

**The Intimacies of Industry:
Affect, Effect and the 'Stuff' of Celebrity Chefs**

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Introduction

In the simple act of tuning into a television cooking programme or logging onto a chef's website, consumers invite celebrity chefs into the private domain of their homes. Channelled through an increasing array of multimedia platforms, from television-on-demand to Twitter feeds and smartphone apps, chefs enter lounges and kitchens, even the bedrooms, of consumers; permeating domestic spaces with new ingredients, equipment and cooking techniques. In turn, with cookery programmes located increasingly less in professional contexts or restaurant kitchens, consumers are invited to enter the (often staged and aspirational) homes of celebrity chefs. In the UK, they are invited to sit in Nigel Slater's kitchen while he prepares a 'simple supper', relax in Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's River Cottage garden – maybe alongside a celebrity friend or three – while he digs up his vegetables and cooks a meal on a rudimentary clay oven, 'cookalong' in real-time with Gordon Ramsey and guests on Christmas Day, and, perhaps most intimately, raid the fridge after hours with Nigella Lawson. Even on the occasions celebrity chefs are on the road, consumers are encouraged to share such adventures and experiences; riding shotgun with Jamie Oliver as he tours the United States and Europe, and exploring 'exotic' markets with Rick Stein on his far Eastern, Spanish and Indian *Odyseys*.

This form of 'domestic' media presentation arguably creates an intimacy between the chef and consumer, which is further compounded when chefs' private struggles and family lives are laid bare on screen – a strategy that has perhaps been most successfully deployed by Oliver (Rousseau 2012a). As Collins (2009) explains, cookery programmes are particularly strong examples of the way television networks purposefully look to foster intimacy

between host and viewer, inasmuch they selected chefs consumers could personally relate to. Compounding this is the way chefs directly address the camera – and their viewers – in a conversational style, thereby removing the ‘aesthetic distance between performer and audience’ (Adema 2000: 115). Social media, specifically Twitter, takes these relationships to another level as the flow of information moves beyond the uni-lineal and chefs respond to and pose questions to their audience of ‘followers’. The extent that it is the chef, as opposed to one of his or her team, who is posting these feeds, tweeting and retweeting is of course debateable, but even the most cursory of glances at @GordonRamsey, @jamieoliver or @Nigella_Lawson, for instance, suggest that these forms of communication seek to give consumers the sense that the chef is conversing directly to them and that followers, for their part, are content to participate in this masquerade. Affective relationships are thus fostered not just through the virtual commensality of shared meals, food events and experiences, but also through media techniques that aim to draw consumers into chefs’ (semi)personalised networks and encourages the consumer to return the favour. Rousseau (2012b) summarises, the shift towards giving, instead of demanding, customer attention through social media is commercially beneficial for those in the food industry.

In this article I unpack these intimacies and draw attention to the industry that lies behind the cosiness and warmth of, for example, Nigella’s satin pyjamas or summer evenings spent at the River Cottage. In particular I move away from discussions of the media *per se* and explore the ways in which consumers form and enact affective relationships with celebrity chefs through the material objects, both branded and non-branded, they come to associate with such chefs. As such, I implicitly draw and build upon theories on the ‘social life of things’ (Appadurai 1986) in elucidating how social relations are created and maintained through commodities, and how these, in turn, sculpt and govern people’s practices (cf Bennett 2010, Latour 2005). In so doing, I wish to reveal the political and economic relations oft obscured by the media- and consumer-constructed intimacies I consider. Rousseau states ‘it is easy to forget that they [celebrity chefs] are primarily in the business of selling themselves and their products’ (2012a: xxvii) and, at the very least, my aim is

that this article acts as a reminder of the commodification and market-led motivations that lie behind the para-social relations between chefs and their consumers. Yet, following Rousseau, I also aim to show how consumers are complicit in this process, and demonstrate not only their agency and creativity in the ways they overlay their own meanings onto the ‘stuff’ of celebrity chefs, but also how this process partially circulates and generates the ‘fame’ of chefs. My use of the term consumer is thereby intentional, as I not only wish to indicate the myriad ways in which people ‘consume’ chefs and their ‘stuff’, but also confer throughout that these are economic transactions inasmuch that, however creative consumers may be, they are still buying, and buying into, a commodified product.

Celebrity chefs do not enter consumers’ homes unencumbered. Nor are they temporary guests. Rather they arrive laden with multiple material *accroutements*, such as cookbooks, kitchen gadgets and ingredients. These material objects, and the ways they are used and materially experienced by consumers, creates an ‘absent presence’ (Battaglia 1990) through which the fame of chefs is produced and enacted (cf Gell 1998). Once invited chefs also tend to loiter. As individuals, their fame may be shortlived; they can fall from favour and/or replaced by the latest chef *de jour* and their objects. Yet collectively, celebrity chefs penetrate the domestic spaces of consumers through branded and unbranded material artefacts, making their homes, particularly their kitchens, conversely, more industrialised. As such, chefs’ presence continues long after consumers turn off the television or power down the app. Consequently, in addition to elucidating the economic dynamics underlying these processes, this article further draws attention to the ways in which a focus on the under-examined material worlds of celebrity chefs – and the ways they are experienced – can deepen and broaden our understanding of how both affective and commercial relations between consumers and marketers are (re)produced in the context of food practices. To this end, my discussion can be situated in the broader context of current debates regarding retailer attempts to de-fetishize food through personalised supply networks and re-connective food marketing strategies (cf Baker 2013, Holloway and Kneafsey 2000).

This article is based on fieldwork with UK consumers, and my participants were all professionals, aged between 30-50, and had a self-professed interest in food. My mixed-methods approach included auto-ethnographic reflections (cf Reed-Danahay 1997), questionnaires, focus group discussions, photo elicitation, informal interviews and kitchen walkthroughs, and I drew particular inspiration from Appadurai (1986) who called for a methodological focus on the social and historical trajectories of economic objects and their personal politics of value. To this end, I asked my participants, and reflected myself, on the meanings and associations overlayed onto seemingly fetishized and depersonalised commodities, such as homewares and ingredients. My analysis, then, does not attempt to be a broad survey of consumer behaviour, but should rather be read as a qualitative snapshot of consumers' relationships with celebrity chefs as enacted through the particular lens of material objects.

