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SPECIAL ISSUE: SPECTACULAR FOODSCAPES:
FOOD CELEBRITIES AND THE POLITICS
OF LIFESTYLE MEDIATION IN AN AGE OF
INEQUALITY"

EDITED BY JOSÉE JOHNSTON AND
MICHAEL K. GOODMAN

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Spectacular Foodscapes

FOOD CELEBRITIES AND THE POLITICS OF LIFESTYLE MEDIATION IN AN AGE OF INEQUALITY

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Abstract

This editorial introduces a special issue of Food, Culture & Society and works to add a parallel, substantive take on the phenomenon of the food celebrity and the mediated, everyday cultural politics they create. We start by exploring the concept of the foodscape. Specifically, we argue that food celebrities represent a fundamental component of contemporary foodscapes, how they “perform” and function, and the socio-material means by which they are produced. We then explore the key roles and privileges of food celebrity, arguing that the celebrity chef is not the only high-profile, mediating figure at work on the foodscape. Key food celebrity paradoxes are identified and discussed: food celebrities must work to be authentic and aspirational, accessible yet exclusive, responsabilizing but also empowering. We conclude with a short contextualization of the papers in this special issue, and argue for the rich potential of food celebrity scholarship as a way to better understand food inequalities.

Keywords: food celebrity, foodscape, cultural politics of food, celebrity culture, food inequality

Introduction

Food celebrities can come to feel like trusted friends.¹ Jamie advises you how to cook a healthy, inexpensive dinner. Michael provides you with a set of rules, such as not eating anything your grandmother would not recognize as food. Nigella confides in you about her love for chocolate. Gordon tells you straight: your take-out meal is crap and is killing your kids. Hugh urges you to buy, cook

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and eat more sustainable fish. Guy is more laid-back, giving you tips about the best hamburgers or barbecue you can find on Main Street, USA. Gwyneth, in her rather haughty, yet earnest fashion, implores you and your family to go vegan, wheat-free and take a weekly food “cleanse.”

Fans of food celebrities frequently refer to them on a first-name basis, and take their product recommendations and lifestyle advice very seriously. We buy their cookbooks, watch their shows, and seek their counsel when we make daily food choices. Even people who detest food personalities, or who hate certain food celebrities, find themselves talking about or engaging with them at some level.

The papers in this special issue of *Food, Culture & Society* all explore, through different critical lenses, this peculiar kind of mass-market intimacy with food celebrities. In this introduction, we add our own take on the phenomenon of the food celebrity and the mediated, everyday cultural politics they invoke, provoke and create in our “worlds of foods” (Morgan *et al.* 2006). To do this, we will first explore the concept of the *foodscape*, which we see as providing a kind of conceptual home and important platform for the study of food celebrity. Specifically, we stake a claim that media—here, in the particular guise of food celebrities—represent a fundamental component of contemporary foodscapes, how they “perform” and function, and the socio-material means by which they are produced. Second, we draw from celebrity, media and food scholarship to explore the key roles and privileges exhibited by and afforded to food celebrities on contemporary foodscapes. Based on this, we argue that the celebrity chef is not the only high-profile, mediating figure at work on the foodscape; indeed, all manner of celebrity figures, such as musicians, authors and actors are now routinely commenting on all aspects of food. Thus, in this introduction and our title, we have worked to “think through” the more generalized figure of the *food celebrity*, as our goal is to speak to the much broader “celebritization” of food that encapsulates those diverse and mercurial celebrity forms beyond the rather overwhelming figure of the celebrity chef.

Below, after working through the concept of foodscapes and exploring the figure of the food celebrity, we situate and introduce the five papers in this collection. Each approaches food celebrity, forms of mediation and food celebrities themselves through a series of different approaches. It is our hope that this collection works not only to definitively emplace food celebrities—and, more generally, media forms and the processes of mediation in the context of food—on current foodscapes and within the orbit of critical foodscape research, but that it also makes a substantive contribution to ongoing debates about the contemporary cultural political economies of food.

Of Celebritized Foods and Food Celebrities: Media, Mediation and the Foodscape Concept

While we acknowledge that the idea of a foodscape is perhaps too diffuse and nebulous for some, we have both found it to be variously useful in our own work to explore the ethical relationships that co-produce (alternative) food politics

(Goodman *et al.* 2010), the social worlds that “foodies” inhabit and work across (Johnston and Bauman 2010) and the corporatization of organic food movements (Johnston *et al.* 2009). Building on the five “scapes”² that Appadurai (1996: 33) sees animating global cultural flows and formations, at its simplest, the foodscape concept describes and facilitates analysis of the encounters, contestations and resistances that make up the everyday landscapes of food we inhabit.

More specifically, the concept of a foodscape is a crucial way of capturing the cultural spaces and practices of food, as well as the material realities that underpin but also create food culture. In this way, if we think of a foodscape as akin to a landscape, then, like a landscape, a foodscape is a socially-constructed view of the field of food. Like a landscape, a foodscape presents a culturally-mediated lay of the land wherein the material reality of food and people’s livelihoods matter—what kind of food is being sold, who controls the food system, who eats well (and who does not), as well as how resources are sustained (or deteriorated) through our food practices and engagements. The idea of a foodscape not only attends to the cultural *and* material dimensions of food, but it crucially and at its most powerful highlights the dialectical *relationalities* between and among food culture (values, meanings and representations) and food materiality (physical landscapes, ecologies and political economy).³ As a concept and set of practices, it not only explicitly incorporates the political-economic dimensions of food, but it encourages us to spatialize our analyses, drawing attention to the ways that food cultures operate and travel across different, multiple and shifting scales (e.g. from your television set to your kitchen cabinet via transnational commodity chains).

A foodscape, for MacKendrick (2014: 16) “centers around a food environment.” In her own neighborhood, she describes how the foodscape includes the local grocery stores, food banks, school-lunch programs and fast-food restaurants, but it is not *just* about food’s physical presence or market availability. Rather than seeing foodscapes as static, physical entities, MacKendrick (2014: 16) emphasizes how foodscapes are “never fixed; [their] boundaries shift depending on how the food environment expands and contracts.” She also notes how foodscapes are unequivocally classed and racialized—to which we and others (e.g. Cairns *et al.* 2013) would also add—gendered and laden with power inequalities (Miewald and McCann 2014; Mikkelsen 2011; Potter and Westall 2013; Yasmeen 2007). These intersecting power inequities make clear the limits of obsessively and single-mindedly focusing on individual food choices. Indeed, as MacKendrick argues in the context of food and health:

the heterogeneity of foodscapes is not just a function of consumer demand. Healthy and unhealthy foodscapes owe more to deep-seated prejudices and the industrial food system’s hunger for profit than the spatial distribution of food cravings—those who desire hamburgers versus those with hankerings for kale chips. (MacKendrick 2014: 17)

As MacKendrick’s writing makes clear, the foodscape concept encourages food scholars to move beyond individual-level explanations for food choice as well



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as their traditional academic silos. It allows and even inspires us to see food in terms of its cultural, political and environmental relationalities. For example, Miewald and McCann (2014) productively use the foodscape concept to explore the politics of food access for impoverished residents in Vancouver's gentrifying downtown East Side—a place where soup kitchens bump up against trendy, high-priced restaurants. For them, the foodscape concept transcends the simple question of whether food is available or not (as implied by the term *food deserts*), and instead “offers a language for thinking through food-place relations” (Miewald and McCann 2014: 540). As such, the foodscape concept is relatively demanding: It “requires and rewards being situated in a particular place and focused on the relationships that a particular community has with food.” When used this way, it allows the authors to “go beyond descriptions of where people can access food,” and “unpack the political implications of its very provision” (Miewald and McCann 2014: 552).

Other research has deployed a foodscape framework to analyze a myriad of topics such as eating out (Mikkelsen 2011); sustainable food and the city (Edwards and Mercer 2010; Morgan and Sonnino 2010; Psarikidou and Szerszynski 2012); food systems transition (Spaargaren *et al.* 2012); indigenous wellbeing (Panelli and Tipa 2009); the performance of children's bodies and eating (Brembeck and Johansson 2010; Brembeck *et al.* 2013); the production of gendered city space (Yasmeen 1997); ethical food consumption/production (Morgan 2010; Sage 2010); and the cultural politics of neo-liberal austerity (Potter and Westall 2013). Still other work—while not badged under the foodscape moniker but equally concerned with the spatial politics of food's cultural materiality—includes that focused on the ongoing debates about “obesogenic” food landscapes (Colls and Evans 2013; Guthman 2011) and those surrounding the “visceral” a/effects of alternative foods (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2010, 2013).

Yet, in our estimation, little foodscape work—although clearly highlighting the significance of food culture, cultural politics and media in constructing foodscapes (e.g. MacKendrick 2014; Mikkelsen 2011)—specifically analyses the relationalities of food culture, media and foodscape production, nor, as we work to do here, the mediating impacts of food celebrities on contemporary foodscapes. This is not to say that food and media, nor celebrity chefs, have not come in for extensive exploration and analysis. Indeed, a growing body of writing from across the humanities and social sciences has approached the growing food-media-celebrity nexus from a number of different disciplinary, theoretical and empirical angles (e.g. Bell and Hollows 2011; Collins 2009; De Solier 2013; De Solier and Duruz 2013; Hollows 2003; Hollows and Jones 2010a, 2010b; Lewis 2014; Piper 2013; Naccarato and LeBesco 2012; Rousseau 2012a, 2012b) with a great deal more on the way (e.g. Abbots and Attala, in press; Barnes, in press; Johnston *et al.*, in press; Silver and Hawkins, in press).

Rather, what we argue here is that, given the fundamental importance of media, in both powerfully shaping and reflecting the food cultures that constitute particular foodscapes, the consideration and critical evaluation of media *must* be a core feature of foodscape analysis. Therefore, expanding on Johnston

and Bauman's (2010) analysis of "foodie" culture and Potter and Westall's (2013) outstanding examination of the neo-liberalized "austerity aesthetic" in contemporary British food television—both of which utilize the foodscape concept in analyzing food-media tropes—we advocate here for a much greater conceptual and empirical cross-fertilization of foodscapes research. This expansion, in the first instance, would include a broader engagement with the complex and diverse media formats, forms and connectivities that exist in our current "media ecologies" (Parikka 2011; Scolari 2012), from television programs (in all their various fictional, reality and investigative guises), to films, books, magazines, newspapers, advertisements and marketing to the exploding new media spaces of food in the forms of blogs, food review and recipe sites, celebrity chef webpages, tweets and Facebook posts. Indeed, virtual foodscapes (Rousseau 2012a) are becoming a thing in and of themselves, especially in the way Web 2.0 technologies have developed space for multi-directional communication among food celebrities, audiences and eaters (Barnes, in press).

Food media, through its elevated celebrities, interactive processes and multiple media platforms,⁴ has both an empirical and a normative-aspirational dimension. Put differently, food media *frames* and *mediates* what foodscapes could and should be, how they could and should operate, and for whom they could and should work. They communicate specific food instructions via recipes, but they also project powerful images of what constitutes a good meal, a worthy home cook and a celebrated chef. The normative dimension of food media animates a vital set of questions worthy of greater investigation: how are particular foodscapes being mediated and to what material, cultural, ecological and political ends, and how does this benefit or harm specific groups and society more broadly?

Foodscape mediation is, therefore, a fraught and multifaceted process. It equally contains the expressions of social resistances and acceptances. It crosses the realms of the mind, unconscious tastes, desires and visceral embodiments with those of socially constructed ideals of fit bodies, optimal health, good taste and responsible consumes. Furthermore, foodscape mediation occurs within a larger political-economic setting of extreme income inequality and corporate concentration and in spaces where celebrity food brands are designed to appeal to different classes of consumer. Indeed, a foodscape approach reminds us that food celebrities are not isolated voices in the media wilderness, but are one (albeit important) set of actors in a complex mediation process. They have arisen as individual symbols of the "good life" in a particular cultural and political-economic context—a context where individualized approaches to food (and politics) are typically favored (MacKendrick 2014: 17). To return to our earlier metaphorical lens, just as an analysis of a landscape painting draws our attention to both a physical setting *and* the painter, so too the study of foodscapes requires us to examine those active creative agents who mediate our understandings of food on a daily basis.



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Food Celebrities and Big Citizens: Selling Aspirations and “Good” Citizenship in Contemporary Foodscapes

In the current foodscapes of the global north in particular, food celebrities are not doing small, unnoticed sketches off in the corner; they are instead drawing colorful, large-scale, and often highly politicized murals that are difficult to ignore. Importantly, as the concept of the foodscape would suggest, food celebrities have both cultural and material dimensions: they are key, elevated voices of cultural and culinary authority, but at the same time deeply embedded in political-economies of media production, food marketing and brand creation. Celebrities, in general, are not just popular individuals who rise to fame on their own charisma, but are, as cultural studies scholarship argues, media creations and commodities that assume value much like any other brand (Marshall 1997; Turner 2004; van Krieken 2012). Food celebrities are no exception, and can be seen both as a commercial brand created through endorsements, product lines and their own-branded goods and a vehicle for social meaning, as all the papers in this special issue explore.

At the moment, the figure of the celebrity chef includes both professional (read: credentialed) and amateur chefs, and has taken up a prominent place in the lifeworld of everyday home cooks (Rousseau 2012b). Yet, numerous other forms and instances of celebrity, with its accompanying elevated voice(s), now litter contemporary foodscapes. A brief set of examples would include Paul McCartney advocating for “Meatless Mondays”⁵ to Chris Martin from the band Coldplay as the face of Fair Trade foods in the UK (Goodman 2010), Gwyneth Paltrow pushing her version of a “healthy” diet through lifestyle cookbooks and her popular website Goop.com,⁶ to Matt Damon and Ben Affleck raising awareness of food poverty in the United States. This, of course, does not even begin to touch on the role of food celebrities in marketing all manner of specific food brands, such as Scarlett Johansson’s advertisement for SodaStream (see Thorpe 2014) and George Clooney’s fronting of Nespresso across television, print and online media. Indeed, much like what is happening in the realms of the environment (Boykoff and Goodman 2009; Brockington 2009), development (Goodman and Barnes 2011; Brockington 2014), humanitarianism (Kapoor 2013; Richey and Ponte 2011, 2013) and politics more broadly (Wheeler 2013), rock stars and movie mega-stars are now very much in the business of developing and being given media space to talk about food. It is this more generalized celebritization of food—i.e. much beyond the vaunted celebrity chef cooking meals on television and/or writing cookbooks—that we wish to capture and conceptualize through the more expansive figure of the food celebrity.

Food celebrities have not simply stuck to cookbooks, diets, television shows and food travelogues—each “artifact” of which is inevitably embedded with its own cultural politics. Instead, many have begun to turn their hands to wider, overt engagements around food politics and policy through a diversity of media forms. In the United Kingdom, for example, celebrity chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall fronted a television series entitled *Hugh’s Fish Fight*,⁷ through which he built and ran a multimedia campaign to promote sustainable fishing in the European

Union and more recently, across the globe. Focused on his own campaigning efforts and his ability to rally audiences to sign petitions, tweet the European Parliament and eat less popular, typically “trash fish,” the campaign was based on Hugh’s embodied pronouncements and advocacy of “good fish.” Jamie Oliver, meanwhile, is famous for his healthy school meals campaigns in both the United Kingdom and United States, the latter being much less successful than he had hoped, and a clear example of food-related “poverty shaming” (Slocum *et al.* 2011). A more recent UK example includes that of Jack Monroe, a food blogger turned celebrity chef, who not only produces healthy, cheap meals to get families by on £10 a week, but is a key voice in debates over food poverty and austerity in the UK through a national newspaper column. Examples from the United States might include Alice Water’s Edible Schoolyard project, Michelle Obama with her Whitehouse vegetable garden and “Let’s Move” childhood obesity program, or the “anti-politics” politics of Sarah Palin who famously held aloft a 128-ounce Big Gulp full of soda in protest to New York Mayor Bloomberg’s attempt to legislate limits on the size of drink containers.

This is, then, not just the celebratization of food generally but rather of *good* food: food celebrities are increasingly vital figures in defining, framing and mediating the *grammars* of good food for much of the contemporary foodscape. They do this by telling us what we should or should not eat in order to define our identities, maintain our health and household budgets, as well as experience pleasure and conviviality through tasty food. Thus, politicized food celebrities work hard not only to mediate diets, personal food engagements and food governance, but they have also taken to the role of framing what it means to be a good food citizen who aspires not only to eat healthy food (and have the “correct” body shape and size) and feed their family “proper” meals, but also choose, buy, prepare and consume foods produced under more sustainable conditions.

Seen through a critical lens, food celebrities are a form of what the cultural studies scholar Chris Rojek (2014) calls “Big Citizens”: celebrities who put forward relatively “safe” solutions to society’s ills, doing so through a “celanthropy” (celebrity approaches to philanthropy that transform certain social problems into “*cause célèbres*”) that offers up technocratic, de-politicized, individualized responses to inequality, injustice and problematic governance. Think Bono with Product (RED), Madonna and her Raising Malawi charity, the Jolie/Pitt foundation, Bob Geldof and Live 8, and even George Clooney through his Satellite Sentinel project in Darfur. As Rojek puts it:

The celebrity wonk is the perfect servant of the power brokers [by] portray[ing] themselves as the conscience of capitalism, while their high profile, media friendly efforts are disconnected from the main levers of power. Their glamour and media friendly indignation is a key component in [a] politics ... where countless private projects are preferred to fiscal re-engineering and diverting corporate and private wealth to the poor and hungry ... It is precisely what is excluded and muzzled that permits the vested, predatory interests to thrive and prosper ... Viewed from this perspective, Big Citizen



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celanthropy is the modern equivalent of fiddling while Rome burns. (Rojek 2014: 138–9)

While some politicized food celebrities' activism works to complicate Rojek's critical analysis (e.g. *Hugh's Fish Fight*), the vast majority of food celebrities' good food prescriptions, activism and commentary that fills contemporary foodscapes is highly individualized, exceedingly technocratic, and silent on the structural conditions surrounding health and hunger, eating and wellbeing. Indeed, even Jack Monroe, a figure who has worked hard to foreground the growing food poverty in the United Kingdom through her sustained critique of the political-economic policies of austerity, tends towards a kind of personalized good food response. In a very real way, her popularity and the explicit media space she has been given, similar to that given to other food celebrities who promise to teach us to cook healthy, quick meals on the cheap, works to construct the new "normal" of austerity cooking where we can, and specifically *should*, all get along on very limited food budgets each week. This growing normalization of eating (healthily) on increasingly limited resources fails to ask the much larger questions about the political economies of income inequality, wealth disparity and wage stagnation and the historical "cheapening" of unhealthy processed food calories through subsidies, corporate control and marketing (see De Schutter 2014).

There is a great deal more that can be said about food celebrities as the papers in this collection show. Before we introduce and contextualize the papers, we articulate what we see as three central food celebrity paradoxes. These are presented in brief in an effort to spur debate and consideration as well as further situate the papers here.

Authentic and Aspirational

First, food celebrities are paradoxically authentic and aspirational. As Goodman and Barnes (2011: 72) note, they are both an inspiration to the "ordinary," but also proof of the possibility of the "extraordinary" in their celebrity embodiments. Food celebrities often put themselves forward as just like *real* people, perhaps struggling to get dinner on the table, source the "right" foods or cook in a healthy way. They appeal to us through this sense of authenticity that works to develop their ordinariness front and center to what they are doing, how we can do and be the same, and how their suggestions might fit easily into our everyday, ordinary lives. This is one of the most powerful aspects of food celebrities: they work to make ordinary the extraordinary food cultures they construct in the mass-mediated foodscape.

In addition to these appeals to the ordinary, food celebrities also present idealized lifestyles—lifestyles worthy of emulation, or what some call "food porn." Ina Garten showcases the attractiveness of home-cooked meals in her stunning Hamptons home, while Giada de Laurentis demonstrates how a beautiful, thin woman may produce mouth-watering pasta dishes with a minimum of effort. Chan (2003: 50) discussed the phenomena of food porn in relation to Nigella Lawson over a decade ago, writing that "the beautiful and

curvy Lawson seems to have it all—she appears able to juggle career, kids, a husband, and three-course meals including dessert and still look fabulous.”⁸ Here, food celebrities’ extraordinary, aspirational nature takes over in such a way that we can equally become extraordinary by approximating the food cultures they work to publically produce and promote. Furthermore, the number of male celebrity chefs and food celebrities has seemed to produce new forms of aspirational masculinity. The home cook has become an increasingly “safe” role for men to inhabit (see Hollows 2003), and “gastrosexuals” can showcase their ability to bring professional food standards and practices to the traditionally feminine home-kitchen (see Johnston *et al.*, in press). How this potentially feeds into men’s specific engagements in the kitchen—whether it is just for special occasions or implicated in the drudgery of everyday family reproduction⁹—is worth greater consideration and research (cf. Szabo 2014).

From a foodscape perspective, the “realness” or authenticity of the food celebrity is closely connected to the commodification of their image and the material products that bear their brand. This is a paradox, because a key dimension of the meaning of culinary authenticity, and authenticity more generally, has traditionally meant being “true” to oneself, following one’s heart or passion or creativity instead of just following the pull of profit and commercial gain (Johnston and Baumann 2010: 85; Trilling 1972). To be an authentic, but commercially-successful food celebrity thus involves a delicate balancing act. As viewers of the Food Network’s “Next Food Network Star” series will well understand, a successful food star has to be believable, charming, charismatic and worth following, but not so perfect that they appear fake, phony or salesperson-like. The performativities of food celebrities, and the materialities that undergird the dialectic of true-self authenticity and successful branding, deserve further scholarly attention.

Accessible yet Exclusive

Second, food celebrities embody the paradox of accessibility and exclusivity. The successful food celebrity should be broadly accessible to mass consumers through television, commercials, cookbooks and product placements. This gives food celebrities a kind of democratic feel, a feel that is most evident in the recent rise of “austerity cooking” through, for example, the efforts of Jamie Oliver and Jack Monroe. At the same time, the food celebrity must be democratically accessible; their celebrity status is deeply connected to pre-existing schemas of race, class and gender, and as such, reproduces those inequalities and cultural status hierarchies (e.g. Bell and Hollows 2011; Johnston *et al.*, in press). We have described this tension elsewhere as a dynamic between democracy versus distinction (Johnston and Baumann 2010: xv) and it is a tension that appears to have a specific manifestation in the world of food celebrities. For example, the most venerated celebrity chefs are disproportionately white men who tend to dominant professional roles and put forward a vision of upper class privilege. At the same time, they are part of the democratization of the foodscape, giving the common person (via mediated forms of communication) access to high-end



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food worlds. You may not be able to *eat* at one of Gordon Ramsay's restaurants, or live in one of his amazing houses, but you can enjoy the lifestyle vicariously on television or purchase one of his cookbooks.

The core questions here then are who is able to access food celebrities—and their food-related suggestions and cultural politics—and in what ways? This is where a foodscape lens is critical and, indeed, inescapably required in the context of not only food media but with food celebrities specifically: The contemporary spectacle of food celebrities denotes, as Debord (1983 [1967]) would have it, socio-economic and material relations that are both inclusive and exclusive, the latter of which should be of core concern to critical food scholars.

Responsibilization and Empowerment

Finally, food celebrities embody and articulate to audiences a kind of responsabilization, at the very same time they look to inspire practices of personal empowerment around food, health and choice. Coincident with the prevalence of a neo-liberal biopolitics of self-care that “couples control and deservingness” (Guthman 2009: 1,126) through the interventions and mediations of food celebrities, audiences are responsabilized to purchase and cook the “right” foods for themselves and their families. This is, in effect, an even deeper and greater responsabilization for the woman in the family, as women continue to carry out the mainstay of domestic cooking in most national contexts. The feminine figure must possess correct knowledge of the healthy yet delicious meals that Jamie or Jack suggests she cook, but also be able to adapt these recipes to meet the taste proclivities of her individual children. Moreover, this responsabilization often falls hardest on the poor, with even Jamie recently complaining about how poor people spend their money on large-screen televisions and eat “chips and cheese out of Styrofoam containers” instead of preparing healthy meals (Deans 2013). Here then, audiences are being responsabilized around consumer choice: choose the right foods, choose the right recipes, and choose the right lifestyle so that you can spend the time cooking “properly with love, from scratch” (Slocum *et al.* 2011). Yet, research on women's daily food practices (Bowen *et al.* 2014; Cairns and Johnston, in press) shows very clearly the folly of these simplistic approaches to food culture, given the multiple structural burdens shaping everyday meal practices as well as the “dietary cacophony” of conflicting information that overwhelms many consumers in contemporary foodscapes (Rousseau 2012b: xxiii)

But with responsabilization can also come a potential sense of personal empowerment. The ability to gain new knowledge through mediated food celebrity engagements might then empower an individual or family to broaden their palate, their food choices or develop, for example, more healthy diets and eating habits. In the midst of the dietary cacophony, for example, Michael Pollan (2008) injects seemingly straightforward rules for eating: “Eat food, not too much, mostly plants.” Clearly, the potential for empowerment needs to be approached with a great deal of skepticism and caution. Who is empowered by celebrity food interventions, and how is this being done? Where do celebrity mediations work

to reinforce already unequal relations of class, race and gender and where might they break them down and facilitate negotiation, communication, commensality and, even, solidarity? Again, much further, engaged research must be done on the notions of responsabilization and empowerment, as well as their socio-material implications and a/effects, that are embedded and embodied in the figure of the food celebrity.

What Lies Ahead: The Papers

The first paper in this special issue is by Emma-Jayne Abbots (2015). Through autobiography and interviews, she explores how celebrity chefs become “intimate strangers” (Schinckel 2000) in and through our domestic spaces, cooking practices and lifestyles. Abbots’ approach is attentive to both the culture and the materiality of celebrity chefs. Her article shows how tracking the “stuff” of celebrity chefs (which is both explicitly and implicitly branded) provides a useful lens to explore shifting foodscapes in the home and study the way that commodities contain affective social relations. Abbots’ analysis also convincingly demonstrates how the “social life” of stuff provides moments for individual creativity, the production of self and identity, as well as a surprising degree of intimacy. Because these intimate relationships with celebrities can be “simultaneously empowering and alienating,” Abbots cautions against viewing the celebrity chef influence as “inherently positive or negative.” Still, by analyzing and critiquing “the myriad ways in which people “consume” chefs and their “stuff,” economically, culturally and corporeally,” Abbots also reminds us that this is an inherently a commercial relationship: we are the consumers while they are the salespeople promoting their branded saucepan, ingredient, cuisine or food ideology.

The second paper, by Nicholas Piper (2015), similarly analyses the socio-material terrains of food celebrities and intimacy through the specific figure of Jamie Oliver as a cultural intermediary. Analyzed through an “audiencing” of focus group members, Piper disturbs the notion that cultural intermediation by celebrity chefs and other food celebrities is a one-way process. Rather, he suggests that it is instead one of co-production where individuals and audiences refract their engagements with food celebrities through existing or even novel notions of taste, value and practice as well as the gendered and classed social relations that surround these engagements. Thus, for him, even the resistances and negative responses of audience members to food celebrities consist of a form of cultural intermediation in the negotiated formation of the cultural materialities of foodscapes. Put in simple terms, even those who are profoundly irritated by Jamie Oliver find themselves engaging with him in their daily kitchen practices. As Piper concludes, the role of celebrity chefs and food celebrities as key cultural intermediaries must be understood as a process thick with dynamism, complexity and contestation: the “exposition and suggestions for different ways to live” that accompany celebrity chefs are continually “negotiated in relation to existing culinary and social understandings for food and lifestyle aesthetics.”

Building on her previous work on “attention economics” (e.g. Rousseau 2012b), the paper by Signe Rousseau (2015) takes us on a tour of the fad diets



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that make up the dietary cacophony that food celebrities create on contemporary foodscapes. Explored specifically through those advocated by the doyenne of all things Goop.com, Gwyneth Paltrow, the recently disgraced Dr. Oz, and Timothy Noakes, a well-known South African professor of sports science, Rousseau works through what she sees as the “bad science” underpinning their fad diets, which have no doubt helped consolidate personal brands and bolster bottom lines. Through the dueling notions of “bounded rationality” and “docility,” she critiques the use of anecdotal evidence as data and the elevated media voice and expertise of food celebrities who work to empower audiences to become healthy through their nutritional and dietary advice. “Fixing” oneself through these fad diets might, instead of (re)making oneself in the image of a global mega-star continually exalted for her beauty and nutritional knowledge, actually be bad for one’s literal health and wellbeing.

Telling us what to eat—or really, where to buy food in Australia—through the co-incident branding of celebrity chefs and supermarkets, forms the focus of Tania Lewis and Alison Huber’s (2015) analysis. Building on the credibility, expertise, charisma and (albeit fraught) authenticity of two celebrity chefs, the global mega-chef Jamie Oliver and the popular Australian chef Curtis Stone, the Australian supermarkets Woolworths and Coles utilized the ethical capital of these food celebrities to mediate against the negative perception of their monopolistic power over the Australian food system. For Lewis and Huber, this ethical supermarket make-over, through the use of food celebrities, suggests that the mainstreaming and celebritization of ethical food concerns cannot be seen solely as a consumer movement. Rather, they point to the need to understand this celebritization process as a key way that non-state actors are positioned as central to the governance and regulation of foodscapes, a move that is in keeping with broader neoliberal processes of the marketization of food politics.

The final paper, by Jonatan Leer and Katrine Kjær (2015), analyses the ways that the intimate strangers of Gordon Ramsey and Jamie Oliver work to uncover the culinary authenticity in the foods of exotic Others, but also how this uncovering works to re-inscribe the unequal notions of the Other. Analyzing Ramsey and Oliver’s food travelogues, Leer and Kjær explore the ways that the “stranger fetishism”—a concept drawn from critical cultural studies and postcolonialism—is present and reproduced in the discursive materialisms of the chefs’ culinary cosmopolitanism. Stranger fetishism becomes tangibly present in the noble pursuit of bringing novel, interesting and exotic culinary delights to the television screen. Refracted through multiple notions of authenticity that co-exist in the chefs and the Others they cook with and for, the paper builds a nuanced analysis of the (problematic) cultural and social relations created in the powerful and elevated voices of food celebrities that traverse, travel and make up today’s increasingly cosmopolitan, but deeply stratified, contemporary foodscapes.

Taken together, these papers speak to the rich potential and promise of the critical study of foodscapes, media and food celebrities. Analyzing food celebrities

usefully allows us to interrogate the spectacular nature and tremendous influence of public personalities on the foodscape. More broadly, we believe that the study of food celebrities provides a timely and revealing optic that sheds much needed light on the role of contemporary food cultures in normalizing multiple forms of inequality across and within foodscapes. Put another way, analyzing food media critically helps us understand our cultural idealization, and even obsession, with mouthwatering meals, “good foods,” restaurant rankings and idealized kitchens (see Lanchester 2014) and the spectacular gap between those ideals and most people’s everyday lived food realities.

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Notes

- 1 The full names of the celebrities listed here, in order, are: Jamie Oliver, Michael Pollan, Nigella Lawson, Gordon Ramsey, Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, Guy Fieri and Gwyneth Paltrow.
- 2 Appadurai refers to the following “scapes”: ethnoscapescapes, mediascapescapes, technoscapescapes, finascapescapes and ideoscapescapes (Appadurai 1996: 33).
- 3 Another of the key reasons we keep returning to the concept of foodscape, and are unabashedly advocating for it in these pages, is that we believe that this is an important tool for working through the longstanding and persistent divide between the cultural and political-economic approaches to food studies (Goodman and Dupuis 2002). To study a foodscape without attending to both the cultural *and* the material dimensions of the food topic at hand is missing the point.
- 4 Each of which are situated within their own established and evolving materialities and political economies.
- 5 As also endorsed by Sir Richard Branson and celebrity chef Curtis Stone. To see Sir Paul McCartney’s amazing “rap” about Meatless Mondays, see Siddique (2014).
- 6 This is Gwyneth’s lifestyle website that proposes to help you “make, go, get, do, be, see” yourself to a better person through lifestyle advice and the commodities that will, no doubt, help you fulfill this aim.
- 7 See fishfight.net for its current incarnation.
- 8 This notion of “having it all” for Nigella has more recently been complicated by charges of domestic abuse (suffered at the hands of her former husband) and a serious drug habit. In a way, this goes to the constructions of her ordinariness, but in a very tragic direction.
- 9 Thanks to Sophie Bowlby for this point.

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The Intimacies of Industry

CONSUMER INTERACTIONS WITH THE “STUFF” OF CELEBRITY CHEFS

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Abstract

Celebrity chefs foster a relationship of intimacy with consumers, compounded by presenting styles, social media and the opening up of their personal lives. These intimacies are extended into domestic spaces through material objects such as kitchen equipment, specialist ingredients and cookbooks, which are brought into the home. This article interrogates the ways a group of UK consumers interact with this “stuff” of celebrity chefs and explores the ways these interactions (re)produce chefs and make them present in consumer homes. As such, it elucidates how focusing on the material objects that consumers personalize and associate with a celebrity chef can provide new insights into assessing the ways such chefs influence food and eating practices, as well as showing how these objects enable consumers to actively produce their food identities and social relations. As these relations are social and economic, attention is drawn to the manner in which the fostering of intimacies can obfuscate commercial relations.

Keywords: television chefs, materiality, intimacies and affect, cultural authority, food identity

Introduction

In the simple act of tuning into a television cooking program or logging onto a chef's website, consumers invite celebrity chefs into the private domain of their homes. Channeled 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 specialty ingredients, endorsed equipment and cookery books. In turn, with cookery programs 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 United Kingdom, they are invited

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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, “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 *Odysseys*.

