more than 25, and "obesity" as a B.M.I. equal to or more than 30' (W.H.O., 2006).

<sup>47</sup> 2007 figures for England suggest a 23% obesity prevalence (Dalton, 2007). In Europe in general, according to W.H.O., the incidence of obesity 'has tripled in many countries in the W.H.O. European Region since the 1980s, and the numbers of those affected continue to rise at an alarming rate, particularly among children. Obesity is already responsible for 2-8% of health costs and 10-13% of

Department of Health and Ageing proclaimed in a 2003 media release that ‘the nation is facing an epidemic of obesity and agreed that joint national action must be taken to increase healthy eating and physical activity amongst children, young people and their families’ (A.G.D.H.A., 2003).<sup>48</sup>

These represent only a small sample of the continuing stream of published statistics on obesity. Already evident, from a rhetorical perspective, is the tenuous line between ‘overweight’ and ‘obesity’; McDonald’s heading, for example, highlighting Scotland as an “obese” British island, corresponds poorly to what he reports as the national average B.M.I., which at 27.1 falls comfortably below W.H.O.’s obesity index of 30 and above. Likewise, according to the 2006 map of U.S. Obesity Trends (1985-2006) issued by the C.D.C., the majority of U.S. states – twenty-two – had a prevalence, in 2006, ‘equal or greater than 25%’; two of these states (Mississippi and West Virginia) had a prevalence of obesity equal to or greater than 30%’ (C.D.C., 2006). Needless to say, there exists some misrepresentation between this and Dr. Ogden’s reported declaration that 31 percent of U.S. adults are obese.

That is not to say that all statistics are necessarily misleading, and neither is it the primary intent of this discussion to debunk the obesity “epidemic”. To be sure, there can be little questioning the general – and global – rise in average body mass,

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deaths in different parts of the Region’(W.H.O., 2007). Following a Ministerial Conference on Counteracting Obesity (Istanbul, November 2006), this resulted in the adoption of a European Charter on Counteracting Obesity.

<sup>48</sup> In *Food Fight: The Inside Story of the Food Industry, America’s Obesity Crisis & What We Can Do About It* (2004), Kelly Brownell cites Dr. Stephan Roessner, President of the International Association for the Study of Obesity: “There is no country in the world where obesity is not increasing. Even in (developing) countries we thought were immune (such as Zimbabwe and Gambia), the epidemic is coming on very fast. The frightening thing is that so far nobody has succeeded to [sic] stop it” (cit. Brownell, 2004:54). Nigerian writer Oha Obododimma confirms the shift in a West African context, where the historical association of fat with affluence and health (termed *Iriputa ahu* in Nigerian; “eating out the body”) ‘has been corrupted to validate wrong feeding habits, something that would almost justify the bias of Tarzan on Black African food culture... Indeed, many Africans are dying, not because of HIV/AIDS, but because of what they have eaten rather than that ... not eaten, and also due to lack of exercise’ (Obododimma, 2000:6).

and its attendant health complications,<sup>49</sup> over recent decades. This is evidenced most compellingly by the estimated \$94 billion spent annually in the U.S. ‘treating ailments related to overeating’ (Cloud, 2007), and which forms the basis for what Daniel Gross terms “fatonomics”, or ‘how fat people could save American business’ (Gross, 2005), simply by extending an already booming weight-reduction industry<sup>50</sup> – currently ahead of tobacco as a ‘key local industry’ (ibid.) – to the international market. Yet the indeterminate chasm between represented and actual statistics, between being overweight and obese, and between obesity as a condition and an epidemic equally provides fertile ground for what Andrew Smith terms culinary fakelores - ‘invented stories that serve purposes other than historical accuracy’ (Smith, 2000)<sup>51</sup> – and which factor significantly in the construction of obesity as a risk. It is the anxiety that results from its portrayal as such, including the represented uncertainty about whether obesity is an avoidable risk, that informs the tension between guilt and accusation that underlies – and undermines – Ebner’s position as a parent.<sup>52</sup>

A brief overview of some of the most recent “causes” of and “solutions” to the purported epidemic highlight the fundamental indeterminacy of obesity, and also the extent to which new “evidence” regularly passes into fakelore, and vice versa.

Television is arguably the most oft cited cause of obesity because it is a sedentary

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<sup>49</sup> W.H.O. lists cardiovascular disease (‘already the world’s number one cause of death, killing 17 million people every year’), diabetes (deaths from which are estimated to increase by 50% within the next decade), musculoskeletal disorders, and endometrial-, breast- and colon cancers as the major potential risks of excessive body mass (W.H.O., 2006).

<sup>50</sup> The weight-reduction industry includes ‘surgery practices that focus on liposuction and gastric reduction, weight loss clinics and gyms, health food stores and diet pill purveyors, personal trainers and Weight Watchers’, as well as Reality TV shows, ‘size-friendly’ resorts, travel agencies, dating services, weight-loss camps, and gyms, such as Curves, with 9,000 franchises (Gross, 2005).

<sup>51</sup> In addition to ‘journalistic enrichment’, and ‘commercial promotion’, Smith suggests ‘health myths’ as ground for the invention of culinary fakelores; ‘medicinal claims for specific foods/products frequently repeated without solid scientific basis’ (Smith, 2000). Each of these potentially relate to the representation of obesity as an epidemic.

<sup>52</sup> To further this example of the limited authority of parents, it was announced in September 2007 that the U.K. government will be introducing mandatory weighing of children in schools, one aim of which is to inform parents who might not recognise that their child is, in fact, obese. According to research leader Helen Crocker, a dietician at University College London, “When we told some parents that their child was overweight they were shocked” (in Crompton, 2007).

activity. Kelly Brownell cites a study published in *Pediatrics* (2000) which unequivocally declares: ‘The risk of obesity in a preschool child increased by 6 percent for every hour of television he or she watched per day. If there is a TV in the child’s bedroom, the risk of being obese increased by 31 percent’ (cit. Brownell, 2004:106). The unambiguous responsibility of the parent in this scenario, however, is problematised by the received relationship between junk food advertising and consumption<sup>53</sup> – as Tracy McMillan puts it, ‘we all know one reason why kids can’t stay away from fast food: The marketing juggernaut is inescapable’ (McMillan, 2004)<sup>54</sup> – and which effectively shifts the blame from the consumer to the producer.<sup>55</sup>

Two notable initiatives have resulted from the recognition of the influence of television, advertising, and peer pressure; of producers and consumers alike. Firstly, an increased focus on and legislation around advertising specifically aimed at children. In the U.S., for example, the Council of Better Business Bureaus (C.B.B.B.) established, in 2006, the Children’s Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative: ‘a voluntary self-regulation program with 10 of the largest food and beverage companies as charter participants. The Initiative is designed to shift the mix of advertising messaging to children to encourage healthier dietary choices and healthy lifestyles’ (C.B.B.B., 2006).<sup>56</sup> Second is the design of televised initiatives such as the primary

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<sup>53</sup> In his seminal work on sugar (1985), Sidney Mintz proposes an early connection between advertising and consumption of particular foods: ‘My research to date is uncovering the ways in which a modern notion of advertising and early conceptions of a large clientele – a mass market, or “target audience” for a mass market – arose, perhaps particularly in connection with sweet things and what I have labelled here “drug foods”’ (Mintz, 1997:367).

<sup>54</sup> Miryam Rotkowitz uses the anecdote of a child who is willing to trade a coat for an Oreo cookie to conclude that ‘it appears that even the toddler set appreciates the value of the Oreo cookie. And the opinions of youngsters matter very much, considering the fervor with which the advertising industry directs its efforts toward them’ (Rotkowitz, 2004:165). Brownell similarly argues that ‘children have immense buying power already and, of course, are tomorrow’s adult consumers’ (Brownell, 2004:130).

<sup>55</sup> A 2007 survey that ‘powerfully demonstrates how advertising can trick the taste buds of young children’ revealed that any foods – including milk and carrots – wrapped in familiar McDonald’s packaging tasted ‘better’ to young children (A.P., 2007b).

<sup>56</sup> Participants in the new initiative include Cadbury Schweppes USA, Campbell Soup Company, The Coca-Cola Company, General Mills, Inc., The Hershey Company, Kellogg Company, Kraft Foods Inc.,

school ‘intervention’ (Horne et al., 2004) known as the Food Dudes Programme. Designed by psychologists at the University of Bangor (Wales),<sup>57</sup> Food Dudes comprises six episodes that narrativise the exploits of four “cool” and always successful’ (www.fooddudes.co.uk) superheroes in their fight against the Junk Punks, who threaten to steal the world’s Life Force by eradicating all fruits and vegetables. Children who watch the programmes can help their ‘heroic peers’ (Horne et al., 2004) save the Life Force by eating fruits and vegetables, for which they earn various rewards, including stickers and certificates. Following the successful implementation of the pilot scheme in Ireland and the U.K. (Lowe and Horne, 2007) – with ‘poorest eaters showing up to twelve-fold increases’ in their fruit and vegetable consumption (www.fooddudes.co.uk), and for which the initiative won the W.H.O. Best Practice Award in 2006 – Food Dudes is to be introduced to all primary schools in Ireland in a seven-year implementation programme, starting in 2007. Coghlan notes that at the time of reporting (July, 2007), Food Dudes was also under consideration for implementation in the U.K., Italy, the U.S. and Canada, following the reported failure of “free fruit” initiatives in British schools (Coghlan, 2007), and similar health education initiatives in American schools (Mendoza, 2007).

Despite this registered success, the increased regulation of food consumed in schools is not without contention, particularly when it comes to the personal and economic freedom of older students. Following the systematic banning of junk food from school canteens and vending machines in recent years in the U.K.<sup>58</sup> and the

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McDonald’s, PepsiCo, Inc., and Unilever. ‘It is estimated that these companies account for more than two-thirds of Children’s food and beverage television advertising expenditures’ (C.B.B.B., 2006).

<sup>57</sup> Research was initiated in 1992 by the Bangor Food and Activity Research Unit (B.F.A.R.U.). ‘In early research, more than 450 children between the ages of 2-7 years took part in studies conducted in homes, schools and nursery settings, in the course of which the Food Dude Programme was developed. It was found to be extremely effective at boosting children’s consumption of fruit and vegetables with long-lasting effects’ (www.fooddudes.co.uk).

