

Introduction: foreign cookbooks

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1

Edward Said claims that the “veracity of a written statement about the Orient . . . relies very little and cannot instrumentally depend on the Orient as such.”¹ If the “Orient as such” cannot be represented by Western travellers and ethnographers, it is because, according to Said, the attempt to translate foreign cultural practices into one’s own language will always fail. You will only reiterate the codes, categories and prejudices of your own ethnicity. This claim seems simple enough, perhaps even irrefutable. Yet it has a curious corollary: the rigorous binding of culture to place. For if the “Orient as such” is fundamentally intransmissible, where can it be located, if not there, on the ground, among “the people”? That’s why it’s so interesting to see the approach cookery writers take to these matters. It’s radically different. The presupposition of a text like Claudia Roden’s *A Book of Middle Eastern Food* is not merely that you can know another culture, but that you don’t even have to be there to do so.² You can recreate it in your own home. You don’t even have to leave the house.

Mezze, or *hors d’oeuvre*, are “one of the most delightful features of Middle Eastern food”; Indeed, “they are almost a way of life.”³ Roden proceeds to describe how you can make that way of life your own. She gives a recipe for it: “In a large bowl, mix the rice with the tomatoes, onion or spring onions, parsley, mint, cinnamon, allspice and salt and pepper to taste.”⁴ We are making *cold stuffed vine leaves*. Roden shares with Said a reservation against collapsing the multiple cultures of the region into one homogenous entity. So she gives an Iraqi variant (use spinach leaves instead of vine leaves), and an Iranian one (add 2 tablespoons chopped dill, and 90g seedless raisins). Cultural difference is a practical matter in such literature; they do things differently there; so you vary the recipe. Of course, not all cookbooks are so positivist. Elizabeth David, who intersperses her recipes with quotes from travel writers, regularly gestures towards that world of phenomena that cannot be transmitted from abroad. But her aim “to bring a flavour of those blessed lands of sun and sea and olive trees into our English kitchens” is fundamentally the same as Roden’s.⁵ It is to transmit key features of a specific culinary environment to the at-home-reader, and to do so as authentically as possible.

If I am the first critic to accuse Said of failing to include the recipe for *cold stuffed vine leaves* in his purview of “Western conceptions of the Orient,” it is because I believe that such recipes do indeed “instrumentally depend on” the cultures from which they emanate. I am suggesting that we treat cookbook writers as cultural theorists in their own right, and take seriously their claims. To do so is

to entertain a very different understanding of the concept of representation, and, by extension, culture. Briefly put, I think the usage of these terms in much Postcolonial and Cultural Studies betrays their origin in literary studies and aesthetics, to the detriment of other ways of comprehending the form and transmission of human behaviour. It is a question of archive as much as anything. We've basically ignored technical literature like cookbooks, where the function of representation is less to provide a veridical statement about some supposed reality, or *thing-in-itself*, than to put in motion, and so replicate, a series of practices. After all, the recipes one finds in the works of writers like Roden go much further than typical ethnography in representing the Middle East. They allow for its effective recreation elsewhere. A recipe in Roden is more akin to a computer program, a chemical formula, or even a musical score, than a depiction. What's more, it's a Middle Eastern one.

These assertions will take some time to unpack. In the following pages I will attempt to show that any cuisine is capable of codification – or rather, that it is in essence code, and so is amenable to transmission. This will take me through a reflection on the chemistry of cooking, and its relation to semiosis more generally. I will then proceed to address some recent academic analyses of recipes and cookbooks, to diagnose why we, in contemporary scholarship, are so hesitant to assert that culture can be transmitted and, as such, known in places other than its place of origin. Needless to say, these are large claims. They can be made even larger. For it is not merely the possibility of representing culture across space that is at issue. In including recipes from Al Baghdadi's 1226 manuscript, Roden effectively transports a cuisine across time as well. Why not? When Ian Robertson, to cite one of my favourite cooks, offers us the recipe for *chicken in verjuice* from Bartolomeo Platina's *De Honesta Voluptate et Valetudine*, he is doing likewise: offering for our recreation "the way of life" that was Italian cuisine, in the ages prior to the New World introduction of tomatoes, maize and potatoes.⁶

2

But did Said really deny this? Wasn't his point simply that "the Orient", as practised in the West, is an ideological construct? And didn't he offer a way beyond such discursivity, in suggesting that the "most important task of all" for scholarship in the wake of Orientalism is to work out how we might "study other cultures and peoples from a libertarian, or a non-repressive and nonmanipulative perspective"?⁷ Such a quote shows that Said's critique of translation was political, and specific, rather than ontological. No it doesn't. Let me give a fuller context to the quote in my opening paragraph:

In any instance of at least written language, there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a *re-presence*, or a representation. The value, efficacy, strength, apparent veracity of a written statement about the Orient therefore relies very little and cannot instrumentally depend on the Orient as such.⁸

For Said, a presence cannot be written down. There's no way out of that. As James Clifford has shown, such Nietzschean moments run through Said's

text, contradicting and confusing his otherwise quite humanist position.⁹ You might well claim that the book *Orientalism* is as internally contradictory as Orientalism itself. Then again, what book isn't? What author isn't? One only has to consider, honestly, one's own scholarly productions to see that. The Said I take issue with is the one students of my generation consumed¹⁰ in the late 80s and early 90s, the Said who taught us, by way of colonial example, that translation is impossible. That was the Said who had most influence upon us, to the point where the critique of representation seemed, both ethically and philosophically, to be the only valid way of approaching difference.

I'm going back to the founding father in this fashion because I think it's time for some new recipes. That's why I find it so interesting to see the approach cookery writers take to these matters. For they have a theory as to how culture can be translated through time and space.

3

Most immediately, it's a matter of chemistry. When Ken Hom introduces his *Chinese Cookery* with the claim that the "recipes in this book were all tested with easily obtainable ingredients," he is referring to the curiously Popperian requirement of repeatability that pertains to the recipe.¹¹ Anyone who has ever curdled their *tomato eggflower soup* will understand why.¹² You need to set in motion a functionally identical set of chemical reactions to those enacted in Canton, where they make the soup, or it just won't work. Elizabeth David's *A Book of Mediterranean Food* is similarly peppered with words like "discovery" and "demonstration": "A handful of the recipes in this book, learned when I lived in Alexandria, Cairo and Greece, demonstrate the cooking of the Near East."¹³ A kitchen demonstration is not dissimilar to a laboratory one. It hence occasions little surprise to read that Marcella Hazan, of *The Classic Italian Cookbook*, has doctorates in natural sciences and biology.¹⁴ Attitudinally, texts like these are more disposed to physical science and its realist outlook, than to cultural theory. Hence the necessity, evinced in all three, to ensure the provision of ingredients that will allow the correct chemical processes to occur. As Ken Hom puts it, "if you want to cook authentic Chinese food there is ultimately no alternative but to track down a reliable source of the key ingredients."¹⁵

Authenticity requires biologically correct ingredients for its transmission, but – and this is interesting – it seems to bear no nostalgia for locally specific foodstuffs. An author like Hom is aware of the massive transplantation of domestic crops ("the biggest human intervention in environmental history since the beginnings of species domestication"¹⁶) that has taken place over the last 500 years. After all, *tomato eggflower soup* relies on a product "introduced into China less than 200 years ago," probably by the Portuguese, who themselves received it from the Americas.¹⁷ As for contemporary globalisation, it has its advantages: "one of the most positive and benign results" being that you can now find "fresh ginger, bok choy and a limited spectrum of Chinese sauces and condiments" almost anywhere in Europe, America or Australia.¹⁸

It is instructive to compare the status of a term like “authenticity” in contemporary scholarship. For Colin Graham, “the paths of decline and difficulty on which authenticity depends,” predispose it to nostalgia.¹⁹ Graham’s work on Irish tourist advertisements seeks to show that the discourse of “authenticity” is in fact far more canny than the standard deconstruction will allow. Yet he has little to say about those situations where “authenticity” is given substantive, as opposed to merely rhetorical, power. Whereas for Hom, authenticity has nothing to do with rhetoric; it is a real measure of chemical and stylistic adequation; a measure of whether you have cooked the same food that they eat in Hong Kong, or not. Again, I think we should take such claims seriously, and see where they lead. For what is most interesting about Hom’s positivist usage is that it implies – and this is decidedly *not* nostalgic – that cultural authenticity transcends the specifics of place. Hong Kong, as he puts it in another context, “is not only a geographic place, it is also a state of mind.”²⁰ It is hard to read “decline and difficulty” into that statement, or, for that matter, into its author’s embrace of globalisation. I would suggest, contra Graham, that the real definition of nostalgia is the idea that culture is inseparable from place. Hom could not be further from such a rhetoric of origins.