In this article I unpack these intimacies and draw attention to the industry that lies behind the coziness and warmth of, for example, Nigella's satin pajamas or summer evenings spent at the River Cottage. In particular, I explore the ways in which the UK consumers with whom I conducted my research form and enact affective relationships with British celebrity chefs through the material objects, both personalized and generic, they come to associate with such chefs. As such, I implicate and build upon interests in the “social life of things” (Appadurai 1986) in elucidating how social relations are created and maintained through commodities, as well as scholarship on the ways in which material objects become affectively charged through their social interactions (Bennett 2010; Latour 2005). I further draw attention to the political and economic relations oft obscured by media and consumer-constructed intimacies while concomitantly showing how these structural dynamics provide the space for consumers to creatively produce and enact their own food identities. My use of the term *consumer* is thereby intentional, as I wish to indicate the myriad ways in which people “consume” chefs and their “stuff,” economically, culturally and corporeally.

Celebrity chefs do not enter consumers' homes unencumbered; nor are they temporary guests. Rather, they arrive laden with multiple material *accoutrements*, such as cookbooks, kitchen gadgets and ingredients. These material objects, and the ways they are used and materially experienced by consumers, help invoke the presence of the chef and are a mechanism through which their fame is produced and enacted (cf Gell 1998). Once invited, chefs also tend to loiter. As individuals, their fame may be short-lived: as my research participants demonstrate, they can fall from favor and/or be replaced by the latest chef *de jour* and their objects. Yet collectively, celebrity chefs penetrate and arguably reshape our domestic spaces, our tastes and our bodies through material artifacts, new ingredients, and styles of cooking and eating. As such, presence of chefs continues long after consumers turn off the television. My aim in this article is therefore to draw attention to how the material worlds of celebrity chefs—and the ways they are experienced by consumers—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.

Throughout my discussion, I draw on my original research with UK consumers. My research participants were all professionals, although with varying income ranges, aged from thirty to fifty years, and were predominantly, although not exclusively, living in urban contexts. At the time of the interviews, all were

currently living, or had lived for a while, in South-East England, primarily London. Moreover, all had a self-professed interest in food and cookery, especially in relation to eating “good food” and acquiring food knowledge. I am disinclined, however, towards defining my participants as “foodies,” however relative and subject to contestation this term may be (Johnston and Baumann 2010), in part because they do not define themselves in this manner and also because their interest is less pronounced than common definitions of the term suggest (see Johnston and Baumann 2010).

I adopted a mixed-methods qualitative approach to my research that included online questionnaires, group discussions, photo elicitation and informal interviews. I also used kitchen “walk-throughs,” which involved participants taking me through the contents of their kitchen cupboards and talking about how they had acquired and now used the objects within them, in order to help me discern the ways in which they drew associations between object and chef. As an “insider” to the social group with whom I conducted research, I also draw on auto-ethnographic reflections to gain further insight into the interactions between consumers and the stuff of celebrity chefs. These reflections were also helpful in identifying pertinent issues and lines of questioning. While this approach has been criticized for being too self-focused and deviating from participants’ voices (Aull-Davies 2008), it arguably also provides a deeper understanding and engagement with the views of research participants and more accurately reflects the blurred lines between researcher and researched (see Reed-Danahay 1997). I also draw particular inspiration from Appadurai (1986) who calls 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 about, reflected upon and observed the meanings and associations overlaid onto seemingly fetishized and depersonalized commodities such as homewares and ingredients. My analysis, then, does not attempt to be a broad survey of consumer behavior, but rather should 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: Endorsements, Influence and Aspirations

Cookery programs are particularly strong examples of how television networks have purposefully fostered intimacy between host and viewer (Collins 2009). Careful selection of personable hosts, conversational presenting, domestic environments and even the chefs’ own private troubles and family life (Rousseau 2012a) are all mechanisms used to remove the “aesthetic distance between performer and audience” (Adema 2000: 115). Social media channels, specifically Twitter, take these relationships to another level as the flow of information moves beyond the unilineal to the dialogic (Barnes, in press). The extent that it is the chef, as opposed to one of his or her team, who is posting feeds, tweeting and retweeting is subject to question, but even the most cursory of glances at @GordonRamsey, @jamieoliver or @Nigella_Lawson, for instance, suggest



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these forms of communication seek to give consumers a sense of conversing directly with the chef. 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) personalized networks and encourage the consumer to return the favor. As Rousseau (2012b) notes, the media’s shift towards giving, instead of demanding, customer attention is commercially beneficial for those in the food industry.

The intimacies between chef and consumer, and the extent that a chef’s “presence”—whether it is orchestrated through television, social media, recipe books, ingredients or kitchen regalia—influences consumers’ food practices became immediately apparent in some of my participants’ responses. Kelly, for instance, who is vegetarian, cited Yotam Ottolenghi as her favorite chef “because he makes vegetarian food glamorous and taste amazing.” She 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 comments prompted me to turn to my own kitchen and discern the ways I experienced a particular chef’s presence in my everyday interactions with food and its material culture. I primarily focused on the endorsed objects: 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 for information on kitchen equipment acquired, received or purchased because of celebrity chefs yielding images and details of endorsed 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. Rousseau argues that celebrity chefs “sell entire lifestyles” (Rousseau 2012a: 70), and narratives of aspirational motivations frequently, although not always, accompanied these listings and images, with Kate, for example, stating: “I totally bought Jamie’s bowl as I got sucked into the lifestyle he was selling in his 15-min meal program. All this sharing marlarky with large platters etc.” Aspirations were also perhaps evident in the way that a number of my other participants had either received or gifted chef-branded equipment. Dan told me that while he would not 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.

Dan's comment implies the added value that celebrity chef endorsements bring to a product. In one sense this value can be seen in economic terms, as is evident in the well-documented "[chef] effect." This refers to the causal "spike" relationship (often leading to a shortage) between the foodstuffs promoted by particular chefs and the success of these products in the market. 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 the fortunes of a small kitchenware company when she referred to their omelet pan as a "little gem,"¹ leading Sainsbury's to stock chestnut flour for the first time, and boosting the sales of instant mashed potato (Singh 2009). Indeed, the impact of the so-called "Delia effect" has been such that the term was added to the *Collins English Dictionary* in 2001 (Rousseau 2012a; Singh 2009), and supermarkets continue to exploit the phenomenon, as seen with Waitrose predicting increased sales in rhubarb, ginger and meat thermometers (and a total sales boost of £1 million) following the screening of its first advertisement featuring Smith alongside Heston Blumenthal (Wallop 2010a).

A possible interpretation of these effects can be found in Bourdieusian (1984) explanations of emulation and distinction and the establishment of a relationship between identity and consumption (Abbots 2011, 2014; Roseberry 1996). Through this lens, Kate's "Jamie platter" is not just another instrument for serving food. Instead, its use is to communicate a lifestyle choice (and possibly class position and status), to emulate Jamie's style of food and eating practices, and to engender sociality. As such, one 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. Invoking gift theory (Mauss 1990), Dan's preference for giving an endorsed product could also be understood in this way, as he arguably gains social status by gifting a prestige object with a higher social value. However, gift theory also indicates that other factors may be at work, as it highlights the need for the gift to be social rather than alienated. Dan's comment thus starts to hint that celebrity chef endorsements serve not only to add economic value, but do so by personalizing a commodity and making that which seems alienated, less so.

Yet Kate and Dan are somewhat 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. For example, in reference to a Jamie Oliver bowl, Amy told me 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 favorite chef so affective relations cannot be altogether discounted). Returning to Amy, she was initially uncertain as to whether she would be able to contribute to my research as the product she identified as "Jamie's" was not officially branded as such. However, in making this tentative comment, she also inadvertently widened my scope of enquiry by



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indicating that personalization and intimacies are not solely located in endorsed and branded products, and it is to that I now turn.

Personalizing the Impersonal: Reproducing the Fame of Chefs

As a result of Amy’s comment, I revisited my kitchen cupboards with fresh eyes, looking for the presence of chefs in non-endorsed equipment and examining the routes and associations through which I had acquired them. It did not take much reflection on my part to realize 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. Moreover, Mary Berry was, I surmised, at least partially responsible for the madeleine mould that lurks in the cupboard following my attempt to host a *Great British Bake-Off* inspired afternoon tea. Likewise, I can credit Valentine Warner for the deep-pie dish gathering dust, which was bought in a fit of enthusiasm following *What to Eat Now*. The never-used ice-cream maker 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 programs 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 of producing “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 (Roseberry 1996; Rousseau 2012a). For instance, the resurgent interest in baking, in part attributable to programs 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 (Lovegren 2005). The influences here are numerous, entwined and often mutually enforcing—incorporating restaurants, chefs, critics, bloggers, television programs, 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 factors and actors that create, inform 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.

What is of immediate interest, however, are the ways in which I was able to trace specific items of kitchen equipment—seemingly alienated commodities—to a specific celebrity chef. 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. Appadurai (1996) helps us understand this process of personalization by demonstrating that symbolic meanings are not abstractedly fixed, but are instead entangled in social relations that shift over time, space and socio-cultural context. He elucidates how fetishized commodities can be defetishized 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 labeling (see Baker 2013; Holloway and Kneafsey 2000; West 2013).

This process that is not so dissimilar to the branding of homewares with the names and faces of celebrity chefs. In these contexts, the labeling (or branding) is driven by the retailer (or producer) and can be interpreted as an attempt to reconnect the consuming masses to an individual producer/grower/chef in order to imbue the alienated product, and the economic transaction, with sociality (Baker 2013; Carrier 1990). Yet, the dynamics to which I am referring differ inasmuch as they are appear to be 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, I embedded my commodities in networks of affective relations, drawing an association between a non-personal item and a specific individual. This suggests the object provides the pivot around which the relationship between consumer and celebrity chef is fostered. In turn, this affective relationship imbues the commodity with social meaning. Celebrity chefs, then, offer a mechanism for consumer-personalization. They present a particular lifestyle and aspirational model, but it is the consumer, as Kate and her Jamie platter demonstrate, who takes these opportunities and finds, locates and enacts that lifestyle in their kitchens; a process that dialectically brings forth the chef both through the objects and the consumer's interaction with them.

Gell's (1998) theory of distributed personhood is also 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 just by the chef and the retail and media discourses in which they are embedded, but also by the consumer via material objects. As Rousseau highlights, "celebrities have to be celebrated by someone" (Rousseau 2012a: xix). I wish to extend this argument that consumers' complicity cannot be denied, by more fully accounting for the role played by the "stuff" of chefs in this process. I contend that Gell and Appadurai help us address this by attending to the centrality of commodities in externalizing and distributing the selfhood of a celebrity, and I now turn to explore how a chef's presence is made manifest through the other objects highlighted by my participants, such as ingredients.



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Shaping Tastes and Bodies? Selling Ingredients and the Risk of Over-exposure

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. Attention to ingredients thus helps us understand how chefs inform not just consumers' cultural tastes, but also the very food that goes into, and shapes, their bodies.² This process is double-edged. On the one hand, it is indicative of celebrity chefs' influence over—or interference in (cf Rousseau 2012a)—consumers' 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 to express their own tastes, preferences and politics, while also opening up new spaces for cosmopolitanism and the construction of identity. I address this potential knowledge in the final section, but first I wish to develop my discussion of how active and creative consumers (re)produce the fame of chefs and draw attention to the precariousness of these relationships.

As with kitchen equipment and homewares, the briefest of strolls through the aisles of any supermarket or food retailer shows the extent that celebrity chefs “sell” ingredients. 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. 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.³

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 Young's, a major seafood producer); pasta, sauces and oils; herbs and spices; and prepared “ready meals,” including the “Little Meals” range designed for children. *The Grocer* reports that some of these products are now exported to thirty-nine 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”, is also available through independent delis and department stores.⁴

I highlight these endorsements as they give some indication of the multifarious ways that celebrity chefs are present in the foods we consume, as well as the ways we consume them. The seeming omnipresence of chefs on supermarket shelves can also be read as suggestive of their “interference” (Rousseau 2012a).

Yet, my participants also highlight how 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 influence. As one participant, Gaynor, exclaimed on seeing a photograph of Jamie Oliver seed packs taken at Homebase [a do-it-yourself store] “his face is on fucking 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 inside back cover of *Jamie* magazine, which lists his commercial enterprises, including 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, “Bastard Mary Berry has sold herself to the fucking Daily Mail!!!!!!” and continued “I like her less I think.” At a later date she continued her Oliver “rant” by comparing him with Ottolenghi, who she had seen during a question-and-answer session at a literary festival:



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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.

Gaynor's and Laura's comments suggest that chefs' personal engagements with their food and food projects, or more accurately the way these engagements are interpreted, is a significant factor in determining their relationship with that chef and, potentially, the chef's influence. My participants do not have an issue with chefs' commercial endeavors *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 excessively business-oriented and self-interested. Laura's comment is also telling in that it points to how social status—and aspirations—are entangled in consumers' judgments of chefs. Jamie's “selling out” in this context has distinct associations with the mass market and populism, whereas “Otto” is, for Gaynor, more exclusive.

Oliver, like Smith and Blumenthal may be exceptional in terms of 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 be seen as influencing the foodstuffs of my participants' kitchen cupboards and stomachs. 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 Miers was accountable, I determined, for a range of chilies and chili 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 in mind. Others, however, had another explanation. Lily rationalized 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 aspiration 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 being sold by the chef (and media). It is the "chef effect," as experienced by the consumer. But this, as I have already intimated, is not a unilineal process. What is striking about my participants' responses is the way that my participants constructed connections between a chef and ingredients in their own kitchens. Kelly's ingredients, for example, are featured in a range of cuisines, recipes and foods. They are not particular to a specific chef, celebrity or otherwise, and they are certainly not exclusively Ottolenghi's ingredients. But she makes these associations through her relationship with Ottolenghi, the style of food he presents, and the recipes (of his) she follows. As such, they effectively *become* Ottolenghi's ingredients, just as my chili paste became a "Thomasina Miers" ingredient.

Thus, as with equipment, invisible threads of intimacy between consumer and chef are created and fostered by the meanings and interpretations that consumers overlay onto particular ingredients, endorsed 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 I wish to draw attention to the active roles consumers play through their everyday interactions with the "stuff" of chefs.

Guiding the Where as well as the What of Food Preferences

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 (e.g. D. Smith 2008; Stein 2002). 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 produce a more "savvy" consumer. As Dan stated: "Delia Smith and Heston Blumenthal can easily steer me to Waitrose for ingredients." However, lists of recommended suppliers are commonly more insidious, comprising smaller retailers and artisan producers. These recommendations do not appear as explicitly commercial or economically



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beneficial as those between chefs and supermarket chains, and, at first glance, a Waitrose or Sainsbury's product line appears very different from a local delicatessen or heritage cheese maker. But I want to raise the possibility that lists of preferred suppliers are, in many ways, no less value-laden than the more corporate, although values may be different. One has only to browse *Food Heroes* (Stein 2002) or the *Great British Food Revival* (Vaughan 2011), an edited collection in which celebrity chefs promote their favorite heritage ingredient, to get a sense of the type of cultural values infusing such activities. And, while there may be less commercial gain for the chef in these endorsements than those tied to supermarkets, they can be seen as similar in that they seek to “steer” consumers to specific retail outlets, some of which are the chef's own fulfillment website, which 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, in their words, “helpful,” as they enabled them to acquire specialist ingredients without expending the time and energy required to track them down. Ottolenghi's site (www.ottolenghi.co.uk) for instance, offers Palestinian and Lebanese za'ar mixes, dried rose petals, dried barberries, whole Iranian limes and mahleb as well as the “other essentials” of organic apricot kernel butter and sea spaghetti: foodstuffs that are difficult to obtain in the United Kingdom, outside of urban centers 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 little sense among my participants that these lists of recommended suppliers were shaped by commercial endeavors 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. While allowing for the clear structural differences and disparities in political leverage and economic power between chefs' own websites, artisan producers and the “super” powers of food retailing, when viewed through the lens of potentially influencing and steering consumers, Rick Stein's list of *Food Heroes* (2002), for example, may not be that far removed from Jamie Oliver's relationship with Sainsbury's or Heston Blumenthal's deal with Waitrose. Moreover, one could argue that the commercial aspects of chefs' websites and their list of recommended suppliers are obscured

through the intimacies that are fostered between them and their consumers, whereas clear commercial endorsements are, at least, transparently so. It is only when a celebrity chef becomes too commercially prominent, as Gaynor's perspective on Jamie Oliver demonstrates, that the veil is lifted and "eyes are opened."

Nevertheless, 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, while Dan told me, "although I try to follow certain TV chefs' recipes, I tend to find alternatives as I do not have time generally go 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 imagined than real. Dan's consumption of cookery programs appears to echo, and substantiate, the argument that watching cookery programs 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 programs by saying that Raymond Blanc was her favorite 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, my participants' views also suggest that this gastro-porn argument is, at best, a partial reflection of consumers' relationships with chefs. I am not denying the vicarious consumption element of cookery programs, 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 created the capacity for 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. 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 more related to adaption 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



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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?

The influence of celebrity chefs is both challenged and (re)produced by the interactions my research participants have with both the chefs and “their” material culture, but it also emerges that chefs provide a space in which consumers can create their own cooking identities. As such, chefs can democratize and open up new food knowledges and practices just as much as they potentially close avenues by steering consumers towards particular foods, cooking styles, shopping habits, equipment and techniques. The celebrity 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’ 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 be interpreted as a form of fantasy and vicarious pleasure as they are “transported” to a different, Othered world,⁵ but also they do not travel alone. Rather, consumers’ journeys are discursively governed by the stuff of those they “follow,” to draw on Kelly’s analogy of disciples.

Celebrity chefs can thus be understood as “cultural guides” (cf Rousseau 2012a). This entry to new food worlds and experiences, however mediated it 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” (Adema 2000: 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 (Adema 2000: 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, whose economic circumstances were slightly more constrained than many of my participants, 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 discussed above, with some of my less economically advantaged participants unable to participate fully 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 participate fully, 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 who cannot arguably increases. It can also be argued, however, that celebrity chef websites (or directions to specialist online retailers) facilitate wider consumer participation, and provide greater opportunities to source "new" ingredients than would be the case if consumers were relying on their "corner shop" 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. They further stressed how they felt these lists were widening and, as a consequence, they were unable to engage with particular chefs. Thus, there is a tension to democratization that appears to compound—for some—a sense of alienation and disengagement from the celebrity chef culture. For others, however, it provides an opportunity to access new worlds and lifestyles that, in turn, enable the creation of social relations and identities. The response to this emergent form of distinction was not uniform: some participants, who did not have the economic and/or cultural capital disengaged altogether, while others selected those chefs they felt best understood their economic and food position. The process is not exclusive to lower-income groups, as Laura's and Gaynor's disengagement from Jamie Oliver, following his "selling out," testify. This further



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reminds us that what is aspirational or unattainable for some, may be too mass-market for others.

Using Cookbooks: Knowledge, Display and Distinction

Cookbooks can also be seen as opening up new avenues of food knowledge and facilitating the enactment of new food identities and distinctions. But they are not just used for their contents, but also displayed. It is not just the kitchen, then, that has a celebrity chef presence, as cookbooks find their way into lounges and bedrooms, reinforcing, perhaps, a sense of intimacy and affect. Returning to my own auto-ethnographic explorations, I discover not only kitchen shelves laden with cookery books—the majority of which are authored by celebrity chefs—but also that 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 to be not just unread, but unopened. Again, this may be indicative of my gullibility and social aspirations, 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 percent, a figure that reflects the sales figures and dominance of celebrity chefs in the non-fiction bestseller lists (Mitchell 2010).⁶

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, 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 shows us not only that reading a cookbook is just as valid as cooking from it, but also points to the personal vicarious pleasure and fantastical journeys they, like Coles’ (2013) 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 range of sources, and a number of my participants consistently used online

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 Abbots and Attala 2014; Rousseau 2012b), 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 utilize 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

This article has drawn attention to the ways that consumers engage with the "stuff" of celebrity chefs. I hope to have demonstrated the creativity of my research participants as they construct their relationship with chefs through their interactions with the material objects and foodstuffs they associate with such chefs. In so doing, the complicity of consumers in celebritizing 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 endorsed and branded equipment, "chef effect" ingredients and named cookbooks to include objects and foods that consumers personalize 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 present 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 value systems and aspirations. However, I have also suggested 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. Thus, it is worth reiterating that however affective the relationship may appear (and is 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



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remains, in the words of Adema, “a maker and marketer of commodities” (Adema 2000: 117). We may invite them into our homes, take vicarious flights of fancy into their lifestyles, chat with them online, 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 this may be to individual consumers, these intimacies ultimately serve to obfuscate the multiple ways that this relationship remains premised on industry and commercial gain.

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Notes

- 1 Singh (2009) reports that sales within the company rose from 200 a year to 90,000 in four months.
- 2 The embodied power dynamics that are implicated in this process of mediation are addressed more fully in Abbotts (2014).
- 3 These films demonstrated 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 2010b). My own Blumenthal meat thermometer may well have been acquired as a result of this campaign.
- 4 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

Puddings was entirely sold out within weeks. Smith's contract with Waitrose was not renewed by "mutual agreement" (Cooper 2013).

- 5 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 orientalised (see Rick Stein's *Indian Odyssey* for a particularly clear example), and the subject is worthy of further investigation.
- 6 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.

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Jamie Oliver and Cultural Intermediation

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Abstract

This paper examines how Jamie Oliver, an increasingly global celebrity chef, works as a cultural intermediary. It explores focus group data to demonstrate how he is received and used by different people. The paper explores instances of positive identification that are supported through a sense of personal familiarity with Oliver. It also tracks negative identifications where audiences refuse to accept the cultural and practical value of his culinary lifestyle suggestions. These identifications, whether positive or negative, are theorized as cultural intermediation. Intermediation should be understood as situated and coproduced as audiences bring moralized notions of self, other, class and gender to bear upon their view of Oliver and his influence in their life. Oliver's perceived normality is a key factor in allegiance and successful intermediation. Reports of familiarity and personal affinity are often seen as central to willingness to "try something new." Oliver's resistance to certain culinary and social norms highlights the extent to which domestic notions of culinary and social normality are used to defend against his influence and deny his importance as a cultural intermediary. The power of celebrity chefs as cultural intermediaries should be considered as part of dynamic social processes.

Keywords: celebrity chefs, cultural intermediation, food media, audience, Jamie Oliver

Introduction

Jamie Oliver is a UK-based celebrity chef who numbers among a growing, increasingly global proliferation of television cooks. The rather banal title "television cook" belies what is arguably a staggering range of potential social roles that such figures play in a heavily mediatized world. To date, academics have been playing catch-up with the activities of celebrity chefs such as Jamie

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Oliver in order to better understand the cultural, political and economic significance of such rapidly changing figures. The principal concern of this paper is to provide some empirically grounded insights into the role Jamie Oliver plays in cultural intermediation. That is to say, what do people actually do when they engage with this celebrity chef?

Recognizing Jamie Oliver as a culinary lifestyle advocate, “lifestyle guru” (Lewis 2008) or “ordinary expert” (Lewis 2010) raises questions about the way audiences engage with his ideas in practice. Television series such as *The Naked Chef* and, more recently, *Jamie’s 30 Minute Meals* are exemplary of the lifestyle genre. In the *Naked Chef*, one sees a young chef displaying a “hip,” hedonistic urban lifestyle in what is presented as his own domestic life (Hollows 2003). In *Jamie’s 30 Minute Meals*, the viewer sees him appealing to the time-poor by demonstrating how to prepare seemingly lavish meals in just half an hour. It may be the case that food media can be about inspiring fantasy (Ketchum 2005) and vicarious consumption (Adema 2000; Barthes 1972) in a viewing context. However, these demonstrations of culinary lifestyle are not simply presented as entertainment but as value-laden suggestions for domestic practices that viewers might take on. For example, Hollows (2003) notes how he is shown riding a Vespa, arranging dinner parties for friends and using certain kinds of language such as the word “pukka”¹ (in his case with a pronounced Essex accent) to promote a positive view of his lifestyle that potentially beckons audiences to take it on. So-called “ordinary experts” (Lewis 2010) such as Jamie Oliver need to be understood in the context of their varied social reception in order to assess whether people really do accept their authority as taste makers and domestic pedagogues. For one thing, this might cause academics to reconsider the extent to which a socially differentiated audience regards their particular version of ordinariness or expertise as valuable. An underlying concern in this literature regards the extent to which celebrity chefs and food media carry the ability to democratize taste (Bell and Hollows 2005). This underlines a key point in the debate about the value of celebrity chefs as cultural intermediaries. Are they regarded as working to democratize culinary knowledge (see Bell and Hollows 2005; Powell and Prasad 2010), or do these presentations offer only an illusory opportunity for people to shift their class status through food (see Adorno and Horkheimer 2007; Barthes 1972; Naccarato and Lebesco 2008)? One way to nuance this rather binary picture is to explore the particular ways that consumers exercise judgment in taste and the grounds on which they do so.

The practical uptake of his suggestions may not be the most socially relevant form of intermediation as debating the merits of his culinary style and of his worth as a figure within popular culture more generally is an important way for people to participate in public life. As Hill (2005) points out, expositions of particular lifestyles are not merely neutral pieces of information but display what are considered “good” ways to live. The presentation of desirable ways to cook and live carries with it, and prompts normative questions about the alternatives. These become particularly important in the context that they are presented as “normal” because they stand to clash with established conceptions

of normality in lifestyle among a diverse range of people. This leaves open the possibility that presentations of the “good life” in food entertainment media are implicitly calling other practices into question as “bad.” Discussing these implicit normative claims is a significant part of food media engagement. For example, Skeggs *et al.* (2008) have discussed the way audiences of “reality TV” actively produce their identities through talking about their viewership. It is for this reason that the terms of debate around their role as cultural intermediaries should be broadened to include the way they enter social dialogue regardless of whether or not they have a significant bearing on social taste or culinary activity.

In the remainder of this paper, I briefly discuss the concept of the cultural intermediary and some of the current thinking about celebrity chefs as cultural intermediaries. In the methodology, I discuss the use of audiencing theory and the use of focus groups as a way to study cultural intermediation in an empirically grounded way. I then take selected examples from focus groups to exemplify some of the ways that Jamie Oliver and his audiences are caught up in the process of cultural intermediation. In the first two examples (Maud and James), I discuss the classed and gendered nature of some adoptions of Jamie Oliver’s lifestyle advice. In the second two (Wendy and Brian), I discuss how even the rejection of Jamie Oliver invokes a process of cultural intermediation as Oliver is drawn into social discourses on taste and value. The point of these examples is to draw out some of the diversity and distinctiveness involved in the way people actively engage with Jamie Oliver. This situates cultural intermediation in food media as a coproduction rather than a one-way flow of information.

Cultural Intermediaries and Cultural Intermediation

Palmer (2008) argues that while “lifestyle programming is nothing new in the history of television, recent additions to the genre have become more aggressive in imploring people to rethink their identities, familial relations and political sensibilities in a way that represents a significant shift from a public service ethos to inform, educate and entertain” (Palmer 2008: 1). However, the extent to which people actually do rethink these aspects of life in light of the suggestions of lifestyle media is less well understood. So, while there may have been a relative upsurge in the way culinary practices are related to social and cultural identity, there remains a gap in our understanding of the way audiences actually deal with these messages in practice. Cultural intermediations, in their specific forms, are defined by the way audiences engage with food media messages.

The concept of the cultural intermediary was originally coined by Pierre Bourdieu (1984), and was principally intended to apply to an emergent middle class whose work in the so-called “cultural industries” worked to move cultural ideas into new social and economic spheres. Nixon and Du Gay (2002) note that Bourdieu defines cultural intermediaries broadly as those involved in the production of cultural programs including those broadcast via radio and television. In its original conception, the term referred principally to those facilitating the flow of information from an expert source to various audiences. Under such a view, the production executives and media workers would be defined



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as cultural intermediaries rather than the “stars” of media *per se*. Nonetheless, celebrity chefs can be viewed as cultural intermediaries because of the way they distribute culinary and lifestyle information to audiences (e.g. Bonner 2005; Hollows 2003; Hollows and Jones 2010; Jackson *et al.* 2013). The experience of food media for the consumer puts them in more obvious contact with the celebrity than it does with their production company. Of course, those working to bring celebrity chefs to the screens and books of the consumer can also be regarded as intermediaries, but from the consumer’s point of view, the chief conduit of information is the celebrity. Further to this and despite recognized semantic issues with the term “cultural intermediary” (De Propriis and Mwaura 2013), it is certainly the case that they are involved in the business of cultural intermediation alongside their audience counterparts.

A key claim of this paper is that the process of intermediation in the context of food media is defined as a coproduction between audience and media. In its broadest sense, cultural intermediation describes the process of moving “cultural” information around. Typically, the figure of the cultural intermediary is ordained through the process of imparting forms of knowledge, experience or skill to another person who did not possess this before. The study of the cultural intermediary and the allied process of cultural intermediation places its central interest on the way that cultural information is moved around and how this information comes to shape contemporary tastes and consumption cultures. It is not surprising that celebrity chefs have been considered as cultural intermediaries because much of their work promotes forms of culinary learning (Caraher *et al.* 2000; Rich 2011) and lifestyle advice (Hollows 2003; Powell and Prasad 2010). In short, they offer people ideas about ways to shape their culinary and social lives by presenting particular visions of domestic culinary activity. The transfer of ideas through media, whether television, book or internet based, can be regarded as a straightforward form of cultural intermediation. It is not necessary for the audience, whoever they are, to act upon it for intermediation to occur. The specific way that this information is dealt with in a range of social circumstances adds another layer of complexity to the nature of cultural intermediation.

Studying audiences in contexts other than the immediate site of viewing is a good way to understand some of the facets of cultural intermediation, including how people report using ideas from celebrity chefs (or not) as well as how celebrity chefs become part of lived culture through social exchange. Thus, in what follows, I report and analyze the findings from a study informed by the methodological approach called “audiencing” (Fiske 1992; Piper 2013) where analysis of focus group data provides empirically informed insights into cultural intermediation.

Methodology

The principal theoretical ambition of this article is to use an approach informed by the concept of audiencing (Fiske 1992) to identify some of the key social practices involved in the cultural intermediation of food media. The concept of

audienicing provides a way to study how audiences engage with media in multiple contexts. Of central interest are the ways that the social uses and understandings of a given text shift according to a range of “variables” including specific social contexts, practices and locations. For example, it has been argued that some audiences deal with particular Jamie Oliver programs very differently according to whether they are watching him on television or subsequently talking about them with friends (Piper 2013). This theoretical approach is supported by the use of focus groups where reported behaviors and observed social exchanges relating to Jamie Oliver reveal the complex relationships individuals have with this media.

The following analysis is taken from a series of interviews and focus groups that were carried out in two UK towns as part of a research project studying the audiences of Jamie Oliver.² Audience engagement with Jamie Oliver’s lifestyle programming is explored through the focus group encounter as a key site where audiences form active relationships with Jamie Oliver and to those within their social group. A series of ten focus groups each composed of around five people and six in-depth interviews were undertaken in Tunbridge Wells in the south of England in 2011.³ The focus groups were comprised of individuals that were all known to each other as friends, work colleagues, and mostly both. The groups were comprised of friends and family and were recruited on the basis that they already socialized with one another on a regular basis. They were conducted over dinner and drinks to approximate the “normal” social conditions that these participants were likely to engage in. Following Holbrook and Jackson (1996), I argue that there are significant benefits to recruiting “natural groups.” In particular, I was concerned to observe how people engaged with Jamie Oliver in their social interactions, including the effects that peer pressure might have on the formulation of responses such as a tendency towards conformity that has been posited by others (Stewart *et al.* 2006). The “natural groups” approach was adopted to facilitate a close approximation of the normal social interactions that a group of friends might have and to encourage the openness that familiarity can foster (Burgess 1996). The present paper concentrates on two of these focus groups. The first group was made up of five participants of varying ages. Maud and Alec are married and in their fifties and sixties respectively, Catherine and Rachel are sisters in their mid-twenties, and James is in his mid-twenties and a mutual friend of all. The social composition of this group was mixed, with some participants displaying more working class identifications than others. The second group was comprised of local council administrators and friends (who socialize outside of work). The focus group took place over dinner. The group was made up of four women (aged 28, 32, 50 and 52 years) and two men (aged 31 and 35 years). The groups were all white and mostly working class.

I offer some insights into the ways that media figures such as Jamie Oliver are woven into a personalized relationship with individuals and how these personal relationships are brought to bear in social exchanges as Jamie Oliver enters, figuratively speaking, everyday interactions. In common with Skeggs *et al.* (2008), emphasis is placed upon the way individuals produce their identities



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through the focus group encounter rather than relying on reported behaviors and opinions as the sole source of data. To make the conjoining of audiencing and cultural intermediation more clear, this paper is concerned with exploring how Jamie Oliver's ideas are appropriated or rejected, how they are personalized, and how they are spoken about as concrete forms of social practice. In the process, factors of age, gender and social norms are analyzed to explore the part they play in the particular ways that Jamie Oliver comes to matter in cultural intermediation

Cultural Intermediation in Practice: The Coproduction of Culinary Identity

The following sections take discrete examples of people who have engaged with Jamie Oliver and discuss how each of these constitute different forms of cultural intermediation. The sections discussing James and Maud are examples of people adopting aspects of Jamie Oliver's lifestyle suggestions for different reasons according to their age, gender and class position. The second section is drawn from a different focus group and discusses the various ways that these people engage with one of Jamie Oliver's ideas about using a chopping board to serve food. In one example, I refer to the way the group talks about the chopping board as a transgression of culinary norms. In another example, I talk about the way an individual, Brian, uses the rejection of Jamie Oliver to assert his own domestic sovereignty.