<sup>58</sup> U.K. Education Secretary Ruth Kelly announced in 2005 that a nationwide ban on junk food in schools would be implemented in September 2006 (BBC, 2005b). Nutrition guidelines detailing the

U.S.,<sup>59</sup> headlines regularly proclaim dissent: “Fewer pupils eating school meals” (BBC, 2006b), “Healthy dinners turn off pupils”(BBC, 2006c) “Pupils snub healthy school meals” (BBC, 2006d). When the school-district of Oakland (California) enacted the first ban, in 2002, of ‘all junk food from its buildings’ (Shiels, 2002), John Doyle, spokesperson for the Centre for Consumer Freedom (C.F.C.) anticipated this response when he claimed, “They can eliminate everything they want and it will not do one thing to curb obesity. You cannot mandate fat away” (in Shiels, 2002). Unspoken in Doyle’s proclamation is the fact that consumer freedom depends on economic power. This relationship is best demonstrated by the example of Texas, the state in which ‘schoolchildren are among the fattest in the country’ (Breen, 2006a), and where, since 2004, the state has offered economic incentives in the form of reimbursements to schools which comply with nutritional decrees, and penalties for those who don’t.<sup>60</sup> Yet schools in several districts – significantly ‘rich’ schools – have declined the incentive in return for ‘freedom from the food police’ (Breen, 2006b). The motivation, from one perspective, is simply economic, and recognises that school nutrition is a lucrative business as any other, with 2003-04 profits of \$109,000 – exclusively from sales of ‘candy bars, sports drinks, extra-large cookies and large muffins’ (ibid.) – clearly outweighing the forfeited reimbursements of \$81,000 for that period. But it equally recognises the need for autonomy of choice and responsibility. As one senior student commented, “Well, let’s face it. We’re all going

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ban were published by new Education Secretary Alan Johnson in May 2006 and were reported to ‘follow a campaign by TV chef Jamie Oliver to improve the quality of school dinners’ (BBC, 2006).

<sup>59</sup> Junk food legislation, or ‘access to nonnutritious foods’ in U.S. schools continues to be on a voluntary basis (Burros, 2007), though 42 states did impose bans in 2006 (Hellmich, 2006).

<sup>60</sup> Among the violations recorded by the Texas Department of Agriculture between 2005 and 2006 are a school in Dallas, fined \$3,966 for ‘Cookies too large; sales of Skittles’; in Lindale, fined \$577 because ‘Elementary teacher gave students fruit drinks for lunch’, and in Plano, fined \$1,067 for ‘Carbonated beverage violation; Gummi Bears shared by student’ (Breen, 2006b).

to be living on our own in a year or two. If we can't decide now (to choose healthy meals), it's pretty much a lost cause" (in Breen, 2006b).

The relationship between choice, preference, and financial means is central to the school of thought that considers the rise in obesity a direct result of post-war industrial booms and the consequent mass availability of cheap, processed foods.<sup>61</sup> Obesity, in this line of reasoning, is less an indicator of a sedentary lifestyle encouraged by television and computers than it is a class marker of people who are forced, out of economic necessity, to resort to cheap foods with poor nutritional value. The example of schools in Texas indicates the degree to which choosing these foods now increasingly represents an economic luxury, which is similarly the idea behind the proposed "fat tax", designed to recast historically cheap junk food as economically inconvenient. In a study published in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, Oliver Mytton et al. (2007) reported on three potential taxing scenarios in the U.K.. They concluded that taxing 'only the principal sources of dietary saturated fat' could lead to increased deaths because consumers would likely opt for cheaper goods with higher salt contents,<sup>62</sup> while taxing a wider range of "unhealthy" foods<sup>63</sup> 'might avert around 2300 deaths per annum, primarily by reducing salt intake'. In the third scenario, based on 'taxing foods in order to obtain the best health outcome', they found that placing levies on all foods containing salt, sugar and fat 'could avert up to

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<sup>61</sup> Evidence suggests that U.S. consumers generally spend less money on food than any other nations; in 2007, 9.9c of every dollar spent in the U.S. was for food, compared to 23.4c in 1929, and to current figures of household expenditure on food in the U.K. (16%), Brazil (23%), Thailand (29%) (Cloud, 2007). The inverse relationship between wealth and food expenditure is known to economists as [Ernst] Engel's Law (ibid.). Spending less money on food does not imply that Americans eat less than the rest of the world, but that calories are generally cheaper for U.S. consumers. This is the principle behind an injunction, published in October 2007, to 'blame Congress' if 'you're feeling fat these days', because that's 'what the nation's doctors are doing, saying that [U.S.] federal lawmakers are responsible for the fact that a salad costs so much more than a Big Mac' (Hotakainen, 2007).

<sup>62</sup> High salt content increases the risks of cardiovascular diseases by contributing to high blood pressure.

<sup>63</sup> Ranked by the so-called SSCg3d score, these foods are evaluated according to a number of factors, including nutrient and calorie contents.

3200 cardiovascular deaths in the U.K. per annum (a 1.7% reduction)' (Mytton et al., 2007).

There are two things of interest here, and which are pertinent to the general discussion of choice, responsibility, and the manufacture of risk. The first relates to representation. While Mytton et al.'s study was published under the title "Could targeted food taxes improve health?", media reports were quick to translate the idea into a "fat tax"; the BBC's headline, for example, read "Fat taxes 'could save thousands'" (BBC, 2007c), while the *Scotsman's* Jane Kirby suggested that "Fat tax 'would save 3,200 lives a year'" (Kirby, 2007). The ambiguous reference to food or people implied by the term "fat tax" – a similar proposal in Australia was reported in *New Scientist* under the heading "Taxing Gluttony" (Davenport, 2006) – is concomitant with the culture of shame<sup>64</sup> attached to the so-called epidemic, and in which "unhealthy" eating habits continue to create associations between economic and intellectual disadvantage. According to popular representation, in other words, obesity is the domain of the fat and the poor,<sup>65</sup> the latter of which would also be most affected, naturally, by the proposed tax, which would increase food expenditure in the U.K. by 4.6% (Batty, 2007).<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Dr. Michael Gard, an Australian physical educationist, sees anti-obesity campaigns, particularly those in schools, as too often being "punitive and mean-spirited, knee-jerk reactions that simply serve to take some of the pleasure out of life" (in Christian, 2007). This extends the argument put forward by Luik et al. who contend, in *Diet Nation*, that the prejudice against obesity has a long standing history: 'the century-long European and American preoccupation with thinness and the rejection of fat is very much a social construct in which obesity is increasingly associated with the morally unacceptable' (cit. Lyons, 2007a).

<sup>65</sup> This view is endorsed by Gary Foster, director of the obesity research center at Temple University School of Medicine: "We have known for a long time that obesity is disproportionately related to income. The poorer you are, the more likely that you are obese" (in Bég, 2006). Yet Simon Crompton reports in the *Times* that 'experts are increasingly emphatic that it is wrong to believe that obesity is just a problem among certain social classes' (Crompton, 2007).

<sup>66</sup> The Dieticians of Canada Resource Centre similarly reports on a study by the Danish Food and Resource Economics Institute which found that 'taxing food based on fat or sugar content could positively change the eating habits of some groups but not those for whom obesity and unhealthy diets are of the most concern' (D.C.R.C., 2006).

Popular responses to the study provide the second point of interest because the purported motivation behind the tax is not, of course, to increase expenditure, but to decrease consumption of specific “unhealthy” items. Yet, it is the social, political and logistical impossibility of exclusively targeting obese people that renders the general population equally patronised by initiatives such as this. As Rob Lyons – who somewhat contemptuously refers to Oliver’s Feed Me Better campaign as ‘Jamie’s jihad on junk’ (Lyons, 2007b) – suggests, the tax represents ‘a way of saving us from ourselves’:

Efficacy aside, should we really allow the government to determine, through fiscal nudges and prods, how we choose to conduct our private lives? Who are they to tell us whether we should eat broccoli or burgers, chickpeas or cheddar cheese? It’s one thing for your parents to nag you as a child to eat your greens; it’s quite another for the health authorities to nag us when we’ve reached adulthood, and in the process to infantilise us all. Maybe campaigners for liberty should recognise that defending freedom in the twenty-first century will involve standing up for the freedom to choose what passes our lips as well as traditional issues like free speech. (ibid.)<sup>67</sup>

Lyons’ retort verifies British ex-Prime Minister Tony Blair’s rejection of the tax on the principle that people “don’t want to live in a nanny state” (in BBC, 2007c), but what remains nebulous in this debate and, indeed, in the obesity issue in general, is the shifting line, not only between childhood and maturity, but between public and private responsibility. While Lyons’ proposal for ‘freedom to choose what passes our

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<sup>67</sup> Lyons’ objections echo a televised advertisement for the U.S. Center for Consumer Freedom, featuring a montage of various people about to enjoy something – a child with an ice cream; a man sitting at a bar with a beer; another about to take a bit of a hotdog – which is then snatched away from them by an anonymous hand. The voice over reads: “Everywhere you turn someone is telling us what we can’t eat. It’s getting harder just to enjoy a beer on a night out. Do you ever feel like you’re always being told what not to do? Find out who’s driving the food police, at Consumer Freedom-dot-com”. The final shot features a woman about to eat a piece of steak in a restaurant, and when the ominous hand approaches, she snaps, “Hey! Back off.”

lips' should hardly need saying, the combination of government intervention and media portrayal when it comes to obesity is equally instrumental in constructing a climate in which the general consumer is made to feel increasingly insecure about that choice and, therefore, to rely more and more on being told what to do, be it a professed 'nanny state' or not.<sup>68</sup>

To summarise, despite the blatancy of the fact that obesity – epidemic or not – is the result of a combination of factors, including economics, education, and taste (which, to recall Bourdieu, is itself a 'forced choice', in other words consequent to factors such as economics, education, and availability), popular perception remains contingent on what Gary Taubes, author of *Good Calories, Bad Calories: Challenging the Conventional Wisdom on Diet, Control, and Disease* (2007), terms the 'flip flop rhythm of science' (Taubes, 2007a), by which new scientific "evidence" regularly displaces or discredits that previously established.<sup>69</sup> With regard to obesity, one of the most controversial findings yet is the publication, in *The New England Journal of Medicine* (2007), of the results of a 32 year study which concludes that the condition is neither primarily economic, nor a reflection of inactivity, but that it 'appears to spread through social ties' (Christakis and Fowler, 2007). Unsurprisingly, media headlines simplified the findings to suggest that obesity is "contagious" – in *New Scientist*, "Is Obesity Contagious?" (Khamsi, 2007); in the BBC, "Obesity

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<sup>68</sup> Maura Gillespie, head of Policy and Public affairs at the British Heart Foundation, for example, directly asserts that the government should be responsible for people's choices: "[W]e call on the government and industry to help people make healthier food choices. We want the government to take all possible action to keep the price of healthy foods and drinks low" (in Batty, 2007).