Kitchens Full of Chefs: Creating Intimacies through Objects

My auto-ethnographic explorations of my own kitchen confirmed my initial suspicions that celebrity chefs are an 'absent presence' (Battaglia 1990) in my home through their material culture. I initially focused on the branded goods: a Jamie Oliver pasta machine, a Heston Blumenthal meat thermometer and a Gino D'Acampo knife block were just three of the immediately-obvious celebrity chef items residing on the kitchen counter. My research participants took a similar lead, with initial responses to my request for information on kitchen equipment acquired, received or purchased because of celebrity chefs yielding images and details of branded equipment – a Jamie Oliver muffin tin, a Jamie Oliver serving platter, a Jamie Oliver salad dressing shaker, Michel Roux saucepans, Nigella Lawson salad hands, a Jamie Oliver bowl, and a Raymond Blanc frying pan were just a few examples. One obvious reading of these purchases is that they are aspirational inasmuch they open a brief window into the world of the celebrity chef and enable consumers to enjoy, albeit briefly, the lifestyle constructed around him or her. As Rousseau states celebrity chefs 'sell entire lifestyles' (2012a: 70). The marketing message is clear – buy this product and cook/ eat/ live/ speak/ have value systems like

Jamie/ Nigella/ Heston etcetera. This perspective was upheld by some of my participants, and was made most explicit by Kate who stated: 'I totally bought Jamie's bowl as I got sucked into the lifestyle he was selling in his 15min meal programme. All this sharing marlarky with large platters etc'. Aspirations were also evident in the way that a number of my other participants had either received, or gifted, chef-branded equipment. Dan, for example, told me that while he would not buy the pay the premium for 'the equal of a normal branded product' just because it had 'Jamie Oliver's name on', he 'strangely might plump for the chef influenced product' if he was giving a gift.

It is tempting to interpret these purchases through the lens of the Frankfurt School theorists (cf Horkheimer and Adorno 1973), wherein a semiotic approach conceived consumer objects as alienable and abstract commodities imbued with the marketers' meaning, which a consumer, by possessing the object, can appropriate. In other words, a direct relationship between identity and consumption is established as the use-value of an object is diminished in relation to its exchange-value. Consumers are thereby understood to be manipulated into passively consuming by 'the Culture Industry', which cultivates false needs among, and defrauds, the masses. Yet, Kate, in many ways, is exceptional among my research participants, most of whom stated – some categorically – that they did not believe that the celebrity chef associations or branding influenced their decision to acquire or purchase kitchen equipment. Amy told me in reference to a Jamie Oliver bowl that 'it's Jamie's, but we didn't buy it because of that – we just liked it' and Lily explained that her Raymond Blanc frying pan was purchased mainly 'because it was the cheapest option in the shop at the time', although she later told me that Raymond Blanc was also her favourite chef so affective relations cannot be altogether discounted. Returning to Amy, she initially was uncertain as to whether she would be able to contribute to my research as the product she identified as 'Jamie's' was not branded as such. However, in making this tentative comment, she also inadvertently widened my scope of enquiry by indicating that everyday kitchen objects, even when they do not carry 'the brand'.

As a result of Amy's comment, I revisited my kitchen cupboards with fresh eyes, looking for the presence of chefs in non-branded equipment and examining the routes and associations through which I had acquired them. It did not take much reflection on my part to realise that my decision to purchase my Kenwood Chef may have, in part, been driven by (perceived) need and brand values, but that I also connected the product to Marcus Wareing, who promoted the very same model that sits proudly on my kitchen worksurface in a series of advertisements in *Good Food* magazine. Moreover, Mary Berry was, I surmised, at least partially responsible for the madeleine mould that lurks in the cupboard and that I have used exactly once following my hosting of a *Great British Bake-Off* inspired afternoon tea. Likewise, Valentine Warner for the deep-pie dish that gathers dust on the butcher's block, which was bought in a fit of enthusiasm following *What to Eat Now*. The never-used ice-cream maker (an add-on to the Kenwood) was a Christmas gift, but one I requested due to my frustration at not being able to make a number of recipes featured in the programmes and books of Jamie Oliver and Nigella Lawson. I also held Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and Paul Hollywood – the latter another product of *The Great British Bake-Off* – accountable for the bread-proofing basket, a result of my short-lived phase to produce 'real' bread, and Heston Blumenthal for the never-used (and in all honesty never-likely-to-be used) molecular gastronomy kit.

These products may speak of my participation in multiple cookery phases, whims and trends (not to mention my gullibility), of which celebrity chefs and their unique position of authority and influence, coupled with the media and the food marketing industry shape as much as they reflect (cf Rousseau 2012a, see also Roseberry 1996). For instance, the resurgent interest in baking, in part attributable to programmes such as the *Great British Bake-Off* and the 'rediscovery' of Mary Berry as a 'national treasure' (Sanderson 2013), and the popularity of nose-to-tail eating, as championed by Douglas Henderson and reflected in *Masterchef*, are both examples of celebrity, the market and media dialectically producing recent 'food fashions' or 'fads' with which consumers engage (cf Lovegren 2005). The influences here are numerous, entwined and often mutually enforcing – incorporating restaurants, chefs, critics, bloggers,

television programmes, social networks, retailers, lobby groups, marketing and branding agencies, food networks and consumers – and it would be an impossible, and probably futile, feat to attempt disentangle the myriad of multi-faceted factors and actors, and assess their relative influence, that create and promote food fads. We can, however, point to the specific actors, agents and institutions that, in particular contexts, exert influence (intentionally or not) over consumers, the mechanisms through which they do so, and the ways consumers respond and negotiate this relationship. It is exactly these processes and dynamics that I explore below.