James: Intermediation as Novel Development

James, a 30-year-old man, exemplifies the process of using Jamie Oliver as a route into novel domestic possibilities and how, in talking about this process, Jamie Oliver becomes part of a cultural intermediation of individual culinary identity. This section highlights how factors of age and gender-appropriate behavior have made Jamie Oliver an attractive cultural intermediary. At the same time, the article demonstrates how this individual's socio-cultural background has made this kind of attraction possible.

The excerpts here are taken from a focus group in Tunbridge Wells and principally reflect the conversation between James and a 50-year-old woman called Maud. These two people can be characterized as "foodie types" and both are certainly frequent and enthusiastic cooks with professional experience as chefs. In James's words:

I've been fortunate because my Mum was a home ec teacher so she knew the score, she knew what to do and what not to do ... I have memories of, you know, coming here and, you lot had gone off somewhere and we were having a few beers and a smoke the book had just come out and we were like, alright, shall we try that? It, it sparked, like a, because he'd taken away the fuddy duddy, and the regimented side, I've already mentioned this, but that's what I feel. It took it to just a different level, I think I remember reading in *The Guide of The Guardian*, just the TV review and it was like a preview of the very

first series and they said something about you know the *Naked Chef* being something refreshing and something different, and by the way ladies he's not naked although some wish he was. And you know things like that, there was obviously a marketing machine but it worked, you know because it did create a buzz because he reached the people that were reachable or wanted to be reached.

James's recollections here are indicative of a formative period in his youth during which he was "reached" by Jamie Oliver. The introduction of Jamie Oliver into his life was facilitated by what might be considered a fairly middle class "habitus" (Bourdieu 1984). The reference to reading *The Guide* in *The Guardian* newspaper, for example, highlights what could be thought of as a typical British middle class source of cultural information and to a certain extent, suggestion on the part of journalists.⁴ The connotation here is that this publication could be seen to legitimate certain forms of popular culture and/or offer a powerful source of critique to its readers regarding different kinds of media. On the other hand, when James refers to the idea that people are "reachable" by Jamie Oliver, he highlights more than a simple problem of information transfer. What he means is that some people, by virtue of their social dispositions, are more likely to recognize and respond to Jamie Oliver because of his specific appeal. For James, one aspect of this appeal is described in terms of the way Jamie Oliver offers an alternative to the "fuddy duddy" and "regimented side" of cookery that he clearly associates with Oliver's precursors. James suggests that he was "lucky" in the sense that his mum was a home economics teacher. This reference to his early culinary education is an indication that James was "primed" for adopting and appropriating Jamie Oliver's ideas into his own culinary practices. On the other hand, there is a suggestion that his break from the culinary norms of the past offered an attractive and amenable way for him to engage with Jamie Oliver in his social life. He points towards concrete examples of "having a few beers and a smoke" while cooking with his friend as a way to show how compatible Jamie Oliver was with his lifestyle and leisure activities at the time.



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- Maud: So really it just gave you confidence and he must have given lots of people confidence
- James: mm [agreeing]
- Maud: just to do those simple recipes that were really good, that's the difference between them
- James: mm, it took the fear away ... [*Larousse Gastronomique*] assumes a level, whereas this doesn't assume any levels at all and it was just that informality, and and, putting people in that environment makes you think "ooh I might give it a crack, why not, what have I got to lose."

As mentioned earlier, Jamie Oliver can be thought of as presenting a "recognisably masculine" (Hollows 2003) way of cooking that disavows domestic labor in

favor of domestic leisure. Hollows draws on the dual figures of the “new man” and the “new lad” to suggest that Jamie Oliver has coupled hyper-masculine “laddishness” with stereotypically feminized conceptions of the “new man” whose enhanced “sensitivity” and liberality made cooking a recognizable facet of his practice. To some extent, traces of these figures can be discerned in James’s attitude towards him. James talks about his own lack of confidence and Jamie Oliver’s appeal in providing an informal context to become a better cook. This self-reference to a lack of confidence is not symmetrical with Jamie Oliver’s confident approach, although the appeal of this figure for James is undoubtedly related to the desire to get some of that specific brand of domestic confidence. Whether or not James is thinking about this form of appropriation in specifically gendered ways, however, is not clear. What is clear is that he can present himself as a competent young man in culinary terms and that Jamie Oliver has played a part in that. James’s way of describing himself and his relationship to Jamie Oliver espouses a position that does not fit easily with either “laddishness” or hypersensitivity. The appropriation of Jamie Oliver because of his appeal to a youthful masculine “foodie” way of “doing gender” (Cairns *et al.* 2010) already implies a mixture of these two otherwise contradictory personality traits. What we see here is a man confident enough to talk about his own insecurities around food but who also indicates his desire to appropriate and use some of Jamie Oliver’s aesthetics and skills to live a different kind of life. This is a kind of intermediation that seemingly started with a younger man finding a culinary aesthetic exciting and relevant and which continues as part of the way he stories his private and public identity. Jamie Oliver’s influence as a cultural intermediary is not forgotten and continues to form a substantive and normalized part of James’s cultural reflections, but clearly what started off as a way to explore cookery and new lifestyle is now a way to tell a story about his very personal and distinctive development.

Maud: Normality as an Appeal to Social Class

The following excerpts are taken from a focus group where Maud, the middle-aged woman referenced above, expresses why she feels that Jamie Oliver is appealing, and reflects on some of the specific ways that she personalizes and interacts with his ideas about food. In this case study, we can see how his appeal as a “normal bloke” is combined with the novelty of his culinary expertise. His perceived normality effectively works in the service of transmitting novel culinary ideas by making them appear more accessible. Here Maud talks about her view that Jamie Oliver presents his real life and how this appeals in class terms:

[the guests on his show] are his friends and they are his family. But the thing about Jamie is that he’s cute, he’s managed to get more people on side than, than um Nigella would because he’s appealing to the masses. He’s not appealing to the upper classes, there are more, there are more of us than there are of them up there do you know what I mean?

One of the key ways that an intermediation takes place here is through the formation of a para-social relationship to Jamie Oliver. Broadly defined, this concept refers to the way individuals form imaginary relationships with distantiated figures, often, but not exclusively those who appear on television and other media formats (Bonner 2010; Piper 2012; Skeggs *et al.* 2008). In this case, Maud can be seen to form a relatively direct identification with Jamie Oliver based on a recognition of his appeal to the “masses.” In doing so she actively defines herself against the upper classes and arguably aligns herself much more with a notion of working class selfhood.

There is something quite self-deprecating in Maud’s reference to herself as part of the “masses” and yet at the same time there is something affirming about her need to distinguish herself from the “upper classes.” Jamie Oliver’s success as a cultural intermediary is, for Maud it would seem, characterized by her ability to identify with him in class terms. Indeed, metaphors of depth, position and hierarchy can be repeatedly discerned through her identifications with Jamie Oliver. Maud’s reference to Oliver as being unlike Nigella Lawson—who is famously regarded as an upper middle class celebrity chef—serves to place him in a sharper class dialogic because in referencing Nigella Lawson she puts Jamie Oliver in a conversation about class. There is Maud, Jamie Oliver and Nigella Lawson, and in that order. Despite this identification, she also flags up a key idea in that she thinks he is “cute” in appealing to the masses in this way. This suggests that Maud suspects there is some contrivance, or at the very least strategy going on by Oliver, and that perhaps he is not particularly like her in the end. This identification operates then through a semblance of social relations in which Maud can identify herself as a concrete classed entity, even if the relationship with Jamie Oliver is premised on a fallacy of mutual identification. Further to that, her relationship towards Jamie Oliver supports a further identification with an “us,” articulated as the masses. It is this way that engagement with Jamie Oliver’s mode of address stimulates a wider framing of her place in a social order. His influence as an intermediary is bolstered by Maud’s conceptualization of him as a democratizing figure.

In this next quote, Maud exemplifies another process of identification that highlights the importance of Jamie Oliver’s perceived normality as a factor determining his success as an intermediary. She does this through a paradoxical example of drawing attention to his interaction with a celebrity musician (Fatboy Slim) over the phone:



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Yeah, well I’m reading his book at the minute [referring to unofficial Jamie Oliver biography] and it said that he had a phone call from I don’t know, Fatboy Slim who was following one of his recipes on tuna and he said “well can I use shark instead?” and he said yeah that’s fine ... Alright he’s higher than us, but he’s one of us; and people like that, if they’re a bit higher.

Maud demonstrates a key method by which Jamie Oliver is able to operate as a cultural intermediary. By stating that people like that “he’s higher than us

but he's one of us" she introduces the idea that Jamie Oliver is laudably normal but also appreciably higher in social status. This particular mix of normality and higher social status generates a successful process of identification for Maud. She alludes to this "highness" by reference to his relationships with other celebrities and indeed to the way his expertise is valued by those people. At the same time, Maud indexes Oliver's normality and that of his celebrity friends by drawing attention to relatively common practices—like phoning a friend for cookery advice. It is in this way that Jamie comes to be seen as both normal, but sufficiently "higher" to warrant the interest and affections of his audiences. Arguably this normalization of celebrity is precisely what Maud likes, in the sense that it affords her ways to identify with people "above her" while at the same time affirming that Jamie Oliver's mundane actions among friends are intelligibly equal between herself and them. It is important for Maud that she can discern certain aspects of her own practices in Jamie Oliver, while at the same time maintain reasons to hold him in the place of a cultural authority whose advice on cookery or lifestyle propositions might be valid.

However, although there remains a discourse that posits that celebrity chefs like Jamie Oliver could be considered as "expert," and Maud demonstrates that matters of taste are a very personal matter of expertise. She comments that "Jamie Oliver uses too much lemon for my liking, I would never use as much lemon as he does, but but, but that's all about cooking." Maud's reference to Oliver's use of lemon and to her own preferences for its use in cookery demonstrate an important limitation to the reverence and authority afforded to him on such matters. Whereas Maud asserts her own preference in opposition to his tastes, she also reaffirms an empathy for his position by demonstrating her familiarity with the ethos of personalization to one's own tastes in cookery. This is a move that sets her apart as an individual with specific tastes but reaffirms her connection to Jamie Oliver through sharing the broader conventions of culinary skill and adaptation. Maud recognizes his expertise as a chef, but also establishes herself as an expert and knowledgeable voice, but being able to speak back to his expertise, and establish her own sense of good taste.

Intermediation as Rejection

To publicly reject Jamie Oliver as a culinary and social influence may deny his power as a cultural intermediary and yet paradoxically this rejection is one way that celebrity chefs enter the social fabric. This section discusses some of the ways in which Jamie Oliver's cultural authority is refused or fails to take root. Lifestyle practices that clash with existing sets of relations between materials, meanings and skills are debated and critiqued by a group. In so doing, I argue that this form of dis-identification is itself constitutive of a kind of cultural intermediation because Jamie Oliver is still incorporated in discussions of culinary normality. It is in this way that I wish to question what could be meant by intermediation if practices result from suggestive programming and framings of Jamie Oliver that are oppositional to his suggested practices. In other words, I wish to posit that in rejecting Jamie Oliver as a credible source of lifestyle

information there is a form of cultural inclusion that still situates him as an important part of culinary and social life. There is a certain inescapability to his influence that remains even when he is resisted. In the example of Brian (below), one can see how an active rejection of Jamie Oliver's suggestions for repurposing a chopping board is a way for people to assert their own culinary and domestic values. This negative reframing of Jamie Oliver within a moralized reflection on "normal" culinary practices demonstrates how Jamie Oliver works as an intermediary, even in contexts where his authority is refused. The supporting practice of publicly critiquing him demonstrates some of the limitations of his influence and at the same time his inclusion within everyday debates on culinary practices.

Wendy: Transgressing Culinary Norms

On occasion, intermediation can be seen as a process of discussing the logic of certain ideas that Jamie Oliver proposes. In such instances, one can see how Jamie Oliver's suggestions for culinary organization are actively critiqued by a group according to their ideas about what is normal and morally appropriate. It is in this rather oblique way that Jamie Oliver operates as an intermediary by setting the figurative stage for conversations about people's personal domestic values.

The following comes from a focus group conducted in Tunbridge Wells with a group of friends and colleagues who are having dinner together. The focus group took place over a dinner I cooked for them as a thank you, and as a way to facilitate as near to "normal" conditions for social interaction as I could. Generally speaking, it would not be unusual for this group to meet for dinner, although as one participant jokingly pointed out, the dinner party turned out to be more like "work." The main point of interest in this interaction is a discussion about Jamie Oliver's use of a chopping board from which to serve food in his television series *30 Minute Meals*.

Wendy: No
 Debs: Instead he serves it on a chopping board
 Mary: Yeah
 Wendy: On his *rustic board* [emphasizing syllables]



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Here, Wendy draws attention to the connotation of the board as "rustic." The construction of a culinary aesthetic around ideas such as rusticity is something that audiences acknowledge celebrity chefs doing. Wendy's recognition of "rusticity" as an intentional technique signals her own recognition of it as a trend but also of her own critical distance from it. However, just as pretentiousness can be recognized in the form of an intelligible culinary aesthetic, rusticity undergoes an examination of practical value in order to assess whether this form of style comes at the expense of substantive benefits in "normal" practice. In other words Wendy is making a joke about the chopping board, but it is a joke that the group responds to instantly and recognizes because of the particular

way that the word “rustic” is “loaded” in culinary terms. It is not a complete rejection of the “rustic” idea but it is a way to acknowledge that using a rustic aesthetic is stylistic and not substantive. By acknowledging Oliver’s rustic board, Wendy is affirming her knowledge of, and to a certain extent resistance towards the use of this particular aesthetic as a legitimate marker of social capital.

- Mary: Yeah that was on his 30 minute meal thing, he serves everything up on a chopping board. Yeah, it’s a bit strange. He says it saves on washing up
- Wendy: so where do you eat it? Standing up in the kitchen?

The use of an object that rarely moves from the kitchen immediately implies to Wendy that the diner must come to it, rather than the other way around. It is indicative of the extent to which the proper place of an item (and, as we will see later, specific practice with that item) is embedded in the imagination of the routine organization of the home. Further to this, one can see how this imagination and recollection of one’s own domestic logic informs how novel practices are imagined, theorized and evaluated. In other words, certain materials imply specific practices and spaces. Oliver’s use of the chopping board outside of its proper and “normal” space is characterized as strange. It is both out of place but also outside the frame of routinized practices associated with it.

- Mary: No, he serves it, he puts it on, it’s when he, the programme’s the 30 minute meal thing that he, he cooks it all, and then he serves it, on the table and then you help yourself (inaudible) so instead of ...
- Brian: So you still use plates?
- Mary: Yeah you still use plates
- Wendy: Oh yeah
- Brian: How is he saving on washing up then?
- Mary: Well because it’s not then transferring what you’ve cooked...
- Debs: to a serving dish [finishing Mary’s sentence]
- Mary: to a serving dish [finishing her own]
- Wendy: Yeah but why don’t you just put it on the plates like normal people do straight from the bowl?

It is striking to note how far out of line the introduction of a novel practice idea places the otherwise “taken for granted” organization of eating in the home. Although not evident in the transcript, the tone that Wendy uses in this situation suggests a disdainful reaction. By asking why he doesn’t just do what “normal people do,” she establishes a critical distance from Jamie Oliver as an “expert” and affirms that “normal” practices are just as valid, if not more so than his suggestions. More than this, her resistance to the idea of eating from a chopping board can be demonstrably linked to a domestic moral order. This shows that a rejection of Jamie Oliver’s suggestions, although seemingly rooted in routine,

normalized behavior, actually have a very logical set of reasons that are in this case related to childcare and parenting. For example:

- Brian: So he prepares
Debs: It's so you can help yourself isn't it
Brian: So if he prepares raw chicken ...
Wendy: Yeah but in a family you wouldn't do that, you wouldn't do that with Harry (referring to Mary's 12-year-old son), yeah do whatever you want (emulating Mary speaking to her son)
Debs: Yeah, no you wouldn't
Mary: No. A normal family you would dish it up
Debs: Perhaps that's why you don't copy him, because
Wendy: Yeah
Debs: the average family doesn't do it like that
Brian: Well actually what did we do this evening?
Wendy: Yeah but this is a dinner party
Debs: But this is different
Wendy: and we're grown ups

During the course of the evening, the participants were offered dinner and it happened that a pot of stew was placed in the centre of the table (on a chopping board to protect the table) for them to help themselves. When Brian draws attention to this oversight by the group they are quick to justify the logic of "helping themselves" as a practical serving strategy, especially when there are no children at the table who require assistance. In some ways, this highlights how the group is thinking about this celebrity chef in the sense that they assess his suggestions in terms of their everyday utility. They may well be engaged in a focus group that in some senses mimics a typical dinner party, but it is clear that it is referred to as an exceptional event. The presence of the chopping board here and the "help yourself" organization of the meal are appreciably similar to the practices of Jamie Oliver that they have just rejected, yet this is not strong enough grounds to reassess their own everyday mealtime values. In other words, the practice is not transferable between different culinary contexts.

A number of factors are brought to bear in assessing whether Jamie's practices are worthy of adoption. One reason that this micro level of detail is interesting is because it shows how culinary intermediation operates in practice. Novel practices here are assessed in relation to a practical cultural logic rooted in the everyday. From this close-up perspective, one can start to see how certain practices might gain currency and how others are rejected. Whereas Lewis (2010: 583) contends that "expertise today is increasingly caught up in the logic of celebrity," evidence from the present study suggests that the expertise of figures like Jamie Oliver is not unquestioningly accepted on the logic of their celebrity. Instead, Oliver is subject to scrutiny on the basis of what people see fit to judge as logical (e.g. seeing the point of doing something). Crucially though, his suggestions are assessed according to their own pre-existing attitudes to



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food and domestic organization and there are clearly some circumstances where his ideas do not take hold, as with the everyday use of a chopping board at (daily) meal times.

Brian: Public Rejection as Intermediation

The next example demonstrates how a public rejection of Jamie Oliver still ends up as a form of cultural intermediation involving the chef by the simple virtue of his inclusion in the social discourse. The example comes from the same focus group conducted in Tunbridge Wells. It is around Brian, a 35-year-old man, that the following analysis pivots. In the following, we see Brian trying to describe why Jamie Oliver's persona is so infuriating to him:

- Brian: He just really irritates me and I hate his voice and his anima... over-animated, he's, he's a twat. Oh he just drives me mad, I can't stand the sight of him or the sound of him.
- Mike: Why is it? What's behind it though?
- Brian: I just look at him on the TV and think there is a bouncing pillock⁵

By drawing attention to Brian's distaste for Jamie Oliver, I illustrate how cultural intermediation can function through the practice of re-audiencing. That is to say that while Jamie Oliver presents himself in various ways through his own media, audiences themselves tend to offer their own interpretations of him and re-present his ideas with their own specific forms influences and values. Specifically, Brian personalizes a narrative about his disengagement and even disdain for Jamie Oliver in a way that demonstrates his own cultural capital through a public rejection of the cultural intermediary. Intermediation can therefore be observed in contexts where Jamie Oliver is entirely rejected as a source of desirable cultural capital. This specific form of intermediation is a coproduction where Jamie Oliver is critiqued to other people as a means towards establishing the legitimacy of personal alternative cultures of consumption. Jamie Oliver is still a relatively "active" part of the cultural intermediation taking place, albeit it in a negative way. The simple fact is that rejection of Jamie Oliver does not amount to removing him from the cultural equation; on the contrary, it fully incorporates him within debates on culinary culture.

In the following transcript, the group is discussing whether or not they serve food at home in a communal pot for all to share as Jamie Oliver frequently does on television. Having listened to the others talking about whether or not they serve food in such a manner, Brian takes the opportunity to reconceptualize this practice on his own terms. He clearly wants to reject any association with Jamie Oliver's cultural influence in this regard and therefore seeks to position (in this case his use of a chopping board) his actions as entirely free from Jamie Oliver's influence. Nonetheless, he has to negotiate (with humor) the idea that he might have "copied" Jamie Oliver.

Wendy: Yeah well you and Carl don't do that, when you and Carl sit down for dinner, do you do that?

Cath: depends what we're having

Wendy: or do you dish it up on the plate

Brian: I had scrambled egg on toast for breakfast and I ate it straight off the chopping board

[Whole group erupts in laughter]

Wendy: See so you're copying Jamie Oliver now

Mary: But he doesn't watch him so he doesn't—

Brian: I didn't know that!

Brian is not joking about eating scrambled eggs off of a chopping board but he uses humor to demonstrate a rather more serious point about the logic of culinary practices. In this case, he ate the eggs from the board simply to save time and washing up in the morning. It illustrates an example of using the chopping board, not for cultural novelty but for practical expediency and therefore presents an alternative cultural understanding of this practice. When Brian says "I didn't know that!" he shows the group that he does not engage with Jamie Oliver enough to know that Oliver serves food from a chopping board and signals his distaste at the idea that he would use a chopping board to "copy" him. His insistence on this seemingly mundane use of the board is a way of communicating a kind of cynicism towards Jamie Oliver but also an affirmation of his own everyday practices. This exchange demonstrates the extent to which Jamie Oliver's influence as a cultural intermediary can be easily overstated and mistakenly allocated because of his cultural pervasiveness. The joke about Brian copying Jamie Oliver only works because he runs the risk of perceptibly losing his culinary autonomy as somebody copying Jamie Oliver. This is an instance where Brian does not want one of his own practices to be associated with the influence of Jamie Oliver, but where he also recognizes that it could easily happen. Brian is keen to claim the practice for himself, or at least as a practice that predates Jamie Oliver and is rooted in a less conspicuous logic. When Wendy jokes that he is "copying Jamie Oliver," Brian reacts by stamping his own cultural authority on the chopping board. Wendy and Brian therefore joke around the possibility of a conflation between his use of a chopping board at breakfast as "routine" (for want of a better term) and his use of it as "copied." In so doing, they highlight that they are both aware that the everyday practices that they carry out could be falsely attributed to celebrity influence. This recognition demonstrates the importance of defending one's own culinary authority in the context of the cultural pervasiveness of Jamie Oliver. If Brian does not assert his autonomy, eating from a chopping board could be derided as a futile attempt to gather cultural capital by taking instruction from a food media pedagogue. The participants in this study make a joke out of this, but it underlines the point that people are scrutinizing how others derive their culinary practices. When the group make fun of Brian by suggesting that he might have been following Jamie Oliver in using a chopping board he responds with similarly humorous retort: "I



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once had a ploughman's⁶ in the Westbourne Pub and it came out on a chopping board and I just thought ooh, fair enough. That didn't faze me." Brian's rejection is of Jamie Oliver's cultural capital in regard to a practice that he already has encountered in his everyday life. This public articulation is a kind of re-audiening because it publicly subverts Jamie Oliver's cultural logic of novelty and supplants it with a personalized narrative of chopping board use. Brian is in a predicament because in order to reject Oliver's authority as an intermediary he first has to acknowledge that his authority is something that is powerful enough to require a defense. Therefore while it is worthwhile pointing out Brian's resistance to Jamie Oliver as a potentially laudable aspect of audience activity, one should be careful to avoid what Morley (1993) refers to as a "pitfall" in theorizing this as successful elimination of media influence in his life.

While Brian is demonstrably resistant to Jamie Oliver, and especially towards being associated with his ideas, his entire argument in support of his own practices is based on referencing Oliver. Thus, despite his resistance to Jamie Oliver, by bringing him into the conversation he coproduces him as a cultural intermediary. The cultural ubiquity of Jamie Oliver means that he can function as a reference point in social interactions around food whether or not his suggestions are being consciously (or unconsciously) acted upon. This is itself a form of cultural intermediation as consumers mediate their own views and values around food to one another by referencing Oliver. In contrast to the model of cultural intermediation where knowledge flows from the "expert" to the layman, in this case, the consumer assumes a degree of cultural sovereignty by using Jamie Oliver as a conduit and a reference point for self-expression, and for asserting their own culinary capital.

Conclusions

In this paper I have argued for an understanding of Jamie Oliver as a cultural intermediary whose influence is given multiple expressions by different audiences and different individuals. Cultural intermediation is therefore understood as a dynamic process but also one that is structured by pre-existing notions of value, gender and social class. An emphasis on the personalization of media content enhances an understanding of the way media "messages" are not simply transmitted, but transformed and augmented in local contexts.

Jamie Oliver's ability to make inroads into the lives of individual consumers is dependent on the way particular aspects of his approach are judged to fit with the social circumstances and aspirations of each individual. The appropriation of Jamie Oliver demonstrates the way that his values, aspirations, familial contexts and gender roles are aligned sufficiently closely with Jamie Oliver's media to make a particular kind of intermediation possible. Viewed through Bourdieu's (1984) concept of "habitus," this kind of appropriation makes sense. Jamie Oliver is firmly within his cultural sphere and the behaviors and values he espouses are understood as an appropriate form of development for James. Taking on Jamie Oliver as part of his life was, as it might be known in the pedagogy literature, within his "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky 1987). Thus, the idea of

celebrities offering “opportunities for learning” has to be understood in the context that audiences’ (or learners’) cultural context (or capital) has a bearing on whether that pedagogy is seen as appropriate for them. It is not the case that all audiences will respond to Jamie Oliver in the same way because they will have to assess whether he is an appropriate intermediary for them.

I have argued that rejection of Jamie Oliver does not signal his failure as a cultural intermediary and that, on the contrary, his figuration as an influence to deny only serves to reinforce his prominent cultural position. As Lewis (2010) points out, part of Jamie Oliver’s appeal as a cultural intermediary rests on his ability to present himself as both ordinary and expert. However, ordinariness is anything but uniform for a socially differentiated audience, and different audiences value the same expertise differently.

Despite the insistence on the appeal of celebrity chefs in terms lifestyle expertise, the examples used in this paper demonstrate that audiences assess Jamie Oliver as much for his practical utility as for the sense of style he might offer their domestic life. People are actively assessing the practical benefits of the culinary advice he offers and are by no means accepting of his ideas because of stylistic appeal. Novel ideas, such as the use of chopping boards, must clearly stand up to being assessed according to the ordinary practical domestic values of different audiences. If such ideas fail to “make the cut” then they are regarded simply as aspects of Jamie Oliver’s style. They stay where they are and are not intermediated in that sense. This is said to caution against the assumption that these figures have an all-pervasive monopoly on culinary expertise. Instead, one can see everyday audiences exercising their own expertise with their own ordinary values that are often rooted in practicality and familial attitudes to food.

Hollows and Jones (2010) argue that the ability of different audiences to participate in Jamie Oliver’s particular culinary world, replete as it is with middle class practices (elaborate dinner parties, for example) is likely to be variable at best. This leaves open the question of whether and how audiences with different gendered and classed positions are able to engage with his ideas in everyday life. Moreover, this prompts the question of how people without the necessary cultural or financial capital to follow his lead assess his worth and how he comes to matter (if at all) in their lives. The findings from this study suggest that people with access to different kinds of cultural capital and differing social values find their own ways to engage with this figure, adopting or rejecting aspects of his oeuvre as they deem appropriate.

As Signe Rousseau (2012) points out, and indeed as Jamie Oliver himself has, the viewing public has largely defined his fate as celebrity and as social force. A wider point to take from this is that the power of celebrity chefs as cultural intermediaries should be understood as a dynamic process. Their expositions and suggestions for different ways to live are negotiated in relation to existing culinary and social understandings of food and lifestyle aesthetics. To say that food celebrities like Jamie Oliver are cultural experts would be to disavow the value that people often afford to their own ways of organizing their culinary life.



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Such figures undoubtedly and demonstrably play an important role in domestic debates about the value of certain practices, but they are by no means accepted as authorities in the way that the term “cultural intermediary” commonly implies. This paper has demonstrated how Jamie Oliver is involved in similar expressions of identity. This is cultural intermediation stood on its head as audiences can be seen to use Jamie Oliver to mediate their own identities and ideas into the social world rather than the other way around. Above all, the ease with which people talk about Jamie Oliver demonstrates how far food media and celebrity chefs are an embedded part of the social fabric. Jamie Oliver exists as a common resource for talking about food whether or not one sees any particular value in following his advice or using his lifestyle as a template for their own. This perhaps is intermediation at its most pervasive—when a lifestyle icon becomes such a prominent form within popular culture that discussing their relative merits becomes a matter of common sense. Observing cultural intermediation as a coproduced phenomenon reveals something of the democracy that already exists in the hands of consumers, thus subverting some of the unidirectional logic that the term “cultural intermediary” has often implied.

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Notes

- 1 A slang term basically meaning “good” with which Jamie Oliver has famously become associated.
- 2 The project is part of a wider program of research looking at Consumer Culture in an “Age of Anxiety” (Conanx), funded by the European Research Council.
- 3 Tunbridge Wells is typically represented as an upper middle class town where the attributes of wealth and trappings of highbrow culture could be said to thrive (Cobb 2009).
- 4 *The Guide* is as supplement in the popular broadsheet newspaper, *The Guardian*, which is widely regarded in the United Kingdom as having a middle class readership.
- 5 A “pillock” is a derogatory British slang word usually referring to a stupid person.
- 6 A “ploughman’s” lunch is a meal of various cheeses and salad items commonly served in British pubs.

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The Celebrity Quick-Fix

WHEN GOOD FOOD MEETS BAD SCIENCE

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Abstract

Fad diets are nothing new. But fad diets peddled by celebrities in this unique media climate—aptly described by French sociologist Claude Fischler as a “dietary cacophony” thanks to its often conflicting and therefore confusing messages—are a novelty and, as argued in this article, an unfortunate one. From celebrity foodies like Gwyneth Paltrow recommending home-made detox plans to television nutritionists prescribing alternative therapies for all manner of ailments, celebrity diets are a dime a dozen. Not confined to movie stars and television personas, even medical doctors can achieve celebrity by advocating the opposite of mainstream medical advice. It is a disconcerting trend because it reflects a market for quick-fix solutions, often based on questionable science, which is then perpetuated as the publication of “success stories” functions to disguise anecdotes as data. Building on my existing work on attention economics—specifically, key concepts like “bounded rationality” and “docility” as manifestations of our tendencies to seek external guidance—I argue that this industry entails a threat not only to critical and scientific literacy in the public at large, but also and more crucially, to the health and wellbeing of those out to “fix” themselves.

Keywords: bad science, pseudoscience, diet, nutrition, health, obesity, authority, expertise, attention economics

Introduction

We are becoming ignorant of ignorance. (Wieseltier 2013)

In a 2009 stand-up show, Irish comic Dara O’Brain spends a few minutes talking about pseudoscience, one characteristic of which is a tendency to claim certainty where none is warranted. “Science,” he continues, by contrast, “knows it doesn’t know everything. Otherwise it would stop.”¹ It is a useful summary

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of a key principle of the scientific method, which is simply that no theory can be considered absolute—only the best theory available to us thus far. Here the “best” available theory is not necessarily infallible nor indeed incorruptible (because science is conducted by human beings, and therefore cannot exist outside of the structures of power that shape most if not all human endeavor), but the one that has been most carefully, and repeatedly, tested without being falsified, and which is instead supported by statistically significant and up-to-date evidence. Thus, nutrition, like other fields of science, is by no means static. As our environments, behaviors and the foods available to us change and evolve, so too could what our bodies do with what we put into them. It is indeed the dynamic nature of nutritional science that continues to provide important research areas for professionals in this and related fields (including, but not limited to, dietitians, medical doctors, epidemiologists, food scientists, agriculturalists and behavioral psychologists).

This article focuses on the extent to which discussions about how and what to eat increasingly exist outside of and against the parameters of current scientific consensus. To be clear, it is not about setting up a false dichotomy between ideas supported by scientific consensus as inherently “good,” and anything that challenges that consensus as necessarily “bad.” It is, rather, about shifting sites of authority and expertise, or what might better be described as the “crisis of authority, trust and responsibility” (Belasco 2013) that results from the combined factors of a unique media climate which engenders various anxieties specific to food, health and eating (Jackson *et al.* 2013; Levenstein 2012; S. Rousseau 2012a) and which simultaneously provides the virtual space for the production and consumption of nonconformist positions. By definition against the consensus, the proliferation of these “alternative” positions and voices contributes to what Claude Fischler called the “dietary cacophony” (cit. Levenstein 2003: 212) of conflicting and therefore often confusing messages. It similarly contributes to lowering the bar in the public sphere for understanding the rigors of actual science, which is best understood not as a finished product, but as a *method* for reaching evidence-based conclusions. Here we see a flourishing market for fad diets offering “quick-fix” solutions like juice regimens (popular as a “detox” method), or intermittent fasting (also known as the 5:2 diet because it involves restricting calories for two non-consecutive days of the week), even as their efficacy lacks supporting evidence except as heuristics for reducing calorie intake. What these non-conventional eating plans do often enjoy is the endorsement of celebrities, whose competitive advantage on public attention spans ensures the spread of a brand of thinking aptly described by one commentator as “data-free celebrity science” (Robbins 2013).

Not confined to “traditional” celebrities like movie stars, even medical doctors can achieve celebrity status by advocating the opposite of conventional medical advice. Given their professional membership in the community that ordinarily contributes to establishing scientific consensus, this public dissent “from within,” so to speak, exemplifies an emerging trend of broadcasting scientific disagreements on public, non-scientific platforms like television or social media

networks rather than in the annals of peer-reviewed medical journals (ideally following the publication of clinical trials in the case of nutritional science).² Often in evidence here, as in most fad diets, is a rejection of nuance and complexity in favor of one new certainty (the elimination of which is often key to the quick fix promised by the diet), for example, the “toxicity” of gluten, sugar or carbohydrates in general,³ and the support of anecdotes rather than scientific data.