<sup>69</sup> Jo Revill provides another example of this in the *Observer*, citing conflicting evidence about how, when and what to feed infants in order to minimise their risk of developing allergies, with the result that 'now doubt is being cast over whether our approach to feeding babies is correct' (Revill, 2007). A more explicit example of culinary fakelore for the purposes of commercial promotion is Marian Burros' suggestion, in the *New York Times*, that U.S. government recommendations for women of 'childbearing age' to eat less fish because of potentially dangerous mercury levels was contradicted by The National Healthy Mothers, National Healthy Babies coalition, not because of new evidence that established the healthiness of fish consumption, but because of substantial economic contributions – a \$60,000 grant, to be exact – from fishing industries (Burros, 2007b).

‘contagious’, experts say” (BBC, 2007b) – not through a virus, as a 2006 study previously claimed,<sup>70</sup> but through social networks.<sup>71</sup> The result is yet another risk – “If Your Friends Are Fat, Watch Out” (Hobson, 2007) – and yet someone else to blame: “Your Best Friend Could Be Making You Fat” (Reuters, 2007); “Putting on Weight? Blame Your Fat Friend” (Moss, 2007).

Taubes suggests that the media-scientific “flip flop” ‘leads to the argument that the fault is with the press, not the epidemiology’ (Taubes, 2007a), yet this range of examples, from respected scientific journals to popular media, equally underlines the continued ambiguity around the obesity phenomenon, including, importantly, a fundamental resistance to acknowledging any uncertainty. Indeed, it is the persistent and repeated representation – scientific and popular alike – of having found *the* cause and *the* solution that ironically perpetuates consumer insecurities around what and how to eat. Despite Lyons’ calls to freedom of choice, these anxieties validate the “need” for interventions, not only in the form of Food Dudes for primary school children, but also for initiatives such as, in the U.S., smaller packets of snack foods designed – with clear echoes of Lyons’ ‘saving ourselves from ourselves’ – to circumvent the fact that ‘most consumers are going to eat a whole package of food, no matter how many servings it contains’ (Anon, 2007c),<sup>72</sup> or the prepaid “healthy card”

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<sup>70</sup> As David Biello reported in *American Scientist*, ‘New study results bolster the controversial hypothesis that certain cases of obesity are contagious. Over the last 20 years, some research has suggested that certain strains of human and avian adenoviruses – responsible for ailments ranging from the chest colds to pink eye – actually make individuals build up more fat cells’ (Biello, 2006).

<sup>71</sup> William Saletan explains the novelty of Christakis’ and Fowler’s research: ‘Many scientists believe that in some cases, viruses literally cause obesity. Others point to genes or environmental constraints, such as fast-food joints, distances too great to walk, and a shortage of parks, sidewalks, and good grocery stores. Research suggests these factors do matter a lot—and to that extent, fat people deserve sympathy, not blame. But such factors can’t account for the spread pattern documented in this study. Genetics can’t explain it, since having a fat friend was more likely to predict a person’s obesity than having a fat sibling was. Environmental constraints can’t explain it, since faraway friends made a difference, while next-door neighbors didn’t. Availability of food can’t explain it, since friends had a bigger effect than spouses did. Nor can sheer imitative eating, since faraway friends had as big an effect as local friends did’ (Saletan, 2007).

<sup>72</sup> Contentions around smaller snack packs are closer related to economics than to choice: ‘According to the C.S.P.I. [Center for Science in the Public Interest], while portion control in the form of small

proposed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture intended ‘preclude purchases of certain snacks, desserts or sodas’ (Heller, 2007), or, in the U.K., the Food Standards Agency’s proposal to implement a “traffic light” system in supermarkets, using colour coding in order to ‘make it easier for people to make “healthier choices”’ (Rothschild, 2007).<sup>73</sup> Finally is the less conspicuous option of food that ‘texts [sic] you back’; a software package for personal cellphones that allows consumers to enter a code found on food packages, and which will then “advise” as to how the specified item fits into recommended daily consumption (King, 2007).

Though from two extremes of the eating spectrum, the trends of high-end name-brand dining and “healthy” eating advocated by the spectacle of obesity demonstrate the extent to which food exists as fetish in the twenty-first century. They further demonstrate how obsessions with food, be it the “foodie” who waits five years to get a table at El Bulli, or the mother who is wracked with guilt for not complying with governmental nutrition decrees, increasingly parade as political choices, with the inevitable consequence of a lesser engagement with politics beyond what you choose – or let be chosen for you – to put in your mouth. This becomes all the more apparent with the trends that exist in defiance of the insecurities that result from “flip flop” science, and by subscription to which consumers seek to actively define themselves as political agents through their food choices.

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packages of food may help consumers control their appetite and their calorie intake, it also will lighten their wallets. C.S.P.I. conducted a survey and discovered that these small snack packs cost, on average, about 2 1/2 times as much per ounce as similar products in larger packages’ (Anon, 2007c).

<sup>73</sup> It is a further index of public expectations that a survey was conducted in Chicago in 2006 to determine how far restaurant chefs are concerned with calories and healthy eating. Out of the 300 chefs interviewed, ‘only one in six said the calorie content [of the food they serve] was very important, and half said it didn’t matter at all’ (Marchione, 2006). Brian McCune, host of South African food blog *Kitsch’n Zinc*, responds: ‘I’ve got news for you before you waste any more money - most chefs don’t give a toss about how many calories you are going to self-ingest, most chefs are not interested in fighting obesity, most chefs couldn’t care less about your blood pressure, your cholesterol levels, your low sodium diets and why the hell should they? If you’re big enough to sign the credit card then you’re big enough to make your own bloody decisions about what you are going to eat. Most chefs haven’t done any medical training, most chefs concentrate on cooking your food instead of looking out into the restaurant through that little round window, trying to figure out your body mass index and whether they should grab the plate of foie gras back out of the waiter’s grasp’ (McCune, 2006).

## 7.6 Hotdogs and the American Hero

Beyond fast-food restaurants competing to outdo each other with ever larger and more calorific offerings,<sup>74</sup> the industry that most flagrantly defies the so-called food police is represented by what is the currently fastest growing “sport” in the U.S.: competitive eating. While eating competitions are not confined to this century,<sup>75</sup> nor to the U.S., their current – and spectacular – visibility is thanks, in part, to the establishment of organizations such as the International Federation for Competitive Eaters (I.F.O.C.E.), which now oversees, among numerous smaller events, the annual *Glutton Bowl: The World’s Greatest Eating Competition*,<sup>76</sup> and The Nathan’s Famous Hot Dog Eating Contest in Coney Island, a regular 4<sup>th</sup> of July event since 1916 (Grynbaum and Richard, 2007). These are among the subjects of *Insatiable: Competitive Eating and the Big Fat American Dream* (2006), in which journalist Jason Fagone documents the disturbing yet fascinating rise of what George Shea, chairperson of the I.F.O.C.E., does indeed regard as a sport.<sup>77</sup> Fagone opens his book with reference to what a friend suggested – significantly ‘the day after George W. Bush won his second term’ (Fagone, 2006:11) – might be his overriding theme: ‘americans [sic] are big, fat, infantile, stupid assholes who love to shovel shit down their throats, and so to shovel more shit down one’s throat than any other is to be truly king of america [sic]’ (ibid.).

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<sup>74</sup> U.S. state fairs, which Alison Roberts dubs ‘overeating extravaganza[s]’ (Roberts, 2007), are another example of conspicuous indulgence. Stephen Chambers, Executive Director of the Western Fairs Association, ‘suggests that being in a crowd at the fair taps into a kind of primitive, animalistic appetite’ (ibid.).

<sup>75</sup> In his forthcoming *A Short History of the American Stomach* (2008), Frederick Kaufman argues that Americans ‘separate-but-equal urges to stuff and to starve’ themselves is not the result of the ‘excesses of modern living’, but dates back to ‘when the first famished Pilgrim clambered off the Mayflower [1620]’ (Kaufman, 2007).

<sup>76</sup> *Glutton Bowl*, which debuted on Fox in 2002, features a series of different eating “heats”, each consisting of different foods, including hard-boiled eggs, mayonnaise, pure butter, and whole cow tongues. Before each heat, an enormous sample – which will not be eaten – of the food to be consumed is tipped out of a large oil drum into a huge bowl, typically spilling onto the stage in a spectacular visual representation of the enormous wastage that the competition incurs.

<sup>77</sup> Shea claimed to have ‘lobbied unsuccessfully for eating’s inclusion in the Olympics’ (Fagone, 2006:20).

The 2007 Nathan's Hot Dog Contest provides evidence of this. It was preceded by notable media furore: firstly, because Takeru Kobayashi, the Japanese six-time defender of the championship title, or Mustard Belt, had confessed to a 'debilitating jaw pain ...[that] generated widespread speculation' (Chan, 2007) as to whether he could compete, and secondly, because his world record of 53.75 hotdogs in 12 minutes had recently been beaten by local gurgitator<sup>78</sup> Joey Chestnut, setting the new record at 59.5 (ibid.). Kobayashi did eventually compete, and the commentators for ESPN's televised coverage of the event attached due historical significance to its last five minutes; essentially a 'competitive chow-down spectacle' (Grynbaum and Richard, 2007) between Chestnut and the reigning champion:

"For Kobayashi to come out here and eat like this is a singular instance of valour; it is nothing short of amazing...the table-enders are not even in focus, because the entire world – the entire *free* world – is focused on these two men ... \$20,000 on the line, and worldwide celebrity acclaim ... this would be the greatest moment in the history of American sports if Chestnut could bring the belt home to Coney Island; it's been gone for 9 years".<sup>79</sup>

When the bells rang and Chestnut was announced as the champion, with a new world record of sixty-six hotdogs, they continued:

"Unbelievable valour from that man, right there, Joey Chestnut, he may indeed have changed the course of the nation ... of our nation ... Chestnut is a true American hero. On this independence day, we're actually not far from where George Washington began to fight the British...."

<sup>78</sup> The term is a registered trademark of the IFOCE, and also the title of their newsletter, *The Gurgitator*. Competitors apparently prefer the term "eater" (Fagone, 2006:12).

<sup>79</sup> Clips of the contest are available on YouTube (see, for example, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7\\_T\\_cnLb8kQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_T_cnLb8kQ))

The conflation of personal and national triumph was finally consolidated by Chestnut's response to how he managed it: "I had to push harder than my body could handle".