In arguing that the discourse of authenticity in cookbooks applies less to place or provenance, than to the chemical properties of ingredients, I have sought to depict something of the real which cookbooks treat, and necessarily get right. This is not, however, to say that culinary transmission is simply a function of brute physical processes. The easiest way to disabuse oneself of such a notion is to turn to the virtual cookbook, a much more common phenomenon than one might think.

Let me introduce it negatively. In a recent essay, Elaine Showalter expresses her distaste with the growing intellectual interest in Food Studies. Citing a preference for an earlier generation of writers like Elizabeth David, Betty Fussell and M. K. Fisher, Showalter worries about whether “the simple pleasures of cooking and eating” will survive their current intellectualisation: “The next phase, perhaps, will be virtual or conceptual food, where the food is not only deconstructed but imaginary.”²¹ Showalter’s comments are intended ironically. The truly funny thing, however, is that the “next phase” she prophesies has actually always been with us. Cookery writers have always been alive to the virtuality of what they transmit. In her *Book of Mediterranean Food*, Elizabeth David insists upon correct ingredients and at times even furnishes addresses for their acquisition:

Dried fennel twigs from Provence, as also dried wild thyme on the stalk, and dried whole basil, can be bought from L. Roche, 14 Old Compton Street, London W1.²²

But such particulars should not lull one into thinking that *A Book of Mediterranean Food* was in any way a practical text. Published in 1950, at a time when the meat ration was “a few ounces a week,” and the public diet confined to little more than beans and potatoes, most of the recipes in the book simply could not be cooked. David’s inclusion of dishes like *Turkish stuffing for a whole roast sheep*, only heightened the “spirit of defiance” in which the book was written, and by means of which it achieved its huge popularity. For the book’s introductory aim (“I hope to give some idea of the lovely cookery of those regions”) must be understood quite

literally. David conveyed an “idea” of these cuisines, a possibility for their intellectual re-creation, a formula that would serve – in the absence of the food itself – “to bring a flavour of those blessed lands of sun and sea and olive trees into their English kitchens.” A formula for sight-reading.²³

Such virtual pleasures go even further to problematising the anti-positivism we imbibed in the 80s and 90s, when Postcolonial Studies was first making its institutional presence felt. Even in the absence of actual ingredients you can transmit an “idea of the lovely cooking... a flavour of those blessed lands.” What is more, that representation can then be activated years later, once the requisite ingredients are available. Such a transition from real to virtual to real only makes sense if you hold to a positivist theory of representation, only if you hold that it is indeed possible to give an adequate linguistic representation of the being of a cuisine. But how is this possible? How, given the way post-structuralism has served to undermine any claim to a transparent relationship between the word and the world to which it refers, can one hold to such a position?

I want to answer this in two parts. The first step involves the assertion that any individual dish, in all its chemical particularity, and regardless of whether it has been inscribed in a cookbook or not, is already a representation. What I mean by this is that the chemical compounds and physical practices that go to making up a dish are not merely the specific material of a cuisine, but also the sites for the enactment/inscription of a general set of social practices. Just as the commodity in Marxist theory is at once an empirical object, and at the same time a social inscription of the labour time that, on the average, and thus in the abstract, goes into producing it, so too, any empirically given culinary product is simultaneously inscribed with a generalised way of doing chemistry. That general way of doing, and its particular instantiations, together make up a cuisine. For it is as a form of writing, as code, that cuisine is transmitted both within, and beyond, its time and place of provenance. For it to be written down in recipe form presents no barriers to its transmission because it was already in that form. Jacques Derrida will, in like fashion, use the word “writing” to describe behaviours like choreography, painting, sculpture, athletics, and even biology: “All this to describe not only the system of notation secondarily connected with these activities but the essence and content of the activities themselves.”²⁴ A cuisine is already a form of writing.

The philosophical implications of such a stance are more than a little curious. For when Hom claims that “the time and conditions are both propitious for the universal enjoyment of Chinese cookery,” this enjoyment, considered as the universalisation of a specifically Chinese way of writing, forms an intriguing riposte to Hegel’s world-history.²⁵ How would the Eurocentric trajectory of Absolute Knowledge as the writing of consciousness fare against this notion of writing as technique? You eat it.