The three main examples in the following discussion occupy quite different positions on the celebrity scale. First, as a Hollywood film star, Gwyneth Paltrow is the most “traditional” celebrity, but she is perhaps as well-known for being a self-professed “foodie” (most lately of the alternative, gluten-free kind), author of two cookbooks, co-host with Mario Batali of the food travelogue show *Spain ... on the Road Again*, and curator of the lifestyle website Goop. Next, Dr. Mehmet Oz is a well-respected cardiac surgeon, and host of the extremely popular *The Dr. Oz Show* (which grew out of appearances on *Oprah*, and is syndicated by Winfrey’s Harpo Productions), where he regularly showcases both conventional and, more controversially, alternative medical theories and practitioners. His show has been described as “medutainment” (Specter 2013), and he had at the time of writing almost twice as many Twitter followers as Gwyneth Paltrow. Professor Timothy Noakes, finally, is a South African professor of sports science. A runner himself, he is the author of the best-selling *Lore of Running* (Noakes 1986), in which he advocated “carbo-loading” for marathon runners. In 2012, he publicly claimed that he had been “wrong” about needing carbohydrates for athletic performance—or at all—and now describes himself as a “Paleo diet proponent” (“Paleo” is also known as a low-carbohydrate-high-fat (LCHF) diet). Noakes has a significantly smaller media platform than either Paltrow or Oz, but typifies the medical professional who has amassed a noteworthy following primarily through social media, lay print publications and other web-based platforms (such as podcast interviews) to advocate a position which remains largely at odds with his peers.⁴

Together, these three examples demonstrate the extent to which the question of food management—what and how to eat; sometimes even the question of what food *is*—is driven not primarily by the logic of science nor of instinct or desire. Instead, we see a two-way confluence of celebrity and expertise, with unclear and constantly shifting boundaries between the two.⁵ Furthermore, while working against received wisdom is not necessarily problematic—indeed, science would stop if no one ever questioned the status quo—it is problematic if presented with the kind of certainty that disregards the very processes of scientific inquiry, and in some cases, as we shall see, trades on the currency of conspiracy theories. The massive popular attention that such public figures can attract in turn contributes to engendering a wider misunderstanding of the processes ideally involved in reaching justified conclusions about how and what to eat.

To summarize, my aim here is not to call out any of the examples under discussion as categorically “wrong,” nor to describe or prescribe “correct”



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nutrition. Neither is it to propose that anything we know as science is beyond question. It is to call attention to the role of the celebrity figure—be it a movie star or a maverick doctor—in a media economy where “freedom” and “democracy” often present as the right to distrust established authorities, but not, ironically, in exchange for autonomy. Rather, what these celebrity-hyped “fixes” lack in evidentiary support is made up for by the support of a public faced with the challenges of making the “right” nutritional choices in a vortex of confusing information. This approach builds on my existing work on attention economics (S. Rousseau 2012a, 2012b), a concept coined by the economist Herbert Simon to describe the large (and growing) disparity between the information that we have available to us, and the limited resources we have to navigate that information—chiefly attention, but also time, and often the intellectual skill set to question and understand much of what we are exposed to. Two key consequences of this configuration are that we exhibit “bounded rationality”—which as its name suggests, implies that we are prone to some amount of *irrationality* in our decision-making—and also what Simon called “docility,” or “*the tendency to depend on suggestions, recommendations, persuasion, and information obtained through social channels as a major basis for choice*” (Simon 1993: 156, author’s emphasis). Seen from this perspective, I argue that this nutritional counter-industry entails a threat not only to critical and scientific literacy in the public at large, but also and ultimately more crucially, potentially to the health and wellbeing of those out to “fix” themselves.⁶

Is Goop Even Food?

In 2013, Gwyneth Paltrow was crowned *People* magazine’s “Most Beautiful Woman in the World” and *Star* magazine’s “Most Hated Celebrity.” As *Vanity Fair*’s coverage of the story pointed out, “the two categories are not mutually exclusive—a celebrity can be considered physically beautiful at the same time as she’s considered to be a spiritual landfill” (Miller 2013). Neither of these designations appear relevant to Paltrow’s role as a nutritional role model. Yet they are telling indicators first of the scope of her reach, and therefore potentially of her influence, and second of the polarities, and quite possibly the behaviors, that she inspires. Those who deem her beautiful may be encouraged to follow her well-publicized eating and exercise regimens in an effort to look like her, while those who “hate” her may be encouraged to pen snarky, dismissive articles about everything from her daughter’s name (Apple), to how the name of her website “makes you want to rip your face off with your bare hands” (Hudson 2013).

As entertaining and creative as some of the latter diatribes can be, they do not concern us here. What does is the substance of her recommendations, and how they measure against standard nutritional advice.⁷ For her role as “foodie,” Paltrow has most recently been in the limelight for her latest cookbook, *It’s All Good* (Paltrow and Turshen 2013). But together with her fitness trainer, Tracy Anderson—dubbed the “organic plastic surgeon” (Rubin 2012)—she has been involved in giving contentious advice about how and what to eat for several years already. One journalist who followed the eating and exercise regimen

recommended by Paltrow and Anderson reported that while she achieved her “Gwyneth Paltrow body,” she did so at great cost to her physical wellbeing, including suffering blackouts (Wilcox 2012). A registered dietician commented of the diet (which combined strenuous exercise with a 700-calorie-a-day allowance), that “I see patients suffering with anorexia nervosa and now I’m reading their diet in pamphlet form” (quoted in Wilcox 2011).

Paltrow describes *It’s All Good* (her second cookbook)⁸ as being motivated by a migraine and panic attack “one sunny afternoon in London” which, “without sounding overly dramatic,” made her think she “was going to die.” (This apparently followed months involving “lots of French fries and wine”). A series of tests revealed a number of dietary intolerances and deficiencies, and Paltrow was subsequently put on an “elimination diet” by Dr. Alejandro Junger,⁹ who ruled out eggs, dairy, sugar, shellfish, deepwater fish, dairy, wheat, meat, soy, bell peppers, corn, eggplant, “anything processed at all,” coffee and alcohol. Her children were also tested and found to have various intolerances, including to gluten, dairy and chicken eggs. True to the “*gospel of naught*,” or the “view that the worth of a meal lies principally in what it lacks” (Glassner 2007: xi), the cookbook is thus a compilation of recipes free from any of these ingredients (compiled with the help of food writer and co-author Julia Turshen), and contains such information about her family as that when they “are not eating pasta, bread or processed grains like white rice, we’re left with that specific hunger that comes with avoiding carbs” (Paltrow 2013).

This last revelation that Paltrow’s children sometimes eat a carbohydrate-free diet garnered noteworthy reactions, particularly from tabloid publications, with headlines declaring that “Gwyneth Paltrow reveals she starves her children of carbohydrates” (*Daily Mail*), and “Gwyneth Paltrow’s Depriving Her Kids of Brain Healthy Grains, Expert Says” (*Hollywood Life*). She had the opportunity to react when she appeared on *The Dr. Oz Show* soon thereafter, and reassured the world that her children do eat Oreos, and “they’re normal kids” (Gritt 2013). In her book, she does however suggest that her own regimen is suitable for a for a general audience by describing the recipes as appropriate for anyone doing either “Dr. Junger’s Clean Program; a lean-protein-based weight-loss diet; or a food allergy program that steers you away from gluten and dairy; *or if you just want to focus a bit more on nutritious food*” (emphasis added to highlight her implication that any diet other than hers is a less nutritious approach to eating). On that note, obesity expert Dr. Yoni Freedhoff stresses that elimination diets and self-diagnosis of food intolerances can best be “described as non evidence-based hope, and at worst, as plain old malpractice,” and that “pseudoscientific claims may keep patients from a true understanding of their condition, and/or its treatments, putting them at risk of irreparable harm or even death” (quoted in Belluz 2013).¹⁰

Not discounting the many people who have genuine food intolerances and allergies, and whose lives depend very seriously on avoiding certain foods, it is difficult not to agree with the description of *It’s All Good* as “characterized by a complete fear of food” (Freeman 2013), which could similarly motivate a fear of



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food where none is actually warranted. More concerning still is that this is just the latest in a string of fad diets advocated by Paltrow, some of which she has later disassociated from:

Her cred as a health guru is as sketchy as her foodie-ism, especially given the numerous health-trend trains she's ridden over the years, from a macrobiotic diet to cupping acupuncture. In 2010, she featured Organic Avenue on Goop, enthusing about the "amazing results" she'd achieved with a five-day juice cleanse. Earlier this year, she and her fitness guru, Tracy Anderson, were featured in a Redbook magazine cover story, with Anderson warning that "juice fasting destroys your metabolic rate" and is "not what detoxification is about." (Eber 2013)

A charitable reading would extend the same courtesy to alternative health trends as we do to more evidence-based medical practices, namely that ideas and theories change, and perhaps Paltrow and Anderson did not know then what they do now. However, given that many alternative health trends are supported by little or no scientific evidence (because if they were, they would likely cease to be alternative), and that it is unlikely that there existed evidence for juice fasting when Paltrow took it up, the more plausible picture that emerges is of Paltrow herself in search of and falling prey to various pseudoscientific quick-fix solutions. This is her prerogative.

Publishing her efforts as recommendations to the public at large, however, only contributes to further blurring and complicating the divide between celebrity and expertise, and manufacturing pseudo-authority in the process. It also adds to the noise competing for our limited attention, and potentially, therefore, to exacerbating our already bounded rationality by offering yet another alternative authority on which to base our choices. Once again, there is nothing inherently problematic with alternative authorities. But as science journalist Julia Belluz concludes:

Paltrow trades on the expertise of a physician, Dr. Junger, and her ageless bloneness for authority about health. This combination—while attractive—should not form the basis of our health decisions. No amount of cooking like a celebrity will make the rest of us as shiny and golden as Paltrow, and the book risks complicating and confusing diet-related matters by suggesting expensive testing and abstinence from most every food group are the way forward for everyone. That's not all good, Gwyneth. (Belluz 2013)

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz

What about, then, when the center stage is occupied by an actual doctor, whose expertise is earned by professional training: should that not be enough authority upon which to base our health decisions? For the legions of fans who have helped to earn Dr. Oz the moniker "America's doctor"—even "America's *most trusted* doctor"—the answer is evidently yes. But to many

others, Oz's non-discrimination between evidence-based and non-evidence-based therapies raises concerns, as does his enthusiastic endorsement of "superfoods" such as turmeric (noted for its antioxidant, antiseptic and anti-inflammatory properties), chia seeds (offering 500 percent more calcium than milk and as much omega-3 as wild salmon) and sweet potatoes ("super high in heart-healthy vitamin A").¹¹ Professor of surgery Dr. David Gorski (who blogs under the handle "orac") describes Oz as "an excellent example of a practitioner of "integrative medicine" because "he "integrates" pseudoscience with science-based medicine." Gorski suggests that this is the result of a misguided commitment to "balance":

A huge part of the problem appears to derive from an apparent belief on the part of Dr. Oz's production team (and, presumably, him) that they must maintain an "open mind" and present "multiple perspectives." So what we end up with on Dr. Oz's TV show and website are "multiple perspectives" unfiltered by adequate science and reason, producing, in essence, a medical TV show and empire so open-minded that its collective brains have fallen out. (Gorski 2010)

For a more recent profile in the *New Yorker*, Michael Specter draws out some of the implications of this "balanced" viewpoint:

Much of the advice Oz offers is sensible, and is rooted in solidly scientific literature. That is why the rest of what he does is so hard to understand. Oz is an experienced surgeon, yet almost daily he employs words that serious scientists shun, like "startling," "breakthrough," "radical," "revolutionary," and "miracle" ... By freely mixing alternatives with proven therapies, Oz makes it nearly impossible for the viewer of his show to assess the impact of either; the process just diminishes the value of science. (Specter 2013)

Writing for the James Randi Educational Foundation (JREF),¹² magician and columnist for *Skeptic Magazine* Jamy Ian Swiss, who calls Dr. Oz an "anti-thinker," concurs: "He is reversing his responsibility as medical practitioner and weakening the public's ability to make informed judgments" (Swiss 2013).

Common to most of the critiques leveled against Oz is precisely the influence he wields on audiences. Like Paltrow, Oz has the right to dabble in whichever non evidence-based therapies or beliefs he chooses—until those beliefs or therapies pose potential harms to others. This is the same logic that applies to parents who choose not to vaccinate their children, and who potentially put other children at risk. It also applies to those under what Edzard Ernst, a physician who specializes in studying complementary and alternative medicines, calls the "Oz Effect," which is what happens when Oz's audiences buy into various recommendations made on the show, despite a lack of scientific evidence for their efficacy or safety. As Ernst explains, "Prominent people like Oz do have considerable influence. If this influence is used to promote quackery, bogus



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treatments seem credible. Using bogus treatments for serious conditions may cost lives” (quoted in Belluz and Hoffman 2013).

In an ideal world, it would be the job of the critical consumer to evaluate whether or not health-related advice is reliable, or at least to recognize some of the signs indicating that it may not be (for instance, “because Dr. Oz says so” would be an example of the logical fallacy of an argument from authority). For example, Jamy Swiss asks: “When was the last time that a revolutionary, historic, scientific breakthrough was first demonstrated and announced on an afternoon television talk show? The correct answer: NEVER” (Swiss 2013). For many reading the present article, this probably goes without saying. But in a media landscape where attention is scarce and short-lived, and where boundaries between public and private, between professional and amateur, and between newsworthy and Instagram-worthy shift so relentlessly—and are debatably often not mutually exclusive—why should a revolutionary scientific breakthrough *not* happen on daytime television, or on Twitter for that matter?

The question is admittedly facetious, but illustrates the extent to which a public figure like Oz’s non-discrimination can contribute to the scientific illiteracy of viewers, who could easily be led to believe that daytime television is indeed an appropriate place for such breakthrough revelations. More importantly, perhaps, Oz’s histrionic approach arguably does less in the end to help his audiences navigate the many options available to them, encouraging instead myopic, short bursts of attention to practices and products that often promise far more than they can deliver. This problem was dramatized in June 2014, when Oz was called testify at a Senate hearing on the topic of deceptive advertising, and was taken to task for his promotion of “miracle” weight loss products, as described in the following statements (made on his show):

You may think magic is make-believe, but this little bean has scientists saying they’ve found the magic weight loss cure for every body type: It’s green coffee extract.

I’ve got the number-one miracle in a bottle to burn your fat: It’s raspberry ketone.

Garcinia cambogia: It may be the simple solution you’ve been looking for to bust your body fat for good. (quoted in Hamblin 2014)

His main questioner, Senator Claire McCaskill, acknowledged both how much good Oz does in terms of providing information to his viewers, and also how much power he wields, but challenged him for making claims such as these that he knows not to be true. Oz countered that his show is “about hope,” and how having to be more conservative with his language would make him feel “disenfranchised.” The Senator replied that the hearing was not about “beating up on” Oz, but rather to “talk about a real crisis in consumer protection,” concluding that “No one’s telling you not to use passion, but passion in connection with the

word miracle pill and weight loss, is a recipe for disaster in this environment in terms of the people who are looking for an easy fix.”¹³

McCaskill’s response does well to underline the key issue with the example of Dr. Oz, which is both specific to his brand, and also germane to the more general issue of a public which is easily misled thanks both to the dynamics of our bounded rationalities and to the requirements of celebrity-hosted television show. As a doctor summarizes it in an article called “Why Dr. Oz Makes Us Crazy” (also acknowledging that Oz does much good service in the name of providing easily-digested medical information):

While we physicians fill our days providing sound advice to our patients, there are, by comparison, remarkably few recommendations that we can make to the population as whole. Everyone should exercise and wear seatbelts, nobody should smoke or drink excessively, and everyone should receive childhood vaccines. Not only are these types of recommendations limited in number, they are also neither terribly interesting nor surprising. They would certainly not support a daily, or even weekly, television show. (Cifu 2014)

In short, the rather mundane logistics of having to produce regular “sexy” (or at least attention-grabbing) content contributes significantly to a mediascape clogged with misinformation and hyperbolic claims about what and how to eat, including the question of when blanket recommendations are warranted.

Being as prolific as he is with supplying the “new,” Oz’s output is thereby part of the problem of the dietary cacophony. But to his audience, he is likely also the solution, as the trustworthy authority who can dispense seemingly risk-free advice and recommendations. To be sure, in the “risk society” theorized by Ulrich Beck (1992),¹⁴ public “experts” become indispensable as interpreters of complex scientific knowledge—here, personifying the “social channels” that Herbert Simon (1993) suggested become a major basis for choice in an attention economy. In the context of shifting sites of authority and expertise when it comes to questions of health and nutrition, the operative question is therefore *whose* voices are loudest in this competition for attention, and at the expense of which other voices?

A key problem with scientific discussions in the public sphere is that together with the issue of “balance” outlined above there exists an expectation of entitlement which posits that every idea, belief and opinion has equal merit, and by that token, has immunity against judgment. While Oz appearing before the Senate Committee is an encouraging corrective to lay misunderstandings about nutritional science, it remains (so far) an anomalous event. In a media climate where attention is one of our scarcest commodities, and the competition to be heard fiercer than ever, it stands to more unfortunate reason that nonconformists will fashion themselves as visionaries offering “miracle” cures for those out to fix themselves. Although there is nothing particularly novel in eccentric characters claiming access to some truth that the rest of us do not have, it is surely a disconcerting development to see medically trained practitioners impatiently



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spreading as-yet unverified “facts” or offering advice on the optimum nutrition for bodies under the strain of rigorous exercise.

The (Not So) Quiet Maverick

As Director of the University of Cape Town’s Research Unit for Exercise Science and Sports Medicine and a recipient of (among other awards) the South African National Research Foundation’s Lifetime Achievement Award in 2012, Professor Timothy Noakes (MBChB, MD, PhD, DSc) is a scientist of notable credentials and repute. In addition to being considered an authority on exercise and nutrition at least since his 1986 *Lore of Running*, in which he advocated high-carbohydrate diets for runners, Noakes also famously coached arctic swimmer and environmentalist Lewis Pugh, who found him to be the only doctor who would agree to supervise swimming expeditions in such extreme conditions. Reflecting on how if any of the expeditions had failed, everyone “would be looking at Tim differently,” as “the guy who took the swimmer to the North Pole and the swimmer died” (quoted in Ilbury 2013), it was Pugh who suggested that “quiet maverick” be an appropriate moniker for his erstwhile coach.

True to the nonconformist designation, when Noakes came across a spam e-mail one day advertising a book promising fast and easy weight loss, he originally filed it as “bogus” (quoted in Stilwell 2012), but then recognizing the names of the authors, reconsidered: “I suddenly thought, they can’t be writing stuff that is wrong ... because they are good scientists”¹⁵ (another notable example of the fallacious argument from authority, where information is trusted and accepted based on the qualifications of the person providing it, rather than on its own merits). The diet was an Atkins-type, LCHF regimen, which Noakes began and soon experienced both rapid weight loss and improved running performance. Once suitably convinced that he had been “wrong” about carbohydrate-loading, he has, however, been anything but quiet about it.

Asking his followers to “tear out the chapter on nutrition in *Lore of Running*,” he has since early 2012 taken advantage of a number of popular, public platforms, including social media, radio, television and web-based interviews to explain his change of opinion. Briefly, this has included the revelation that he was pre-diabetic at the time he wrote the book, making him both “insulin-resistant” and “carbohydrate-intolerant,” and that he now believes—in defiance of the more conventional model that drastic weight gain is a predictor for diabetes—that these conditions are a cause rather than result of obesity.¹⁶ In advocating a high-fat diet (for both weight loss and as a longer-term lifestyle change), he has similarly and vocally aligned himself with those who believe that everything we know about cholesterol (for example, that it causes heart disease) is a “myth,” if not an outright conspiracy perpetuated by the statin industry.

There are two issues of note in the story of Noakes’ revised beliefs (his 2012 book, in which he includes a new chapter on nutrition, is appropriately titled *Challenging Beliefs*), and neither have to do with the simple fact of altering his position. The first is about the evidence and resources he marshals as support for his new stance. As the revelation about his personal health may suggest,

his initial evidence was based on a sample of one—himself—whom he claimed also to have cured of “exercise-induced asthma, allergic rhinitis, irritable bowel syndrome and sleep apnea” (Stillwell 2013). Given the lack of randomized clinical trials establishing the long-term efficacy or safety of an LCHF diet,¹⁷ the sample size is by necessity small and observational, yet that did not stop Noakes from widely advocating the diet on public platforms. As a profile written by a South African medical practitioner, who described Noakes as the “Malema¹⁸ of medicine” (“a man with a hoard of followers and considerable media sway, who is capable of producing charismatic, easy to hear and probably irresponsible solutions to very complex problems”) summarized:

Everybody agrees that a low-carb, high-fat diet can cause rapid weight loss, but the regimen is not without acute dangers. Type one diabetics may develop renal failure or go into hypoglycemic coma, and patients with elevated triglycerides risk contracting potentially fatal pancreatitis. The long-term benefits of the diet remain unclear and, just as short-term athletic performance does not always equate with longevity, weight loss does not always equate to good health. Skinny people have heart attacks too. (Stillwell 2013)

Still, his sample of one has grown anecdotally to include the “hundreds” of people who write to Noakes on a regular basis thanking him for saving their lives, even as other medical professionals warn that the diet can be directly harmful to some (Child 2013), and neither has it prevented Noakes’ own progression from being pre-diabetic to diabetic, as he now describes himself.¹⁹

Noakes finds support for his position from other writers, some contemporary, such as science journalist Gary Taubes, whose *Good Calories, Bad Calories* (2008) he regularly cites as inspiration, as well as the writings of Nina Teicholz (author of *The Big Fat Surprise: Why Butter, Meat and Cheese Belong in a Healthy Diet*), Dr. Atkins, Dr. William Harvey and William Banting (prescriber and subject of the first widely publicized low-carbohydrate diet). Then there are the more unusual sites of “support” for his position, such as (in response to a question posed by this author about the scientific accuracy of some of Noakes’ declarations), the following pronouncements on Twitter:



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Every great scientific truth goes through three stages. First, people say it conflicts with the Bible. Next they say it has been discovered before. Lastly they say they always believed it. Louis Agassiz.²⁰

And this exchange:

Noakes: “Prudent diet for children is a genocide diet.” Sally Fallon in *The Oiling of America*.

Interlocutor: Genocide is a little too strong here. I guess people like to try to shine through.

Noakes: When you follow her argument and evidence she presents, word is not too strong. Industry's greed is the cause of our ill-health.

...

Noakes: [Sally Fallon's] lecture should be required reading for everyone in developed world who can choose what to eat.²¹

Louis Agassiz, for readers who are not aware, was a creationist and proponent of scientific racism, while Sally Fallon is the author of *Nourishing Traditions: The Cookbook that Challenges Politically Correct Nutrition and the Diet Dictocrats*, which reveals the "startling message" that "Animal fats and cholesterol are not villains."²² Fallon is also a co-founder and president of The Weston A. Price Foundation, which is "dedicated to restoring nutrient-dense foods to the human diet through education research and activism."²³ In addition to providing various resources about how and what to eat, and a quarterly newsletter called *Caustic Commentary*, the foundation's website contains information about how "vaccines can be extremely harmful, permanently disabling and even deadly to our children" (Born 2005) and an essay dedicated to "Autism and Vaccinations" (Megson 2004), which does *not* convey the fact that there is no statistically significant causal relationship between vaccinations and autism.

To summarize, Noakes regularly cites figures ranging from journalists to pseudoscientists and vaccine-denialists in support of his position, and openly supports practices unsupported by science, like homeopathy (Blackburn 2013). It is easy (and one hopes, reasonable) to assume that as a trained scientist he himself is able to tell the difference between what does and what cannot count as scientific evidence. By choosing not to do so publicly, however, and at times favoring questionable sources (particularly if they are useful for quote mining), Noakes does his supporters a worrying disservice. Put otherwise, like Oz, Noakes' very public non-discrimination between good science (or just "science") and bad science signals to his followers that there is no need for that discrimination. To be sure, there is a sense in which Noakes and other health "mavericks" generate and thrive on a celebrated status not so much for the facts as for the fact of rebellion; a ruthless and messianic conviction *in spite of* the available scientific data. This leads to the second issue that the example of Noakes highlights, namely where all the attention for rogue science about health and nutrition is garnered. For Oz it is mainly television and radio; for Noakes, it is Twitter, web-based interviews on the LCHF lifestyle,²⁴ in magazines, or magazine shows on television. In neither case is it primarily in journals nor in research-driven seminars, presentations or clinical trials; in other words, it is not from an audience of his peers.

One noteworthy appearance before his peers did take place in December 2012, when Noakes participated in a public debate on the occasion of the centenary celebrations of the Medical Faculty at University of Cape Town. The topic of the debate was the role of "cholesterol as a risk factor for heart disease," and whether "current dietary recommendations do more harm than good." Noakes' position would be "no," and "yes" respectively. Arguing the reverse was

Jacques Rossouw, a South African doctor based in Washington, DC, where he for many years headed the Women's Health Initiative at the National Institutes of Health (NIH).²⁵ The debate format allowed both Noakes and Rossouw to present their positions, after which they could respond to each other. Noakes refused the second opportunity to speak, claiming later that he had been set up. According to the author of a book-length profile of Noakes, the room was

heaving with people wearing condemnatory frowns—the academic equivalent of bared teeth—and hunched forward, ready to scrutinize his every word. He may as well have been blindfolded with a target pinned to his chest ... Rossouw was there to provide evidence to underscore conventional wisdom, thereby supposedly correcting Noakes' research. But most were hoping for more—that he'd put Noakes back in his place, sending him with tail between legs back to the sports field and away from the field of human nutrition. Noakes knew this going into the debate. He was to tell me later, "It was a set up." (Illbury 2013: 6–7)

Whether or not refusing to defend himself in front of his peers constitutes being put "back in his place," or a reaction to a paranoid conviction that he had been unfairly targeted is up for debate. But his views on human nutrition presented that day also provoked the then Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences, Professor Marion Jacobs, to pen an editorial letter in a local newspaper pointing out that the "debates ... being voiced by individual members of the faculty ... do not reflect any official faculty or university position with regard to the debate" (Jacobs 2012). Less than a move for the university to distance itself from bickering colleagues, Professor Jacobs' more important point was that:

for patients, the debate might appear to be confusing, since eminent experts appear to be contradicting each other. The nature of creating new knowledge will always involve grappling with uncertainty and interpreting scientific data to the best of one's scientific ability ... The existing balance of scientific opinion remains in favor of reducing cholesterol in the diet as a key preventive measure with regard to cardiovascular disease. (Jacobs 2012)

Contrary to his peers' apparent hostility, Noakes could evidently count on a more sympathetic audience on Twitter, where he shortly thereafter had the following exchange:

- Interlocutor: @ProfTimNoakes Really enjoying watching the Centenary Lecture videos. Much food for thought. Not sure the audience "got it" as a whole.
- Noakes: Overlooked: If I am wrong, all that suffers is my reputation. If diet-heart [hypothesis, which posits a connection between diet and heart health] is wrong, billions suffer. Scary responsibility.



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Fortunately (and as evidence that social media channels are not universally nor necessarily un-critical platforms) another Twitter follower immediately pointed out the flaw in Noakes' response that all that stands to suffer is his reputation: "If you are wrong thousands of followers health suffers unnecessarily [sic]. You overlooking that?"²⁶

Discussion: Science Knows it Doesn't Know Everything

This last point is—or should be—the crux of any discussion about health and nutrition, namely whether chosen behaviors and eating patterns do more harm than good, or vice versa. But this is of course easier said than known. Witness almost any discussions between people following a diet that Noakes—or Paltrow, or Dr. Oz, or any of the innumerable people ready to give advice at odds with some or most standard recommendations—and the pronouncements are overwhelmingly positive: people often lose weight and feel great. What is less clear is what the long-term cost of that may be, both in terms of physical health and wellbeing, and also intellectually, in terms of eroding the standards for what and whom we regard as food experts and health authorities. This is where concerns about taking possibly dubious advice about how and what to eat coincides with a much wider phenomenon—and where the mechanisms of an attention economy are particularly plain to see—by which "expertise" is conferred by popularity rather than knowledge. It is a phenomenon variously described as the "death of expertise" (Collins 2014; Nichols 2014), or the "cult of the amateur" (Keen 2007), and in which celebrity culture in particular enjoys a venerated position thanks both to the attention celebrity commands, and to the passion with which many of these contrarian positions are espoused.²⁷ Commenting on some of the shifts in knowledge that the digital era has ushered in, philosopher Julian Baggini asks an important question that is equally applicable in this context: "how do we cope with a loss of faith in absolute knowledge without descending into a subjectivism in which the only truth is the passion with which people believe?" (Baggini 2013).

Without enough, or conclusive, data to support the promise that these diets will cause no harm, believing in them, and believing those who advocate them does indeed become an issue of faith, rather than of science. Further, in addition to science knowing "it doesn't know everything," as Dara O'Briain puts it, scientists are fallible; not all scientific trials are well-designed or useful trials; science reporting is notoriously poor (Freedman 2013); and the pharmaceutical industry does not have a stellar track record for best practice (Goldacre 2012). All of this combines to produce a picture of "science" which can be much less confidence-inspiring than the single, convinced voice of the nonconformist who claims to have the "truth" that more banal structures of government departments and scientific institutions have rejected or ostensibly covered up. Indeed, one argument holds that following the current "Paleo" trend articulates a particular political position:

With all of its contested conclusions and shaky methodologies, nutrition is a controversial science. It's also convenient [sic] outlet for those who believe

in self-reliance to shun the government's prescriptions, blame the less healthy for their predicament, and offer unsolicited advice on bootstrapping oneself into a smaller dress size. What could be better, from a Libertarian perspective, than to alter one's lifestyle from a government-sanctioned model to one guided by enlightened, evolutionary, natural principles that match the primal, anarchic state of man. (Abrahamian 2012)

If there is any truth to this, it is telling that this model of "enlightenment," which involves eating as "nature" intended is itself based on questionable science (Arnold 2013) and on a mistaken idea that we are evolutionary "relics hampered by a self-inflicted mismatch between our environment and our genes" (Zuk 2013).

But that complication is evidently less of an obstacle than the patience required to concede that things are generally more complicated than can be fixed with a single magic bullet. This is true of individuals who elect to "fix" themselves by cutting out carbohydrates because a Noakes or Paltrow says it is the right thing to do. It is also relevant to the ultimately more challenging public health conversations about policies required to address obesity, the causes of which are routinely and simplistically depicted as one, rather than several (Berreby 2013; S. Rousseau 2012a). In his response to a viral video claiming that sugar is both toxic and the primary cause of obesity (authored by Robert Lustig, another medical doctor whose ideas do not always reflect the existing scientific consensus),²⁸ Dr. David Katz underlines how at odds with any productive conversation a focus on one food group or macronutrient, such as sugar, can be:

It means that Dean Ornish and Caldwell Esselstyn and others must be wrong about the importance of dietary fats. It means that advocates for the Paleo diet, which certainly does not exclude fructose *per se*, are potentially misguided. It means that Atkins and all of the carb-cutting disciples to follow, were also wrong—since a "just cut fructose" message makes no mention of the starches against which Atkins railed. It means that advocates for a Mediterranean diet, which as noted above is apt to include the occasional baklava, must be deluded ... In fact, if any one of these—or a long list of other—concerns about modern eating is the one thing truly wrong with our food, then all of the others are, *ipso facto*, wrong. If any two of these are correct, then there is no longer just one thing wrong—to the detriment of all that silver bullet, conspiracy theory sex appeal. (Katz 2013a)



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This description also brings to the fore what a veritable marketplace of nutritional thinking we have available to us. As with any resources, there is nothing inherently troubling about different schools of thought when it comes to how and what to eat. Indeed, from a broader perspective, there is nothing inherently troubling with questioning received wisdom, as Thomas Kuhn (1962) famously demonstrated with his description of paradigm shifts as essential to the progress of scientific knowledge. But the variety on offer here is ultimately more revealing of Fischer's "dietary cacophony" (Levenstein 2003: 212) and

what Katz elsewhere calls a “perpetual uncertainty” of audiences, stemming from “a culture that fails to require true expertise as a basis for expert opinion” (Katz 2013b). One key manifestation of this is, as another commentator puts it:

[such a] current fear of food, manifested in daily articles about epidemics of obesity and the various ways we’re killing ourselves through what we eat, that it’s sometimes a little easy to join the next dietary fashion without thinking enough about whether we’re convinced by the evidence rather than by the hysteria. (J. Rousseau 2012)

The examples of Oz and Noakes demonstrate how the very notions of expertise and authority can be misunderstood: a scientist cannot be an authority by virtue of being a scientist. He or she must also behave like a scientist, which means being led by the evidence, rather than by anecdotes. But waiting for scientific evidence requires more patience and longer attention spans than many people possess. Magical thinking, on the other hand, has that sexy edge of being in an imagined “know.” As such, we see a growth in nonconformist positions, not because of more solid evidence (which would move these theories out of the “alternative” zone), but because our digital landscapes and limited attention spans favor frenzy over reason. And so, alongside alternative theories taking stronger hold is a corresponding and unfortunate scarcity of critical assessment. This is a worrying trend not because it unduly favors “science,” but because, as the philosopher Susan Haack puts it, it “feeds the anti-intellectualism, the cynicism about the very possibility of discovering how things are” (Haack 2008: 121). Here, where “balance” dictates equality of ideas, is where the boundaries between celebrity and expertise begin to fray. In a world where it appears to make sense to take nutritional advice from a movie star like Gwyneth Paltrow, and to follow medical practitioners whose ideas do not stand up to the scrutiny of their peers, we can only hope that proper sense prevails.