Pushing one's body beyond its capabilities for the sake of competition is one manifestation of the "American dream" that is unfortunately as lucrative as it is fatal. Prize money from sponsorships doubled from \$80,000 to \$160,000 between 2004 and 2005 in tandem with growing fan bases and the spectacular quality of each event, which increases exponentially every year (Fagone, 2006:15). At the same time, evidence proliferates about the effect of pushing harder than the body can handle. This is the subject of *The Science of Speed Eating*, a National Geographic documentary which seeks to answer questions like, 'where do 50 hardboiled eggs go if you eat them in six minutes...and what happens when a competitive eater eats too much?' (Cesareo, 2007).<sup>80</sup> Ill effects are not confined to solids; in January 2007 a woman died of water intoxication, not even in pursuit of heroism, but of a Nintendo Wii video game system in a competition called "Hold Your Wee for a Wii" (A.P., 2007). As Fagone somberly and succinctly concludes, the phenomenon of the eating competition is 'a barrel of laughs, it's a death cult, it's a protean myth, it's deeply mysterious.... The impact of these spectacles, as they're actually lived, is outpacing the culture's ability to talk about what the spectacles mean' (Fagone, 2006:206).

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<sup>80</sup> In his blog post about the making of the film, director Dan Cesareo describes the feeling of filming someone whose body starts rejecting the rapid ingestion of too many hotdogs: 'I had filmed with the worst prisoners in the U.S. at Pelican Bay and spent weeks in the Guatemalan jungle, both without incident. But here, lying on the floor in the suburbs of Atlanta I had never been more frightened' (Cesareo, 2007).

## 7.7 From Fast Food to Healthy Food

The vast logical gulf that exists between the industry of competitive eating and the discursive hysteria around obesity as a social ill is just one of many contradictions that define contemporary consumerism, and that equally defy the element of trust as fundamental to the ritual of eating. In Korsmeyer's terms, 'The objects of taste are taken into one's own body; they *become* one. Because tasting and eating alter one's very constitution, their exercise requires trust' (Korsmeyer, 1999:189). In addition to the social and biological risks represented by obesity, consumer trust is periodically jeopardised by food "scares" such as B.S.E., also known as "mad cow" disease, and E.Coli infections,<sup>81</sup> causing large amounts of food to be recalled from supermarket shelves. Yet responses to these scares reveal the precedence of economics over potential health implications; Bell and Valentine note that following the 1996 outbreak of B.S.E. in the U.K., sales of beef rose not in response to media reclamation of any risk factors, but when meat prices dropped. This showed, they conclude, 'how the market's power can overcome a serious health scare ... , as well as revealing how fickle the public can be over food safety' (Bell and Valentine, 1997:183). U.S. consumer surveys similarly found that responses to the 2003 B.S.E. contamination in 'two North American cows was limited and dissipated within 2 weeks', leading to the conclusion that 'the announcements did not fundamentally change consumers' risk perceptions' (Kuchler and Tegene, 2007).

Where reactions to health regulations are more defiant is in cases involving "national" foods, threats to which – often the result of newly imposed extra-national

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<sup>81</sup> The worst outbreak to date was recorded in Scotland in 1996, when 506 people were confirmed infected by the virus, and 21 people died (Moss, 2006). Under the ominous heading "E.Coli: It's back", the *Scotsman* reported on renewed cases, including one fatality, in August 2007 (McLaughlin and Moss, 2007). The virus was believed to have spread from ham sandwiches (Dalton and McLaughlin, 2007). More recently, a U.S. meat firm recalled 21.7 million pounds of beef 'that may be contaminated with E. coli bacteria that sickened more than a dozen people in eight states' (A.P., 2007c).

policies – registers as a threat to national identity itself. Sutton gives an example from Greece:

Standardization, producing food and fruits out of season, placing health regulations on certain processes of production and fermentation (...), strips food of its regional diversity, and strips people of their sensory experience. One recent example of this was the EU response to “mad cow” disease, which placed a ban on the internal organs of farm animals more than two years of age. This was perceived as a threat to the Greek dish “kokoretsi”, made from the stuffed entrails of lambs, and led to a variety of protests, including the establishment of a “Free Kokoretsi” website for people to register their dissent (Sutton, 2001:60-61)<sup>82</sup>

Similar cases involve E.U. regulations around the use of unpasteurised milk in the production of French camembert, and which is the historical requisite to labelling the cheese with the ‘vital certificate of authenticity known as *appellations d’origine contrôlée* (AOC). But the request to continue using the AOC seal is likely to be blocked amid widespread fury at what critics see as an attack on one of France’s greatest icons’ (Sage, 2007).

It is in curious defeat of the authenticity principle attached to national foods that one of the largest global eating trends has been the adoption of the so-called Mediterranean diet, evidenced most clearly in the popularity of commodities such as olive oil. Documenting the intersection between publications on the benefits of Mediterranean-type eating and olive oil sales, O’Neill compellingly demonstrates the influence of media on consumption patterns:

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<sup>82</sup> Sutton also gives the example of the much contested Danish feta production: ‘The “purity” of Greek Feta, represented by the “whiteness” of ewes’ milk (as opposed to the “yellowish” cows’ milk that predominates in Danish Feta) became a rallying point in Greece, thus associating Feta with the whiteness of ancient Greek statues. What was a taken-for-granted national product with local associations became a national symbol in which to debate issues of Greece’s relation to the European Union’ (2001:85).

In 1982 “olive oil” appeared 483 times in the publications tracked by Nexis. Last year [2002], the oil had 8,161 mentions. In that same period, olive oil imports rose from \$8.4 million dollars worth to the \$64.3 million worth that will be imported this year [2003]. Many in the persuasion business believe that for every dollar spent on food-related public relations three dollars would have to be spent on advertising to achieve the same results. (O'Neill, 2003)

Likewise, Zoe Williams reports in the *Guardian* that U.K. sales of “EVOO”, to use Rachael Ray’s now standardised appellation (op. cit.), ‘hit a record £71m’ in 2006. ‘These figures have led some people to conclude that we’re adopting “a healthier, Mediterranean diet”’ (Williams, 2007). Yet her concern, echoing Jonathan Meades’ suggestion that ‘Britain values cheapness over quality’ (Meades, 2006), is precisely that U.K. consumers are being too “British” about olive oil, that is, by endlessly sourcing the cheapest varieties. She concludes that ‘we should try to be more Italian about olive oil, accept its very great expense as testament of its deliciousness, and only use it when we’re really going to taste it’ (Williams, 2007).

It is noteworthy that this injunction to ‘be more Italian’ coincides with one of Michael Pollan’s ‘simple principles of health eating’: ‘Eat more like the French. Or the Japanese. Or the Italians. Or the Greeks. Confounding factors aside, people who eat according to the rules of a traditional food culture are generally healthier than we are. Any traditional diet will do: if it weren’t a healthy diet, the people who follow it wouldn’t still be around’ (Pollan, 2007). To his credit, Pollan does acknowledge one of the main critiques of the globalisation of the Mediterranean diet, namely that what he calls ‘traditional food cultures’ are defined by a variety of factors, including socio-economic contexts, climate and historical labour patterns, or in Sutton’s terms, ‘the

complex history and relations of inequality between urban centers and rural villages' (Sutton, 2001:148). National food habits, in other words, are historically determined by a combination of local factors that contradict the principles of globalisation. One result of this decontextualisation is a manufactured nostalgia for a traditional way of life that is threatened by the very commodification that purports to uphold it. In Humble's analysis of the recent popularity of rustic, or "peasant" food, it 'is no coincidence that the notion of peasant cooking became so significant at exactly the moment that the peasant way of life was actually disappearing in western Europe (all those fabulously cheap rural properties snapped up by Brits all over France, Spain and Italy have become available because so many peasant farmers were finding it impossible to continue living off the land)' (2005:252).<sup>83</sup>

This process of detachment from history and politics through the trope of non-existent authenticity extends the inevitable progression from countercultural to mainstream that is one of the hallmarks of successful consumer economies. Liz Wilson details how the consumption of "health" foods, including 'ethnic foods like dark breads', initially served to protest 'the artificiality and homogeneity of the dominant white culture' (Wilson, 2004:248). What is in evidence now, however, are two contrasting trends, each of which are firmly rooted in that same dominant culture: on the one hand, the inflated prices of "authentic" foods – often marketed under the

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<sup>83</sup> Matthew Fort provides another perspective that adds to the disingenuousness of consuming "peasant" products: 'It is one of the abiding ironies of southern Italy that the beauty of the materials, the artisanal ricottas and pecorinos, *soppressate* [Italian salami], extra-virgin olive oils, particular wheats, wild salads, mountain lamb and goat, so appreciated by visitors passing through so sought after by buyers for the chrome and plate-glass food emporia in London, New York and Tokyo, are sustained by a resolutely peasant underclass. On the one hand, a vocal, gastronomically enfranchised elite decry the globalisation and homogenisation of food cultures. On the other, they – and we – fail to recognise the true cost of keeping traditional, indigenous cultures alive to the people who carry the burden of maintaining them. We endorse labour and indignity that we would not tolerate in our own lives' (Fort, 2004:74). Adorno and Horkheimer also commented on the artifice associated with the commodification of nostalgia: 'The stereotyped appropriation of everything, even the inchoate, for the purposes of mechanical reproduction surpasses the rigor and general currency of any "real style", in the sense in which cultural cognoscenti celebrate the organic precapitalist past (1969:127). Berger similarly recognised the role of (false) nostalgia: 'Publicity is, in essence, nostalgic. It has to sell the past to the future' (Berger, 1972:139).

guise of “gourmet”, or “Slow” foods – signal the increasingly exclusive option of buying and consuming foods according to Pollan’s guidelines to ‘healthy eating’. As Helen Macbeth observes, ‘Where the economic situation allows, fashion also affects preferences, for example in the search for the exotic or the homemade.... However, such changes with fashions are only available to those whose socioeconomic and ecological situations allow such choices’ (Macbeth, 1997:4).<sup>84</sup> On the other hand is the democratisation, particularly through popular media representation, of the principles of this form of ‘healthy eating’. In addition to eating according to ‘any traditional diet’, these include foods marketed under a variety of key words<sup>85</sup> – organic, local, sustainable – which have come to signify ethical and political “correctness”.<sup>86</sup>

While ethical eating can take the simple form of what chef Alice Waters terms “eco-gastronomy” – guided by an impulse similar to Oliver’s Feed Me Better Campaign, Waters’ California restaurant, Chez Panisse, ‘funds a local school to have an “edible food garden”, where the kids grow, cook, learn and eat’ (McEvedy, 2007) – it is at the same time problematised by the same factors that render “healthy” an overdetermined word, because scant consensus exists as to what it really means, and who is entitled to it. Organic produce, for instance, is historically more expensive than mass-produced goods because it is more labour intensive and its growth not aided nor protected by chemical fertilisers and pesticides. So, when super-chain Wal-Mart announced the introduction of organic produce in 2006 – incidentally after the

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<sup>84</sup> John Cloud refers to ‘élites who will pay, say, \$80 for a single pound of Nantucket Wild Gourmet cold-smoked salmon. But finding impossibly tender lox,’ he importantly adds, ‘is a recreational, not nutritional, pastime’ (Cloud, 2007).