What is of immediate interest, however, are the ways in which I was able to trace specific items of kitchen equipment – seemingly brandless commodified objects – to a specific celebrity chef, and start to identify ‘the social life’ (Appadurai 1986) of the things in my kitchen. In so doing, I made the impersonal and generic – the alienated and fetishized commodity – personal and particular, embedding the object in a relationship, or specifically my relationship, with a particular chef. Further discussions and ‘kitchen walk-throughs’ with my research participants suggested that I was not alone in establishing these relations, as they started to make connections between everyday kitchen commodities and celebrity chefs, primarily because of the recipes for which the objects had been acquired, thereby investing them with their own meaning. Appadurai helps us understand this process by demonstrating that symbolic meanings are not abstractedly fixed, but are instead entangled in social relations. He elucidates how objects that are fetishised, in the classic Marxist (1954) sense that the relations of production and use-value are obscured by the product’s processes of commodification and its exchange-value, are thereby defetishised by consumer engagement and activity.

This practice, of making the invisible visible, and the impersonal, personal, has not been uncommon in food retailing, as producers and retailers increasingly look to make transparent, and seemingly shorten, the supply chain through the use of origin labelling (see Baker 2013, Holloway and Kneafsey 2000, West 2013). Today, one only has to look towards the

supermarket shelves to see pictures and names of farmers and growers emblazoned upon products; a process that is not so dissimilar to the branding of homewares with the names and faces of celebrity chefs. In these contexts, however, the labelling (or branding) is driven by the retailer (or producer) and is an attempt to re-connect the consuming masses to an individual producer/grower/chef in order to imbue the alienated product, and the economic transaction, with sociality. Yet, the dynamics to which I am referring to here differ inasmuch they are enacted by the *consumer*, who overlays their own meaning and creates their own social relation with a celebrity chef through the object. In other words, individuals embed their commodities in networks of affective relations, drawing an association between a non-branded item and a specific individual. As such, the object provides the pivot around which the relationship between consumer and celebrity chef is fostered, and, in turn, the relationship dialectically imbues the commodity with social meaning.

Rousseau (2012a: 65-9) describes a similar process in relation to Rachael Ray and the story of how a fan warned off a domestic intruder with the chef's branded knife. The consequent punch line of this event was 'Rachel Ray saved my life!', and Rousseau uses this as a platform through which to explore how reality and representation become blended as one, with Ray reported to have enjoyed 'the fantasy of herself in this stranger's kitchen, embodied in a knife' (ibid: 65). As such, Rousseau points to the ways in which objects make manifest not only the relationship between chef and consumer, but also brings forth the chef – concluding 'a knife bearing her logo is Rachael Ray' (ibid: 69, original emphasis). Her discussion only refers, however, to branded items and I wish to go further than this as my analysis suggests that an object does not have to carry the chef's brand to embody the chef, but rather that the consumer themselves can effectively brand a non-branded commodity through association.

Gell's (1998) theory of distributed personhood is helpful here as he expounds the ways in which the self is projected into material forms and extended across time and space. Thus material objects are not only demonstrated to

embody individuals, but the 'fame' of said individual is enacted and circulated by others' use and engagement with the objects into which the individual has been 'distributed'. Resonating with Bennett (2010) and Latour (2005), things are not passive, but actively create and formulate our worlds and our social relations. Applied to celebrity chefs, we can, then, interpret their fame as constructed and circulated not by the chef, but by the consumer (via objects). As Rousseau highlights, 'celebrities have to be celebrated by someone' (2012a: xix). I support Rousseau's argument that consumers' complicity cannot be denied, but suggest her account does not fully account for the role the 'stuff' of chefs play in fostering these relationships and potentially enabling their influence. Gell and Appadurai help us address this as they both draw our attention to the centrality of commodities in externalising and distributing the selfhood of that celebrity and the ways in which they make their presence felt in our everyday lives.

Chef-branded objects and the use of celebrity chefs in marketing promotions can thereby be understood not just as aspirational lifestyle marketing, but also as an attempt to make explicit and capitalise upon, dare I say exploit, this often implicit and intimate relationship between consumer and chef. In many ways this suggests that the conclusions of the Frankfurt School were perhaps not so far off the mark and what we are witnessing is indeed a triumph of advertising' (Horkheimer and Adorno 1973: 167). Yet this is only one half of the equation, as consumers are more complicit in creating these relationships than the framework of Horkheimer and Adorno allows. The agency and creativity of consumers has been well documented in a number of contexts (Caldwell 2004; Miller 1987, 1995, 1998; Watson 1997), and this body of scholarship shows that the Frankfurt School theorists have tended to reduce objects merely to a system of signs divorced from their social context and material use. Subsequently the consumer's relationship with commodities becomes relegated to the analytical and methodological margins. De Certeau (1984) and Miller (ibid), amongst others, re-establish this relationship by demonstrating that social actors imbue their own meaning into objects, creating in the process new meanings and relations. Thus, consumption is portrayed as a creative, rather than passive, act: an argument that has

parallels with Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model, and 'active audience' theories and their subsequent developments (Fiske 1987, see also Morley 1993 for discussion). This contestation of advertising and media messages can similarly be seen in the practices and views of my participants. Dan, for instance, was keen to point out that he could see through the marketing techniques and price premiums of chef-branded equipment, explaining that a Tefal frying pan with Oliver's name on was 'a 1/3'd [sic] more. A great marketing idea obviously but I not fooled by this ploy'.

Hence, to argue that consumers are effectively duped into purchasing objects, and that they passively consume the messages propounded by media and marketers alike would be too simplistic an interpretation and do a disservice to the ways in which my participants amongst others actively produce and enact relationships with celebrity chefs. This indicates that the influence of celebrity chefs on both consumers' food practices and economic behaviour is more implicit and invidious, and more complex, than 'culture industry' interpretations allow. But one cannot ignore the influence of celebrity chefs or the embodied 'power' of their 'stuff', and I turn to develop this theme in relation to the preferred ingredients and cooking practices.