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Notes

- 1 Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDYba0m6ztE> (accessed January 7, 2013).

- 2 Although randomized clinical trials and peer-reviewed publication are considered imperative to the scientific method, it bears noting that neither of these processes is without significant problems. See, for example, Goldacre (2012).
- 3 The punctuation of “toxicity” refers to relatively recent media discussions around, particularly, the *apparent* toxicity of sugar and carbohydrates to the general population. This in no way diminishes the actual toxicity of gluten to people with celiac disease, or of sugar to diabetics.
- 4 While it is true that “conventional” dietary guidelines are increasingly under scrutiny in both popular and scientific literature, the example of Noakes here is intended to illustrate the currency of advocating a position which may eventually be shown to be correct, but which is *not yet* supported by sufficient scientific evidence to be considered incontrovertible.
- 5 As former medical practitioner and current media and communication scholar Tania Lewis articulates this crossover, “If celebrities now reign supreme where does this leave the figure of the expert in modern life? ... This does not mean, however, that experts no longer have currency today. Rather, and this is particularly the case in the realm of lifestyle media, it has translated into a radical reconfiguration of expertise along more popular (and putatively ‘democratized’) lines. In this process the relationship between the celebrity and the expert is no longer necessarily marked by hierarchies and distinctions between experience versus rationality, popular and consumer culture versus the professional/governmental realm ... Rather I would suggest that there is an increasing overlap between these figures and that expertise today is increasingly caught up in the logic of celebrity” (Lewis 2010: 583). On the “celebritization” of expertise in areas related to climate change and development politics, see Boykoff and Goodman (2009) and Goodman (2010).
- 6 With many thanks to the constructive input of the anonymous reviewers of this article.
- 7 I do not intend to suggest that “standard nutritional advice” is immune to criticism, nor that some individuals have different needs from population-wide recommendations. Nevertheless, the “standard,” government-issued nutritional guidelines are the closest we have to “scientific consensus” in the area of nutrition.
- 8 Her first cookbook, *My Father’s Daughter* (Paltrow 2011), shares “family favorite” recipes, and a passion for cooking that she learnt from her father, actor Bruce Paltrow, who died in 2002. The recipes follow no obvious “health” trends (apart from the exclusion of red meat), instead showing how Paltrow “balances healthy food with homemade treats,” as per the book’s blurb.
- 9 Dr. Jager is a leading proponent of the “elimination,” or “detox” diet, and the author of *Clean: The Revolutionary Program to Restore the Body’s Natural Ability to Heal Itself* (Junger 2009).
- 10 For more on the myths of detoxing from the perspective of a surgical oncologist, see for example Gorski (2011).
- 11 From a gallery of Dr. Oz’s “favorite” superfoods (see: <http://www.doctoroz.com/slideshow/dr-ozs-10-favorite-superfoods>, accessed March 3, 2014). It is beyond the scope of this article to interrogate all the nutritional claims made and endorsed by Dr. Oz, but for an examination of fifteen products presented as “superfoods” on the show, see for example Gavura (2013).
- 12 The JREF is “an educational resource on the paranormal, pseudoscientific, and the supernatural.” Since its establishment in 1996, the foundation has offered a prize of



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- US\$1m to anyone who can provide evidence of “paranormal abilities under controlled conditions.” While this prize remains unclaimed, the JREF has conferred its Media Pigasus Award on Dr. Oz twice in a row for doing “such a disservice to his TV viewers by promoting quack medical practices” (see: <http://www.randi.org/site/jref-news/1260-pigasus-2011>, accessed February 20, 2014).
- 13 Video available from: <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/dr-oz-defends-weight-loss-advice-at-senate-hearing-on-diet-scams/> (accessed July 1, 2014).
 - 14 For critique of Beck’s formulation of the risk society (specifically his lack of engagement with different “circuits of communication” when discussing the role of the media), see Tulloch and Lupton (2001).
 - 15 From the “High Fat for Health, with Professor Tim Noakes” podcast interview with Dr. Peter Brukner for the *BMJ*, available from: <https://soundcloud.com/bmjpodcasts/high-fat-for-health> (accessed July 2, 2013).
 - 16 While it is beyond the scope of this paper to engage in the scientific debates about the causal relationship between obesity and diabetes, available evidence for managing diabetes through weight-loss interventions currently support the model of obesity as a predictor for type 2 diabetes rather than vice versa. See for example DPPRG (2002); Malik *et al.* (2004); Hamman *et al.* (2006); Kim and Richards (2010).
 - 17 While numerous studies have compared low-carbohydrate vs. low-fat diets, the long-term differences on weight loss have been negligible (see, for example, Sacks *et al.* 2009; Bueno *et al.* 2013), and the data on the long-term effects of low-carbohydrate diets for cardiovascular health remain inconclusive (see for example Bradley *et al.* 2009; Santos *et al.* 2012).
 - 18 Julius Malema, formerly of the ANC Youth League, is a controversial South African politician.
 - 19 See: <http://thepaleodiet.co.za/professor-tim-noakes/> (accessed May 10, 2014).
 - 20 See: <https://twitter.com/ProfTimNoakes/status/281418940377333760> and <https://twitter.com/ProfTimNoakes/status/281419125895598080> respectively (accessed July 5, 2013).
 - 21 See: <https://twitter.com/ProfTimNoakes/status/325844044607541248> (accessed July 5, 2013).
 - 22 See: <http://www.newtrendspublishing.com/SallyFallon/aboutSallyFallon.html> (accessed June 30, 2013).
 - 23 See: <http://www.westonaprice.org/about-the-foundation/about-the-foundation> (accessed June 30, 2013).
 - 24 For a series of one-hour interviews with Noakes (seven, at the time of writing) on the South African radio station CCFM about the “Paleo” or LCHF diet, see: http://helgavan.com/?page_id=7345 (accessed July 5, 2013). Noakes has also been a guest on the “Livin’ La Vida Low-Carb” podcast (Episode 588), and named as one of the “Top 10 Low-Carb Movers and Shakers of 2012” on that website.
 - 25 For purposes of full disclosure, Jacques Rossouw is also the author’s father-in-law.
 - 26 See: <https://twitter.com/ProfTimNoakes/status/308557593381580800> (accessed June 30, 2013).
 - 27 For clinical perspectives on the celebrity phenomenon, and the suggestion that people who engage in “celebrity worship” are more prone to neurotic and irrational behaviors, see Maltby *et al.* (2003) and Sansone and Sanson (2014). For a critique of current methods of studying celebrity, see Turner (2010).

- 28 See, for example, a video response to Lustig by a registered dietitian who points out that dietitians “find it very frustrating that people want to blame an individual food or ingredient for weight gain,” and “there simply isn’t scientific evidence to support that fructose is causing obesity”: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kZWFsCao2rc> (accessed July 10, 2013).

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A Revolution in an Eggcup?

SUPERMARKET WARS, CELEBRITY CHEFS AND ETHICAL CONSUMPTION

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Abstract

This article examines the role of celebrity chefs and other non-state actors in the heated and highly politicized environment of ethical and sustainable consumption. Focusing on the media campaigns of the two major supermarkets and their attempt to rebrand themselves through ethical associations with celebrity chefs and animal welfare groups, the article discusses the complex entanglement between food politics, discourses of branding, the media and supermarkets in Australia. We suggest that the mainstreaming of ethical concerns cannot be understood simply as a consumer movement or indeed purely as an extension of market logics; rather, it is articulated to and implicated in broader changes in relation to the political and social role and status of corporate players, non-state actors and questions of lifestyle politics in shaping the future of food systems, policy and regulation.

Keywords: food systems, food sovereignty, animal welfare, branding, neoliberalism, non-state actors, lifestyle, political consumerism, food television

Introduction

Celebrity chefs have been described as the rock stars of the contemporary age. More than just stars, however, they have in many ways become cultural icons of our time as they neatly exemplify and embody a variety of contemporary shifts and tensions around work, lifestyle and leisure; branded, performative modes of selfhood and lifestyle; gendered regimes and hierarchies of cooking; cosmopolitan forms of culinary taste and cultural capital; as well as perhaps rather more surprisingly questions of “the good life,” ethics and consumption

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(Hollows 2003; Hollows and Jones 2010; Lewis 2008a, 2014). This article focuses on this latter theme, that is, the way in which celebrity chefs have become key sites through which the ethics of “good” shopping and eating in an increasingly industrialized and globalised food market are interrogated and mobilized within contemporary media culture. As we discuss, the iconic role of celebrity chefs here is a fraught one—one that speaks to the complex role of branded, celebrity “experts” as ethicalized cultural intermediaries, as well as to the broader terrain of celebrity advocacy in late capitalism (Brockington 2014; Goodman 2013; Lewis 2008, 2014). While their celebrity food identities (as narrativized on food TV) often stem from a set of food practices and ethics committed to the local sourcing of produce, knowing and growing one’s own food and/or having a human connection with farmers and food sellers, their branded identities are often ironically embedded in the very marketized and corporatized foodways that their own food practices and ethics would seem to eschew.

Here we explore these issues through examining two extensive “ethical” branding campaigns recently mounted by Australia’s main supermarkets, Woolworths and Coles (Coles 2014a; Woolworths 2013). As we discuss, these two corporate players have sought to leverage the associations between celebrity chefs, “good” food and ethical eating by partnering, in the case of Woolworths, with global food icon, Jamie Oliver, while Coles has chosen local chef made good, Curtis Stone, to front its ethical campaign. We argue that these celebrities possess a powerful, celebritized form of what we term “ethical capital”: in other words, a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1984) that operates in specific relation to the acquisition, performance and recognition of expertise in matters of ethical concern. The ethical capital of these celebrity chefs has been deployed to a greater or lesser extent by these corporate players to signify a commitment to issues such as animal welfare (an association strengthened by both supermarkets also linking their brands to key animal welfare groups), and local and ethical modes of food provenance. This attempt to ethically (re-) brand supermarkets holds particular significance for the Australian context because its grocery market is remarkably concentrated and is overwhelmingly dominated by the powerful Woolworths/Coles duopoly.¹ Importantly, these celebrity chef/supermarket alliances are occurring at a time when these large corporations are under increasing scrutiny in the media and elsewhere for their *lack* of (business) ethics. While this mainstreaming of ethical concerns in the space of the supermarket is, as we shall see, compromised in a number of ways, it occurs at a particular complex conjuncture in which a range of non-state actors have sought to intervene in the future of food ethics in Australia. For instance, various activist, producer and consumer-led movements around Australia have been pushing for reform in relation to a range of food issues from health and animal welfare to food sovereignty. The mainstreaming of ethical concerns then cannot be understood simply as a consumer movement or indeed purely as an extension of market logics; rather, it is articulated to and implicated in broader changes in relation to the political and social role and status of corporate players, non-state actors (from celebrity chefs to local

food networks) and questions of lifestyle politics in shaping the future of food systems, policy and regulation.

Before we discuss these two major supermarket campaigns, we provide a broad contextual background to this recent ethical turn. Accordingly the article is structured as follows: the first section briefly maps the growing interest in ethical consumption more broadly within the international media, focusing particularly on the United Kingdom, before then turning to discuss the role of food TV and celebrity chefs in the ethical space in the United Kingdom and more recently Australia. In the second section, we examine the ethical branding campaigns offered up by Australia's two main supermarket players, discussing the specific role of celebrity chefs Oliver and Stone in these campaigns. Here we emphasize two key elements of these marketized interventions in the domain of food ethics: first, the move by supermarkets to co-brand themselves with seemingly trustworthy "ethical actors" such as celebrity chefs, in order to authenticate their ethical claims while also relatedly attempting to shore up their ethical credentials through an emphasis on local provenance and connection to place; and second the growing incursion of supermarkets and celebrity spokespersons such as Oliver and Stone into once state-based realms of food policy and regulation, here played out through their attempts to shape and control debates, discourses and practices around animal welfare and ethical food production.

Of Meat and Milk: Food Ethics in the Mainstream Media

Questions of ethics and sustainability around food production, sourcing and consumption have become increasingly prominent in wealthy capitalist nations around the world (Barnett *et al.* 2005a, 2005b; Coff 2006; Goodman *et al.* 2010; Harrison *et al.* 2005; Humphery 2009, 2011; Lewis and Potter 2011; Littler 2008, 2011; Micheletti 2003; Varul 2009). An important factor behind this ethical turn has been the growing coverage of ethical or "conscience" consumerism within mainstream media outlets. In 2009, for instance, an issue of *Time* magazine ran with the cover "The Rise of the Ethical Consumer" and featured an article ("The Responsibility Revolution") reporting that, in a poll of 1,003 Americans, "nearly 40 percent said they purchased a product in 2009 because they liked the social or political values of the company that produced it" (Stengel 2009: 24). Meanwhile in the UK, Ethical Consumer, a highly organized lobby for ethical consumption, has contributed to the issue being debated within mainstream media for over twenty years. As Barnett *et al.*'s study of British print media reportage of ethical and sustainable consumption shows, since the 1990s there has been an "exponential growth" in mainstream newspaper coverage of "ethical consumption" or "ethical trade," which they argue is the end result, not of consumer pressure, but of "activists and advocates" strategically developing relationships with news outlets to create a narrative space for the "ethical consumer" as a newsworthy social actor (Barnett *et al.* 2005a: 50).

In more recent years, food television and celebrity chefs in particular have also played a central role in mainstream media coverage of ethical consumption,



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giving heightened visibility to questions of animal welfare, food sourcing, sovereignty and sustainability while also providing an otherwise worthy topic with a degree of popular cultural cachet. In the United Kingdom, for instance, Jamie Oliver and fellow chef and TV personality Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's efforts to raise media awareness about the conditions in which chickens are raised commercially for eggs and meat have been linked to a significant growth in the numbers of free-range products available in British supermarkets, as well as decreased consumer demand for factory-based products (Hickman 2008). In the TV special *Jamie's Fowl Dinners* (Channel 4, 2008), Oliver replicated the way male chicks are killed in carbon monoxide chambers for a visibly shocked "live" audience, including supermarket representatives, a move which, according to Oliver, saw "the shelves cleared of free-range eggs and birds the morning after [the show]" (Lewis 2011). Indeed, Oliver has been particularly adept at exploiting the emotional power of the pop doc/reality format in order to foreground a range of social and political issues.

While Australia has lagged behind in the ethical stakes in recent years, there has been something of an ethical turn on food television, although it has not enjoyed the same mainstream exposure as in the United Kingdom. Focused largely on educated middle class "foodies," it has primarily manifested itself in the soft, lifestyled subgenre of food tourism or "tour-educative" TV (Strange 1998) rather than the more confrontational reality-pop docs like those produced in the United Kingdom (de Solier 2005; de Solier 2013; Lewis 2008b). Recent examples include *Gourmet Farmer* (on the niche public broadcaster SBS), a "lifestyle migration" show about a city dweller who moves his family to the country to learn how to live ethically and sustainably (but in gourmet style) from and on the land, and *Paddock to Plate* (Foxtel's Lifestyle Channel), a tour-educative program featuring the well-known Australian chef and restaurateur Matt Moran visiting places in rural Australia renowned for their local food.¹

Meanwhile, the local, highly successful iteration of *MasterChef*, which has been airing on commercial television in Australia since 2009, routinely inserts commentary about food provenance, though the show's heavy emphasis on product placement and integrated marketing (it has multiple sponsors including Coles supermarket) have largely seen concerns of ethical purchasing and consumption pushed to the side. Commercial broadcaster Channel Ten, the home of *MasterChef Australia*, has also built a loyal audience of Jamie Oliver fans and has a dedicated website for Oliver.³ Along with a number of Oliver's cookery series, the channel aired both *Jamie's Fowl Dinners* and its follow-up *Jamie Saves Our Bacon* in 2008 and 2009 respectively.⁴ However, these programs failed to make much of an impact in Australia at the time. Presumably this was due not only to the rather UK-centered focus of these one-off programs, but also to the fact that ethical eating had not yet received anywhere near the activist-driven media attention it had in the United Kingdom. It should be noted however that while Australia's mainstream retail outlets may have been relatively slow to come to the ethical party,⁵ this is not to suggest that there has been no activism and campaigning within the ethical sphere in Australia. Fairtrade has a very

active presence in Australia, while Australia's Shop Ethical! in some way mirrors the United Kingdom's long-running Ethical Consumer campaign and magazine. This said, campaigns around ethical consumption have tended to be more dispersed and *ad hoc* than those in the United Kingdom, with comparatively less of the strategic media engagement and mainstreaming that Barnett *et al.* (2005a) describe in the UK context.⁶ More recently, however, as we discuss below, various ethical and political issues around food have begun to find their way on to the public agenda in Australia. It is in this context then—one of a broader international engagement by supermarkets and consumers with issues of food ethics, and a less developed but growing level of mainstream ethical engagement in Australia—that we see the two major Australian supermarkets entering the fray. As we argue, their decision to invest significant financial and symbolic resources in ethical branding campaigns can be read as a strategic attempt to anticipate and manage growing consumer concerns in the ethical space.

An Unlikely Marriage: Supermarkets and Celebrity Chefs

In early October 2013, Australia's largest grocery retailer, Woolworths, announced a new working relationship with Jamie Oliver, pairing a press release with a piece to camera on the retailer's website:

[transcript] Hi guys, Jamie Oliver here. Hope you're well Australia. Okay, so I'm going to be working with Woolworths. This is a massive opportunity to reach out to even more Aussies—18 million Aussies go through Woolworths every single week ... I'm going to be working across the whole of the business, front and back end, to make sure that you're going to be inspired, whether it's on magazines, or websites, or recipe cards, or on adverts, to give you all the lovely tips and shortcuts, and brilliant simple recipes that are going to really work hard for you and your families. We're kicking off this new relationship with a commitment from Woolworths to completely get out of caged eggs in the near future, which I think is a big deal. Even on the welfare of chicken, you've got the free range and the organic chicken of course, but on that base level chicken that most Aussies buy into, I'm looking to work with Woolworths—and they've committed to do this—to really raise those welfare standards, to give you a better, more delicious product ... So, take care, and you will see me probably in a Woolworths near you very, very soon. Take care, lots of love.⁷



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The announcement of the partnership between Woolworths and Oliver, one of the most well-known advocates for a return to home cooking and healthy cuisine, and a spokesperson for the virtues of local and ethical produce, coincided with a commitment from the chain to phase out the stocking of cage eggs by 2018—a decision that was heavily criticized by the egg industry (*Herald Sun* 2013)—as well as to phasing in RSPCA-approved chicken.⁸ In brokering this partnership, Woolworths astutely aligned itself with a celebrity chef who brings with him

a wealth of ethical capital. Oliver—a “living brand” whose ethical credibility is embodied in his trustworthy persona, wholesome family-oriented lifestyle, familiar warmth and bonhomie, and performed in his widely mediated food and health activism—helps to “ethicize” Woolworths while requiring relatively little labor from the company’s marketers (Lewis 2010).

Meanwhile, rival supermarket Coles sought similarly to claim the “branded” ethical high ground, but this time with a chef who could claim local provenance, Curtis Stone. While much has been written about Jamie Oliver’s rise to international fame, both in academic and popular circles (see for example Hollows 2003; Hildred and Ewbank 2012; Rousseau 2012), Stone’s trajectory is less well known (though *GQ* magazine referred to him in 2011 as a “one of the world’s culinary superstars”) (Smith 2011). Born in 1975 and hailing from Melbourne, Stone began his kitchen career in Australia, later leaving to gain experience in Europe. He worked under Marco Pierre White in London and eventually became head chef at one of White’s London restaurants, Quo Vadis.⁹ His first notable TV exposure was as co-host (with fellow Australian chef Ben O’Donoghue) of the *Surfing the Menu* series, a travel-surfing-cooking show that screened in the early 2000s on ABC, the country’s national broadcaster. While this series was moderately successful in Australia and Stone went on to host the first season of the popular Australian reality-cooking show *My Restaurant Rules* in 2004, Stone’s celebrity-capital has primarily been brokered in the United States, with a wide range of television shows and guest appearances including a stint on *Celebrity Apprentice*, endorsements from Oprah, and even a place on *People* magazine’s “Sexiest Men Alive” list of 2006. Some of these American endeavors, like TLC’s *Take Home Chef* for which Stone filmed some 140 episodes, have been shown on cable TV in Australia; however, until his relationship with Coles made him a regular—sometimes daily—presence on free-to-air television, his celebrity at home was relatively limited.

His status as “celebrity chef,” then, is articulated slightly differently for Australian audiences (from say someone like Oliver), while his public persona also comes with certain distinctly Australian-inflected signifiers of class and masculinity. As Isabelle de Solier describes in her take on *Surfing the Menu*, Stone’s on-screen presence invokes a specifically Australian version of the “middle class metrosexual,” which in the case of *Surfing the Menu* is contrasted with co-presenter Ben O’Donoghue’s “(m)ocker” persona, with each contributing in his own way to a vision of a new kind of cosmopolitan “laddism” (de Solier 2005: 479). Thus it is a particular combination of relatively sophisticated Australian masculine identity, sex appeal and internationalized Australian celebrity (think perhaps Hugh Jackman or Guy Pearce but in an apron) that Stone brings to his association with Coles—one that plays off in interesting ways against Oliver’s status as a family man and proselytizer of “good” food.

Despite his fame in Australia, Jamie Oliver is a newcomer to the Australian supermarket scene, while Curtis Stone has been part of Coles’ advertising campaigns since 2008 (*Marketing Magazine* 2013). Coles was also the first of the two major Australian chains to engage a celebrity chef as part of its

branded identity, referencing the great success of the Jamie Oliver-Sainsbury's partnership which lasted an impressive eleven years.¹⁰ Appearing in television advertising campaigns and associated in-store displays (including large cardboard cut-outs of Stone greeting customers as they enter stores), the chef also writes recipes for a variety of Coles' publications (for example, recipe cards and the in-store *Coles* magazine), and hosts video cooking tutorials on the Coles YouTube channel. While Stone has been a longstanding fixture of the Coles brand image, his celebrity identity in earlier campaigns had little to do with ethical eating and indeed his celebrity image was a fairly flexible one; his high-end foodie associations often being used to sell budget and "just-in-time" meals to housewives, most notably in the ongoing "Feed your family for under \$10" campaign which echoed Oliver's 2008 "Feed your family for a fiver" campaign with Sainsbury's. Stone has also not been the only celebrity to have an association with Coles but joins a list of other stars, including boy band One Direction, comedienne Dawn French, and rock band Status Quo (who reworked their 1970s single "Down Down" into the jingle "Down down, prices are down"), as well as fellow celebrity chef Heston Blumenthal, whose "Heston from Waitrose" Christmas range has been sold through Coles since 2012. As this roll-call of celebrities suggests, Coles' marketing strategy in Australia over recent years has been aggressive but also broad and unfocused, reflecting first and foremost a preoccupation with market visibility, rather than with the specific concerns of Stone's more recent Coles campaigns, where the chef is re-presented to the public as an advocate of food ethics.¹¹

Although, as noted, Australian media channels have come to the issues of ethical production, consumption and retail much later than their UK counterparts, Coles and Woolworths have in recent years found themselves operating in a somewhat different media and cultural environment—one in which questions of animal welfare, food provenance, the plight of "Aussie farmers" and the realities of consumer choice in an increasingly concentrated retail market have become topics of water-cooler conversation. The following section will discuss the two supermarkets' recent brand campaigns in terms of the way in which they have sought not only to push back against mounting public and political critique but also to actively claim, shape and intervene in the emerging space of political and ethical consumerism in Australia. In particular, we examine the way in which, in a hostile and contested food environment, the supermarkets have attempted to associate themselves with a range of community actors who are perceived to be trustworthy and authentic. Here, the supermarkets have drawn not only on the ethical star power of celebrity chefs, but have also attempted to tap into the integrity of other players with significant moral weight and standing in the community, such as animal welfare organizations, via strategic cross-branded partnerships. Through these extensive and strategic processes of co-branding, supermarkets in Australia have attempted to dramatically reconfigure their corporate identities and, to an extent, practices in order to claim the emergent terrain of political and ethical critique as a space for new value-added consumer markets (Dixon 2004, 2007).



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Reconnecting the Brand

One of the central arguments in *No Logo* (Klein 1999) is that the mainstreaming of political consumerism today is integrally connected to the centrality of brand culture. As Klein explains, global anti-consumerist movements have been around since the 1970s, yet the shift towards an everyday mode of ethical consumerism has ironically been enabled by the rise of branding as a central corporate strategy and the growing presence of corporate brands in everyday life. While contemporary branding has enabled corporations to integrate themselves seamlessly into spheres of life that were once relatively free from market logics, as Klein argues, the flipside of brand strategies that position corporations as good, responsible citizens is that they are increasingly being held to account for their social responsibilities to customers and the community at large. As Lewis and Potter argue, “The culturally and socially immanent nature of the brand today is thus at once both the strength and the Achilles heel of the contemporary corporation” (Lewis and Potter 2011: 7).

The recent attempt by both Woolworths and Coles to reposition themselves as ethical players in the Australian market and broader community marks their (belated) recognition of these two sides of brand power. While the two supermarkets have held long-term positions in the grocery market as national icons of a sort, in recent years various attacks on the supermarkets from the press, farmers, government agencies and other social actors have dulled the sheen of the big players’ brand image. In their deployment of celebrity chefs and other kinds of co-branding strategies (which we discuss further below), both Woolworths and Coles can be seen as attempting to put a human face on and to reconnect consumers to what is seen as an increasingly impersonal, disconnected and globalised food chain dominated by agri-business (Coles and Crang 2011; Johnston and Baumann 2009). In the Australian context, Woolworths’ and Coles’ most recent celebrity chef-based campaigns are also strategic reactions to a series of local food scandals that received extensive coverage in the Australian press, leading to a considerably heightened awareness of ethical and welfare issues around food (Ferguson 2011; Zappone 2011).

One such controversy, for instance, was the so-called “milk” or “price wars” of 2011 in which the ongoing battle between Coles and Woolworths for greater market share resulted in the supermarkets drastically reducing the prices of staple items such as milk (which was cut to just AUS\$1 a liter), leading to huge pressure on dairy farmers (Cook 2012). While the supermarkets at the time sought to allay public concern over the effects of discounted milk prices on producers by emphasizing the consumer’s sovereign “right” to low prices and greater “choice,” the Australian media highlighted the plight of farmers, with the so-called milk wars generating unprecedented public interest in the fraught power relationships between local food producers, suppliers and retailers. Alongside increasing public and media scrutiny of market power, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), Australia’s competition regulator, had also been conducting investigations into rumors of anti-competitive behavior by the large retailers.¹² Indeed, as we write in May

2014, the ACCC has begun action against Coles in the Federal Court in relation to instances of alleged “unconscionable conduct” made by Coles towards its small suppliers, including allegations of “providing misleading information” and “using undue influence and unfair tactics” (Langley 2014). It is in this broader context of concentrated market power and growing public awareness of and interest in food ethics that we need to understand the specific co-branding role that celebrity chefs Oliver and Stone offer these two supermarkets; after two years of intense press scrutiny and public criticism from farmers in particular, the supermarkets (while still clearly in competition) have both opted to strategically recalibrate and “reimagine” their brands along more ethical and socially responsible lines.

As discussed, Woolworths entered the ethical fray in October 2013, using the global star power of Jamie Oliver to announce its commitment to transitioning towards stocking only ethically sourced chicken and eggs. In response, Coles launched its own ethical rebuttal, one that sought to authenticate its brand through emphasizing connections with place and provenance. Here, the decision to use Curtis Stone as a spokesperson despite his relative lack of ethical credentials compared with Oliver was clearly related both to his existing relationship with and connection to the supermarket’s “authentic” brand image but also to his strongly Australian identity and habitus, as a tanned, blonde blue-eyed Aussie boy made good.

Supermarkets have been viewed as “non-places”—generic spaces with little sense of connection to or engagement with social and community life (Auge 1995). As food retailers, they also offer an experience of food that is disconnected from seasonality and the realities of local farming, where fresh produce is available all year regardless of fluctuations in weather or the ability of local farmers to deliver consistent product in volume. Yet shopping at the supermarket is also a local experience, with outlets typically being “around the corner” or “down the road,” employing local people and impacting communities in a variety of ways (see Dixon and Isaacs 2013; Humphery 1998). One of the functions of both supermarkets’ celebrity campaigns and re-branding exercises, then, has been to reintegrate the local back into the supermarket and to attempt to *emplace* food. Arguably, Coles has been rather more effective with this, at least at an advertising level. While Oliver has sought to emphasize his credentials in and connections to Australia as a kind of adopted son, his repeated claims to a kind of localism—“you will see me probably in a Woolworths near you very, very soon”—feel rather forced. Launched the day after Oliver’s Christmas advertisement for Woolworths (where Oliver rather lamely hosted an “Aussie xmas” in London), Coles’ Christmas 2013 advertising campaign used Stone’s Australian credentials to play overtly on the brand’s connection to place, emphasizing locality, provenance and its relationship with farmers. Like many chefs (including Oliver), Stone’s cooking philosophy revolves around using “naturally produced ingredients just as Mother Nature intended,”¹³ fresh food that is in season, and being in touch with the provenance of ingredients. This approach to food ethics was used strategically and repeatedly emphasized in the “Delicious Coles Christmas” advertisement in which Stone described the various merits of the “special” Christmas food sold



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by Coles in pieces to camera that were interspersed with lingering shots of the products in question:

This Christmas, imagine feeding your family delicious, succulent Coles' Finest Hunter Valley Free Range Turkey; Coles' Finest Triple Smoked Ham cured in Mount Zero Pink Lake Salt ["Australian Free Range Leg Ham" also appears on screen]; melt-in-your-mouth Fresh Tasmanian Salmon, responsibly sourced from the pristine waters off the apple isle; Australia's finest King Prawns ["responsibly sourced" also on screen], and juicy deep red Aussie cherries ["100% Aussie" on screen]. All absolutely delicious, and all available at Coles. Now, that's what I call a delicious Christmas.¹⁴

A Coles Christmas was at once a gourmet, Australian and thoroughly ethical Christmas. Shoppers were encouraged to buy high-end free range and responsibly sourced local produce with a traceable provenance, not from a farmer's market or other bespoke "foodie" retail outlet, but from the most ordinary of shopping locations: the local supermarket. In many ways, this campaign represents the ultimate "mainstreaming" of ethical concerns (although budget considerations were notably not on the table), with ethics, lifestyle and foodie culture seamlessly integrated into the marketing and the branded identity of Coles via its co-branding with Stone. Central to this process is an incorporation of "taste" in both senses of the word into this campaign in which the potentially political act of buying ethically articulates with a decision about flavor and "quality." In other words, the invitation offered in this advertisement to buy local and buy ethically was also a guarantee that the food will taste better, and thus make what you cook more delicious for your family Christmas. Here then, an act of "good citizenship" that might be connected to concerns over animal welfare, land management or low food miles, is seamlessly blended with connotations of pleasure and aspirational lifestyles through the affective and taste-based qualities of "fineness" and "deliciousness." In this sense, the ethical and potentially political dimensions of food are made more palatable as it were to the everyday consumer through appeals to a kind of "alternative hedonism" (Soper 2004; Soper *et al.* 2009), distancing ethical food from any question of asceticism or anti-consumerism.

What these two celebrity chef-supermarket alliances point to then is the increasing entry of corporate players into the space of food ethics through branded discourses and practices that tie ethical consumerism to questions of lifestyle, pleasure and consumer choice. As we discuss in the next section, however, both supermarkets' branded excursions into the domain of ethical consumption have also crossed into, and in certain ways have started to refigure the domain of governance and policy through their engagement with more structural issues regarding ethical production and in their co-branding strategies with non-government actors such as animal welfare groups. As we have suggested, the mainstreaming of ethical concerns here then cannot therefore be understood as just a consumer movement, but rather points to a broader lifestyle-oriented,

politics of food where a range of community, corporate players, and other non-state actors have begun to shape questions of food policy, regulation and sovereignty.

The (Free-range) Chicken and the (Uncaged) Egg: Ethics in a Neoliberal Environment

On January 3, 2014, Coles began the year with an announcement that all its “own brand” chicken would be “RSPCA approved” (the Royal Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals, much like the ASPCA in the United States). This announcement was accompanied by another TV campaign featuring Curtis Stone, a press release, and other associated material explaining the partnership with the animal protection organization on the Coles website. The press release contained some astonishing statistics about the consumption of chicken: that “chicken [is] on the menu in over 95% of Australian households” and that chicken is eaten “between two and four times a week by almost 80% of customers” (Coles 2014b). If this market research is to be believed, any decision made by Coles related to its sourcing of chicken has widespread ramifications for both consumers and producers, not to mention the millions of chickens that end up on Coles’ refrigerated shelves. In the words of Stone’s advert, RSPCA-approved chickens have “room to move around, perch and flap their wings.” They are also housed in barns, have access to “environmental enrichments” such as straw bales and perches, and experience longer periods of darkness each day for resting (as opposed to conventionally raised chickens, which live in a combination of natural and artificial light for around 23 hours per day) (Coles 2013a).