<sup>85</sup> Hsiao-Ching Chou satirises the commodification of ethical labels in his review of Jay Weinstein’s *The Ethical Gourmet: How to Enjoy Great Food That Is Humanely Raised, Sustainable, Nonendangered, and That Replenishes the Earth* (2006): ‘Can you fit any more buzzwords into that title?’ (Chou, 2006).

<sup>86</sup> The Fair Trade label also signifies political correctness. As U.K. chef Nigel Slater puts it, “anything with a fair trade label on it, where we know the producer is paid a fair price for their produce, makes you feel good when you put it in the shopping trolley” (in Roberts, 2006a).

publication of Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, as economist Tyler Cowen notes (Cowen, 2006b) – immediate reactions included fears that mass-availability would force down prices, for consumers and farmers alike, and 'lower the standards for what is classified as organic food' (Gogoi, 2006).<sup>87</sup> Cowen confirms: 'Organic farming has simply become another branch of the industrial food-distribution system' (Cowen, 2006b).<sup>88</sup>

The sanction to "eat local", similarly, is a regular subject of debate. Based on the idea of food miles – a term coined by Tim Lang, professor of Food Policy at City University (London), to 'describe the distance our groceries had to travel to reach us' (Rayner, 2007) – the popular version of eating locally centres on the idea of saving carbon emissions by minimising travelling distances for producers and consumers. Yet, as chef Dan Barber comments, 'If I want to purchase a case of carrots, it's much easier (and cheaper) to get them from the Salinas Valley, in California, than from the Hudson Valley that surrounds my restaurants. The food distribution system favors size' (Barber, 2007). Julie Ferry likewise reports on a U.K. government initiative to include greenhouse gas emission figures on all food labels: 'The message was that food miles, which consumers are increasingly taking notice of, are not an accurate way of judging the total environmental impact. For example, fruit and vegetables trucked in from Spain could actually have a lower carbon footprint than those grown

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<sup>87</sup> Wal-Mart has also become the largest global buyer of organic cotton, a fact which is expected to change the entire organic cotton industry by increasing visibility and thereby demand; global production in 2001 amounted to 6,400 metric tons, while Wal-Mart was expected to use 6,800 tons in 2006 alone (Gunther, 2006).

<sup>88</sup> Richard A. Walker's *Bread of Conquest* (2006) similarly debunks a myth of food production, this time in relation to California, one of the main U.S. producers of organic foods: 'Cutting against the grain of received wisdom, Walker shows that California agriculture has a great deal in common with industry. Like the high-tech mecca Silicon Valley, farms and agro-businesses are part of a many-tentacled beast, organized within the matrix of networks and clusters of business districts that link together manufacturers of inputs, contractors who offer services ranging from pollination to hoof clipping, gang bosses who recruit and control labor, cooperatives and trade associations, agro-industrial processors, shippers, bankers, and merchants' (Lilley, 2006).

in UK greenhouses which use up lots of energy for heating' (Ferry, 2007).<sup>89</sup> Despite this, the simplified message to "eat local" continues to proliferate, with websites such as Zero Footprint, an online carbon emission calculator designed to 'Help Individuals to Create a Sustainable World' ([www.zerofootprint.com](http://www.zerofootprint.com)), as well as major U.K. supermarkets such as Tesco leading the way for manufacturers to label snack foods with carbon emission (Sciutto, 2007). Part of the problem, as Sonia Zjawinski points out, is that a majority of consumers don't yet know how to interpret – and therefore make good use of – the information: 'how would the carbon footprint data be read? ... And how would people know what was a large or small footprint? I still don't know what's an obscene amount of carbs and sugars (...), so how am I supposed to know what's bad for the environment?' (Zjawinski, 2007).

This is a brief summary of the numerous issues – most of which are much more complex than this discussion allows – that populate the media with the ostensible intent of making consumers more aware of, and therefore more confident about, their choices.<sup>90</sup> Yet professional disagreements typically have the adverse effect; citing a public debate on the questionable industrial status of organic foods

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<sup>89</sup> Manny Howard, a U.S. chef who experimented with eating local by living exclusively off what he could produce in his backyard, concluded that, 'Eating local is expensive and time-consuming, which is why this consumerist movement will not easily trickle down into mass society. It requires a willful abstinence from convenience and plenty, a core promise of the modern world' (Howard, 2007). Local and organic goods are also typically the main produce on offer at the newly popularised "farmers' markets" which, as Kurlansky suggests, are defined to a large degree by their expense: 'Originally a movement to take control back from corporate industrial agriculture, these markets, serviced by local farmers trucking in their goods, are a most fascinating collusion of small-scale farming and wealthy consumers. There is almost no limit to the price such farmers can ask for their produce.... The wealthy, of course, reject industrial farming, which was always intended to mass produce for the poor (and yet has failed in its greatest goal: to end world hunger). To see just how much resistance to industrial agriculture there is among the rich, travel to rural areas where wealthy urbanites have their vacation homes and watch them pay fees for the privilege of stooping in the field to harvest a crop' (Kurlansky, 2007).

<sup>90</sup> The increasingly mainstream visibility of these issues arguably began with books such as Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* (2001), and films like *Our Daily Bread* (2005) 'an unblinking, often disturbing look at industrial food production from field to factory' (Dargis, 2006), and *Supersize Me* (2004), in which director Morgan Spurlock eats nothing but McDonald's food for a month in order to "prove" its potential ill-effects. *Fast Food Nation* was dramatised in a film of the same name in 2006, directed by Richard Linklater.

between Michael Pollan and John Mackey, C.E.O. of the organic and natural produce chain Whole Foods, William Shea concluded in the *Columbia Journalism Review* that ‘weighing competing claims by the new food writers and their polemical opponents can be just as mind-boggling as reading the science pages to get a handle on basic nutritional information’ (Shea, 2007). The consequent instability in popular perception also undermines any potentially useful politics that emerge from these questions because they appear – and are therefore consumed – as transient fashions, rather than resilient ideologies.<sup>91</sup> As Tom Philpott maintains, overtly conflicting claims ‘herald the arrival of the sustainable-food movement as a pop-culture phenomenon’ (Philpott, 2007).<sup>92</sup>

Letting fashions guide food choices is neither new nor inherently harmful, and neither is it unbecoming for information about how and what to consume to be of popular concern, understood here in a less derisive context than what Philpott terms ‘pop-culture’. But what emerges most forcefully from the trends discussed in this chapter is the increasingly intricate relationship between science, politics, and anxiety, and how, furthermore, what underlies the “political” choices consumers are guided to is often little more than the economic transactions required to secure the perpetuity of supply and demand.<sup>93</sup> Yet the politics of consumerism are, of course, monetary, and it

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<sup>91</sup> This work does not disavow the potential resilience of these ideologies, and that food consciousness can lead to, and indeed constitute, political awareness and activism. This is confirmed by the work of notable Food Studies scholars such as Belasco and Nestle (see the Introduction and Chapter 5 for review of the steady intellectualisation of food through monographs and scholarly journals). However, this discussion focuses primarily on the average, that is, *popular*, consumer and how choices are increasingly informed by media trends, rather than by a critical engagement with food and/or political scholarship.

<sup>92</sup> The ‘pop-culture’ quality of the eat “local” movement is further evidenced by popular markers such as “loctarians”, “localvores”, or “locavores”; names aside, writes *Sacramento Bee* food editor Mike Dunne, ‘they’re swarming across the land’ (Dunne, 2007).

<sup>93</sup> Anne Kaplan suggests as much when she contends that ‘healthy eating is clearly a political issue and the majority of “information” about food and health is driven by commercial considerations, particularly in terms of advertising and product descriptions’ (Kaplan, 1997:179).

is the economic power of the consumer that functions most compellingly to create a sense of identity over and above, as Buford similarly argues, linguistic markers:

Small food – good. Big food – bad. For me, the language we use to talk about modern food isn't quite accurate.... The metaphor is usually one of speed: fast food ruined out culture; slow food will save it (...). You see the metaphor's appeal. But it obscures a fundamental problem, which has little to do with speed, and everything to do with size. Fast food did not ruin our culture. The problem was already in place, systemic in fact, and began the moment food was treated like an inanimate object – like any other commodity – that could be manufactured in increasing numbers to satisfy a market. In effect, the two essential players in the food chain (those who make the food and those who buy it) swapped roles. One moment the producer (the guy who knew his cows or the woman who prepared *culatello*<sup>94</sup> only in January or the old man who picks his olives in September) determined what was available and how it was made. The next moment it was the consumer. (Buford, 2006a:299-300)<sup>95</sup>

Buford's comments can be applied across the eating spectrum: from patrons of the “molecular gastronomists”, to casualties of the “obesity epidemic”, to world champion “gurgitators”, to pundits on “ethical eating”. Central to all is the simple principle behind Bourdieu's 1979 statement that ‘taste classifies’ (1984:6), namely that choice and preference are fundamentally determined by economic access.<sup>96</sup>

On the one hand, the broadness of this economic spectrum of taste provides yet more evidence for debunking the rhetorical equivalence of globalisation. Arthur

<sup>94</sup> Highly prized Italian cured meat, from the Parma region.

<sup>95</sup> In his review of Barry Glassner's *The Gospel of Food: Everything You Think You Know About Food Is Wrong* (2007), Jacob Sullum details how the Glassner ‘was surprised to discover that food companies “seek out consumers’ views about every aspect of their products” and “really do believe in providing people with more rather than fewer options”’ (Sullum, 2007).

<sup>96</sup> According to a 2007 press release detailing the results of joint survey by the U.S. Department of Public Health and Temple University's Center for Obesity Research and Education (C.O.R.E., Philadelphia), Americans are ‘less willing to pay more for healthy dishes’ than they were three years ago, leading to the conclusion that ‘price and taste trump nutrition when Americans eat out’ (T.U., 2007).

Caplan, director of the Center for Bioethics at the University of Pennsylvania, importantly highlights that the existence, at all, of questions about how and what (or where) to eat are “dilemmas of abundance. If we were living in Darfur, the only answer to ‘what to eat?’ would be ‘anything I can find’” (in Sagon, 2006).