Kitchen Ingredients: Creating the 'Authentic' Product

Celebrity chefs are not just instrumental in bringing kitchen equipment into consumer homes. They further make their presence felt through the introduction of new ingredients, cooking techniques and dishes; shaping not only the food that consumers procure, prepare and ingest, but also the ways they do so. This process is double-edged. On one hand it is indicative of celebrity chefs' influence over – or interference in (cf Rousseau 2012a) – consumers' food and eating practices. Yet on the other it can be understood to democratize culinary knowledge and practices, and the cultural capital with which this is associated (Adema 2000), providing consumers with mechanisms through which they can express their own tastes, preferences and politics, while also opening up new spaces for cosmopolitanism and the construction of identity. I address this potential democratization and erosion of elite culinary knowledge in the final section, but first I wish to continue and

extend my discussion of active and creative consumers by exploring the ways they (re)produce the fame of chefs through their use of commodities and draw attention to the precarious notions of authenticity on which chefs' reputations are balanced.

As with branded kitchen equipment and homewares, the briefest of strolls through the aisles of any supermarket or food retailer shows the extent that celebrity chefs 'sell' products. Waitrose – a higher-end supermarket – yields a number of exclusive and original Heston Blumenthal branded products, from popcorn, ice-cream, smoked salmon and gin to ready meals, sausages, stock and burgers. 'Heston from Waitrose' is described on the supermarket's website as 'bringing an unexpected twist to your favourite dishes' and the chef is quoted as saying:

Waitrose is a supermarket that's actually excited about food. That's why I've worked with them to develop this selection. All the special techniques I've developed in my restaurants, all my scientific knowhow and a sprinkling of culinary magic have gone in creating what I think is the finest range of foodstuffs you'll find anywhere. Because a great meal needs great ingredients (Waitrose.com).

Waitrose further had (until February 2013) a three-year advertising tie-in with Delia Smith, who showcased 'hero' products, and the somewhat unlikely pairing of the 'culinary alchemist' Blumenthal (Hollows and Jones 2010) and the 'doyenne of the kitchen' Smith (Cooper 2013) were marketed not only in store, but also through advertising, recipes, Waitrose's own food magazine, Waitrose's website and a series of promotional narrative-driven films demonstrating recipes, ingredients and utensils that ran the length of commercial breaks and were described by Waitrose's commercial director as a 'mini Delia show in prime time' (Wallop 2010a).

Smith is less exclusive in 'her' products than Blumenthal, and a range of 'Delia Cheat Ingredients', which signify the chef's endorsement and use in her *How to Cheat at Cooking* (2008), are widely available outside of the confines of

Waitrose. The publisher blurb of *How to Cheat* directs the reader to the products:

Delia has sourced a range of pre-prepared foods (from tins, chill cabinets, freezers and store cupboards), to help you short circuit cooking times and techniques. Readily available from supermarkets, delis, online food shops and farmers markets and of the very best quality these recipes will allow you to create fabulous food without the faff.

Moreover, Jamie Oliver, in addition to his advertising deal with the supermarket chain, Sainsbury's, has a seemingly ever-growing stock of Jamie branded prepared foods, including: breaded fish products (produced in association with Youngs, a major producer); pasta, sauces and oils; herbs and spices; and prepared 'ready meals', including the range 'Little Meals' designed for children. *The Grocer* reports that a number of these products are now exported to 39 countries (Montague-Jones 2013), and in 2012 a 'deli-inspired' premium range of foods, branded 'Jamie Does Lunch', was added to his portfolio in partnership with Alliance Foods and Boots, a major high-street pharmacy (Chapman 2012). An additional range, 'Jme', produced in 'collaboration with some amazing artisans and small-scale food producers' (Jme.com), is also available through independent delis and department stores.

These high-profile products and endorsements, while extensive, are also just the tip of the iceberg, with retailers also carrying (smaller) ranges from lower-profile chefs. Paul Rankin bread and Ainsley Harriot couscous are just two examples of the products that are available from my local mini-mart. The relationship between celebrity chefs, retail chains and food producers are, then, established and evident, and one can assume from the ubiquity, mutually beneficial.¹

¹ Rousseau (2012a: 48) states that an advertising deal with Oliver is reputed to have generated an additional £740m for the supermarket Sainsbury's in the first two years. Cooper (2013) also reports that in 2010 the entire supply of 25,000 Heston's Christmas Pudding was entirely sold out within weeks. Smith's contract with Waitrose was not renewed by 'mutual agreement' (Cooper *ibid*).

The relationship between chefs and retailers is however, a potentially precarious one, as over-exposure, self-evident economic interests and/or the selection of a partner deemed inappropriate by consumers can lead to a decrease in popularity, and a questioning of the chef's 'authenticity'. As Gaynor exclaimed on sending a photograph of Jamie Oliver seed packs taken at Homebase [a DIY store] 'his face is on f***** everything' and informed me 'and I was in Boots today and he is now doing packages [sic] sandwiches'. She continued, 'you can now buy Jamie Oliver pans in Home Bargains [a discount homewares store]. Suggests there is a surplus of chef products on the market'. Gaynor later showed me the back inside cover of Jamie magazine that lists his commercial enterprises, which include a range of restaurants, food products wood-fired ovens, kitchen equipment and homewares. Upon being asked how these listings informed her opinion of Oliver, she responded:

Erm, well I guess when I saw the long line of businesses it opened my eyes that 'Jamie' really is just a business. He promotes the idea that he cares about food and what and how we consume, which I'm sure he does, but that sincerity is brought in to question somewhat when I see his range of wood fire ovens, seeds and plants, on the go pre-packaged sandwiches and homeware. It appears he has fingers in every pie there is, be it Italian, British wood-smoked or BBQ'd. Seriously, the guy must be loaded. He also cannot be involved directly with each of these 'projects and campaigns' when he has so many. How much of 'Jamie' is 'Jamie'? Not much I imagine.

Similarly, Laura was keen to discuss Oliver's prepared fish products, explaining that while she had once agreed with his politics and respected him, she thought that he was now 'selling out': 'how can you be taken seriously as a chef and talk about the quality of school dinners', she mused, 'when you're promoting fish fingers and basically using your name to sell crap food'. This theme of 'selling out' was recurrent in a number of my discussions, and suggests that consumers not only have high expectations of celebrity chefs, but that their popularity – and their potential influence – is based on an affinity of consumer and chef values. Any indication that this empathy is not as strong as imagined can result in consumer distancing, a point exemplified

by Gaynor who after seeing a television advert sent me the message, ‘B***** Mary Berry has sold herself to the f***** Daily Mail!!!!!!!’ and continued ‘I like her less I think’. At a later date she continued her Oliver ‘rant’ by comparing him to Ottolenghi, who she had seen during a question and answer session at a literary festival.