From a governmental and regulation perspective, as the RSPCA spokesperson on the Coles/Curtis Stone video points out, receiving RSPCA accreditation means Coles’ animal welfare conditions actually exceed the legal requirements for chicken production (Coles 2013a). Heather Neill, chief executive of the RSPCA, further frames the move by Coles as a response to an increasingly ethicalized consumer-citizenry in her contribution to the press release, stating:

The RSPCA is proud to be working with Coles and its suppliers to make the switch to sourcing only RSPCA Approved chicken under its own brand of fresh chicken. The lives of millions of meat chickens will be improved. It’s an exciting time for Australian consumers, who over the years have been demanding more and more high welfare food in a growing trend, which is directly benefiting the welfare of farm animals. (Coles 2014b)



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While the language of Coles’ announcement refers to securing improvements to animal welfare, a central thrust of the supermarket campaign is on quality and flavor, with the advertisement’s tagline declaring, “Raised better, Tastes better.” As the Coles website puts it, a chicken that can exercise more makes for meat of better texture and taste: “Under the RSPCA standard the chickens are more active. As we know if we exercise more our muscles change and this is the same for chickens. The change in muscle fibres improves the eating quality and during

our independent testing RSPCA chicken was preferred” (Coles 2013a). Supported by further market research¹⁵ conducted by the supermarket which indicated a taste preference for the chicken that was raised to RSPCA standards over those raised “conventionally,” the campaign frames the switch to “ethically sourced” chicken as being, for Coles customers, a question of choosing happy but also *better tasting* chicken, with improved animal welfare positioned as the means through which this outcome might be achieved (rather than as an independent virtue which consumers should desire for the chickens).¹⁶ In a contribution by Curtis Stone in the press release made in support of this new policy, the chef, who Coles cites as being “instrumental” to the commitment, reiterates the connection between production standards, an ethic of care, and flavor:

Whether you are growing fruit and veggies or producing pork and chicken, the fact is the more care you take in growing the plant or raising the animal the better tasting product you’re going to get on your plate. Australian farmers already produce some of the best food in the world and I’m delighted that they are once again leading the way in helping Australian families serve up better quality, better tasting food. (Coles 2014b)

Legitimated by the endorsements of both the RSPCA and a celebrity chef whose profession and expertise revolve around the preparation of high-quality food, this represents a complex ethical and market maneuver by Coles. While the visibility given to animal welfare matters in the campaign speaks to the broader mainstreaming of issues that were (as we have noted) relatively marginal in Australia until recently, it also foregrounds the ways in which celebrity “expertise,” lifestyle branding, accredited standards and corporate interests are being brought together to reconstruct, regulate and capitalize on these concerns. A key issue here then is the role of and use by supermarkets of various non-state actors to give legitimacy, credibility and ethical weight to their claims and to their national status as a brand and cultural institution more broadly. While Woolworths has been rather more low-key in its approach to ethical branding, as we have noted, a central part of its key partnership with Jamie Oliver involves “working with him to introduce a number of significant changes” across the supermarket range, including phasing out caged whole eggs by 2018. Again, Woolworths’ brand partnership with Oliver—perhaps the ultimate exemplar of the blending of lifestyle expertise, politics and branding—has been given further authority through its relationship with a more grass-roots animal advocacy organization, this time Animals Australia (AA). As AA Director Lyn White states (in a nice double play around questions of price, cost and value in an ethical market), “Hens have been paying a terrible price for cheaper eggs ... It’s terrific that Woolworths has acknowledged this and taken an historic ethical stand on this issue” (Evans 2013).

However, it should be noted that both supermarkets’ claims and credibility regarding their own-brand free-range eggs have been widely criticized. For example, Parker *et al.* have shown that Coles’ and Woolworths’ push for low

prices means that “‘free-range’ hens must generally be produced in crowded, large-scale, shed-based systems where many hens have only “theoretical” access to a poorly vegetated outdoor range” (Parker *et al.* 2013: 166). Indeed, both the RSPCA and Animals Australia have since questioned whether eggs produced under Coles’ intensive systems can be called free-range at all (Fyfe and Millar 2013a; Vidot 2013), while the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has expressed concern regarding industry attempts to mislead consumers in order to “increase their own profitability” (Fyfe and Millar 2013a).

What is of interest here, however, is less the “real” impact on animal welfare (although this is of course important in its own right), but rather the way such debates around matters of ethical concern are impacting on the wider realm of food politics. This unlikely marriage between supermarkets, celebrity chefs and animal advocacy groups emblemizes the increasingly blurred boundaries between media and public relations, markets, states and the domain of policy shaping and making in late liberal societies. As we have suggested, this is not just a straightforward case of the capitalist state devolving responsibility solely onto corporate players, but rather shows how the space of policy, regulation and food “norms” is increasingly inhabited, shaped and contested by a range of non-state players sometimes in odd and unruly alliances. The interventions led by Oliver–Woolworths–AA and Stone–Coles–RSPCA in the space of food regulation and production represent a classic marker of the complexity of market-policy-government assemblages in late liberal times. The question, however, is whether such alliances mark the triumph of market logics or whether the *ad hoc* and conjunctural nature of these marriages of convenience signal new forms of and potentials for civic and political engagement within what Michelle Micheletti terms the “post-political” environment (Micheletti 2003).

Conclusion: “Just” Desserts

Around the world, celebrity chefs have become unlikely cultural icons, offering consumers “expert” guidance through the maze of food “choice” we are presented with today, while at the same time reconnecting food to questions of pleasure, conviviality and sensory engagement in a globalized and often alienating food culture. As figures of trust and familiarity, celebrity experts like Oliver and Stone can be seen as idealized consumer-citizens or as what McCracken terms “super consumers,” that is, as both one of us, but also as “exemplary figures because they are seen to have created the clear, coherent, and powerful selves that everyone seeks” (McCracken 2005: 112; Lewis 2010). Clearly they offer rich opportunities for brand synergies as corporate players seek to reconnect with consumers and authenticate their brand identities in the context of industrialized food ways. This article has offered an in-depth Australian-based case study of brand partnerships between two supermarkets and two celebrity chefs, focusing on the ways in which these partnerships have sought to capitalize on the ethical capital and credentials of the chefs in question but also that of other non-state actors, namely, Australian animal welfare groups. Supermarkets in Australia have long been power players in the retail market, and, as we have shown, they



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are also now marking out significant territory in the ethical landscape in relation to food production and sourcing. What is key is the desire to claim a market-based, moral high ground in a context where supermarkets are under increasing media pressure and public scrutiny in relation to their practices of sourcing, their treatment of and commitment to Australian producers, and perceived anti-competitive practices.

It would be too simplistic to reduce this complex moment of articulation between celebrity chefs, animal advocacy and consumer groups and supermarkets to a question of spin or to dismiss the role of the non-corporate players as no more than an instance of corporate co-option. While the welfare standards of organizations like the RSPCA have been criticized as not being high enough by other animal welfare groups, the increasingly public role of once relatively marginal organizations like this speaks at once to the gap left by the weak deregulatory policies of neoliberal governments but also to a growing mainstream critical assessment of that gap within media discourse and a growing intervention on behalf of non-state players in the political and policy landscape. Here, celebrity chefs have played an important role in paving the way for this kind of critique, not just in terms of foregrounding the (absent) state but also in the process of highlighting the excessive role and power of corporations in shaping our food systems. At the same time, a range of prominent celebrity chefs have been staging their own social and political interventions within the space of ethical consumption, from campaigns for healthy eating and animal welfare to a focus on food sovereignty and sustainable fishing and consumption, as per Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's consumer-oriented campaign to protect fish stocks (see <http://www.fishfight.net/>).

There are obviously limits to the branded, lifestyle approach to consumer choice that often underpins such campaigns. For one, they arguably contribute to an insidious "naturalization of brand culture as a site of broader modes of culture and sociality" (Lewis 2010: 596), where a consumer-based voluntarism can all too easily take the place of reforming and regulating the food chain. Yet, when we see a major corporation adopting the ethical discourse of animal welfare as an influencing factor in its business practices, ultimately a decision which will affect, in Jamie Oliver's words, the "18 million Aussies who go through Woolworths every single week," clearly a space is opened up for actors and actions that might take us beyond the purely profit-based logics of marketized agri-business. Supermarkets have, for better or for worse, played a key role in putting the concept of ethical consumption on the public agenda in Australia; the question remains to be seen whether alternative food organizations and activists such as the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance—players who are concerned with a sustainable and equitable food future constructed for and by Australian communities (rather than big retail and corporate agri-business)—are able to use this ethical turn to put the spotlight on their alternative visions for Australian foodways.

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Notes

- 1 While the exact figures of Coles' and Woolworths' market share are open to debate, according to one authoritative analysis conducted prior to Australia's 2013 federal election (during which the concentration of supermarket power was pushed as an election issue by three prominent independent MPs (Martin 2013), these two companies share somewhere around 70–80 percent of the country's grocery business, or in the region of 55–60 percent when the calculation is based on fresh produce alone (King 2013).
- 2 See: <http://www.sbs.com.au/shows/gourmetfarmer/> and <http://www.lifestyle.com.au/tv/paddock-to-plate/>.
- 3 See: <http://tenplay.com.au/channel-ten/jamie-oliver>.
- 4 Indeed, Oliver is Ten's mainstay when ratings are low, with the station recently bumping the finale of the local *The Biggest Loser with Jamie* and *Jimmy's Food Fight Club* (see Thomas 2014).
- 5 This is despite the national survey on lifestyles, consumption and environmental impact conducted by Australia's national science agency, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO 2009) indentifying a growing interest in 'responsible consumption' among the populace.
- 6 More recently, non-government groups such as the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA) have developed strategic alternatives to policy initiatives such as the federal government's "National Food Plan Green Paper" which was widely seen as woefully inadequate and too tied to the concerns of big agri-business (see Parfitt *et*



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- al.* 2013; see also the highly deliberative and consultative process that went into the making of the plan (Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance 2012).
- 7 A partial transcript of Jamie's launch message is available at: <https://www.woolworths.com.au/wps/wcm/connect/website/woolworths/about+us/woolworthsnews/jamie+oliver>.
 - 8 As Woolworths announced at the time: "As part of the partnership, Jamie Oliver has been working with Woolworths on a number of significant changes that are already underway. These include phasing out all caged whole eggs sold in-store by 2018, including those used in Own Brand products. As well, Woolworths will move to RSPCA or equivalent approved standards for all fresh chicken sold in store by the end of next year. Additionally, the chicken used in Own Brand products will also be RSPCA or equivalent approved by the end of 2018" (see Woolworths 2013).
 - 9 For more information on Stone's career trajectory, see his website: <http://www.curtisstone.com/about-curtis>.
 - 10 In 2010, despite stating publically that it would not be employing celebrity chefs for its ads, Woolworths, the market leader, rolled out a new television advertising campaign starring veteran chef Margaret Fulton, much to the surprise of Coles' executives. It subsequently went on to add other celebrity Aussie chefs to its marketing roster (see Shoebridge 2011).
 - 11 As its chief marketing officer, Simon McDowell, said after winning the Australian Marketing Institute's "Certified Practising Marketer of the Year" award in 2013, "We're absolutely fixated on building the largest brand in Australia" (*Marketing Magazine* 2013).
 - 12 These issues, along with other matters related to market concentration, have prompted ongoing investigations by the ACCC (see Greenblat 2013). A critical appraisal of the ACCC's efficacy in dealing with concerns around Australia's supermarket duopoly and the concentration of power in the sector can be found in Richards *et al.* (2012).
 - 13 See: <http://www.curtisstone.com/about-curtis>.
 - 14 The advertisement from which this transcript was made is available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xy3mvJ5qm0s&list=PL8rYS6B-sVuIdb9f8fFUqzDB6ahPYfO-x>.
 - 15 This was conducted in November 2013 by Colmar Brunton and involved blind taste tests with 428 customers (see Coles 2014b).
 - 16 However, the Australian Chicken Growers Council challenges the claims made by Coles (see Langley 2014b).

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Strange Culinary Encounters

STRANGER FETISHISM IN *JAMIE'S ITALIAN ESCAPE* AND *GORDON'S GREAT ESCAPE*

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Abstract

In this article, we examine the ways in which the encountering of “other” food cultures is played out in the two travelogue cooking shows, Gordon’s Great Escape and Jamie’s Italian Escape. We investigate how the two protagonist chefs—Jamie Oliver and Gordon Ramsay—imagine, meet and evaluate the “other” food cultures in these programs, paying special attention to how the encounter with the local Indian and Italian is imagined to be a gateway to an authentic and/or primitive experience. Our main argument is that despite Jamie and Gordon’s “noble” intentions and their “enlightened” cosmopolitan approach to meeting the other (culinary culture), ultimately, their respective culinary adventures work to reaffirm a social hierarchy in their favor.

Keywords: authenticity, cultural encounter, food television, Jamie Oliver, Gordon Ramsay

You know what? I should have been Italian. The truth is, when I’m in Italy I feel Italian. (Jamie Oliver)

I love Britain’s favourite food: Indian. (Gordon Ramsay)

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Travelogue Cooking Shows and “Other” Food Cultures

In the 1980s, the British TV-chef Keith Floyd became “a pioneer of modern food television” when “he famously took the cameras out of the kitchen studio and

into whichever exotic location he (iconic wine glass in hand) happened to be cooking in" (Rousseau 2012: xvi). Being the first examples of a cooking show that also involved traveling, Floyd's travelogue cooking show, as we term this genre—Floyd's programs carved out a new genre in television entertainment by opening up the possibility of having on-site encounters with "foreign" cuisines; instead of merely hearing stories about foreign food cultures, the chef and the viewer could actually meet these food cultures in their natural habitat.

This article considers how the travelogue cooking show ties into a more general debate on Western appropriation of "other" (non-white and more "primitive") culinary cultures. This debate has become an important issue in both academic and popular food discourses following the increased globalization of food (Ingليس and Gimlin 2009; Ray and Srinivas 2012). In this debate, several scholars have stressed that the white appropriation of "other" foods and cultures is essentially a process of commodification of "the other" in which "ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is white mainstream culture" (hooks 1992: 21). A more nuanced view, however, is presented by sociologists Josée Johnston and Shyon Baumann in their analyses of exoticism in foodie discourses. They accentuate that "it builds on and reproduces certain neo-colonial inequalities, at the same time it represents a cosmopolitan interest in broadening the culinary canon and forming intercultural connections" (Johnston and Baumann 2010: 98). The same contradiction is expressed in philosopher and self-proclaimed food adventurer Lisa Heldke's self-reflective book *Exotic Appetite: The Rumination of a Food Adventurer*, a book motivated by the author's discomfort over her desire to "own" an experience of "an Exotic other" to gain social status (Heldke 2003: xvi). Through self-analysis and discussions of other food adventurers' "othering," she proposes ways of resisting this apparent colonial attitude, and insists that "self-questioning can work to challenge the hierarchical dichotomy that separates knowing, powerful subject from known, subordinate object, and that serves as one of the defining elements of the colonizers' attitudes" (Heldke 2003: 171). In relation to this debate, it is arguable that, through his culinary encounters, Floyd broadened the Western canon by presenting new food cultures to the British public. However, he also maintained a position of superiority to the culture he was visiting, and remained completely uninterested in bridging any equality gaps between himself and his local encounters. This was underlined by a series of distinctive signs of Western elite culture from his ever-present wine glass to his white dress shirt and neck tie, all working to emphasize a clear distance between him and the locals.

Since Floyd, many other presenters—particularly male—have offered up their own take on the travelogue cooking show genre. In this article, we want to examine two post-Floyd travelogue cooking shows and ask ourselves how these approach the encounter with the "other" culinary culture, paying special attention to whether they reproduce a neo-colonial mindset or manage to use the genre and food as a platform for "intercultural connection" and exchanges—and thereby create a platform for subversion of a binary "old world"/"new world" power structure.

Our object of inquiry will be the first of the three seasons of *Gordon Ramsay's Great Escape* (2010),¹ where the famous Michelin-starred chef goes to India to learn to cook "authentic" Indian dishes, and the single season of *Jamie's Italian Escape* (2005),² in which we follow a depressed Jamie Oliver as he explores various regions of Italy in order to regain his passion for food and life in general. While Gordon and Jamie share with Floyd a fascination and pursuit of exotic cuisines, these two programs are particularly interesting in that Ramsay and Oliver, unlike Floyd, state an explicit wish to immerse themselves into the "exotic" culinary cultures they explore. We have chosen these programs exactly because of this desire for immersion and attribution of value to the "other" culinary culture; values that, as they both explain in their respective shows, have been lost in their own culture.

As such, this article examines the ways in which the encountering of "other" food cultures are played out in *Gordon's Great Escape* and *Jamie's Italian Escape* and how the two chefs imagine, meet and evaluate their culinary encounter. We approach our two cases from the perspective of critical cultural studies, and we are throughout our analysis theoretically inspired by postcolonial reading strategies and theories, particularly the concept of *stranger fetishism* proposed in Ahmed (2000). Indeed, although the debate on western appropriation of "other" food culture is far from new, this article aims to add new insights by first reframing the debate to discuss its central issues in relation to the travelogue cooking show, and second by introducing a new concept—stranger fetishism—into the debate.

The Travelogue Cooking Show as a Strange Encounter

Our theoretical framework draws on a tradition of postcolonial studies founded most notably by Edward Said's *Orientalism* in the late 1970s and reworked by Homi K. Bhabha twenty years later in his *The Location of Culture* (1994). Where Said focused specifically on the language of colonialism, and laid the groundwork for an understanding of how discursive structures have historically worked to create an "Occidental" notion of the "Orient" marked by both fascination and rejection, Bhabha further developed Said's work within a conceptual framework inspired by psychoanalysis. However, because both Said and Bhabha had (colonial) discourse and language as their main object of inquiry, neither devoted comprehensive thought to a conceptualization of the body and how the meeting of bodies can effect or play into colonial/postcolonial power structures. The bodily encounter is a crucial point to our analysis, as much of the interaction between Jamie and Gordon and their new locations or hosts is exactly body-based or acted out with the body—both because of language barriers, but also because of a conviction repeatedly voiced by both Jamie and Gordon that food, eating and cooking (physical rather than spoken acts) constitute a universal "language" that enables cross-cultural communication.

Feminist scholar Sara Ahmed's work on the *strange encounter* (Ahmed 2000), however, builds on the foundation laid by Bhabha and Said to also include this central point of the embodied experience of a cross-cultural encounter. By



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situating her analysis of the strange encounter at the intersection of postcolonial and feminist affect studies, she updates Said and Bhabha's work and provides our analysis with its main theoretical concept. Crucially, Ahmed's strange encounter both as a methodology and an analytical tool enquires into how "contemporary nodes of proximity reopen prior histories of encounter" (Ahmed 2000: 13). This means that it critically lingers on how discourses of the past—especially colonial discourses—pop up again and again in our current interaction and way of meeting other people, especially the people who are somehow unlike us—those who are, in Ahmed's terminology, strangers.³ Ahmed stresses the centrality of looking at precisely the encounter—the meeting between people—in any analysis that seeks to unpack interpersonal power-relations and social hierarchies by pointing to how:

identity does not simply happen in the privatized realm of the subject's relation to itself. Rather, in daily meetings with others, subjects are perpetually reconstituted; the work of identity formation is never over, but can be understood as the sliding across of subjects in their meetings with others. (Ahmed 2000: 7)

Indeed, as both *Gordon's Great Escape* and *Jamie's Great Italian Escape* pivot on the meeting of a strange culture filled with strangers, the way the two protagonists imagine, meet and evaluate their respective locations and locals must be understood through precisely the meeting and interaction with these.

Finally, Ahmed also introduces the concept of stranger fetishism, which will be key to our analysis. Ahmed's conceptualization of stranger fetishism is rooted in a reading of the classic Marxist model of commodity fetishism and material power relations combined with Freud's psychoanalytical model for fetishism. On the basis of this, Ahmed understands stranger fetishism as a process that "involves not only the displacement of social relations onto an object, but the transformation of fantasies into figures" (Ahmed 2000: 5). This means that once someone is recognized as a stranger, they undergo a process of a sort of de-individualism so that they are conceived "only as having effects, rather than as an effect in itself" (Ahmed 2000)—the concept of stranger fetishism thus identifies how the colonial center depicts the strange "other" as static, without agency, existing only to be discovered. When we are looking at whether Gordon or Jamie are reproducing or subverting a neo-colonial Floyd-inspired mindset wherein the exotic "other" (stranger) serves as a prop in the self-realization of the white man, this concept of stranger fetishism becomes an especially helpful analytical tool as it provides a framework to evaluate the process and the result of the encounter between the two programs' protagonists and the people they meet.

Getting There as Men and Getting Near Authenticity

Two narrative elements dominate both Jamie and Gordon's *Great Escapes*: the journey to and travelling around in Italy and India, respectively, and the meetings

with the people in these countries—the encounter with the *strange location* and the encounter with the *strange local*. To reflect this—and inspired by Ahmed’s idea that “it is the very gesture of getting closer to ‘strangers’ that allows the figure [of the stranger] to take its shape” (Ahmed 2000: 4), we have divided our analysis of the two programs into two parts: *Getting There* and *Getting Near*. The first section provides an analysis of the journey and the chefs’ travel around Italy and India, focusing on modes of transportations and their narrative functions. The following section then analyzes the encounter between Jamie and Gordon and the locals of these countries, focusing on what kinds of power dynamics are evident in the meeting between celebrity chef and native cook, and how our protagonists evaluate these encounters. Contrary to Ahmed, we do not focus on how the “darker” stranger becomes “strange” in “white” cultures; rather, we focus on how the “darker,” authentic subjects in the travelogue cooking show are framed as “strange” by the white host.

Before we begin, however, a short note on “authenticity” and the cooking show as a masculine genre is in order. As noted in Heldke’s critique of the food adventurer (Heldke 2003, 2005), in culinary travels, the exotic stranger is often thought to represent authenticity. In our reading, we do not understand authenticity as something that actually exists, but rather as something “we invent” (Rachel Lauden, quoted in Hudgins 2006: 238) and “as both socially constructed and relational” (Johnston and Baumann 2010: 7) ⁴As such, authenticity here has to do with the ways in which Jamie and Gordon project ideas of authenticity on territories, foods and people. In both *Jamie’s Italian Escape* and *Gordon’s Great Escape*, a central quality of authenticity is “its distance from the complexities of life in advanced industrialized societies” (Johnston and Baumann 2010: 85) as they are both precisely escaping their modern homelands. Indeed, both shows reflect how “the desire for authenticity occupies a central position in contemporary [Western] culture” (Fine 2003: 153) precisely because it is thought of as a liberating “counterspace” modern life.

Finally, it should be noted that both shows have a male presenter, which seems to be a trend within the genre.⁵ It seems arguable to consider the travelogue cooking show as “traditionally masculine in its dynamic journey through the public sphere” in opposition to how cooking in the private sphere has traditionally been associated with women (Strange 1999: 305). As we will see in the analysis of the two shows in question, much of the encounter with authenticity is an encounter between men, notably between the white male presenters and “other” men.

Getting There

As the title of the programs indicates, Jamie and Gordon are both—in their own words—escaping. They are escaping from a hectic celebrity-chef life in London to destinations where they are less well known—certainly places where they will be less bothered by the paparazzi, something that Jamie (who indeed has been a tabloid staple for the better part of the last decade) expresses relief over. By leaving their well-chronicled UK lives behind and going to these new destinations,



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both Gordon and Jamie are free to take on new identities as adventurers. But what kinds of adventure are they seeking, and why?

In the intros to the programs, both Gordon and Jamie express a longing; they are missing something in their current lives that they hope, even expect, that their escapes will provide them. Jamie and Gordon each verbalize this longing as a desire to distance themselves from their very modern cosmopolitan lives; as we shall see, they each—albeit in different ways—express a wish to get “back to basics,” and view their chosen destinations as spaces to enable this. As such, the stranger and the strange encounter is here “a source for fascination and desire” that enables the non-stranger “to transcend the very limits and frailties” of his own figure (Ahmed 2000: 2).

In this section, we will focus on the motivations behind *going on* these great escapes and how these play and/or manifest themselves into the concrete realities of the ways Jamie and Gordon *get to* and not least *get around* India and Italy. This analysis will highlight how the chefs’ motivations are characterized by a set of predefined expectations as to how India and Italy will fulfill their longing for—in their own words—an “authentic” experience. To unpack these expectations and their consequences, we will use Ahmed’s conceptualization of the strange encounter, lifting the concept from Ahmed’s focus on strictly the person-to-person encounter to apply also to inanimate objects and locations—as an analytical framework. This will help to shed light not only on Jamie and Gordon’s reasons for going and their reaction to the obstacles they face on their travels, but also—importantly—to uncover how India and Italy are also in fact *made strange* by Jamie and Gordon in subtle ways throughout the programs.

Finally, as the attentive reader may have detected, Italy has never been never a colony. So how can we justify using a postcolonial-inspired framework such as Ahmed’s when working with *Jamie’s Italian Escape*? As Davide Girardelli (2004) argues, Italy, despite being located in Europe, inhabits a space somehow located between the Old and New World in popular “Northern” imagination, not least due to the mythologization of the country’s culinary culture: “With the myth of Italian food, it is possible to observe a complex interplay between exoticism and identification ... Italy is depicted as a place inhabited by huge and fertile families, a country that is ‘frozen’ in a rural preindustrial reality” (Girardelli 2004: 320–1). It is this shared fetish of the pre-historical qualities of Italy and the traditional colony—the conception that “their great moments are in the past” (Said 1978: 35) that drives our analysis of Italy within a postcolonial framework.

Seeking the Lost “Authentic” in Italy and India

Jamie’s Italian Escape is a part of an ongoing narrative about Jamie Oliver that started in his first show *The Naked Chef*. In his first show, we follow the young Jamie Oliver as he demonstrates how cooking can be integrated into a hip, urban lifestyle. As cultural studies scholar Joanne Hollows notes, Jamie plays on a certain Italian expression in both his identity performance and in his cooking style. This functions to distinguish him and his cuisine from a “posh” French tradition of home cooking associated with a snobbish and bourgeois lifestyle,

as Jamie works against the “old,” “Francophile” tradition by instead adopting a “less formal and more “rustic” [Italian] tradition” (Hollows 2003). By praising simple but flavorsome Italian food “that you can throw in the middle of the table and just let people tuck in,” Jamie also cultivates the informal commensality associated with Italian cooking in northern European mythology. Indeed, Jamie’s appropriation of elements of a mythologized Italian identity has been central to his image from the very start of his career.

In his *Escape*, we meet Jamie Oliver in his very late twenties: he is married, father of two and in charge of his own growing food empire. Exhausted by all his projects, he decides to “escape” from his demanding London life and go to Italy for the summer of his thirtieth birthday in order to regain his passion for food and life in general, in the hopes that he can come back as a “better father, better boss, and a better husband.” Thus, despite the fact that Jamie “has it all” (career, children, house, devoted wife, lots of money, fame etc.), he seems to have some trouble adapting to his new “mature” roles as father and boss—roles that contrasts greatly with his identity as *The Naked Chef*, which was anchored around a more “laddish” kind of masculinity seeking “a space of fun, consumption and sexual freedom for men, unfettered by adult male responsibilities” (Gill 2003: 47).

In an interview in the opening sequence, Jamie’s wife Jools expresses a great understanding of his frustration. She supports his need to live out his boyhood dream of going to Italy to cook—which also means leaving her alone with two children for months—hoping “that he’ll come home happier.” Both Jamie and Jools think that Jamie can regain his positive attitude towards life by going to Italy. In this way, the series constructs the Italian way of living and cooking as a “simpler” way of being in which people do not have the same problems as in northern European countries.

In *Gordon’s Great Escape*, the inner life of Gordon Ramsay and his reasoning behind escaping is made far less explicit. Indeed, it is only in the intro of the first episode that the viewer is told that the reason Gordon is escaping is that he has had a “pretty shitty” year, and that he wants to “get back to what I’m good at doing, I want to cook.” Gordon repeatedly stresses that the most important reason that he is escaping is that he wants to learn how to make the “authentic” versions of the Indian dishes that Brits have so embraced—unlike Jamie, it seems that Gordon is more motivated by the pull than the push of his coming travels. This theme is continued throughout the season’s three episodes, in which we very rarely hear about and never see Ramsay’s family back home in London. Interestingly, however, at the same time as *Gordon’s Great Escape* was first broadcast, the financial troubles that had marked Ramsay’s “pretty shitty” year had been widely publicized in the British press (for example, in Walker and Birkette 2010), meaning that the show was implicitly accompanied by a kind of real-life meta-narrative.

Confessing that he is “no expert” on cooking the Indian dishes that he “loves,” Gordon states that his prime motivation for going to India is to learn how “curry house classics *should* be made.” This is an intriguing change of



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pace for Ramsay who is otherwise known primarily for his fiery temper and aggressive management style (Nilsson 2012) and for being a sharp-tongued über-macho expert in all things cooking and/or restaurant related. Quite uncharacteristically, Ramsay thus starts off his culinary adventure in a state of submission. The wish to educate himself within specifically Indian cuisine also represents something of a leap food-genre-wise for Ramsay, seeing as he has gained his fame and recognition for more posh, gourmet-oriented, typically French-inspired cooking. Rather than refining or updating his area of expertise like Jamie Oliver, Gordon Ramsay is seeking out an entirely new field. Indeed, although Jamie and Gordon's starting points or motivations for escaping may vary, and the reasoning behind leaving in the first place is more explicated in Jamie's case, the two highly-profiled cosmopolitan chefs share a common desire for an encounter with what they envision as the "authentic." While Gordon's eagerness to get "back to basics" is channeled into his desire to learn more about "authentic" Indian cooking, Jamie openly longs for the "authentic," simple, traditional Italian lifestyle (which is, of course, enacted through cooking).

On the Road with Jamie's Volkswagen Van

A central trope in this authentic adventure is the journey—the act of getting there at all—and not least the discomfort of this journey and the obstacles faced along the way. For his escape, Jamie has decided to travel in his 1956 Volkswagen Camper. Choosing a 50-year-old van instead of flying the 2,000 miles to Sicily is of course a symbolic action, and the van could be read as an allegory of the identity project that the travel constitutes. Jamie is distancing himself—both in time and space—from his comfortable modern way of life. This journey is neither easy nor comfortable, as Jamie also renounces the comforts of hotels and sleeps on the floor of the van. Essentially, the Volkswagen Camper symbolizes the liberation from and rejection of the mundane life and its materialism in the same way the van did for the hippie counterculture in the 1960s (Burnett 2002). Jamie is clearly playing on the van's legacy as a hippie lifestyle accessory, but where it often was a space for social gathering and collective excursions in the hippie era, in the *Escape*, the van functions much more as a private space for self-discovery.

Furthermore, the van repeatedly serves as a confession box where Jamie discloses his personal thoughts to the camera; for instance, in an episode in La Marche, after having cooked a dinner for a few locals who did not like his cooking because they did not find it respected their culinary traditions, Jamie expresses his disappointment to the camera in the van just before going to bed. In an example such as this, the van becomes a free space that brings him out of Italy and enables him to evaluate—and hence to distance himself from—the Italian culture. As such, the van has a double function in *Jamie's Escape* as it distances Jamie from both British and Italian culture.

However, the romance between the van and Jamie does not last. The final episode opens with the van finally giving in, and the crash of the van announces not only the beginning of the end of his escape, but also the beginning of the end of Jamie's fascination with Italians and their food culture. Hereafter, he

increasingly emphasizes the supposed narrow-mindedness of Italians and the downsides to the traditional way of Italian life. Jamie is particularly disappointed by the fact that Italians are not adventurous and prefer their food like their *mama* prepared it. So, when reflecting upon his newfound discovery that British people are apparently more adventurous in their culinary habits than Italians, Jamie concludes in the final episode “if anything, the travel has made me appreciate Britons.”

Gordon and a Series of Strange and Uncomfortable Encounters

In *Gordon's Great Escape*, Gordon battles with not one, but many modes of transportation throughout his travels. He jumps from vehicle to vehicle, rarely sticking with one for more than a single stretch of a given journey. The many different forms of transportation used by Gordon—from motorcycles to cars to bicycles to boats—all share the common traits of being uncomfortable and challenging, somehow becoming less functional or even dysfunctional in their meeting with Ramsay. When Gordon meets these objects, his body is forced to bend and stretch in ways to which he is obviously unaccustomed, and these scenes thus showcase a very physical and visual manifestation of his discomfort with being a “fish out of water.”

A poignant example of this is seen in the second episode, where to reach a remote village he must endure two hours and forty-five minutes driving along bumpy roads in a car with no breaks, as to his apparent surprise, “motorways just don't exist here.” Ramsay has “never been to such remote areas of any part of the world like this” and is visibly ill by the end of the ride. This visit to the remote tribe is followed by a visit to the island of Majuli, where he meets a local chef. Here, Ramsay is first given an inappropriately-sized bicycle to ride, again with non-working brakes, and upon arrival at the place where Ramsay and the local chef are to go fishing, we see that he is too heavy to get in the fishing boat—he tries and literally sinks the boat. However, against what has been portrayed as all odds, Ramsay ends up getting from A to B on the bicycle (if unsteadily and not without complaint), and is, in spite of having capsized the boat, ultimately not prevented from getting his fish—he simply accompanies the local chef to the market to buy rather than catch them. Ramsay thus comes out on top: not only does he overcome the defects of the car and the bicycle, but the failed boat trip becomes little more than an additional adventure at Ramsay's disposal, a metaphorical bump in the road rather than something that stops him from achieving his desired goal

In these programs, Ramsay's encounters with defunct transportation always end with him having overcome or overpowered the obstacles these presented. Not only do Gordon's strange encounters with vehicles act as important narrative structures in the *Great Escape* that give Gordon a series of inanimate antagonists that the audience can root for him to win over, these sequences also work to confirm his own expectations of India as a space where you can get “back-to-basics”—without consequences. The use of the overcoming of travel/vehicle-



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related obstacles in a “pre-modern” space as a central narrative structure is notable not least on account of how it “reopen[s] prior histories of encounter” (Ahmed 2000: 13) by how it recalls a genre which enjoyed great popularity far before the travelogue cooking show: the mid-nineteenth century description of colonial travel and exploration. In these descriptions, which at the time were often best-sellers:

the itinerary itself becomes the occasion for a narrative of success, in which travel is a triumph in its own right. What are conquered are destinations, not kingdoms; what are overcome are not military challenges, but logistical ones. The travelers struggle in unequal battle against scarcity, inefficiency, laziness, discomfort, poor horses, bad roads, bad weather, delays. (Pratt 1992: 148)

The act of travelling itself is significant in narratives of colonial exploration and conquest as the overcoming of the difficulties travelling may present becomes a metaphor for the colonial mission more overall—the journey “allegoriz[es] the lust for progress” (Pratt 1992: 148). The parallel is clear: Ramsay’s discomfort in the initial meeting with his many kinds of transportation is a central part of the narrative of how India is indeed a strange place—foreign, unwelcoming, and at times grueling—which he eventually overcomes to reach his respective goals. The story of the means of transportation thus ultimately becomes a key aspect of the story of India, and, not least, of Gordon’s personal progress and eventual success here.