Nevertheless, the media prominence of these questions equally demonstrates the extent to which language and representation continue to supply a semblance of agency, albeit in the limited sphere of personal consumption, where hunger in Darfur has no apparent consequence. Indeed, Pat Caplan claims that ‘people continue actively to construct meanings around the food they consume: they develop taxonomies, articulate satisfaction or dissatisfaction with food, resist advertising or medical messages, and in this respect they are agents’ (Caplan, 1997:25). Yet being an “agent” is not always what it seems. Pollan may conclude by advising, as he does, to simply let ‘culture be your guide, not science’ (Pollan, 2007). As we have seen, the consumer who opts to go Mediterranean should have little trouble finding EVOO, including the British shopper who demands cheapness over quality. But what neither may not know – and may never be the wiser for – is that a fair chance exists that the liquid in the bottle is not olive oil at all, because that most sought after commodity also happens to be one of the most highly adulterated Mediterranean exports.<sup>97</sup>

While this is not to suggest that all olive oil is fake, nor that all consumers are inevitably duped, it does serve as an anecdotal reminder of two points which this chapter seeks to underline. First, that “cultures” of eating – with their attendant stresses on authenticity and autonomy – are no lesser manufactured commodities than the convenience foods first introduced in the post-war years, and which heralded the

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<sup>97</sup> In his *New Yorker* article, “Slippery Business” (2007), Tom Mueller explains that a spate of adulteration cases in the late 1990s led to the establishment of an ‘olive oil task-force’, under the auspices the EU anti-fraud commission. According to Colonel Leopoldo Maria De Filippi, commander for an anti-adulteration group run by the Italian Ministry of Health: “The vast majority of frauds uncovered in the food-and-beverage sector involve this product” (Mueller, 2007).

most literal form of conspicuous consumption. Secondly, that common to all the various and competing food ideologies is their function of furthering an increasing disaffiliation with global politics: the time it takes to be ‘agents’, that is, to develop, revise and renegotiate taxonomies, articulate satisfaction, dissatisfaction or even bewilderment in tandem with constantly shifting “rules” or fashions around eating systematically narrows the ambit of personal consumption, which necessarily disallows wider political engagement. There is more at stake here than ending up with a bottle of imitation olive oil. The danger of this scenario is the comedy of Monty Python’s Mr. Creosote, who shocks his fellow diners not only with vomit, but because his vulgarity gives the lie to their carefully constructed mores, in the one place that they are made to feel safest. The restaurant in Python’s skit, in the end, is not far from the ‘entire ... *free* world’ that watched Joey Chestnut become an American hero by consuming sixty-six hotdogs in twelve minutes, or where hunger, according to Ferran Adrià is ‘solved’.

## 8. Conclusion

In a world that *really* has been turned on its head, truth is a moment of falsehood.  
(Debord, 1995:9)

This thesis has examined the spectacle of food in twenty-first century media. Guided in large part by the theoretical framework of Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, I have argued that the media obsession with food in evidence today follows directly from U.K. and U.S. post-war industrial and economic booms, and by the resultant processes of globalisation that have secured, and continue to secure, the spread of emergent trends from these countries to the rest of what can only tenuously be defined as the developed, or Western, world. Chapter 3 begins with recipes as the basic components of food media, and describes their steady commodification following the war; a fetishism that culminates in the possessiveness represented by contemporary copyright debates. Chapter 4 examines major pre- and post-war trends in cookbooks, and argues that the themes of exoticism and "back to basics" that in the early second half of the twentieth century responded to actual market needs, spawned a present-day market based not on needs, but on the normalisation of ignorance and the exchangeability of culture and tradition. The breadth of this market is confirmed by Chapter 5, in which I argue that the interpellative function of food-related language beyond recipes and cookbooks signals the extent to which food discourse overwhelmingly functions through exchange, rather than use, value. Chapter 6 focuses on television as the medium that crystallises all of these concerns; primarily, now, through the humanised commodity that is the contemporary celebrity chef. The eating trends reviewed in Chapter 7 finally demonstrate the media colonisation of private space and confirms that the spectacle, indeed, is not merely something to look at.

Beyond food, two distinct yet related themes pervade these chapters: globalisation, and what I have termed progressive detachment. The former is not only an object of critique; a cursory look at the bibliography that concludes this thesis reveals that the work, indeed, would not be possible without the internet. The World Wide Web exists as a prime feature of the advances in media and technology that characterise modern globalisation, and it is also the means by which I can sit in South Africa and read the *Guardian* and the *New York Times* on a daily basis, and in so doing keep up with the latest innovations in – and controversies surrounding – trends like “molecular gastronomy”, or with who has been crowned the latest hot-dog eating champion of the world. Globalisation as a media phenomenon is a curious thing, because beneath the empowerment provided by the access that it enables and the information that it delivers, lies the possibility, in equally alluring form, of a progressive detachment from history, from politics, from memory, and from tradition. Food can represent all of these things, yet as the narrative of this thesis suggests, media representations of food equally and increasingly – in tandem with post-war industrial and economic developments – betrays them by the manufacture, in their place, if not of *invented* histories, politics, traditions, and memories, then of profound ambiguities around two of the sites fundamental to the construction of autonomous, or empowered, individuals: choice and responsibility.

This alienating effect of media mechanisms is what Debord recognised when he defined the spectacle, in 1967, as ‘not a collection of images’, but ‘a social relationship mediated by images’ (1995:4). A simple reading of this formulation is captured in the image that featured on the cover of the first English imprint of *Society of the Spectacle* (Black & Red, 1967): a black and white photograph of an audience at the first screening of *Bwana Devil* (dir. Arch Oboler), the first full-length, full-colour

3D – three-dimensional, also known as Natural Vision – film, in 1952 (www.gettyimages.com). In addition to being formally attired for the occasion, the entire audience wears the requisite 3D glasses, designed to enhance the life-like quality of the experience. The image is an apt metaphor for the spectacle: not only are the viewers clearly absorbed by what they see, but the glasses allow them to participate in the show. More to the point, the glasses help to generate the illusion of participation. The artifice of the experience is underlined by the formal dress – a sign, at best, of a special occasion; at worst, of pretence – and by the fact that, with all eyes fixed on the screen, the viewers are naturally not engaging with each other. More than just something to look at, in other words, the spectacle manufactures experience and, in this way, manipulates the parameters of human interaction.

Debord's stress on the visual is specific to his historical context, which included developments such as the 3D technology that would enhance the distractive quality of the film industry as a central feature of consumer culture. A historical analogy would be the release, in 1927, of *The Jazz Singer*, as the first feature film with full sound, and which heralded, to recall John Crary, 'a more commanding authority over the observer, enforcing a new kind of attention' (1989:102). *Society of the Spectacle*, from this perspective, remains an imperfect critique of the vast network of communication – visual, verbal, and written – that defines twenty-first century media and their influence on social relationships. At the same time, however, the potential shortcomings of Debord's theory that emerge from this 'simple reading' consolidate the continued urgency of his critique, precisely because what he described then as the 'abundance of dispossession' (1995:31) that resulted from the consumption of hegemonic images continues to be in evidence, yet the unparalleled proliferation of media that provide a semblance of agency, or participation – what

Baudrillard noted in “Disneyworld Company” [1996] as the interactivity that ‘erases the spectacle’ (Baudrillard, 2005) – also functions more persuasively to distract from the spectacle itself as the root of dispossession. This is how it functions as ‘both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production’ (Debord, 1995:6). Indeed, it is production of “agency”, according to Debord, that secures not the production of subjects, but subjection to a social and economic configuration characterised by alienation: ‘Though separated from his product, man is more and more, and ever more powerfully, the producer of every detail of his world. The closer his life comes to being his own creation, the more drastically is he cut off from that life’ (1995:33).

The paradox of dispossession through agency exists widely in food media, and in two distinct manifestations: fantasy and anxiety. Fantasy is the benchmark of commodity fetishism in that possession compensates for the separation between a commodity and its means of production. There is more implied than plain historical ignorance by owning – or wanting to own – a product for reasons other than its utility, and with little concern for its history. More crucial is the function of that product to compensate for a lack, and thereby to materialise the performance of fantasy. In the case of recipes and cookbooks, we have seen how the swift commodification of Elizabeth David’s *Mediterranean Cooking* (1950) following the Second World War coincided with the end of war-time rationing; a unique historical circumstance in which a fantasy of plenty and otherness, based on genuine shortage, intersected with a new availability of plenty, otherness, and the agency represented by purchasing power.

One decade into the post-war era, the example of Julia Child’s *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* (1961) gestures to the rapid naturalisation of otherness as fetishised commodity, particularly in its coincidence with increased intercontinental

travel as one expression of a nascent global village. Relative to the massive contemporary market that continues the trend of culinary tourism in cookbooks and travel alike, not to mention the ongoing vogue of following a so-called Mediterranean diet, these two early examples underline the extent to which availability and access encourage more, rather than less, fantasy, because the success of culinary tourism depends on the commodification of memory and tradition. This is especially prevalent in the currency of authenticity which, beyond cookbooks that make common what Debord terms ‘participation in cultural consumption’ (1995:152), exists in its most blatantly manufactured form as the variety of “home-made” or “traditional” goods available on supermarket shelves. Yet when memories and traditions are traded rather than lived, it is a symptom that experience itself, as Walter Benjamin wrote in “The Storyteller” [1936] ‘has fallen in value’ (Benjamin, 1999b:83). The fantasy of the other, in this way, compensates for the loss of lived experience, which is well demonstrated by the eager reader who translates M.F.K. Fisher’s memoir into a “philosophy” for life.

The examples of M.F.K. Fisher and Julia Child, and particularly the latter’s Americanisation of French cooking, also point to the burgeoning cult of personality that has become a central feature of a consumer economy that literalises the mystery of Marx’s commodity by relentlessly branding objects and experiences with names and faces. In food, the personalised commodity is most obvious in the extensive industry around chef-branded products, including restaurants. As one case among many, the possibility of interacting with Jamie Oliver “himself” through his online diary and by receiving recipe suggestions on personal cell phones confirms the role of media in manufacturing “experience” through the consumption of branded commodities. This interactive feature is furthered – and made ever more real for the

consumer – by live performances, including talk shows like *Rachael Ray* which, by making its host even more accessible to fans, consolidate the irony of a high-profile multi-millionaire who is also the “girl next door”. In addition to the countless examples that demonstrate the fetishism of the commodity that is Rachael Ray is the account of one enthusiastic consumer who appeared as a guest on an early show to share the story of how Ray had “saved her life”; startled by the shadow of someone she suspected to be an intruder at her front door, she had rushed to her kitchen and found her Rachael Ray knife – much to the consternation of her equally Ray-besotted friend, with whom she was having a telephone conversation at the time, and who pleaded with her to use something else. The suspected intrusion never materialised, and Rachael Ray, therefore, had “saved” this woman’s life. What materialised instead was the fantasy of Rachael Ray, no longer as the girl next door, but in this stranger’s kitchen, in the form of a knife. (The range of Rachael Ray Knives are designed and manufactured by the Australian firm Furi®, whose knives are also the preferred choice of U.K. celebrity chef Nigella Lawson). Nevertheless, Ray appeared to enjoy the story, as did the entire studio, and the two friends were each rewarded with a new set of Rachael Ray (knives).