Compare that [Oliver’s list of businesses] to *dear* Otto who, when asked at Hay last year when and if he would open a restaurant in Wales or at least outside of London, said he probably wouldn’t because he wouldn’t be able to maintain the oh-so-important close eye, on a daily basis, in his restaurants, which ensured the food remained *authentically* Otto. That stirred more respect and belief that his food was important to him than seeing Jamie’s long list of business ventures on the back page of his branded magazine (my emphasis).

The ‘authentic’ product, then, in this celebrity chef context, does not just refer to a dish, but also the chef. What constitutes authenticity is, of course, subjective, but as Gaynor’s and Laura’s comments suggest, claims to authenticity relate to the chef’s personal engagement with their food and food projects. My participants do not have an issue with chefs’ commercial endeavours *per se*, and at times they are astute about the industry with which they are engaging, but they do object when they believe that economic gain is compromising the chef’s love and personal involvement with food. ‘Dear Otto’ is thus contrasted to the ‘loaded’ Oliver, with one perceived to be living his values and the other as too business orientated and self-interested.

Rousseau (2012a: 55) has drawn attention to the ways in which being ‘real’ is increasingly traded as a commodity in the food media world. Oliver has exemplified this approach, and his current fall from grace among some of my participants indicates that he has, perhaps, become a victim of his own success; his believed ‘inauthenticity’ is arguably experienced more strongly because his career to date has been built on a representation of being ‘real’. But, as Rousseau points out, ‘being real’ does not just equate to cooking experience or culinary training, but also, as Gaynor and Laura’s comments support, incorporate private lives, political outlooks, personal backgrounds, food values, and ‘practising what is preached’. I would further add commercial

enterprises and business partners to the list. Moreover, in the HD (high definition) world of television and glossy magazines, looks also play a part. Whether a chef has to be classically attractive (and what that comprises) is debateable (see Cavendish and Skidelsky 2013) but, as Hollows and Jones's (2010) discussion of Blumenthal demonstrates, it helps if the chef's personal image fits their culinary style, an argument reiterated by Lily who stated that her least favourite celebrity chef was Lorraine Pascale because 'I want my chefs to be chefs, not a model pretending to be a chef'.

Oliver, Smith and Blumenthal may be exceptional in terms of their public profile and commercial relationships, but even those who are perhaps more reticent in promoting their, or others' brands, through major retail outlets and food manufacturers can influence and sculpt consumers tastes and, in turn, the foodstuffs that fill our kitchen shelves and cupboards – and our stomachs. The causal relationship between the foodstuffs used or promoted by chefs and those products' success in the market is most immediately and clearly seen in the notion of the [chef's name] effect, which refers to a spike, (often leading to a shortage) in sales of a particular product after the chef has used them. Famous examples include Jamie Oliver and nutmeg (G. Smith 2008), Julia Child and any kitchen implement used on her show (Lovegren 1995), and Delia Smith and cranberries, capers and eggs (Rousseau 2012a). Smith is also credited with transforming a small kitchenware company when she referred to their omelette pan as a 'little gem',² leading Sainsbury's to stock chesnut flour for the first time following her the broadcasting of her chesnut cupcakes recipe and boosting instant mashed potato sales (Singh 2009). The term the 'Delia effect' entered the *Collins English Dictionary* in 2001 (Rousseau 2012a, Singh 2009), and Wallop (2010b) reports that the "Delia effect' is expected to strike again', as Waitrose predicted increased sales in rhubarb, ginger and meat thermometers (and a total sales boost of £1 million) following the screening of their first commercial featuring Smith and Blumenthal.

² Singh (2009) reports that sales within the company rose from 200 a year to 90,000 in four months.

My own Blumenthal meat thermometer may well have been acquired as a consequence of this campaign, and continuing my own auto-ethnographic musings and following the same method through which I examined my kitchen equipment, I turned to my store cupboards. The influence of Ottolenghi could easily be discerned in the unopened jars of sumac and za'tar; Thomasina Myers was accountable, I determined, for a range of chillis and chilli pastes; Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall for a bag of pearl barley; and the combined forces of Paul Hollywood and Dan Lepard for the range of bread flours. I was not alone in my ingredient purchases. Lily explained: 'I purchased a lot of specialist ingredients after buying Rick Stein's book *Far Eastern Odyssey*. A lot of the ingredients I ended up buying online at the time (palm sugar, nigella seeds/specialist sauces)'. When asked whether she used the ingredients she responded 'they are not everyday ingredients so I don't use them very often. I think the palm sugar went rock solid in the end and I threw it away'. Others made similar comments, often citing 'exotic' ingredients to which chefs had either introduced them or encouraged them to purchase. Kelly's response to my question of what, if any, new ingredients or foods had she purchased because of TV chefs, best exemplifies this practice:

Oh my god, so much! Almost all because in order to execute an Ottolenghi recipe. Here's what I remember:

1. Ras el Hanout
2. Palm sugar
3. Palm Oil
4. Hazelnut Oil
5. Almond Oil
6. Tarragon (hadn't cooked with it before)
7. Kizmi Biber
8. Sumac
9. Jerusalem artichokes
10. Shakshuka

Like Kelly's connection of her new foods to Ottolenghi, many of my participants explained that new ingredient(s) had often been purchased with a specific chef's recipe or style of cooking – that had either been shown on

television or featured in a book or website – in mind. Others, however, had another explanation. Lily rationalised her *Far Eastern Odyssey* purchases as ‘they featured heavily in the recipes and the photography and presentation in the book is so good that you immediately get drawn in and want to go and buy all the ingredients’. Echoes of the ‘Culture Industry’ can be heard in Lily’s explanation; she watched the television show, bought the book and then purchased the ingredients, buying into the lifestyle fantasy the chef (and media) is selling. It is the ‘chef effect’, as experienced by the consumer. But this, as I have already intimated and discuss further below, is not a unilineal process, as what is striking about these comments is the way that my participants constructed connections between a chef and ingredients in their own kitchens. Thus, as with equipment, invisible threads of intimacy are created and fostered by the meanings and interpretations that consumers overlay onto particular foodstuffs, branded or otherwise. I am not saying that this experience is not guided and influenced by media and marketers – to do so would pay little heed to the political and economic structures of the food industry – but rather wish to draw attention to the active roles consumers play, as Gaynor’s and Laura’s comments testify to the ways in which consumers create the pedestal on which they place celebrity chefs (and chart their fall). Whether fans or critics, celebrity chefs, then, are just as much products of consumers’ imaginations as they are the media and their own construction.