But I’m not simply philosophising here. You find a similar understanding of culinary identity within the cookbooks themselves. This is most obvious when you see how cookery writers deal with variants and adaptations. Ken Hom’s *cashew chicken*, for instance, uses cashews where “the original Chinese version would have been made with peanuts.” Hom justifies the recipe’s inclusion in a book of *Chinese Cookery* on the grounds that it “uses the best Chinese cooking

principles: velveting to seal in the juices of the chicken, and then stir-frying with spices to flavour it.” Of a Beijing recipe for *braised chicken with leeks*, Hom suggests using a Chinese clay pot, but adds that “any heavy casserole will do.”²⁶ The phrases “any *x* will do” and “makes a good substitute” are part of the vocabulary of such cookbooks.²⁷ For the cookery writers know²⁸ that the thing they are cooking and transmitting is as much *a way of writing x*, as any specific set of ingredients, utensils or chemical reactions. A writer like Hom is simply giving an algebra for what is already – prior to all recipes and cookbooks – algebraic in form. That’s why it can be copied so adequately. I suggested above that all cookery writers are positivists, including those, like David, with slight misgivings. But that is perhaps the wrong way to put it. Positivism is a property of the cuisine as much as the author it is channelled through. For a dish, once in circulation, – you could just as well submit “publication” for “circulation” here; there’s no reason why the word “publication” (Latin *publicus*, the people) has to be confined to print-media, or for that matter, to print-literate societies—effectively says of any of its ingredients, be it a chicken, a few leeks or whatever: *any empirical instance of this ingredient, any such x, will do*. Which is why you can pluck it out of reality, put it into a cookbook, and then make it again, fifty years later. It is already a recipe.

The second step, in showing that cookbooks can serve to give an adequate representation of culinary reality, involves the question of repetition. For a dish may well be a recipe in itself, and so be amenable to re-presentation in recipe form, but this by no means guarantees an identity between the one instance and the other. Surely this is the point of post-structuralist semiotics: repetition necessarily entails difference. This is true, and nowhere is it more obvious than in the difference between food-as-recipe (the *tomato eggflower soup* I ate last night) and recipe-as-recipe (the virtual experience I had of that dish when first reading the recipe). Yet the same argument could apply each time a given dish is cooked. You could argue that each time you cook the same dish, you are actually cooking a different dish, that there is no such thing as culinary identity. But it would be truer to the usage of my cookbooks to claim that a dish has a general being, whose particular instances serve, at the limit, and in their very difference, to convey a functionally identical set of practices. After all, it’s only on those grounds that you can criticise people who get the dish wrong. It’s only on those grounds that you can critique foreign cookbooks for the way they tend to hypostatise national cultures as ethnic unities, the way they tend to ignore much of the food people actually do eat, e.g., McDonalds. Indeed, you can critique any representation. But the critique cannot exist without a belief in representation’s potential adequacy. Personally, I’m far more amazed by those worlds writing does transmit. Why else read?

This is what I was flagging above, in suggesting Postcolonial Studies shift from a literary/aesthetic view of representation-as-depiction, with its nostalgia for a being of culture ever outside of signification, to a technical view, which would focus on how a representation – whether in food, print, or any other material – serves to replicate a general set of practices. I think this is the best way to understand Felipe Fernández Armesto’s otherwise odd equation between cuisine and technology: “Like other forms of technology, cuisine is easily imitated and transferred.”²⁹ Armesto is describing the fascinating influence, indeed

dominance, of “the culinary arts of Muslim courts” over the royal kitchens of medieval Europe, as can be seen from the cookery manuscripts of the latter. Armesto’s usage of the word technology is fascinating because it collapses the apparent distinction between the social and the mechanical (not to mention the medieval and the modern). Both consist of the material instantiation and repetition of general practices. And both can be imitated and transferred.

At this point I want to make a large claim. If a cuisine can be understood as a technology, and a recipe can be understood as a technology too, why should a culture be understood any differently? In asking this question I am pushing my usage of cookbooks as cultural theory to the extreme. And in the process I am seeking further to undermine the notion that culture is intransmissibly anchored to any specific place. On the contrary, its generality – or repeatability – is its very being. That’s true of any way of writing.

4

But why are we so reluctant to view culture as a technical phenomenon, “easily imitated and transferred”? Why is it so much more comfortable to think, as one’s fallback position, that culture is fundamentally intransmissible, ever bound to particular peoples and places? I want to suggest some reasons for this impasse, before proceeding to introduce the new writings – I might even say, the new technologies – that make up this special issue of *Postcolonial Studies*.