The celebration of fantasy demonstrated by the consumption of others – be they people or cultures – manifests as one discursive paradigm for globalisation wherein the fetishised commodity is made common through travel, purchasing power, and media. Physical location in a globalised world is of little significance: before *Rachael Ray* premiered on U.S. television in September 2006, teasers for the show were available for download on YouTube; one year later, the first season is broadcast on the independent South African channel ETV, available free of charge to all who own a television. Even so, contrary to this principle of commonality is an anxiety that

extends to both producers and consumers. From the perspective of producers, the debates surrounding the copyrightability of recipes suggest the professional, artistic, and economic vulnerability that results from the ostensible elimination of boundaries central to globalisation. The fact that these debates exist at all testifies, on the one hand, to a new accessibility. This is not primarily because global media make recipes themselves more available for sharing, which they do, as we have seen with food websites and blogging communities, but it will be remembered that all those implicated in the allegations of plagiarism were former employees with professional access to trade “secrets”. Rather, these debates exist because the act of professional copying – which the example of Escoffier makes plain has been in practice for centuries – can no longer be secret, thanks to global media.

It is a combined expression of the cult of personality around celebrity chefs, and also of a smaller, rather than a larger world, that a restaurant in Australia cannot reproduce (without credit) the so-called signature creations of a New York chef without being charged for plagiarism, particularly if said dishes are proclaimed on the restaurant’s website. Inasmuch as the controversies point to accessibility, then, the various reactions to them – some proposed, such as the move to copyright; some in effect, such as Homaro Cantu’s various patents, non-disclosure agreements and closed-door policy – equally point to a structure of feeling determined by increased protectiveness. Global commonality, in this example, exists not as promise, but as menace, and accordingly generates a tenuous line between sharing and stealing. That the contributors to this particular dialogue form part of the increasingly élite ‘gastronomic cognoscenti’ (Buccafusco, 2006:44), furthermore, signals the classist inclination behind the question that surfaces again and again in contemporary food media, namely whether the chef is an artist. In the historical context of art as *un-*

common, and which several of these deliberations seek to resurrect, this question is negatively resolved by the very commodification that secures the demand for signature creations.

Franchised branding of the artist-chef engenders one strain of anxiety from the perspective of the consumer whose agency in choosing to dine in a branded restaurant is compromised by the potential of the chef not being in the kitchen. It is a symptom of the current, and relatively recent, focus on food as art that there exists a concern with having to ‘accept imitations as being equal to the original’ (Bittman, 2006), particularly if we recall the history of post-war cookbooks that, not many decades ago, explicitly traded on imitations; typically through the use of convenience foods to create an appearance of authenticity, in food as well as in cooking skills. Pertinent to this context are Debord’s remarks on the expansion of leisure and service industries:

In its most advanced sectors, a highly concentrated capitalism has begun selling “fully equipped” blocks of time, each of which is a complete commodity combining a variety of other commodities. This is the logic behind the appearance, within an expanding economy of “services” and leisure activities, of the “all-inclusive” purchase of spectacular forms of housing, of collective pseudo-travel ... and even of sociability itself, in the form of “exciting conversations,” “meetings with celebrities” and suchlike. Spectacular commodities of this type could obviously not exist were it not for the increasing impoverishment of the realities they parody. (1995:152)

Given that these observations were published in 1967, and continue to be in abundant evidence four decades later (for example, in “Tuscan” architecture around the world), the current injunction to “preserve” food as art by rejecting ‘imitations’ does less to stress authenticity than it does to underline the consumer inclination to fetishise food, firstly by diverting attention from its function as nourishment (a tendency well-

documented by the popular insistence on retaining the term “molecular gastronomy”), and secondly, by attempting to remove it from a general culture of artifice and appearance. Yet, as the unparalleled success of multiple name-branded restaurants reveals – including finding a piece of ‘pure Paris’ (Rayner, 2006) in Las Vegas – the allure of the brand is stronger than the (real) possibility of its duplicity, not to mention the prospect of being served something less than ‘great food’ (Bittman, 2006), imitation or not. In this light, any serious ethical questions surrounding the expansion of the artist-chef empire remain undermined by the simple fact that people continue to patronise the restaurants, and continue to construct identities through the non-engagement with the everyday that this form of conspicuous consumption promises.

More relevant to a majority of consumers, whose realities are economically constrained to the everyday, is the anxiety that results from the spectacle of obesity and its various manifestations as a focus on “healthy” eating, including choices marked as politically, ethically, and environmentally correct. Whereas each of the previous examples suggest dispossession through the ideological mechanisms of interpellation – the process by which consumers define themselves through the adoption of a distinct and recognisable set of ‘signs and social practices’, to recall Eagleton’s summary (1983:172) – they each exist primarily as *distractions* from lack. Culinary tourism, together with the consumption of chef-branded commodities, or name-branded dining, all perform the service of furthering a detachment from politics and the self because they depend for their significance on recognition by, and within, the language of the spectacle. This is the paradoxical Althusserian principle of misrecognition, which distinguishes between historical forms of identity construction – through memory, tradition, community, and which Debord evokes by prefacing his final chapter with an extract from Hegel’s *The Phenomenology of the Mind* [1807]:

“Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that, and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it *is* only by being acknowledged or “recognized” – and that compelled by Ideological State Apparatuses, including media. Community, as Debord suggests, is increasingly defined by and constricted to the spectacle, in which imitation parades as agency:

The spectacle erases the dividing line between self and world, in that the self, under siege by the presence/absence of the world, is eventually overwhelmed; it likewise erases the dividing line between true and false, repressing all directly lived truth beneath the real presence of the falsehood maintained by the organization of appearances. The individual, though condemned to the passive acceptance of an alien everyday reality, is thus driven into a form of madness in which, by resorting to magical devices, he entertains the illusion that he is reacting to this fate. The recognition and consumption of commodities are at the core of this pseudo-response to a communication to which no response is possible. The need to imitate that the consumer experiences is indeed a truly infantile need, one determined by every aspect of his fundamental dispossession. (Debord, 1995:219)

The story of Rachael Ray’s knife, in this configuration, would have no significance on national, or global, television were it not for the wider community – and spectacle – of Rachael Ray fans (and detractors); Mark Bittman, similarly, would not suffer less than ‘great food’ for ‘outrageous prices’ were it not for the accepted cachet of the branded experience.

The media phenomenon of obesity, on the other hand, draws attention to a general lack of critical faculties by the outright and persistent prescription of behaviour in line with what Debord, in his *Comments* (1988), called ‘the ensemble of specialists, to their calculations and their judgments, which always depend on their

calculations' (Debord, 1988:V). The conflicting information we have now seen – notably only a sample of the whole – regarding the purported causes of and solutions to obesity strengthen the correlation between Debord's comments and Giddens' definition of a risk society, in which '[m]anufactured risk is risk created by the very progression of human development, especially by the progression of science and technology' (Giddens, 1999a:4). It is true that the progression of science and technology are, and arguably always have been, fundamental to human development; following Atwater's experiments with the calorimeter, food guides in the U.S., for instance, have been issued and revised since the publication, by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, of *Food for Young Children* in 1916, and, with a more general target, *How to Select Foods* in 1917 (Welsh et al., 1993). The difference now, however, lies in the unmatched profusion of different, and competing, sites of authority.

While there is increasing global consensus that obesity is an "epidemic", and 'not just an individual problem', as W.H.O. defines it, what remains ambiguous is how to structure these sites into a reliable hierarchy; in other words, who to trust. Beyond the actuality that even scientific "facts" can be the result of so-called informational cascades, in which one form of misinformation becomes the basis for another (Tierney, 2007) – a scientific game of Chinese whispers, so to speak – this is a problem of hierarchy that directly conflates the political macro-structure of globalization with the micro-economics of consumerism, where power and authority exist in the combination of wealth and agency. In the context of the broader "Western" transformation from producing to consuming economies, and in the absorption of those economies into a global structure – particularly following World War 2 with the establishment of organisations such as the World Health Organization in 1948, under the aegis of the United Nations – one very real dilemma of choice

exists as to whether be guided by the global recommendations of W.H.O., by nationally published Recommended Daily Allowances, by U.S. best-selling journalism professor Michael Pollan, or by celebrity chef Jamie Oliver.

Conspicuously absent from these choices is the option of being guided by *experience*, and it is the increasingly overt infantilisation of entire populations by disabling their faculties of experience that underlines the fundamentally political nature of media management of “health”, and which paradoxically sanctions the emergence of Jamie Oliver as the most inspiring political figure in the U.K. in 2006. Giddens’ comments on the politics of manufactured risks are useful in this respect:

Risk society is not the same as postmodernism. Postmodern interpretations see politics as at an end – political power simply loses its significance with the passing of modernity. Yet modernity does not disappear with the arrival of manufactured risk; rather modernisation, which continues, takes on new meanings and subtleties. Reflexive modernisation presumes and generates a politics. That politics cannot unfold completely outside the parliamentary domain. Social movements and special interest groups cannot supply what parliamentary politics offers – the means of reconciling different interests with one another, and also a balance of different risks in relation to one another.... Risk is always related to security and safety. It is also always connected to responsibility. It isn’t surprising therefore that as we move towards a world dominated by manufactured rather than external uncertainty, there is a renewed discussion of the nature of responsibility. (Giddens, 1999a:7)

The notion of responsibility, Giddens continues, is predicated on decision-making, or, as I suggested earlier, choice: ‘The idea of responsibility also presumes decisions. What brings into play the notion of responsibility is that someone takes a decision having discernable consequences’ (Giddens, 1999a:8). But where a risk society moves

from the abundance of choice as a positive feature is in the establishment, or making common, of what Ulrich Beck terms “organised irresponsibility” (Giddens, 1999a:8, Beck, 1999); the situation in which responsibility is acknowledged as desirable – we have seen this with popular, scientific, and governmental tendencies to “blame” obesity on various factors, including economics, lack of self-control, parents, and fat friends – but where a lack of authoritative consensus precludes definitive accountability. Organised irresponsibility is a useful way to describe the anxiety that ironically results from too much agency, because one consequence of a climate in which competing claims have become naturalised is the production of distrust; in ‘specialists’, as well as in one’s own decision-making faculties. The example of the “guilty” mother clarifies the relationship between then two: though she rebukes the government, media and Jamie Oliver for interfering with her decisions about what to feed her children and thereby indicates her misgivings about submitting to their authority, her feelings of guilt nevertheless betray a distrust in her own authority. The politics of autonomy (how consumers negotiate choice and responsibility), in this way, are systematically obscured and threatened by the manufacture of – and popular consent to – a risk-infused existence.