Lily’s *Far Eastern Odyssey* purchases further indicate the ways that celebrity chefs can practically guide consumers’ food-buying practices. Many a celebrity chef cookbook and website contains not only a list of ‘essential’ store cupboard ingredients and equipment, often with the reassurances that this list is really quite affordable, modest and accessible, but also a list of recommended suppliers. Retail affiliations are, as we have seen above, not unusual in the celebrity chef industry, and at times the transparency of these endorsements does not always equate to a more ‘savvy’ consumer. As Dan stated: ‘Delia Smith and Heston Blumenthal can easily steer me to Waitrose for ingredients’. However, lists of suppliers are commonly more insidious, containing lists of smaller retailers and preferred artisan producers. These recommendations do

not appear as explicitly commercial or economically beneficial as those between chefs and supermarket chains, but I argue they are no less value-laden. One only has to browse Rick Stein's *Food Heroes* (2002) or the *Great British Food Revival* (Vaughan 2011), an edited collection in which celebrity chefs promote their favourite heritage ingredient, to get a sense of the type of values infusing such activities. These recommendations for suppliers and ingredients are also strikingly similar to endorsements with supermarkets in that they 'steer' consumers to specific retail outlets, some of which are the chef's own fulfilment website which are run in conjunction with their recipes and cookbooks.

A number of my research participants found the online stockist suggestions at the backs of cookbooks very 'helpful', as it enabled them to acquire specialist ingredients without expending the time and energy required to track them down. Ottolenghi's site, for instance, offers Palestinian and Lebanese za'tar mixes, dried rose petals, dried barberries, whole Iranian limes and mahleb among the 'other essentials' of organic apricot kernel butter and sea spaghetti: foodstuffs that are difficult to obtain in the UK outside of urban centres and specific communities. The wide and specialist range available on these sites encouraged the prevailing sense among my participants that celebrity chefs had 'done all the legwork to save me doing it' (Dominic). This sense of ease was further reinforced by Lily who advised me that 'Ottolenghi also now has a website that you can buy specialist ingredients from, which I would use if I couldn't get the ingredients in the supermarket. It's far easier'.

There was not, however, any sense among my participants that these lists of recommended suppliers were shaped by commercial endeavours or the chef's own politics or food values. Rather they were interpreted as rather unbiased and founded on the chef's specialist knowledge. As such, these recommended lists of stockists were juxtaposed against the more obvious economic enterprises and commercial relationships, with the former being regarded as unproblematic and the latter, as we have seen, being subject to critique. Following Rousseau's (2012a) elucidation of the subtle (and not-so-subtle) ways celebrity chefs influence, and interfere, with the foodways of consumers,

this unquestioning and uncritical engagement with chef websites and supplier lists does raise questions as to the ways chefs' authority is enacted by consumers and the extent we 'allow', and encourage, chefs to mediate our shopping and eating practices for their own commercial benefit. Viewed through this lens, Rick Stein's list of *Food Heroes*, for example, may not be that far removed from Jamie Oliver's relationship with Sainsbury's or Heston's deal with Waitrose after all.

Yet, as Dan highlights, consumers do not blindly purchase all chef recommended ingredients or source them from recommended retailers, but rather exercise their own agency and ingenuity. Kelly, for instance, explained that she now 'picked up stuff' from Turkish and Asian retailers safe in the knowledge that 'I'll need it at some point', which she had never done before, and Dan told me, 'although I try to follow certain TV chefs' recipes, I tend to find alternatives as I do not have time generally to the specialist shops or wait for them from online sites'. He does, however, have time to watch the chefs on television, telling me 'I watch far too much TV because of them as they can all be fascinating, interesting, informative, and also annoying at the same time', so his time-poverty may be more perceived than realised. Dan's consumption of cookery programmes appears to echo, and substantiate, the argument that watching cookery programmes is a vicarious, gastro-porn-like pleasure that has little to do with increasing cooking skills (Rousseau 2012a); an argument further supported by Lily, who reinforced the fantasy aspect of cookery programmes by saying that Raymond Blanc was her favourite chef not only because he 'creates the most amazing looking dishes', but also because he is 'very entertaining to watch and the environment he cooks in makes you want to drop everything and go straight to Le Manoir and move in!'

Yet, to some extent I challenge this gastro-porn argument. I am not denying the vicarious consumption element of cookery programmes, nor their entertainment-focus. However, all of my participants stated – some forcefully – that celebrity chefs had improved their cooking skills, whether it was by introducing them to new ingredients, techniques or shortcuts. The chefs thereby enabled my participants to be more creative in the kitchen, with Dan

further demonstrating that his time shortages led to ingenuity and innovation in his cooking. Dominic, by contrast, preferred to find the 'proper' ingredients and follow a recipe more precisely, although conceded that this was not always possible and that using alternatives had also led him to create some 'unique dishes'. These results, as Dan also noted, had led to some unprecedented cooking disasters, but had also, at times, resulted in 'improvements on the original!' The ways that both Dan and Dominic see cooking success, in part, as creating their own dishes, using the foundations laid down by celebrity chefs instead of replicating recipes exactly, indicates a more creative and active relationship with their preferred chefs. They channel the essence of the chef but overlay their own tastes and skills; for both, cooking, or following a recipe, was less about reproducing an 'authentic product' of the chef's recipe and but more adapting and appropriation in line with their own knowledges. There is little to suggest, however, that this adaptation diminished the ways they associated chefs with specific cuisines or ingredients, rather it exacerbated it in some contexts, with Dominic explaining that he liked cooking dishes 'in the style of Jamie'.