There is perhaps no more vivid example of this reluctance than in academic writings on cookbooks. In seeking to show how their “compilers saw themselves and projected their values” through focusing on “the stories they contain, fragmentary as those stories might be,” articles such as Anne Bower’s reading of North American community cookbooks show a marked reluctance to engage with the technical function of the recipes themselves.³⁰ For Bower,

a community cookbook is a subtle gap-ridden kind of artefact, that asks its reader (at least the reader who seeks more than recipes) to fill those gaps with social and culinary history.³¹

Reading, in such an article, is a sort of rescue operation, aimed at a truth (of the past, of the present) ever out of view. It is interesting to compare Roden in this respect, for she includes Middle Eastern tales, poems and descriptions of rituals in her cookbook, on the grounds that such peripheral discourse “will make the dishes more interesting and familiar by placing them in their natural and traditional setting.”³² These stories – contra Bower – are clearly of secondary importance to the recipes as agents of cultural transmission. Yet in as much as they serve to make the cuisine and its setting more “familiar” their function is just as technical. One could, of course, seek to rescue a truth hidden in these texts of Roden’s, by treating them as evidence for the discursive productions of a certain (1960s, London, Jewish) diasporic consciousness. To my mind it is more interesting, once more, to take the author at her word, to see where it will lead. For Roden, her stories and poems have a technical function; they are means of re-creating, albeit virtually,

key aspects of a Middle Eastern “way of life.” The implication is that these poems and stories are themselves recipes.

Mind, most of the academic writers I have read end up implying just this. In her “Recipes for Reading,” Susan Leonardi critiques the editing of Irma Rombauer’s *The Joy of Cooking*, and in the process shows a clear distaste for the unadorned recipe, that “mere rule for cooking.”³³ Leonardi dislikes the way Rombauer’s later editors, influenced by “the fifties penchant for science in the kitchen,” acted to eliminate the literary references and autobiographical chit-chat found in the initial 1930 publication. As Leonardi puts it, “the shift away from recipe as highly embedded discourse akin to literary discourse moves the recipe away from its social context.” My argument problematises this claim, because it asserts that a recipe is itself a social context. But Leonardi herself goes some way toward collapsing the opposition she asserts between the social and the technical. For she is intrigued by the notion that a narrative can, just like a recipe, be reproduced: “folktales, ghost stories, jokes and recipes willingly undergo such repetition and revision.” Focussing on the giving and exchanging of recipes leads her to question whether a narrative might not itself function as “a kind of recipe”; in the case of Nora Ephron’s novel *Heartburn*, a recipe for “how to survive a disastrous marriage” If stories are hence understood as recipes, this lends a certain sense to Leonardi’s critique of the pared-down fifties edition of *The Joy of Cooking*. For by reducing the peripheral text, the editors effectively reduced the number of recipes in the book.³⁴

But if Leonardi is effectively releasing poems, stories and novels from the unfortunate particularism of an overly Romanticist critical tradition, why does she need to *seem* still to subscribe to that tradition? This returns me to the question I have raised throughout this paper. Why have we been so reluctant to allow that a culture can be transmitted and, as such, experienced outside its place of origin?

Perhaps because it implicates us. As Charles Saunders Peirce argued, the meaning of anything is simply the events it leads to.³⁵ Under Peirce’s definition, the meaning of a book is not what it seems to say about the world, but what effects it has upon the world, which include what effects it has upon us. To think this way allows for a very different reading of Said’s *Orientalism*, the text with which I opened this article. For *Orientalism* was, alongside Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*, one of the most successful political interventions of twentieth century scholarship. Whole disciplines were challenged to the core by it. As an example of intellectual politics, of disciplinary strategy, Said’s book is hard to surpass. It may well be – if we take it this way, and I’m suggesting we should, and perhaps already have, even in spite of ourselves – it may well be that the prime meaning of that work is the recipe it gives for how to break into an oppressive knowledge field and cause havoc there. For what I am calling a technical model of representation is equally a model for how one becomes influenced – i.e., transformed – by other ways of writing the real. And that includes the ethical possibility of allowing oneself to be so influenced. In other words, it’s also a theory of learning.

Which is quite a scary possibility. It is instructive to read Lisa Heldke’s comments on her restaurant and at-home travels through the cuisines of various

INTRODUCTION

cultures. “When I went away to graduate school,” Heldke writes, “I entered a world of experimental cooking and eating.”³⁶ Yet something

made me feel uncomfortable about the easy acquisitiveness with which I approached a new kind of food, the tenacity with which I collected adventures. Was such collecting really such a benign recreation, like stamp collecting? . . . The unflattering name I chose for my activities was “cultural food colonialism” which made me your basic coloniser. . . I found echoes of nineteenth and early-twentieth century European painters and explorers, who set out in search of ever “newer,” ever more “remote” cultures they could co-opt, borrow from freely and out of context, and use as raw materials for their own efforts at creation and discovery.³⁷

It seems to me that the thing to render one anxious here is the possibility of learning, a far more traumatic process than one might think. Heldke’s comments, a directly contrary view of the possibility of cultural transmission to that posed by Said (or at least, a certain Said), suggests that it is far more disturbing to imagine that culture can be transmitted than to think of it as an ever veiled *an-sich* of inarticulate place or being. Heldke thinks like a cook.