Indeed, the use of transportation in both programs can, rather than simply being a facilitator of the encounter, be read as a marker of the individuality of Jamie and Gordon. In the case of Jamie, the van serves to continuously underline that it is *Jamie’s* Italy and *Jamie’s* escape we witness in the show in that the discovery of Italy must go through his identity crisis and his pre-constructed version of what Italy is. In *Gordon’s Great Escape*, the “local” transportation serves to underline Gordon’s corporeal largesse and how he is strong enough to overcome the challenges that the primitivism of the transportation poses. As such, the difficulties of getting to and around have not so much to do with the specific modes of transportation themselves as about how India and Italy “function to establish and define the boundaries of who ‘we’ are” (Ahmed 2000: 3), that is, how these strange locations and strange vehicles act as elements against which Jamie and Gordon can position themselves. Throughout both programs, the vehicles serve to make Italy and India strange, and to reinforce both Jamie’s and Gordon’s ideas of Italy and India as places where one can travel back in time to a more traditional, pre-industrial place. This making strange also sets the scene for the next step in the journey having now established the location as strange, Jamie and Gordon are ready to meet the locals that inhabit this strange place—locals that Jamie and Gordon will depend upon to introduce them to Italian and Indian culture. Here, however, Jamie’s and Gordon’s power to establish and define the strange encounter becomes less straightforward.

Getting Near

In both Jamie's and Gordon's escapes, once the getting there is over, the getting near to the stranger begins. Here, the bodily aspect of the encounter is again central; in their interactions with the people of India and Italy, it is repeatedly highlighted that neither Jamie nor Gordon speak the local languages, but they are nevertheless able to communicate with the local people through the language of food and cooking—an embodied language based on intuition, sensual expressions and emotional reactions. Importantly, however, Gordon and Jamie verbally translate their interactions with the local strangers to the camera, in other words, to the viewers of the programs. In their translations, Jamie and Gordon are positioned as authoritative voices, mediators and evaluators of their Indian and Italian encounters. These evaluations are characterized by being marked either by excitement or disappointment according to how they live up to the aforementioned mythologies of India and Italy. This section will unpack the evaluations that take place both within the bodily encounter and in the verbal translation of these encounters. We analyze how and why certain encounters provoke excitement while others provoke disappointment and what consequences this has. Here, we will use stranger fetishism—the process wherein the stranger is conceptualized “only as having effects, rather than as an effect in itself” (Ahmed 2000: 5)—as an analytical framework to understand the complexities of Gordon's and Jamie's reactions to and evaluations of the strangers they meet.

Gordon: Desiring the Pre-modern Stranger

From the very beginning, Gordon stresses that he has embarked on this great escape in order to *learn* how “curry house classics should be made”; to gain knowledge of how to prepare “the real thing,” as he calls it. Although this ambition at first glance seems to lean on an ideal of learning and open-mindedness, based on the reactions Gordon has to his teachers in this ambition, it nevertheless eventually becomes evident that he has very clear preconceived ideas and ideals of what the “real thing” actually is. Interestingly, these preconceived ideas and ideals seem not to be based as much on the food as on the *person* preparing the food; depending on the demeanor of the person and their interactions with him, Gordon's reactions to the food being prepared shift between ambivalent, anxious disappointment and unabashed excitement. In the following, we will attempt to deconstruct the cause and consequences of these reactions via two concrete examples of Gordon's encounters with local chefs.

In the first episode, Gordon is unambiguously excited to have encountered a chef who is capable of producing “delicious, authentic and amazing” Indian food—a man who according to Gordon has earned a reputation as “king of korma” in the United Kingdom. In this scene, Gordon visits the chef and his son Irfan, who also acts as Gordon's interpreter, in order to help them cook for a wedding taking place the same day. Gordon's excitement for the chef and the food blend together in wild enthusiasm for both the process of cooking and the end product. The “authentic and amazing” food and chef are both characterized



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by being marked by a certain extent or sense of exotic pre-modernity; the food is made from scratch, prepared outside and cooked over fire rather than in an industrial kitchen (despite having to serve 1,100 guests), the rice is not boiled, but sealed and steamed using a special technique, and the heads of the goats they are using in their *biryani* are left on both during cooking and serving—all in all, the food is “completely unknown” to Ramsay. The chef is hailed as a mysteriously old master of Indian cuisine and does not, as Gordon himself enthusiastically remarks, “speak a word of English”; here is thus a stranger who embodies a kind of pre-modern, pre-western strangeness, and who is, as a result, apparently able to produce truly “authentic and amazing” food. Gordon’s last words to the camera describe the end product as “food from the heart, soul and passion and *historic*. It’s given me a lot of inspiration. That was amazing.” For Gordon, the historic aspect of the chef and the food are thus key factors in his excitement; in this encounter, achieving this state of excitement, then, is crucially linked to “the impression of temporal distance between viewing subjects ... and consumable objects” (Taylor 2001: 9). For Ramsay, ideal Indian cooking is here related to going back in time.

Importantly, Ramsay remarks that the Indian chef “made me feel like a chef” rather than a “spare prick at a wedding” after just ten minutes of cooking together. Indeed, despite cooking with an expert in a field that is self-confessed completely unknown to him, Ramsay’s authority is never challenged, a fact that apparently pleases him very much indeed.

In contrast to this, there seems to be a coalition between situations wherein Ramsay’s authority is in fact challenged and scenarios he finds disappointing or somehow inadequate. When Gordon cooks with Bozo the Rajasthan prince in the first episode, Bozo does not make him feel like a chef; rather, he lets him do only “the shitty bits,” and Gordon jokes that Bozo considers him “good below stairs material.” The cooking we see Gordon doing here (mixing spices and smearing meat with them, before putting the meat in the ditch where it is to be cooked) is not significantly different from the cooking we see him doing at the wedding, but with Bozo, Gordon has encountered a man who speaks perfect English, who dresses in recognizably Western clothes and who unapologetically lives a life of privilege. Although Gordon does eventually praise the meal that he and Bozo produce, he is much less enthusiastic, and begrudgingly comments that he did not think it would turn out to be as tasty as it did. In the end, Gordon, referencing to the traditional method of cooking the meat in the desert, makes a toast “to tradition” with the conclusion that “if there’s one thing I’ve learnt tonight ... it’s sticking to tradition.” However, he makes no praise about the authenticity or amazingness of it all.

True “authentic and amazing” Indian cooking for Gordon has thus not only to do with the food, but also the perceived simplicity, and “otherness” of the people making the food, and, not least, *his* relation to the stranger. For a strange culinary encounter to be satisfying, the strange food must be produced by the right kind of stranger—Gordon desires a specific kind of strangeness that can only be fulfilled if the stranger himself fully embodies it. Whereas Bozo is the

stranger that “has already come too close ... is ‘in your face’,” the King of Korma is the kind of stranger that “remain[s] at the service of a white, masculine store of (self)-discovery. Rather than being annihilated as a threat, they become incorporated to what is lacking in his self” (Ahmed 2000: 123). Bozo’s modernity and recognizable Westernness disturbs the temporal distance between Gordon as the (modern) viewing subject and India as the consumable (historic) object because Bozo has betrayed the imperative for him to be *authentically* (that is, historic) Indian. Instead, he is exposed as a kind of disturbing mimic man whose body is a little too unstrange to be strange—“a subject of a difference who is almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha 1994: 122)—thus tainting Gordon’s experience and preventing it from being truly pleasurable (despite the fact that the food eaten in this scene is based on a recipe that is, according to Bozo, over 300 years old—a fact Gordon must in the end ambivalently accept lives up to his ideas of tradition and, to a certain extent, authenticity).

Jamie: When in Italy, I Feel Italian

Like in *Gordon’s Great Escape*, Jamie’s reactions to the Italians he meets are marked by a binary either/or distinction between excitement and disappointment, with the people cooking the food again being the decisive factor in how encounters are evaluated.

Jamie’s most exciting experience of “real” Italian cooking takes place in the second episode of the show, where Jamie travels to the island of Marettimo—an island described as being “almost in Africa.” As his boat arrives, Jamie tells the camera that the captain said he was “mad to go there” because “no tourist ever comes here.” Indeed, we already at this point get the impression that Jamie has gone as far as he can spatially go in his hunt for Italian “authenticity,” which is linked to a sense of distance from Jamie’s life in London. The purpose of the journey is to visit and cook with the self-taught chef Giovanni who owns a highly esteemed fish restaurant on the isolated island. The island has no shops, so Giovanni has to improvise a new menu every day on the basis of the fish landed that day and the vegetables in season. Jamie is very impressed with Giovanni’s cooking style, which is exactly the “authentic” cooking Jamie hoped to find during his trip to Italy:



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What’s more natural than that man waiting to see what comes in that door [the kitchen door], if he gets it, he gets it, if he doesn’t, he doesn’t. In London there’s a lot of chefs who can cook really well. But they are like robots; they got no heart, no soul. This man, he’s like a man of the earth. He’ll make a new menu every day. To do that you have to be a cook, not a chef, but a proper cook.

In this quote Jamie distinguishes between the “natural” way of cooking that Giovanni embodies versus the “unnatural” and “robotic” way of the chefs in London. The latter might have better skills in the kitchen, but they have lost the connection to their environment. Giovanni, however, is closely connected to

the earth on which he lives. This seems to be the main reason why Giovanni's "proper cooking" is driven by "humor, fantasy, and dedication" and this encounter becomes the climax of excitement in Jamie's exploration of Italian cooking

Jamie is excited not only by Giovanni's way of cooking, but also by his lifestyle: his daily partying and drinking as well as his physical humor and his corporal communication with Jamie, manifested through hugs and slapstick situations, such as when he tries to throw Jamie overboard from a fishing boat. Unlike Jamie, Giovanni has achieved balance between his work as a chef and his family life, exemplified by how his daughter works with him in the restaurant. This balance is something that Jamie was missing in his stressful life in London, and during his stay at Marettimo, Jamie experiences and verbalizes this unproblematic synergy. After a week in Giovanni's company, however,—and a break from his exhausting everyday life packed with burdens (kids, wife, business—burdens that apparently do not exist on the island), Jamie must move on to his next Italian destination.

Next stop on his *Giro d'Italia* is a visit to a family in La Marche. Where the Giovanni experience was centered on a liberated way of living, the Marche experience focuses on the life of a family living together across generations in the countryside. In this family, several generations appear to be living harmoniously together following an old peasant tradition that has been destroyed in England by the urbanization and industrialization of agriculture. Jamie is symbolically initiated in this tradition of "living of the land" when he is invited to slaughter one of the family's lambs. As he explains to the camera after the deed is done, the ritual makes him feel closer to this pre-modern (food) culture and the strangers living in it: "To do that today was pretty emotional and pretty hard-core, but you know to be honest, as a chef who has cook two thousand sheep its only fair you kill one, otherwise you're just a fake." Here, Jamie asserts that his deed has made him more "authentic" and less "fake" than the heartless and soulless robot chefs back in London.

So, in his cooking with Giovanni and in his initiation into living off the land in La Marche, Jamie acquires—or at least perceives that he acquires—some of the "authenticity" he so craved. An important point here is that this process of becoming less fake—the process through which the "authenticity" of the strange encounter makes the white explorer less inauthentic—is obtained through a bodily experience (the physical bonding and working with Giovanni) and affective performance (the "pretty emotional and hard-core" slaughter of the lamb).

However, Jamie's encounter with "authentic," and "other" Italy is not unproblematic, or without contradiction. Tension becomes apparent as Jamie cooks the lamb he slaughtered. Jamie wants to cook the lamb Tuscan style served with a vignole, a roman pea stew, but this is not a success—the dishes are too unfamiliar and do not respect the cooking tradition of the family. In particular, *nona*, the grandmother, who has primary responsibility for the household's cooking, is not impressed, whispering "*puzza*," ("it stinks") as she inspects Jamie's lamb. Back in the camper van, Jamie expresses his thoughts on the unflattering reception of his food:

The funny thing is that if you take something like a vignole ... you take that from Rome and you give it to someone in La Marche and not one of them had seen it before and they felt it was really peculiar. You know Italians are [pause] from what I can gather, and that's why I'm here, that's to learn from them [pause] I'm not sure [pause] they say it's regional, but I think it's almost more than that, you know, Italians like it like in their village, but also secretly I think they want it like their mum's.

Here, Jamie takes a more ambivalent position towards the authentic; although it is stressed several times "that every Italian is in their blood to be a food expert," he is critical of the narrow-mindedness and conservatism that accompanies this tradition-based food culture. The family wants nothing but its own traditional cooking. On the other hand, Jamie wants to compose his individual palette of various types of "authentic" cuisines that he can "twist" and "fuse"; he fails to understand that the people of La Marche do not share this "omnivorous" approach to food (Johnston and Baumann 2010) that is dominant in the "modern" world, notably London, where authenticity can be conveyed through a chef-artist's creative improvisation with "old" ingredients and "traditional" cooking styles (Johnston and Baumann 2010: 86).

Re-authenticizing the Monks

If the visit to la Marche was "too authentic," then Jamie also encounters Italians who are not authentic enough. Most significant among these examples is his visit to an ancient monastery in Lazio, which is famous for having one of the oldest herb gardens in Italy. Jamie is very excited about this visit because "everyone knows that monks eat really well." So much heavier then is his disappointment when he discovers that the old monks are living on a diet of fish fingers and canned minestrone soup, and that the famous herb garden has vanished because the few monks left in the monastery do not have time to tend to it. To Jamie, these monks have betrayed their tradition and their reputation as caretakers of an historic, pre-industrial food institution.

So, Jamie takes action to *reauthenticate* the monks and to re-convert them to his religion—cooking—by giving them lessons in cooking and restoration of the herb garden. After having organized a collective cooking session on a sunlit terrace outside the somber chambers of the monastery, Jamie likens the monastery's culinary *felix culpa* to a minor miracle, as he describes it to the camera: "Have you noticed how they have all pepped up a gear, they have been so solemn and serious and then all of a sudden, you give them a bit of decent grub, they start cracking jokes. I'm chuffed, really, really chuffed." In this case, Jamie establishes himself as an authority able to—almost obliged to—point out "lost authenticity" where he finds it, and to restore things to an acceptable level of authenticity accordingly. It is striking that the indicator of a successful restoration in this case is the spontaneous cracking of jokes; indeed, the solemnity of the monks does not fit with Jamie's conception of Italians as being bodily driven by uncontrolled affect like Giovanni.



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As the above analyses show, both Jamie and Gordon have specific, but similar conceptions of what constitutes a truly exiting culinary encounter: untouchedness and untamedness mediated through bodily and affective experience. The untouched and untamed encounter is for both chefs defined as situations that are decisively non-British/non-Western, and which are pre-modern, primitive and othering. In situations where the two chefs “feel” that this has been infected by Western culture (the Westernness of Bozo’s behavior) and modernity (the canned minestrone soup in the monastery), however, the excitement is replaced by disappointment; the strange encounter is thus always marked by instability—once the stranger dares to defy the specific strangeness assigned to or expected (but rarely concretely verbalized) of him by Gordon or Jamie, their strange encounter becomes disappointing, not exciting. The satisfying strange encounter for Jamie and Gordon, then, depends on a delicate and always uneasy spatial negotiation (Ahmed 2000: 24)—the stranger must simultaneously be near and recognizable in a certain, predefined way, but also far and different in an equally predefined way.

Strange Culinary Encounters and the Re-structuring of Social Hierarchies

It appears that both Jamie and Gordon—in their encounters with Italian and Indian cuisine, respectively—are performing acts of stranger fetishism by turning specific strangers into bearers of “authenticity” and themselves into subjects who can evaluate this authenticity as well as distinguish between what is “too authentic” and what is “not authentic enough.” At the same time, they take an ambivalent position towards culinary authenticity—as much as they are craving the encounter with these “authentic” cultures, they do not want to be limited by their traditionalism. In their discussion of the coexistence of these oppositional forces, Jamie and Gordon appear—as our analyses have shown—to remain within a discursive framework that is reminiscent of a colonial mindset, which fetishizes the strange encounter as a gateway to an affective experience of authenticity. In addition, the strange encounter functions for both chefs as a way of distinguishing themselves both from the strangers they meet, and from their (male) colleagues back home who have not “gone native.”

If, with this in mind, we return to the debate on Western appropriation of “other” food, one could make a strong case for underlining that the travelogue cooking show genre does not form “intercultural connections,” but instead “builds on and reproduces certain neo-colonial inequalities” (Johnston and Baumann 2010: 98). The two shows leave little room for the self-questioning that Heldke has proposed as a way of resisting the colonial attitude (Heldke 2003: 171). This is also evident in how the two programs end with Jamie and Gordon’s final evaluations of their culinary encounters. Gordon’s final evaluation takes place in the closing sequence of the season, where he is to cook for a party of Indian foodies and celebrities in the famous Taj Mahal Hotel. Here, Gordon puts back on his chef’s uniform and challenges himself to put “all of his great escape adventure” on to one plate; however, with its neat and precise presentation, the

plate ultimately resembles the French-inspired, high gastronomy of Gordon's Michelin-starred restaurant in London, which, of course, contrasts with what Gordon has hailed throughout his travels in India as the "authentic" Indian cooking and presentation style. This indicates that Gordon's project is perhaps not as he initially proclaims to learn how "curry should be made," but rather to pick and choose from the Indian repertoire and elevate and adapt these elements to fit into his own Eurocentric idea of *haute cuisine*. In this, he maintains an authoritative position for himself through his hierarchical distinction between Indian cooking and Western cooking, where the untouched Indian cuisine needs to be touched by Gordon to achieve a quasi-equal status.

Jamie's Escape is a long negotiation of the "authentic" that ends, as we have seen, in a defense of the "open-minded" British nation and a critique of narrow-minded Italian regionalism. Although he initially praises Italy and its people and cooking, he paradoxically ends up praising and appreciating British food culture, and, importantly, British people as omnivorous food consumers who are not tied to culinary tradition. In hailing the British as more open-minded and cosmopolitan, Jamie ultimately positions the British people and their food culture as being superior to the Italian food culture he once so idealized. In the end, his strange encounter has thus worked to reaffirm a social hierarchy in Jamie's favor, and he can return home with a renewed sense of national pride.

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Notes

- 1 The show was broadcast on Channel 4 (2010). The first season lasted three episodes.
- 2 The show was broadcast on Channel 4 (2005). The first season lasted six episodes.
- 3 Ahmed uses the term “stranger” where other postcolonial-inspired writing has typically used the term “other.” As we are employing Ahmed’s framework of the strange encounter so centrally, we will in this article adopt her terminology and also use “stranger” in the place of “other.”
- 4 As noted by Johnston and Baumann (2010), exoticism and authenticity are central elements in contemporary foodie discourse and are markers of high status here. However, Johnston and Baumann also stress that although they are often mentioned in the same sentence, exoticism and authenticity are not always synonymous. For instance, mass-produced Chinese fish sauce might be conceived to be inauthentic while still being exotic, whereas handmade Vietnamese fish sauce from a very specific territory and produced in small scale is both authentic and exotic (Johnston and Baumann 2010: 98–9). However, both Gordon and Jamie use “exotic” and “authentic” interchangeably, although they both favor the use of “authentic” when enthusiastically describing their encounters. As such, to be able to unpack these programs, we will use the words “authentic” and “exotic” in the same way as Gordon and Jamie, knowing that their use is perhaps not as nuanced or sophisticated as when used by Johnston and Baumann.
- 5 There are exceptions to this tendency. For instance, Rachel Ray had a travelogue cooking show for several seasons on the Food Network called *Tasty Travels*. Also, the French food journalist Julie Andrieu has also hosted several travelogue shows, such as *Julie autour du monde* (2003) and *Fourchette & Sac à Dos* (2007).

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GEOGRAPHIES OF RACE AND FOOD: FIELDS, BODIES, MARKETS

EDITED BY RACHAEL SLOCUM AND ARUN SALDANHA (FARNHAM AND
BURLINGTON, VT: ASHGATE, 2013)

Reviewed by Brigitte Sébastia, French Institute of Pondicherry

DOI: 10.2752/175174415X14180391604440

Geographies of Race and Food: Fields, Bodies, Markets attempts to overcome the tendency in American academic food studies to avoid the use of the term “race” in explaining social inequality and power in the fields of production, consumption and marketing. The authors argue that the process of racialization of food cannot be neglected as it drives worldwide consumption and production, notably during periods of crisis resulting from climatic disaster or economic depression. The inclusion of a full range of racial distinctions in the exploration of this field reveals injustices regarding food, insecurity in the domain of consumption and vulnerability, and inequality in food production.

The editors suggest six approaches that would make race worth studying in the domain of food. The first is to question the intersection between culture and phenotype in the process of racialization, including nutritional status, eating behavior, food preference and the organoleptic proprieties of food. The second is to investigate how differences between populations resulting from colonial capitalism continue to be maintained despite there being no stable division in terms of phenotype or genetics. (It should, however, be added that as much as racial distinction is intrinsic to colonial programs, it is also often produced by the sociocultural context; the brahmanical stratification in India is an example.) The third approach is to focus on the harmful consequences for the environment, whether social, economic and political, or climatic and ecological, which reinforce inequalities between population groups, reinscribing them in a process of discrimination and insecurity about food. The fourth is an examination of the phenomenon of deterritorialization used by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to describe the dynamic of mobility/displacement and rearrangement in terms of significance and adaptation. Race is at the forefront in this approach and is seen



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as being used to control others or to affirm one's own identity. The fifth, again based on the Deleuzian ontology on deterritorialization, focuses on the question of how race affects the capacity of bodies to adapt to the spatio-temporal configurations in which they move. The last approach is concerned with the productive domain of biopolitics. This is a key concept in Foucauldian theory used to examine the domination of the world by the West, which results in the egregious discrimination exerted by colonial and present powers against slaves and indigenous people, through the total control of the market and of bodies, the high value of whiteness imposed as a norm, and the gender bias in food production and publicity.

The book is in three parts. The first, "Fields: Ecology, Labor, Inequality" is composed of six chapters focusing on the alienation of bonded laborers in food production and on inequality of access to environmental resources, including land. Judith Carney examines how food systems in the United States have been enriched and transformed by bonded laborers from poor countries. Not only have these migrants participated in food production, a subject traced historically by Don Mitchell, but they have also contributed to the food heritage of the countries in which they labor. Carney shows, too, that the contribution of African migrants, for instance, to the food heritage of the United States, has been little recognized: they have been dispossessed of their own foods for the benefit of Americans. Meanwhile, foods associated with bonded migrants still have a stigmatizing effect. In Brazil, as Susan Paulson explains, Africans put a high value on manioc as its calorific content is necessary for hard work, but manioc is denounced by the powerful for its injurious effect on environment and health. Nowadays, food and nutritional security has become a priority for activists, academics and governments, but racialization continues due to the use of Western methodology in studies and funding approaches. Questioning programs of urban agriculture in South Africa, Jane Battersby demonstrates why such programs are inadequate for the targeted population, who expect that migrating to towns will give them freedom from the land and the alienating work on it. As a counterexample, the program of the Newtown Florist Club seems more efficacious as this community organization has gained popularity by fighting racial oppression. As gardening was abandoned because of the polluted environment, the association, involving women, has developed means to clean the soil in order to cultivate food plants and, concomitantly, to ensure healthy food and some economic returns.

The second part of the book called "Bodies: Diet, Taste, Biopolitics" is composed of four chapters which show how biopolitics can racialize the world. The chapter by Nigel Clark and Yasmin Gunaratnam is linked with that on the Newtown Florist Club, describing the polluted space where African Americans are constrained to live, focusing on ecocide, i.e. the extensive destruction of ecosystems that deprive people of the enjoyment of their environment. Where humans have been capable of adapting to climate and diet change, an abrupt climate change in a context where there is standardization of living and agriculture can still be destructive, notably in the global south where populations

live in precarious conditions. Food patterns play a large part in diasporic contexts: people quite often tend to resist the homogenization imposed by the dominant society and express their difference through an aesthetic of food and eating. Nazarin Naraghi and Paul Kingsbury look at Iranians in Canada, who use the register of food which belongs to Zoroastrian tradition in order to distinguish themselves from Arabs. These authors define this process as an *objet petit*, an object that “incites desire” (p. 180)—the desire to be identified as a pre-Islamic people endowed with a high culture. The article by Robyn Longhurst and Lynda Johnston is more classic in dealing with diasporic studies on food and what they call “alimentary assemblages” (p. 203). This process draws in several food systems, involving memory, authenticity, aesthetics, pragmatism and identity. But resistance to biopolitics is not always possible, nor, certainly, as festive as it is in these two diasporic situations. The Northern Territory Emergency Response inflicted by the Australian government on the Aboriginal population is a clear example of the contemporary racism or “modern sovereignty” described by Dinesh J. Wadiwel and Deirdre Tedmanson (p. 231). Under the pretext of moralization while assuring them of food security, they have received ration cards for food from state-controlled shops. These cards do not simply prevent them from buying alcohol—they also limit access to regular healthy food as well as food that Aborigines consume traditionally, as the shops are situated far from their settlements and are inadequately supplied. Rick Dolphijn continues this thread of analysis, focusing on how a negative stereotype allows people to be classified as uncivilized and justifies control of their behavior. His chapter on cannibalism, a product of the colonial imagination and a tool for moralizing others, shows how the concept of cannibalism endures and continues to evoke fear.

The last four papers compose the third part of the book, called “Markets: Exchange, Commodification, Empire.” The first, by Hilda E. Kurtz, concerns food deserts in the United States that recall the living conditions of the Australian Aborigines, as poor access to food and the types of food available has increased malnutrition. Kurtz details how food retailers, restaurants and the food they provide reproduce the racial landscape of residence. Urban centers are well stocked with healthy food, but people living on the periphery of cities, often non-whites and poor whites, have access mostly to food rich in fat and carbohydrates. Aaron Bobow-Strain deals with the process of racialization at two levels: gender and color. Industrialization of bread has dispossessed women of their know-how as the erstwhile bread-makers for the family. Bread-making has become increasingly a scientific process in which whiteness is the guarantee of hygiene and safety. Mimi Sheller shows that, behind the eroticism associated with the banana, which was developed for promoting consumption, the extensive banana trade and the over-cultivation of lands in colonies has caused ecological, economic and human disasters. Certain agencies involved in southern development are denouncing the continuing over-exploitation of ex-colonial countries, racism, poverty, dispossession etc., but the situation is unchanged. The author calls for an ethical banana which would entail informing consumers on how fruits



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are produced, where, by whom and under what conditions. The last article, by Arun Saldanha, is on the violence of the Dutch when developing the spice trade in Indonesia. The author adheres to the opinion of Georges Bataille, who saw the push to increase the spice trade as “soaked with ambiguous desires and outbursts of destructive and self-destructive animosity” (p. 313). The Dutch used biopolitical techniques, blocking the importation of staple foods and destroying crops to drive up prices. This form of mercantilism had racialized populations before colonialization; the underlying ideology was the superiority of religion, not that of whiteness.

The diversity of the articles exploring the relationship between race and food, from production to consumption, in history and in the contemporary world makes the book unique and stimulating for readers interested in the fields of food and agriculture, as well as of developmental and gender studies. One may nevertheless regret that some articles, favoring a discursive approach, would have benefited from more extensive empirical content in order to highlight the racialization process. Moreover, the classification of the articles under three defined parts is not very pertinent and the impact on health of dispossession of land and food, marginalization of populations, migration or transformation of eco-systems has not sufficiently engaged contributors. The editors have covered a wide range of situations and, even though this diversity entails an important heterogeneity with regard to the gravity of conditions stemming from the racialization of food and land, certain fields have not been explored. Subjects such as internal migration due to seasonal work or displacement by development projects or armed conflicts—phenomena which are drastically increasing in developing countries—would be very relevant to grasping new forms of racialization which deny populations land and/or food, forcing them to change their diet with adverse consequences for their health.

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EATING RIGHT IN AMERICA: THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF FOOD AND HEALTH

BY CHARLOTTE BILTEKOFF (DURHAM, NC: DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2013)

Reviewed by Clara Hanson, Boston University

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The White House kitchen garden may seem like a simple tool to teach Americans to be healthy in the midst of an obesity epidemic, but in her book *Eating Right*

in America: The Cultural Politics of Food & Health, Charlotte Biltekoff uncovers a more insidious impulse in the garden than meets the eye. *Eating Right in America* traces changes in rhetoric beginning with the establishment of modern nutrition at the end of the nineteenth century, followed by nutritional propaganda during the Second World War and the alternative food movement of the late 1960s through to the present. The book concludes with a critical evaluation of the anti-obesity movement, focusing largely on the past two decades. Biltekoff succeeds in her attempt to rethink discourses about eating right as a social duty, a moral measure, and a form of power by highlighting similar messages about class and citizenship in each seemingly unique movement. Unlike many books that challenge readers to rethink dietary discourse in terms of nutrition, economics or sustainability, Biltekoff challenges readers to move past debates about the definition of eating right in order to focus on the social implications inherent in movements that attempt to change the eating behavior of many to fit a certain definition of eating right.

The book begins with the establishment of nutrition in the late nineteenth century and traces its progression through the Second World War. Despite the emerging field's scientific methods, the first examples of applied nutrition actually built on existing moral precepts of appetite. Activists initially attempted to educate members of the working class about nutrition through outreach efforts like The New England Kitchen of 1890. These efforts were soon abandoned as audiences rejected the new scientific standard of eating right, largely because it failed to account for a diverse public palate. Early discourse morphed from reforming the working class to preserving and distinguishing the middle class. Ellen Richards was a critical proponent of both incarnations, and led the effort to bring lessons about "right living" and home economics to students. Ultimately, the discourse exploited the image of an unhealthy other by using coded language that conflated environmental factors with nutritional science to create a biological measure of class.

Early ideas of nutrition were rethought with the discovery of vitamins. New anxieties about hidden hunger, a paradoxical form of hunger caused by inadequate vitamin intake that was impossible to detect, emerged. War efforts pressured Americans to support their country in new ways, including eating healthfully according to the new Basic 7 food guide. The war broadened the purview of reformers to the entire American population. The result integrated ideas about proper nutrition and the image of good citizenship, and implored all to follow as an act of patriotism during wartime.

Although dietary movements following the Second World War seemed to move beyond earlier hegemonic definitions of nutrition, class and citizenship, they often perpetuated earlier moral ideas about eating right. One such movement was the alternative food movement that began in the late 1960s. As with earlier reforms, the movement employed empirical standards to define how to eat right, but, according to Biltekoff, the standards were equally moralizing. Reformers increasingly engaged neoliberal ideas that emphasized the responsibility of individuals in eating right. In one of her most cogent



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and provocative points, Biltekoff explores the parallels between early home economics leader Ellen Richards and alternative food activist Alice Waters. Both worked tirelessly to bring their visions of eating right to young students, and both believed doing so would repair critical elements of America's social fabric.

Neoliberal dietary philosophies were crucial to the anti-obesity movement. Even the language used following the September 11th attacks invoked ideas of diet and citizenship reminiscent of Second World War rhetoric. The anti-obesity movement also paralleled nutrition discourse from the end of the nineteenth century in two ways. First, it attempted to reform the diet of the poor through the rhetoric of personal responsibility. Second, it created a new measure of middle class identity that othered people with large bodies, especially if they were working class or minorities. By deconstructing the discourses of two historical and two contemporary movements, Biltekoff persuasively shows that while definitions of eating right may change, the moral messages these definitions implicitly spread have been told time and time again.

Biltekoff draws from an extensive bibliography to create a well-researched argument that is relevant across the fields of food studies and fat studies. *Eating Right in America* is concise, well written and packed with examples that compellingly interrogate conventional ideas about eating right. Although Biltekoff focuses on movements that have already garnered academic attention, her analysis offers a new and complex way to reexamine nutritional history. The way she engages dominant political philosophies and popular food ideologies will also compel readers to think more deeply about the messages they receive and the messages they share.

While *Eating Right in America* makes a significant contribution to the growing number of postmodern works that deconstruct nutritional discourse, certain sections should be expanded upon. The dynamics of race in these moralizing reform movements must be examined more deeply. Biltekoff critically examines race and ethnicity only in her final chapter about obesity. There are also gaps in her chronology. Detailed information from the 1920s and 1930s is absent. Dietary advice following the Second World War leading up to the alternative food movement in the late 1940s through the early 1960s is also missing. An analysis of food in civil rights activism, including the Black Panther Party's food programs, might be a good place to start. Despite these gaps, this volume significantly advances our understanding of nutrition beyond its science. The reformers Biltekoff deconstructs may or may not have been right about American eating, but by the end of her book, Biltekoff leaves no doubt that dietary discourse itself is in need of reform.