Identities and Alienation: The Democratization of Cooking Knowledge

Whether shaping consumers' cooking, eating, shopping or viewing habits celebrity chefs are undeniably influential. This influence may at times be challenged when consumers believe that chefs' values systems are not compatible with their own, as we have seen with Gaynor's changing relationship with Oliver and Berry, but in cases where there are affinities the influence is pronounced. Kelly, for instance, who is vegetarian cited Ottolenghi as her favourite chef 'because he makes vegetarian food glamorous and taste amazing' and told me that he 'entirely' influenced her decision to try new ingredients and dishes as she had 'a disciple-like trust of Ottolenghi. I will cook something I don't like if he has written the recipe because I know I will like it by him'. Similarly, Lily explained that celebrity chefs had changed her approach to food 'a huge amount', continuing:

they make me want to go out and use fresh, quality ingredients and make good, interesting and tasty food. I've definitely been influenced by their TV shows and subsequently gone out and bought their books (Jamie's 15 and 30 minute meals). I was intrigued to try making new recipes that I could produce quickly and that would still taste good.

These observations clearly testify to the influence of celebrity chefs, but they also indicate, as Dan and Dominic's comments above also show, how consumers can use celebrity chefs in the creation of their own cooking identities. The chef, then, can be seen as a guide or intermediary, opening up new food worlds, dishes and tastes to the consumer. This is particularly explicit in travelogue shows and among those chefs that focus on a particular cuisine, for example Rick Stein's *Odysseys*, but also occurs in any food 'event', virtual or otherwise, in which the consumer is introduced to a new ingredient, dish, place or cooking technique. Coles (2013) explores this process in relation to coffee production and place-making, and shows us how the promotional newsletter produced by the *Monmouth Coffee Company* effects a form of consumer travel to the site of origin in which their beans are grown, which is, in turn, ultimately translated to the particular 'taste' of the coffee in question. Consequently, he elucidates the processes through which the consumer experience is mediated by the *Monmouth Coffee Company*. Coles's argument is helpful in understanding the role celebrity chefs play as 'guides' to new food experiences, and indicates that not only can my participants' consumption of celebrity chefs interpreted as a form of fantasy and vicarious pleasure as they are 'transported' to a different, Othered world,³ but also they do not travel alone. Rather, consumers' journeys are discursively governed by the stuff of those that they 'follow', to draw on Kelly's analogy of disciples.

Celebrity chefs then can be understood as 'cultural guides' (cf Rousseau 2012a). This entry to new food worlds and experiences, however mediated it

³ The questions of representation of 'other' cultures, places and people through this process are complex and profound and unfortunately lay outside the scope of this paper. Such representations are, however, not uncommonly problematic and deeply orientalized (see Rick Stein's *Indian Odyssey* for a particularly clear example), and should be subject to further investigation.

may be, as Coles and Crang (2011) also note in relation to Borough Market, further enables the construction of new cosmopolitan identities and consumer expressions of taste. Adema (2000) makes a similar argument. Her discussion of Emeril Lagasse's cooking shows on the *Food Network* stresses how culinary knowledge is democratized and empowering to viewers who learn to 'speak the language of cooking and cuisine' (ibid: 117). Focusing on Lagasse's deconstruction of language, as exemplified by the ways the audience is told *génoise* is just a 'fancy word' for a sponge cake (ibid: 116), Adema contends that food practices, tastes and ingredients that were once 'traditionally elite' become readily accessible to the masses. This does not, however, diminish food's abilities to create social distinctions, but rather redefines them, as those with culinary knowledge, i.e. those who understand that the definition of a *génoise* as 'just a sponge' is an oversimplification, have their experience and knowledge reinforced vis-à-vis those who do not. Adema therefore reminds us that consumption can be as alienating as it can be empowering, and that participation in Lagasse's shows is, in part, dependent on the economic capacity to acquire the accompanying cookbooks and access the commercially-driven website. Democratization, it appears, has its limits and constraints.

The ways in which exposure to new ingredients and cooking techniques enables the construction of new food identities, while simultaneously being a mechanism for the production of distinction (cf Bourdieu 1984), otherness and alienation was also felt by my participants. As Lou explained: 'they [chefs] use all those fancy ingredients, I couldn't get them even if I wanted to, and to be honest I'm not sure I do, why can't they cook simple food that I can eat?'. This alienation was compounded by the lists of recommended equipment I discussed above, with some of my less economically advantaged participants unable to fully participate in the 'celebrity chef experience'. Lou continued:

I started watching Jamie's 30 minute programme, but what's the point? I mean, you need a food processor to start off with, and it's alright him saying they're cheap and a 'good investment' etc etc – what with his millions – but I haven't got the money to buy pieces of kit I'm only going to use once or twice.

Thus, celebrity chefs provide spaces for social differentiation between those consumers who are able to participate and those who are not. Some, like Lou, may ‘choose’ not to fully participate, and ‘choose’ to spend their money elsewhere, but as the lists of required equipment and ingredients becomes ever more extensive, the gap between those who can acquire these objects and ingredients and those that cannot arguably increases. It can, however, also be argued that celebrity chef websites (or directions to specialist on-line retailers) facilitate wider consumer participation, and provide greater opportunities to source ‘new’ ingredients than would be the case if they were relying on their ‘cornershop’ to procure their foods. Accordingly, the celebrity chef experience appears not to be governed by place and postcode. Yet, while this was definitely the case for some of my research participants, others, as Lou exemplifies, felt economically unable to acquire the necessary equipment and ingredients.⁴ They further stressed they felt these lists were widening and, as a consequence, they were unable to engage with particular chefs. The response to this was not uniform: some disengaged altogether whereas others selected those chefs they felt best understood their economic and food position. As such, again, we see the ways in which individual consumer circumstances and values shape and inform the chefs with whom they form a relationship.