5

Heldke thinks like a cook, because she thinks through her distaste. Describing the late twentieth century diffusion of olive eating among non-Mediterraneans across the Atlantic, and into South Africa and Australia as well, Margaret Visser writes that “human beings. . . are unique among omnivorous mammals in continuing to try eating foods they find repellent in the beginning.”³⁸ The olive is, after all, a hard taste to acquire, albeit a difficult one to relinquish once acquired. I want to suggest – to conclude my argument here, and by way of introduction to the texts that follow – that Postcolonial Studies take the anxieties Heldke evinces as a new point of departure.

We need to rethink just what it is to “co-opt, borrow from freely and out of context,” and why we so often regard it as such a bad thing. I’m not discounting this possibility, to the contrary – theft needs to be called theft.³⁹ I simply want to put my finger on the fact that cultural appropriation might betoken other possibilities – like dialogue, or learning. It is interesting, to mention another such possibility, to see Heldke associate “creation and discovery” with this process. I don’t think we have sufficiently thought through why that association makes sense, nor whether creation might not itself, like learning, be a cause of anxiety. I say this because I suspect that what often lay behind our Saidian critiques of representation was an anxiety about the contrary possibility, the possibility that something might indeed be taken on board from the Other, to become us.

To explain where this suspicion comes from, I am going to table some ideas from Roberto Schwarz, a Brazilian literary scholar and Marxist theorist, whose insistence on the reality of cultural transmission grounds his analysis of colonial and neo-colonial Brazil. As will be apparent, this approach affords Schwarz a directly contrary perspective on cultural appropriation to Heldke’s. Having set

forth some of Schwarz's ideas, I will then proceed to introduce the work that comprises this issue.

In an interview entitled "Beware of Alien Ideologies," Schwarz argues that

[a]nyone who deals with literary history – or to give another example, with the history of technology – cannot escape the idea of external influence, because these are areas in which the history of Brazil always appears as something backward, as a continual process of keeping up.⁴⁰

Schwarz is responding to Maria Sylvia de Carvalho Franco, who had critiqued his earlier work on "the importing of the novel to Brazil." Franco, critical of the notion that European ideas had travelled to Brazil and colonised the local literary product, sought to reassert the particularity of Brazilian culture, on the grounds that "ideas are a *social product*." Schwarz does not deny this claim, "but I still think that they travel."⁴¹ His point, and the point of his "Brazilian Culture: Nationalism by Elimination", which travelled to the *New Left Review* in 1988, is that Brazil literally is backward. The "artificial, inauthentic and imitative nature of our cultural life" is a simple fact for Schwarz, one caused by "forms of inequality so brutal that they lack the minimal reciprocity" necessary to foment a representative relationship between artist and populace.⁴² The distance of elite cultural producers from the social life of the majority of the population, itself a function of Brazil's skewed role in the global economy, necessarily inclines that elite to rely on foreign recipes, out-of-date ones at that.

Commentators outside Brazil who have proceeded to use Schwarz's work have tended to focus on his corollary claim, the idea that such a "morphology of underdevelopment" does, in exceptional cases, give birth to "incredibly original" works among those rare artists (e.g., Machado de Assis) who can stare this predicament in the face, and make literature of the disparities it occasions.⁴³ This Third World literature of *slippage*, if I can call it that, has been widely celebrated.⁴⁴ The reality of the imitative – and more than imitative, directly transmissional – processes which occasioned it tends to disappear in the process. Yet what Schwarz is really doing is analysing the economic forms which make contemporary Brazilian cultural production so North American. One could say the same for Franco Moretti, in relation to his complementary work on "Planet Hollywood".⁴⁵ For it is only by accepting that writing acts to give cultural forms *not merely* their slippages, *but also* their adequacy and internal consistency across time and space, that one can speak to the various forms of "interdependence" in which we find ourselves.⁴⁶ How else is one to explain the processes by which Brazil, and the rest of the world, becomes so North American? How else is one to see limits to those processes?