GLOBAL APPETITES: AMERICAN POWER AND THE LITERATURE OF FOOD

BY ALLISON CARRUTH (NEW YORK: CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2013)

Reviewed by Tom Hertweck, University of Nevada, Reno

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In *Global Appetites: American Power and the Literature of Food*, Allison Carruth argues that food can be used to engage with the long arc of modernist globalization after the First World War. In her view, the scaling-up of the industrial forces of American agriculture, wrought by the Great War and intensified by its sequel, transformed not only the material spaces of American food consumption, but also made possible the immense political and cultural influence the United States acquired. As much a study of the movements against American control as it is of the construction of that hegemony itself, Carruth's book sets out an important historical argument that has the potential to invigorate food studies by inflecting it through its literary manifestations. More than food history, *Global Appetites* focuses on literature's place at the table.

The book opens with an historical chapter, which lays out the book's central claim within the history of food consumption in the United States and discusses the book's methodological structure that links it to an impressive transdisciplinary research apparatus indebted to food historians, literary critics, Marxist social theorists, and political scholars and activists. The subsequent chapters take up specific literary spaces where Carruth identifies the relationship between globalization and literary expressions of food thought. The second chapter studies one author—Willa Cather—against the backdrop of the formative days of industrial agriculture when her novels were written. For Carruth, Cather brings into focus an important notion of “rural modernity” in which the novelist rejects the quaintness of the smallholder's perspective and shows the pressing need for agribusiness in a nation desiring to feed its own and increase its presence on the global stage. Chapter 3 explores a host of nonfiction texts (especially the memoir writing of M.F.K. Fisher and the journalistic food essays of Elizabeth David) as well as poetry (such as Lorine Niedecker's experimental work) around the period of food rationing brought on by the Second World War. Set against Cather's plenty in the preceding chapter, the writers Carruth constellates demonstrate the palpable feeling of hunger.

In Chapter 4, which returns to fiction, Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* places American literature within the scope of the United States' increasing influence in global food markets. Here, the case study is Morrison's representation of the Caribbean, and the increasing presence of supermarkets in American culture and their ability to make exotic foods accessible, and thus stoke consumer desire. Chapter 5 continues a focus on fiction, turning to Ruth Ozeki as a leader among what Carruth calls the “new muckrakers,” or novelists who, like Upton Sinclair before them, used fiction to expose social and economic injustice. Unlike their



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frequently humorless early-twentieth century counterparts, however, writers like Ozeki satirize the rhetorical and ideological structures of contemporary food systems. The final chapter moves back to nonfiction, in this case to a subgenre Carruth calls the “locavore memoir,” that is, recent autobiographical writing (such as Novella Carpenter’s popular *Farm City*) by food activists who use political advocacy of food localism to orient their stories. The chapters, which move chronologically forward through the long sweep of the twentieth century, combine to assert a linkage between food production in the United States and the nation’s increasing control on the world stage, an idea Carruth distills as “US food power.”

Coming in at just 168 pages, Carruth’s study is nonetheless expansive: in scope, ambition, and interests. Take, for instance, her broad definition of “the literature of food”: “not just culinary writing and agrarian narrative, but also experimental poetry, postmodern fiction, government propaganda, advertising, memoirs, and manifestos” (p. 6). In this way, Carruth might be chastised for not using the term “literature” in the plural, as from the outset she moves beyond a singular genre. Furthermore, the scope of texts she identifies often prevents one from gaining a clear picture of what this body of work has in common or causes it to cohere other than the presence of food. What, for example, are the conventions of the novel of food? Surely it is not the case that a single instance of food in a text suddenly transforms a text into food literature. In moving swiftly between fiction and nonfiction, between art and activism, the larger literary import may be lost. There may be too many types of objects under study pressing too much against the bounds she lays out. The stated purpose of the book as she explains it expands outward, wanting to do more and more: the introduction includes no fewer than five moments where the author extends the book’s intellectual project, which begins as literary history, but quickly gobbles up territory in economic policy, environmental effects, decolonizing social movements, arguments about localism, the modes of consumerism, and the place of technology (especially information and communication networks) in food study. All are appropriate spaces in which food and literature interact, but the speed with which Carruth accrues new valences is dizzying.

A related concern is Carruth’s unstable focus on American literature. On the one hand, as she readily points out, this story of global hegemony requires that attention be paid to non-American works and areas of concern. *Tar Baby*’s depiction of Americans’ desire for exotic foods and the demonstration of meat-and-starch globalization in Ozeki’s *My Year of Meats* are particular perceptive and well-crafted. On the other hand, however, this transnational gaze is not always fully realized. The extended reading of Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, for example, presented as a provocative coda to Chapter 3, ranges a bit too far afield. One suspects that traditional literary scholars will be less interested in the study, not because it lacks nuanced close readings of texts, but rather because the book strains against its stated focus.

And yet, Carruth’s lack of a tightly focused investigatory lens nonetheless makes the book significant in other, perhaps more important ways. For those

interested in the intersections between food cultures and literary criticism, the dearth of book-length studies has been frustrating. Carruth's new work is an antidote to that frustration. While the book might take too much onto its plate, and thus be less successful as the comprehensive literary history the author seems to want it to be, the individual chapters more than ably demonstrate the remarkable work waiting to be done in literary food studies. It rewards the interested food scholar by working within existing discussions of food globalization, and gives readers new tools in the process, namely, exemplary site-specific studies of the literary-discursive fashioning of American food power. Carruth explains how the literary shapes the gastronomic imagination and serves as a vital expression of efforts to support or undermine the historical developments of American production and consumption. In this way, *Global Appetites* is an important book that offers a sumptuous tasting of the type of intellectual engagement waiting for both the literary critic and the food scholar.

THE POLITICS OF THE PANTRY: STORIES, FOOD, AND SOCIAL CHANGE

BY MICHAEL MIKULAK (MONTREAL: MCGILL-QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2013)

Reviewed by Brad Jones, independent scholar

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Food is increasingly produced, packaged and sold with a story. These narratives valorize everything from raw produce to heavily-processed products, and they can be found not only at farmers' markets, greengrocers, and in other alternative food markets, but increasingly in more conventional food markets as well. What is more, the proliferation of books, movies, television shows, and other popular media aiming to "lift the veil" off industrial food production by giving a behind-the-scenes look into its manufacture suggest that food narratives are not only of popular interest but that storied food—carrying with it narratives of production, exchange and consumption—is an important contemporary political matter. In *The Politics of the Pantry: Stories, Food, and Social Change*, Michael Mikulak analyzes such rhetoric by framing it within economic, social and ecological paradigms. The book proves itself a timely and welcome addition to the ever-expanding literature on alternative foodways in the United States.

In this well researched and thought-provoking book, Mikulak turns our attention to the political and discursive aspects of storied food to question what it is about these foods that make them so interesting to the public imagination. Still more, the author asks if storied food can be fruitfully employed not only to produce better edibles but, more importantly, to realize goals of ecological



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sustainability amid pervasive environmental degradation and the totalization of capitalism as a global economic force. Chapter 1, entitled “How Green Can We Grow,” lays groundwork for the chapters that follow by providing a history of environmentalism in the last half century. The politics of the pantry, Mikulak suggests, evoke dialectical tensions between pleasure and knowledge, utopia and apocalypse, and the local and the global. Which storylines are highlighted or obscured and by whom, provides insight into relationships of power, politics and knowledge as well as the formation of alternative systems of value. More importantly for Mikulak, these narratives either forge a way forward in the form of a utopian bridge or, in the case of green capitalism, shut down the prospect that radical change and alternative futures are possible. He notes, “the arguments of the ecological-modernist paradigm fail precisely in their inability to move beyond the rationality of the market and the economic grammar of yield, consumer demand, ethical consumption, and neoliberal subjectivity” (p. 46). Food is one nodal point through which these discourses are projected, enacted and imagined.

Chapter 2, “Writing the Foodshed,” looks at food narratives in contemporary media. Mikulak asks what the attraction of food politics is to his specific demographic—the Western, affluent and writerly audience—and teases out the implicit value systems embedded in various genres of contemporary food writing. Parsing the genre into four distinct categories, the author concludes that of the commodity biography (e.g. Michael Pollan’s *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*), the pastoral narrative (e.g. Barbara Kingsolver’s *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*), the utopian narrative (e.g. Jamie Oliver’s *Jamie at Home*) and the foodshed memoir (e.g. Gary Paul Nabhan’s *Coming Home to Eat*), it is the utopian narrative that holds the most political potential. He argues that through such depictions we may be able to find our way forward, away from states of anxiety, anticipatory futurism, or romanticized nostalgia, towards empowerment in the present and an imagined utopian alternative to capitalism in the future. Mikulak writes, “The utopian pastoralism of food offers a unique combination of practical hands-on training and a longing for a past that perhaps never was, but which nonetheless inspires a future that could be” (p. 126).

Mikulak proposes that we may progress toward a better tomorrow through grassroots participation in our local foodshed. Revolutionary change, the author urges, will not come from the pens of policy makers or from behind the closed doors of corporate boardrooms. Although Mikulak laments that the rhetoric of individual agency has been co-opted by neoliberal agendas and often diluted into a greenwashed consumerism of “voting with one’s fork,” he nevertheless argues that it is the soiled hands of actualized individuals that will catalyze real change. In digesting abstract thinking into felt subjectivity, by making the politics of the pantry a personal and pleasurable act, Mikulak, like so many others in this genre, emphasizes that the paralysis rendered by apocalyptic thinking can be replaced by a paradigm of hope, enchantment and possibility. Incorporating storied food into everyday living may be one important step in that direction.

Mikulak supports his case with empirical (if personally anecdotal) evidence from a year spent participating in a strict hundred-mile diet. Chapter 3 “The Enchantment of Place” engages the author’s own narrative in order to demonstrate the importance of subjective experience. His recollections of baking bread and keeping a garden are of more than mere prosaic interest; they reiterate the author’s belief that active participation in the foodshed creates a sort of authenticity and agency that resonates because it is quite literally incorporated. Moreover, they exemplify the relocalization and embodiment of knowledge as an active contest against the disembedding mechanisms that Giddens (1991), Beck (1992) and others have persuasively argued attend modernity. Mikulak writes, we must frame the hundred-mile diet, and others like it, “as a form of resistance, a practice of producing place that sustains alternative modes of production ... [storied food] can provide a model, a lived experience of nature that reminds us that we are of the earth” (p. 153). In its capacity to do so, it brings attention to what Mikulak refers to as “bio-social production”: a perspective that collapses dualistic modes of thinking into a dialectic that emphasizes the cooperative relationship between nature and culture, environment and human, rather than conquest.

The Politics of the Pantry is part discourse analysis and part literature review of the alternative food movement. At times it is difficult to identify the author’s voice among the cacophonous chatter of so many others, academic and popular alike. Moreover, when Mikulak’s voice is heard, it seamlessly and thus confusingly slips between the colloquial and theoretical—evoking the prose of Pollan or Schlosser here, and the academic argot of Foucault or Deleuze there, sometimes in the very same paragraph.

Nevertheless, the book is a success. It invites the reader along to show that discourses claiming to help create a more transparent system of food production are at the same time obscuring the subjective value systems that frame their own narratives. Depictions of ethics, ecology and economics turn out to be informed by personal beliefs of what is good and evil, what is right and wrong, and Mikulak argues that it is important to contextualize these media within broader, culturally-specific patterns of moral behavior. Moreover, Mikulak reminds us that it is in connection with our food and to each other in the act of eating it that we build not only a grassroots “politics of the pantry” but also a “politics of the possible.” We lay foundations for a bridge that traverses the paralysis of impending environmental collapse and the utopian garden where nature and culture flourish in harmony. In doing so, and this is Mikulak’s central claim, we “become the authors of our stories, rather than spectators,” and as agents pen our own narratives of a better future (p. 198). Food—the stories we write about it and the relationships we have with it—is at once incredibly simple and infinitely complex. *The Politics of the Pantry* is a valuable guide to the power of discourse, to the appeal of food and its stories, to the relationship between politics, economics and the environment, and to personal empowerment. It appeals to academic and lay audiences alike.



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BEYOND HUMMUS AND FALAFEL: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ASPECTS OF PALESTINIAN FOOD

BY LIORA GVION (BERKELEY, CA: UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS)

Reviewed by Farha Ternikar, Lemoyne College

DOI: 10.2752/175174415X14180391604602

Beyond Hummus and Falafel begins by exploring the significance of food in the development of Palestinian identity in terms of a national culture within and outside its borders. It examines the politics of an indigenous people's food. Liora Gvion provides us with rich ethnographic details of the culinary and political worlds of Palestinians in Israel by looking beyond the actual food into their kitchens, restaurants and own understandings of culinary traditions based on one hundred interviews with Palestinians living in Israel.

In the preface to the American edition, the author explores some of the challenges she faced in conducting the research. She explains that she had to cope with "resentment" from both political activists and Israeli colleagues who questioned why she wanted to study Palestinian culinary culture in Israel since she herself was an Israeli Jew. She was intrigued because "despite the large amount of culinary knowledge at their disposal by virtue of their being responsible for feeding their families, Palestinian women only moderately and informally negotiate the extent of their dissent from their existing social order" (p. xii). She wanted to investigate why.

In the introduction, the author explains that food is a prism for studying relationships of "control, exploitation and denial of or derogation of rights accorded to the culture of the other" (p. 2). Since 1948, Palestinians have "formal citizenship" but they live in an ethnic state in which national identity is limited and does not easily include Palestinians. Furthermore, the everyday lives of Palestinians continue to be shaped by discrimination by the Israeli state.

The book is broken up two distinct parts: "What Palestinian Women Must Know: Food in the Home" and "The Public Dimension: The Encounter with Jewish Society." Each of the four chapters explores an important theme related to understanding Palestinian cuisine in Israel. Chapter 1, "Women's Way of

Knowing” opens with the assertion that culinary knowledge is essential to the identity of Palestinian women (p. 29). Gvion examines female knowledge that is relegated to the domestic sphere, knowledge that women acquire through understanding their environment and access to local products, and the knowledge that women have that enables them to distinguish between everyday family meals versus festive events. Gvion shows that the family meal is as much about culture as it is about economics. For instance, it is an important marker of cultures of hospitality, where cultural capital, economic resources and quality of foods all indicate status and identity. Meat dishes in particular indicate high social status; for example, privileged households have meals with multiple meat dishes. Furthermore, women are clearly and often exclusively responsible for feeding the Palestinian family, and through feeding the family, women develop social, cultural and culinary expertise.

Chapter 2, “The Social Sphere: The Culinary Scene as Constructing and Reinforcing Power Relations,” explores how food and culinary activity are tied to the power dynamics in the family, in the community, and lastly in Israel. In particular, interrogation of food in the Palestinian family provides further evidence of patriarchy in the domestic sphere. Along with the husband’s culinary preferences, religion also plays a role in feeding the Palestinian family. Most Palestinians are Muslim, but a significant number are Christian. Ramadan and Easter both alter food preparation in the Palestinian households. Ramadan is a time to prepare special dishes at the end of a long fast. Women socialize around culinary experiences, share recipes and exchange culinary information. Even among working women, cooking is a key aspect of identity. This chapter ends by emphasizing how patriarchy structures the household and culinary menu decisions, yet food is a way in which women can share cultural knowledge and develop a sense of female solidarity.

Chapter 3, “Labaneh with Light Bread and Knafeh with White Cheese” explores how Palestinian culinary identity has been shaped by tradition and modernity. Gvion highlights the transformation of culinary knowledge in four ways: the purchase of ready-made dishes for some things becomes acceptable; some new methods of cooking are rejected if they do not complement Arab tradition; innovation is introduced through the media, food industry and Jewish neighbors; and modernity allows for bringing back traditional everyday dishes that symbolize ethnic culture (p.103). Modernization also includes the attempt to add “healthy food” to the Palestinian diet through examples such as chicken replacing lamb and margarine replacing olive oil. In addition to modernization, Gvion attends to the Arabization of Western food, in particular the ways in which lasagna, pasta and pizza are adapted. This chapter also provides us with one of the most important contributions of this work: exploring how minority groups over generations are able to use culinary traditions to maintain their heritage (p.126).

Chapter 4 “Encountering Israeli Jews: When there Is no Pride, Cookbooks Are not Written” in many ways brings us back to the larger thesis of this book connecting foodways of marginalized and indigenous groups to cultural colonialism.



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The dearth of Arab cookbooks and restaurants is part of a broader phenomenon in Western society: cultural colonialism. Cultural colonialism occurs when the dominant group monopolizes the cultural culinary assets of minorities and sees them as their own. The adapted cultural products are returned to the minority group in a way that presents the dominant group as a being open to foreign cultures and acting to bring cultures together. (p. 130)

In *Exotic Appetites*, Lisa Heldke (2003) introduces the concept of *cultural food colonialism*, explaining that this refers to cooking and eating ethnic foods from “economically dominated,” minority or third-world cultures. Gvion emphasizes that the Palestinians in Israel have a strong sense of displacement, and they are a diasporic minority that struggles to create and maintain a distinct ethnic identity. The Palestinian kitchen is one important way to resist the cultural appropriation of Palestinian food and maintain a collective ethnic heritage (p. 130). Cookbooks and the lack thereof are one clear example of this. One Palestinian cook explained:

When you're under pressure, there is no time to preserve the culture. We worry about living conditions and wonder whether we will be able to provide for our families. One needs to be proud to wish to preserve tradition. When there is no pride no cookbooks are written. (p.135)

Yet, Palestinian women express little need for cookbooks because they teach each other how to cook, and cooking is essential to their identities. The larger Palestinian community does not see cookbooks as a way of preserving its heritage. Another Palestinian expressed his disapproval of needing cookbooks:

Why do I need you to preserve my food? We do a very good job of preserving it, because by us it is transmitted spontaneously. So we don't need the Jews to preserve our heritage. And why should they be the ones to profit from it. (p. 143)

This chapter also brings us back to the title of the book, and helps us understand how “hummus” and “falafel” are symbolic foods that have been appropriated by Israeli culture. Appropriation and cultural colonization are intertwined with the culinary politics of minority groups.

Palestinians, who struggle for recognition as a distinct ethnic group with rights, worry that recording existing culinary knowledge will not only change the character of their kitchen and hasten the disappearance of gastronomic learning through observation and trial and error but will also ... reinforce the appropriation of Palestinian culture by Jews. (p. 145)

The collective unwritten “cookbook” of Palestinian women is necessary to maintaining Palestinian cultural identity in Israel. The book has several goals

beyond the culinary that include understanding how food becomes part of “collective national memory and is used as a means of constructing culture and a sense of exile,” and how Palestinians are able to “demand cultural recognition” through their food (p. 166). From a Palestinian view, food is a way to preserve heritage and identity, especially when not codified into a cookbook.

In the conclusion, the author explains that:

A study of Palestinian food in the state of Israel is also a good case study of social groups whose sense of exile has become central to their identity. It is a case that combines within it longings for a state that has not yet arisen and for an unclear future that needs to be created. (p. 166).

This ethnographic study of Palestinian food in Israel would be a useful tool for teaching minority ethnic food cultures, sociology of food, or politics of food. The book also raises important questions such as the role of food in the life of the displaced, and how it is important for ethnic and indigenous minorities to maintain their collective sense of self under severe conditions of occupation and colonization.

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LABOR AND THE LOCAVORE: THE MAKING OF A COMPREHENSIVE FOOD ETHIC

BY MARGARET GRAY (BERKELEY, CA: UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS, 2014)

Reviewed by Suzanne Cope, Manhattan College

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What is a locavore to do? First consumers are told of the atrocities of large industrial farms and the imperative to buy local and now they are told that even local farmers, in the Hudson Valley at least (although one is left feeling that these findings can be generalized to “local” farmers around the United States) are not treating their workers justly. At least, that is the main takeaway from Margaret Gray’s *Labor and the Locavore: The Making of a Comprehensive Food Ethic*.

Margaret Gray has done over a decade of research interviewing farmers and workers, some multiple times, to help “raise the new food ethic to a higher level of integrity” (p. 12). The introduction starts with the question: “Is local food an ethical alternative?” (p. 1), laying down a challenge for everyone who has fought

for more farmers' markets and locavore offerings since the word was coined not even a decade ago. She, rightfully so, remarks that the local food movement has "a tendency to conflate *local*, *alternative*, *sustainable*, and *fair* as a compendium of virtues against the factory farm that they so vigorously demonize" (p. 3), but that they look less critically toward their own labor issues. Thus, it is her goal to "take on the challenge" of "promoting local food justice in terms of ... active support for workers' rights with a view to improving the livelihoods of the laborers" (p. 3). For the most part, she illuminates issues that even the most thoughtful among us have been turning a blind eye toward regarding the experience of many farm workers.

In her second chapter, Gray seeks to illustrate the landscape, so to say, of the Hudson Valley region in terms of agriculture, noting that "'local' is the best way to define the region's food culture" (p. 17), thus equating it with the aforementioned inherent virtues. Here we receive a broad overview of the history and current farming statistics of the area and are told that this book is "primarily a contemporary survey of agriculture and agriculture labor issues in the Hudson Valley" (p. 21). Yet what I do not sense sufficiently early in this book, or in any great detail overall, are details about the sizes of the farms in the region, the number that hire outside workers, or where they typically sell their produce (i.e. to wholesalers or at the farmers' market). The reader also begins to sense the tension between our author as unbiased researcher and, at the same time, advocate for worker's rights.

By Chapter 3, however, we have no question which side our author is on. Using in-depth interviews, we receive plenty of examples of "horrific labor exploitation" (p. 43) ranging from worker quotes about the exhausting nature of farm work, to their desire to make more than their average rate of US\$6.92 an hour (p. 45), to episodes of active discrimination against unionizing, sometimes through threat of violence. The reader cannot be left to dispute the backbreaking work on a farm, nor the fact that illegal workers are often the ones doing this work. No thoughtful locavore could argue that farming is anything less than difficult, painful and largely unappreciated work. Nevertheless, some reports in *Labor and the Locavore* do suffer from discrepancies or vagueness. For example, citing "one study," the author notes that the undocumented workers were "more likely to be paid below minimum wage" (p. 63)—which makes me wonder how prevalent this underpayment is. In fact, much of the information is presented with a similar slant; consider, for example, the author's comment on employer "paternalism" (providing employees with transportation, housing, food and other non-monetary compensation): "When a grower went out the extra mile for an employee, was it an act of goodwill or an expression of labor control? In reality, there was no way of separating these intentions" (p. 60). By establishing such a pro-worker narrative, the findings of the next chapter, illustrating the farmers' experiences, can only be seen through a lens of questioning their motives at every turn. At the end of this chapter I was left sympathizing greatly with the plight of the workers—but also feeling as if their stories were serving to demonize all farmers, many of whom were trying to mitigate situations beyond their control.

Finally, in Chapter 4 we learn the story from the farmers' perspective—and receive more detailed statistics on the size of farms in the Hudson Valley: 72 percent of farms earn less than US\$25,000 a year, and of the remaining 28 percent, more than half earn above US\$100,000 a year. Gray clarifies that her interviews were restricted to those farmers with medium and large farms (making over US\$50,000 annually) (p. 70)—meaning that three-quarters of the farms in the area go unrepresented. The interviews with the farmers do point out the stresses faced by so many farmers—large and small: complicated and sometimes illogical government regulation, very slim profit margins, and intensive harvests that require the aforementioned difficult work. What is unclear, however, is just how representative these stories are of the farmers in the area.

I was left conflicted about Gray's argument until the final chapter—sympathizing with the workers, certainly, but also with all farmers in the study area—who would now be the subject of scrutiny or ire—and possibly lost sales—from newly enraged locavores. That said, I could not help but agree with Gray's comment that her book is a “call for the inclusion of labor rights alongside environmental concerns and animal welfare in conversation and activism related to the food movement” (p. 129)—an important goal and one any conscientious consumer should support. At first glance, however, I fear that the vague representation of where these farmworkers are actually working will leave the more casual reader throwing their hands in the air and forgoing buying from smaller “local” farms, figuring that they might just as well buy from the local mega-mart. Gray quotes another statistic that in New York State in 2007 there were 36,000 farms and 60,000 workers (p. 136)—which means that many small farms do not hire any outside help. I wish that she had made this clear sooner, rather than seeming to demonize all “local” farmers as “patrons” who seek to take advantage of workers. While she does acknowledge the benefits of buying local in this final chapter, for many it will be too little too late. I am instead left with more questions: How pervasive are these labor problems? How can consumers ask the right questions or facilitate legislation that might make a difference? Perhaps a louder call for domestic “fair trade” distinctions might be a point to make. Gray does leave the reader with good advice as to how to create change—namely that starting the conversation is a good first step. Overall, what I hoped for was a better distinction between small and large farms, more information on the pervasiveness of these well-drawn worker narratives, and a better sense of what we can do as consumers. We do not want to leave consumers feeling so hopeless so that they do not buy local for fear of perpetuating these ills. Further, the discussion around the larger issues—for example, how subsidies given to industrial farms leave many smaller farmers feeling as if they must eke out every penny from their workers, and cause consumers to balk at the rising prices of fresh vegetables. While these larger local farms can do better, they are already doing better than so many others. Acknowledgment of this fact, rather than hearing these admittedly abhorrent narratives of workers in an information vacuum, would have made this argument even sounder.



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FOOD ACTIVISM: AGENCY, DEMOCRACY, AND ECONOMY

EDITED BY CAROLE COUNIHAN AND VALERIA SINISCALCHI (LONDON: BLOOMSBURY, 2014)

Reviewed by Brenden Beck, City University of New York

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Food Activism covers a lot of ground. Its fifteen chapters, each written by a different ethnographer, report data from five continents with field sites ranging from community gardens in Seattle, to protests about genetically modified foods in Colombia, to small-scale farms in Sri Lanka. The authors jump scales and span supply chains. The movements studied range in membership size from a few dozen to a few thousand. While the book is not without its blind spots, it covers a remarkable breadth of subjects in a comparatively brief number of pages. This unique and insightful book is a useful addition to the study of social movements and food justice.

The book's chapters are divided into three sections each corresponding to a geographic scale. The first two, "Local Engagements" and "National Actions", include studies of movements that seek to change food systems in a particular local or national space such as Kyoto or France. These two sections skew towards the developed world. In the third section, "Transnational Networks," the focus turns to the global south.

A typical chapter traces the history and organization of a food movement, quotes its current membership, and explains its theoretical and geographic context. For instance, anthropologist Daniel Reichman chronicles Utz Certified, an organization that certifies the agricultural, environmental and labor practices of coffee and other commodity producers. Reichman takes us to the group's origin, contrasts it with other similar groups, and details the lives of the coffee growers it is meant to help. He deftly navigates different geographic and structural levels as he describes how international market fluctuations, corporate actions and foreign aid programs interact with life in a Honduran coffee town.

In one of the book's standout chapters, Brigit Müller fruitfully explores the conflict between farmer activists in Canada's grain-producing west and consumer activists in the country's eastern cities. When the federal government there considered dismantling the Wheat Board, a regulation that had protected wheat farmers from market speculation, the National Farmer's Union appealed to "non-farmer Canadian citizens" to help maintain the board (p. 138). Few eastern food activists heeded the call because, Müller finds, the farmer's union practiced large-scale and non-organic growing practices that did not align with the eater activists' health demands. Müller demonstrates the cultural and geographic gaps between farmers and consumers, as well as gaps within the farmers' coalition. Müller also expertly uses quotes from her informants to reveal why some of the farmers opposed a Wheat Board that would have protected them because it violated their free-market principles.

Other contributors are at their strongest when they explore such divisions in food movements. Delphine Thivet analyzes the tension between peasant farmers and non-governmental organizations in the movement for food sovereignty. She demonstrates how different ideas about the movement's representation, its goals, and its tactics lead to acrimony. The divergence between more radical and more conventional strands of a movement is also successfully explored in Reichman's comparison of Fair Trade and Utz Certified coffee certification organizations. Teresa M. Mares explores the barriers between mostly white urban farm activists in Seattle and their Latino/a neighbors. These examples of division are not the whole of the book, which chronicles many coalitions that successfully combine the power of different constituencies, but these schisms provide instructive moments when the complex dynamics of food activism become more acute.

In a chapter that promises to be the book's most controversial, Nefissa Naguib describes young members of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood who carry out some of the movement's social work by providing fruits, vegetables and bread to low-income Cairo neighborhoods. Naguib seeks to demonstrate "that theology and pragmatism are intertwined in food" (p. 145). She provides deep insight into understanding how devout activists combine their social work with their faith. Her research delves into a region and a religion that is otherwise unrepresented in the book. This unique contribution is hindered, though, by some frustrating omissions. Naguib does not provide context for her informants. We do not learn how the young Brothers fit into their families, into their country, or into a larger Muslim Brotherhood organization that was achieving unprecedented political power at the time of Naguib's interviews. The only glimpse we get of the group from outside its ranks is a short utterance by a father who is waiting to get bread from a Brotherhood-sponsored bakery. The father describes Brothers who have come to ensure an orderly distribution of bread as "food vigilantes", a chilling description that Naguib reports but does not explain (p. 150). This quote would seem to indicate that the Brotherhood's appeal is not universal, but we do not learn what the public thinks of the group. Naguib also conspicuously ignores gender, remarking on the class and education background of her informants, but ignoring their being all male. This chapter misses an opportunity to situate these actors and elucidate the Brotherhood's popular appeal.

While the Muslim Brotherhood defies easy political categorization, its politics are decidedly more conservative than the bulk of the movements in *Food Activism*. Across the chapters, the activists share common ideologies and common villains. While the book's introduction promises that food activists "cover ... the entire spectrum from left to right" (p. 5), most of the book's social movements fall on the left. Multi-national corporations, privatization and agri-business are the antagonists in at least seven of the chapters. "Food security", a term favored by mainstream government actors and policymakers, is mentioned critically in several chapters, while "food sovereignty", a term preferred by leftist activists, is discussed reverently in nearly every chapter, including by one Muslim Brotherhood respondent (p. 147). The market-



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oriented Utz Certified is an exception to the mostly leftist groups. Reichman describes Utz as “not tied to a particular set of ... political values beyond the value of transparency itself” (p. 160). This declaration of non-ideology is belied by Reichman’s data. He demonstrates how Utz combines free-market solutions with environmental, agricultural, and workplace safety norms into a decidedly centrist stance. Utz and the Muslim Brotherhood provide instructive counterbalances to the otherwise leftist groups and their work for food justice raises interesting questions about how such disparate ideologies can all participate in the same broad movement.

Although the groups do not always share similar demographics or geographies, *Food Activism*’s authors share common methods. Mostly anthropologists, their different approaches to ethnography and participant observation demonstrate useful contrasts. Some researchers keep a tight focus on a few members of their social movement, providing long block quotes and biographic details. Mares, for instance, gives her white informants room to explain how they think about outreach to Latino/as so we get a nuanced picture of how they confront their work. Other authors zoom out, like Müller in her discussion of Canadian wheat farmers, providing quotes from and descriptions of various disparate players in multiple positions around an issue.

For better or worse, the book does not interrogate why food sovereignty is good. How will community gardens help Latina immigrants in Seattle? Why are genetically modified foods bad? This book takes the answers to these questions for granted, and doing so means the authors can be more precise. It also means that people outside the movement should choose a different place to start their learning. Another way in which the book is pitched to fellow food researchers is that it assumes a working knowledge of the terminology and issues common to food activism. As one author puts it “many readers of this volume will no doubt be familiar with the basics of the fair trade certification and labeling system” (p. 162). Although the author goes on to explain the system to readers who are not familiar, this chapter is representative in that it does not dwell on definitions or background explanations. By assuming some knowledge, the book provides a high density of information for the fellow food researcher, but will require careful rereading by a novice.

Though not a handbook for change, *Food Activism* will prove useful for food activists. The discussions of movements’ successes and failures, while not the focus of the book, will help current organizers strategize and might help them feel less alone in their struggle. The case studies provide examples that might prevent an activist from having to reinvent the wheel. In addition to activists, researchers of social movements and of food will obviously benefit from reading this work. Less obviously, sociologists and anthropologists of organizations will also find many trenchant observations here. It is often hard for researchers to trace the growth of an organization from its meager, uncertain beginnings through to its institutionalized forms. Many scholars of organizations study established groups because of time constraints and the risk of studying an organization that fails, curtailing the research. In this volume, Joan Gross’s

participant observation of a group advocating for locally sourced food in Western Oregon is a rare, fine-grained, longitudinal analysis of an organization transforming from a fledgling volunteer-run collective to a more developed, bureaucratized non-profit. The density of information in this slim volume will pay dividends to interested scholars. The tales of struggle for food justice will give hope to all growers and eaters.

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Guide to Submissions

Food Culture and Society is an academic journal committed to the promulgation of the latest research findings in any academic discipline that deals with the intersection of food and culture/society as broadly conceived. We regularly publish works in both traditional scholarly fields such as Anthropology, Sociology, History, Philosophy, Literary Studies, etc., and we also welcome multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary works which challenge prevailing academic boundaries. We expect that submissions will adhere to accepted standards of research methodology, providing substantial evidence to support clear and well-argued theses and employ accepted forms of citation suited to each discipline. We also expect authors to carefully consider our audience which consists of informed food scholars rather than specialists in a particular field. Thus, we ask authors to avoid jargon and fully explain any methodology or results which are unlikely to be understood by our readers. We do not normally publish works of scientific research in fields such as nutrition, physiology or food science, unless they incorporate the social sciences or humanities in a significant way.

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