Food identities and distinctions are further enacted through my participants’ display and use of cookbooks. It is not just the kitchen that feels this presence of the celebrity chef. Cookbooks are increasingly found in lounges and bedrooms, reinforcing, perhaps, a sense of intimacy and affect. Returning to my own auto-ethnographic explorations, I find not only kitchen shelves laden with cookery books – the majority of which are authored by celebrity chefs – but also the coffee table in the lounge displays a number of carefully selected works, including Nigel Slater’s *Kitchen Diaries*, Claudia Roden’s *The Food of Spain*, and Heston Blumenthal’s *In Search of Perfection*. In fact, a somewhat painful audit of these books, both in the kitchen and lounge, reveals a number

⁴ Considering the geographical discrepancies in the distribution of wealth in the UK between the North and the South, and the city and country, not to mention the ‘digital divide’, this observation puts ‘place’ back on the agenda.

to be not just unread, but unopened. Again, this may be indicative of my Horkheimer and Adorno-like gullibility, but I am not alone, with a number of my research participants also placing their cookbooks on prominent display in kitchens and living spaces, and some having to use bedrooms and offices for overspills. Asked to estimate how many of these books were written by celebrity chefs and/or had television show tie-ins, most arrived at a figure of 80-85%, a figure that reflects the sales figures and dominance of celebrity chefs in the non-fiction bestseller lists (Mitchell 2010).⁵

Not all of these books were used, in the sense that my participants cooked from them. However, contrary to the suggestion that one needs to cook from a cookbook to make good use of it, and that ‘cultural cachet’ and usefulness are mutually exclusive (Rousseau 2012a: xxiv and 37), I prefer to invoke a wider definition of ‘use’ in order to better reflect cookbooks’ cultural capital. Bower (2004) has noted how a cookbook can be consumed in multiple ways and thereby not only shows us that reading a cookbook is just as valid a use as cooking from it, but also points to the personal vicarious pleasure and fantastical journeys they, like Coles’s coffee brochure, offer. Yet cookbooks also have a social role in consolidating and communicating culinary knowledge; knowledge that was once, following Adema, elitist but is now more widely accessible (economic resources allowing). The historical associations between elite knowledge (and lives) and culinary tomes, as Mennell (1985) has discussed, have resulted in cookbooks becoming markers of distinction and taste, and, although the knowledge contained is today more popular, Adema’s account of Lagasse reminds us that cookbooks can still serve to express social status and produce otherness.

These observations may go some way in indicating the reasons why, in an era of smartphone applications, e-readers, websites, newspaper supplements and food blogs, celebrity chef cookbook sales are not just rising, but soaring, and Jamie Oliver is second only to J.K. Rowling as Britain’s most successful author (Malvern 2013). It has arguably never been easier to access recipes from a

⁵ See also Rousseau (2012a: xxiv, 48) for a discussion of the celebrity chef cookbook market, especially in relation to Oliver’s dominance in the UK market.

range of sources, and a number of my participants consistently used on-line recipe sites, as well as cutting-out and collecting recipes from newspapers, to create their own virtual and material recipe books. Yet, despite the supposed democratization of food spaces that multimedia can facilitate (see Rousseau 2012b for discussion), those sourcing recipes from non-traditional means still relied heavily on recipes from celebrity chefs, whether it was via the columns in national newspapers or established food websites, such as those of the BBC, and supermarkets, as well as the chefs' sites. Celebrity chefs, then, rather than being usurped or challenged by new technologies effectively utilise them to establish further points of entry into consumers' domestic lives and foster a relationship; a relationship which often, as I have looked to demonstrate, obscures the commercial industry that lies behind.

Conclusion

Throughout this article I have looked to draw attention to the ways that consumers engage with the 'stuff' of celebrity chefs. Arguing against notions of passive consumers, as depicted by the Frankfurt School, I hope to have demonstrated the creativity of my research participants as they construct and circulate the 'fame' of celebrity chefs through the use of the material objects and foodstuffs they associate with such chefs. In so doing, the complicity of consumers in celebratizing chefs becomes evident, as does the way they create intimate and affective relationships. The 'stuff' to which this article refers is more wide-ranging than initially appears, and goes beyond the obvious branded equipment, chef effect ingredients and named cookbooks to include objects and foods that consumers effectively 'brand' themselves through the associations they make between that object or food and a particular chef. These associations are more pervasive than simply referring to a chef's culinary style, as consumers construct affinities between ingredients found in their *own domestic spaces* with specific celebrity chefs; a process that, I have contended, draws the chef into the intimate spaces of the home and makes them an 'absent presence' in the everyday lives of consumers.

Consumers are, nevertheless, selective as to the celebrity chefs with whom they form these intimacies, and the affective relationships they create are

based on the chef's perceived compatibility with their own personal politics and (food) values. This suggests that the influence chefs have over consumers' cooking and eating practices is tempered, as the chefs activities – especially those that are transparently commercial – are filtered through consumers' own lenses of 'authenticity'. However, I have also suggested throughout that once a consumer has engaged, and established an affective relationship, with a chef, the effects of said chef can be far-reaching on the consumer's cooking, eating, reading and shopping practices.

Celebrity chefs, then, make their material presence felt through myriad ways. This influence is not inherently positive or negative, in that they can be simultaneously empowering and alienating. But it is an economic relationship. And in conclusion I wish to reiterate that, however affective the relationship may appear (and experienced) and notwithstanding active participation, we remain consumers and the chefs, salespeople. Whether they are selling a branded product, an ingredient, a culinary style, or a food ideology, the celebrity chef remains, in the words of Adema, 'a maker and marketer of commodities' (2000: 117). We may call invite them into our homes, take vicarious flights of fancy into their lifestyles, chat with them on-line, call them by their first names and others terms of endearment, learn about their personal lives and relationships, and join them virtually around their dining table. Yet, however empowering they may be to individual consumers, but intimacies ultimately serve to obfuscate that this relationship is one that is strictly business.

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