The political charge of Schwarz's analysis is predicated upon the thesis that culture is transmitted. Only, for him, the appropriation to worry about is *the reverse* to that which unsettles Heldke. It is the appropriation of European and North American culture by Brazil! He realises, again contra Heldke, that it is *you* who are colonised by the discourses you consume. The cogency of such ways of thinking cultural appropriation will hopefully be apparent, and, what is more, useful. For that is why Schwarz writes. To be of use. Who does not? Though we

need to keep in mind that to be of use also means, for someone with a message to spread, to use us. This is the point at which to introduce Merlinda Bobis' "The Making-Better Herb," and with that story this special issue of *Postcolonial Studies*. "It is like a short variety of *kogon* grass," the making-better herb, and the story of its planting in a remote Filipino village hits you in the eyes. Bobis forces her reader's focus upon complicities that hurt to consider. It moves too fast, and if you are left with the feeling that you have been made better, or even worse, without yet quite knowing how, there is a reason for all this. Bobis tells us why: "So we can make better the truth that we speak."

Bobis' story is followed by a painting, number 13 in Mariángeles Soto-Díaz's "On Sugar, Spice, and other Delectable Abstractions" series. The main reason this image been placed after Bobis' work is because it's so soothing. Though it has an agenda to think through us too, as will be apparent further on. As for this special issue, on the topic of *Postcolonial Food*, it comprises a series of texts submitted in response to the proposition you find on the front cover. Mine – the arguments about cookbooks, writing, translation and learning taking up the preceding pages – is just one of them.

Wendy Foley's article "Tradition and Change in Urban Indigenous Food Practices" traces the way social and economic disadvantage effects food choices for the indigenous Australians who make up her inner Brisbane subjects. There is real resonance here with Schwarz's analysis of the "morphology of underdevelopment" effecting Brazilian cultural production, the work I discussed above. Yet where Schwarz's argument is broadly posed, Foley's is grounded in participant observation and interview. The approach is revealing, as when Foley questions her interviewees about their willingness to try out different cuisines. "Karen", questioned on this score, explains her reluctance to experiment by describing a recent attempt of hers. Her boys didn't like it; "that's \$4 worth of waste to me." Such an anecdote – how many of our readers would think twice about potentially wasting \$4? – makes starkly clear that an openness to learning and difference only goes so far. Learning costs. Foley's position is complex. As well as unpacking the reasons why Indigenous Australians have such a restricted and often directly harmful diet, her work shows a clear pride in that heritage, described as "plain food – meat, flour products, sugar and lard or dripping" (which of course includes KFC and McDonalds, and reaches back to a pre-colonial hunter-gatherer privileging of meat over other foodstuffs too).

Rachel O'Reilly's "Cooking Stories" describes an exhibition of that name curated by Julia Shiels and housed at the Melbourne Immigration Museum. Participants were asked to provide a recipe reminiscent of their experience of migration, refuge and/or incarceration, and a short explanatory text. Boris Kiner's text is as follows: "I never ever want to go back to Moldova, I have no feelings for my country and it is no longer part of my life, except for this traditional recipe." O'Reilly's own prose matches the style of such deeply historied utterances. Individual sentences contain whole stories. Others articulate wide ranging theses on themes as general and incisive as "the connection of identity to singular historic moments." Joshua Sofaer performs a similar series of transitions between individual and global history in "Yellow Potatoes", which he

co-wrote (in a number of senses) with his grandmother Rachel Sofaer. Mind, such transitions are by no means unproblematic. An investigation into the author's Indian Jewish ethnicity, through the food he received as his culinary inheritance, Sofaer's piece turns into a startling deconstruction of the very possibility of tradition.

Appearing in article, photo essay and recipe form, Sofaer's text is multiply genred. This issue is too. The brief of *Postcolonial Studies* has been widened in this case to incorporate creative work as well as traditional academic articles. There seems to have been a real cross-pollination in the process. One of the real delights for me, in reading the formally academic articles, has been to see just how individually voiced the writing is. People are really saying something here, and that necessarily gives a unique tone to their words (Kierkegaard: "everyone who really has thoughts has also style immediately").⁴⁷ Mieke Bal's "Food, Form and Visibility: the Aesthetics of Everyday Life" is one such text. It concerns her work with filmmaker Shahram Entekhabi. The pair have trained their lenses on the Middle Eastern habit of eating sunflower, pumpkin and other such seeds on the street, seeds whose shells are now appearing on the footpaths and kerbs of European neighbourhoods marked by migration (and art galleries). For Bal, this film-making project is also academic, in that it helps her think through the "look" of a city, and its almost imperceptible changing over time. Yet if this article tracks Postcolonial Food, through both culinary and visual domains, it is also serves to articulate a veritable aesthetics. The work of art emerges from Bal's investigation as that which "enables us to learn to see what, by lack of recognisable form, seems invisible." You could call this a theory of pedagogy too.