The question of autonomy in the face of a mass of media information is also usefully understood from the perspective of what economist Herbert Simon (1916-2000) dubbed the “Attention Economy”. Known as the ‘Father of Artificial Intelligence’ (Spice, 2001), and the 1978 Nobel Prize Laureate ‘for his pioneering research into the decision-making process within economic organizations’ (N.F., 1978), Simon’s early work focused on debunking the assumption made by classical economics of “economic man” as a “rational man” (Simon, 1955), and suggesting, instead, that decisions are made not only in the interests of maximising economic

profit, but are equally informed by psychological factors, processes variously known as ‘satisficing behavior’ (Simon, 1959), or ‘bounded rationality’; the idea that ‘we do what we do because we have learned from those who surround us, not from our own experience, what is good for us and what is not’ (Simon, 1993:157). Coincident with the post-war increase in mass media, the principle behind the Attention Economy is that, as information proliferates, attention becomes the scarcer commodity, resulting in a significant disjunction between the amount of available knowledge, and what we *do* with it:

Many of the central issues of our time are questions of how we use limited information and limited computational capacity to deal with enormous problems whose shape we barely grasp. For many purposes, a modern government can be regarded as a parallel computing device. While one part of its capability for rational problem solving is directed to fire protection, another is directed to paving highways, and another to collecting refuse. For other important purposes, a government, like a human being, is a serial processing system, capable of attending to only one thing at a time. When important new policies must be formulated, public and official attention must be focused on one or a few matters. Other concerns, no matter how pressing, must wait their turn on the agenda. When the agenda becomes crowded, public life begins to appear more and more as a succession of crises. When problems become interrelated, as energy and pollution problems have become, there is the constant danger that attention directed to a single facet of the web will spawn solutions that disregard vital consequences for the other facet. (Simon, 1978:13)

The danger, in short, is that in ‘a world where attention is a major scarce resource, information may be an expensive luxury, for it may turn our attention from what is important to what is unimportant’ (ibid.). Simon’s ideas are pertinent to the narrative of this thesis because they supplement Debord’s analysis with the economic

grounding that some of his formulations lack. Yet their differences, as with many theories which could be enriched by complementing, rather than precluding one another, are primarily linguistic and disciplinary: what Debord dubbed the spectacle, Simon refers to less ambiguously as economics; what Beck and Giddens term risks, Simon terms crises; the *non*-engagement that is one reaction to all of these – and which Simon describes as a deficit of attention – could equally be framed as examples of Marx’s false consciousness, of Sartre’s bad faith, or of what I have termed progressive detachment.

Common to all of these ideas is the rejection of freedom that paradoxically manifests as “agency” in the twin strains of anxiety and fantasy, and which finds its only logic in an economy of consumption. The consumer who gives their hegemonic consent to the spectacular authority of media that dictate when, what and how to eat renounce their autonomy by submitting their attention to the trend or warning – Simon’s ‘information’ – of the moment, be it regarding obesity, ethical shopping, having the luxury to buy Rachael Ray knives, or to visit the latest “World’s Best Restaurant”. The consumer who asserts agency by *ignoring* media-generated risks and fashions is similarly accommodated; in cookbooks and television, by the endless stream of “back to basics” products that commodify ignorance; in more direct eating situations, of ‘thumbing your nose at the food police’ (Tamaki, 2005) through the spectacularly “unhealthy” activities of seeking out ever more calorific offerings from fast-food restaurants, by schools catering to economic demand rather than nutritional decrees, or by going to the extreme of eating sixty-six hotdogs in twelve minutes to become an American hero. The political circumscription of each of these scenarios lies in the economics of attention, which in its scarcity disqualifies intellectual and personal engagement with the wider world and with history. By shifting attention

from ‘what is important to what is unimportant’, to recall Simon’s phrasing, these trends also give the lie to the rhetorical cohesion of globalisation in a world in which, according to statistics from the British Red Cross, more than 20 million people were ‘struggling to live on meagre food and water supplies’ in 2005 – in Africa alone (B.R.C., 2007). “Freedom”, in this world, can only exist in dispossession of knowledge, and in detachment from politics. Yet choices provide the fantasy of freedom and agency, and in this way consolidate the distractive authority of the spectacle.

This work also suffers from a lack of freedom. In part, this is the fault of the object of inquiry itself, namely food media, which continues to generate information at an unrelenting pace, compromising even the attention of the critic, whose work, as a consequence, is never complete. In part, it is the fault of theory, which as a tool is never exhaustive, particularly in the face of rapid technological changes which challenge even the most basic historical categories of human interaction and understanding. In the time it has taken to write this thesis, for instance, the online phenomena of Facebook and MySpace have changed the meaning of the word “friend”, which now exists as a verb – ‘to friend’ – writes Christine Rosen in “Virtual Friendship and the New Narcissism” (2007). Apple’s iPhone was also released in June 2007, much to the joy of award-winning food blogger (101cookbooks.com) and self-professed ‘Apple loyalist’ Heidi Swanson (Swanson, 2007), whose readers can now access her recipes with their phones; the first one she posted described “How To Make Gnocchi like an Italian Grandmother” (ibid.). There can be no doubting that these events belong to the spectacle, yet where they belong in this thesis is questionable, except, perhaps in its final paragraphs, as historical signals of an endpoint, rather than a conclusion.

What this work can conclude is that food media both establishes and calls into question the very nature of food – in the twenty-first century it exists variously as art, as science, as “good”, or “bad” – not to mention the activity of, and motivation for, eating. That food is seldom represented for the sole purpose of nourishment underlines its fundamentally *unnecessary* quality in the proverbial West: not because people don’t need to eat, naturally, but because a demand exists for representations of what is already in abundance; of unreal versions, in other words, of reality. Yet this is the internal logic of the spectacle, and within this logic, a preoccupation with food makes sense because it materialises the guiding economy of consumerism. Through its logical injunctions to consume – and not to consume – food media, indeed, materialises the consumerist ideology:

Once ideology, which the *abstract* will to universality and the illusion thereof, finds itself legitimated in modern society by universal abstraction and by the effective dictatorship of illusion, then it is no longer the voluntary struggle of the fragmentary, but rather its triumph. The claims of ideology now take on a sort of flat, positivistic exactness: ideology is no longer a historical choice, but simply an assertion of the obvious. (Debord, 1995:213)

Food media also, and therefore, makes sense as the guiding model of subject articulation in this economy, and where the autonomy of the subject is in question, it makes sense to turn to the celebrity chef: for lessons in politics, to Jamie Oliver; for history, to Mario Batali.

Yet history and politics, in popular discourses and experiences of globalisation, are easily displaced by money and communication as the *bona fide* agents of growth. It makes sense, therefore, and this time in conclusion, that in April

2007, Gordon Ramsay starred in an advertisement for British Telecommunications (B.T.) in which the multi-millionaire who has proved himself as adept an entrepreneur as a chef ironically appears unable to complete a Do-It-Yourself broadband installation. The punch line – ‘Do What You Do Best’ – assures “freedom” from technical or intellectual engagement with the communication system that ironically facilitates Gordon Ramsay’s global success. Likewise, in February 2007, then-reigning hotdog champion Takeru Kobayashi featured in a commercial for Mastercard, which he uses to pay for an impromptu chow-down spectacle when he bumps into fellow gurgitator Sonya Thomas (a.k.a. The Black Widow) in a small convenience store. In line with Mastercard’s “Priceless” campaign, the tagline guarantees that, ‘There are some things money can’t buy. For everything else, there’s Mastercard’. These narratives are both about credit, and therefore dispossession, in the sense that they promise *more*, and they legitimise the fantasy of excessive consumption through the non-ironic use of food celebrities. These narratives *make sense* because, as Debord himself suggested, it is impossible to critique the spectacle without ‘talking its language to some degree’ (1995:10).

In the language of the spectacle, and in the language of its critic, food media is pornographic. Whether in description of wanting what we can’t have, or having what we can’t want, the term food porn remains the most useful critical tool to describe the profoundly ambiguous relationship to food generated by seven decades of plenty, from World War 2 to the World Wide Web. Of course the effects of industrial and technological advances in the name of mass consumption are not confined to this period; the proposed genesis of Debord’s spectacle to the interwar period of the late 1920s suggests as much. So do Adorno and Horkheimer’s comments on the dominion of the “culture industry” on American life in 1944:

The idea of “fully exploiting” available technical resources and the facilities for aesthetic mass consumption is part of the economic system which refuses to exploit resources to abolish world hunger. The culture industry perpetually cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises. The promissory note which, with its plots and staging, it draws on pleasure is endlessly prolonged; the promise, which is all the spectacle consists of, is illusory: all it actually confirms is the real point will never be reached, that the diner must be satisfied with the menu. (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1969:139)

The fact that this description remains remarkably fitting to life in the twenty-first century underlines the historical continuity of *lack* as a central feature of the consumerism that was set in motion, ultimately, by the “freedom” from material lack generated by post-war economic booms.

Still, two things emerge from the story of chef to superstar to emphasise the discontinuity between then and now. First is the fact that the so-called culture industry is no longer confined to the pursuits of leisure and entertainment, but now occupies the historical role of memory, tradition, and experience in determining actual life choices, such as what, when, and how to eat, including in the privacy of your own home. It is this confluence of the represented and the lived – the *publication* of the private, in other words – that confirms Debord’s critique of the spectacle as ‘a social relationship mediated by images’. Secondly is the blatant translation of the ideology of the spectacle to food. Adorno and Horkheimer’s analogy of the diner and the menu need no longer be an analogy, because whether it manifests as fantasy or anxiety, the twenty-first century eater is never allowed to be satisfied. This is the result of an industry which is relentless in its production of the “new”, which is not so new at all, just unmatched in quantity: of cookbooks, of television, of celebrities, of the variety

of consumables, of information. Secondary to this abundance, but primary to the success of the food media industry, is the production of consumers whose hungers must remain unfulfilled, both figuratively and literally.

To the baker who asked Clarissa Dickson-Wright ‘why it is that the English produce more and more food television and cook less and less’ (op. cit.), I would point out that it is to the happy advantage of the industry, indeed, that basic biology prescribes that people can never get enough of food; of eating it, of talking about it, and of seeing it. And it is to its further advantage that the new combination of a post-war culture of convenience with the twenty-first century “risk” of obesity prescribes representations of food as easier, and safer, than the real thing. ‘Publicity is never a celebration of pleasure-in-itself. Publicity is always about the future buyer,’ wrote Berger in *Ways of Seeing* (1972:132). Food media, similarly, is not about food as much as it is a perpetual advertisement for itself, and a perpetual reminder of how unnatural it has become to enjoy a shameless relationship to food that is unmediated by television, by Jamie Oliver, or by W.H.O. statistics, but guided, instead, by what should be the simplest and most human of faculties: the ability to feed oneself. B.T. does well to remind people to ‘do what you do best’; just don’t think you can do it alone.

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