In the course of her argument, Bal comments on food's tendency to signify both "recognition and difference", a signification it performs though our very senses, several of them at once. We can see in these comments the affinity of a theme like *Postcolonial Food* to the question of intercultural learning, which of course involves one's body too. The fact that one's tastes can harden validates Bal's further statement that food, by dint of the "recognition and difference" it conveys, "has something in common with media coverage." For the latter works through habituation too: "within the semantic field thus established, every incident becomes recognisable from earlier news items." This tastes good, that's disgusting. May Joseph's "Pillage Feast" plays havoc with such embodied knowledge, her persona's New York city café suddenly surging with repulsion, coffee only just washing down newspaper accounts of the Coalition of the Willing's atrocities in Baghdad. Joseph reminds us that we take in postcolonial food in many different ways. For the Bush and Howard administrations do not merely habituate their subjects to stock images of racial prejudice. On another level, they just simply disgust us to the point where we don't want to know.

Sunil Govinnage's "The Vanished Trails" also deals with questions of ethnic recognition and difference, in its tale of Anura, an unemployed Sri Lankan immigrant to Australia, who in a Sydney restaurant vents his prejudice against the Indians who "come here and grab our jobs". Food is less the medium of distaste in this scene than the site for labour – and argument. The story is given from

INTRODUCTION

the perspective of Anura's old school friend Siri, who is visiting from Perth. Siri's relative openness to difference provides some interesting insights into postcolonial learning. For it is not the case that Siri simply abandons his Sri Lanka heritage, to adopt an Australian one. It is rather that he finds a way to imagine that heritage in local terms: a visit to Botany Bay is superimposed, in his mind's eye, with an earlier vision of the Colombo dockyard near where he grew up (and with it, the recognition that all such places, all such trails, will disappear and change in time...). Is the capacity to feel the presence of one's own origins in fact a prerequisite for accepting difference and change?

Alcohol, among the Samburu of Northern Kenya, is regarded as a "food of the elders." Introduced for a complex, and often contradictory, set of reasons by the British as recently as the 1950s, this food is thus very new to the Samburu. Its legitimate consumption is the preserve of married men who have passed through their time as bachelor warriors and so developed their *nkanyit*, or sense of respect. In "The Drunken Chief: Alcohol, Power and the Birth of the State in Samburu District, Northern Kenya," Jon Holtzman addresses the widespread drunkenness among Samburu chiefs. As he shows, the series of behaviours associated with that drunkenness are directly contradictory to the traditional virtues *nkanyit* embodies. One might have been tempted to portray alcohol's recent introduction as the cause of a decline in indigenous traditions. Holtzman argues that alcohol serves to preserve them. For drunkenness has the virtue of excusing the various abuses that the chiefs, in their role as officials of the corrupt Kenyan state, necessarily commit. That is to say, the Samburu preserve *nkanyit*, by fetishising the agency of alcohol to subvert it.

I say fetishising because, as Holtzman makes clear, the myriad different behaviours associated with alcohol have far less to do with its "psychoactive effects", than with the forms of alternate subjectivity a given culture decides to licence through it. In a similar light one might understand the way drugs like marijuana and ecstasy have fuelled the U.K. dance party scene over the last two decades, and so allowed for an unprecedented level of interaction between populations of young people otherwise segregated by race, class and sexual orientation. Perhaps the drugs had nothing to do with it. Holtzman does not, mind, make this connection. That said, I think the translatability of his research to radically different contexts is the real measure of its value. For it strikes me that our main criterion (though we keep this strangely quiet) for judging the value of academic research is the work's capacity, however specific its ambit, to elicit analogies elsewhere. If you were to ask me for the recipe, I'd say that Holtzman shows us how to find language (a role for concepts, ideas and analyses) in a place, drunkenness, that seems so utterly beyond it.

Emma Tarlo's "A Taste of Anthropology" takes us back to the question of translation, with a personal illustration of how cuisine and culture are transmitted through time. Droitwich may now have an Indian restaurant, "clearly identifiable as the only black and white Tudor building with a gold dome above the porch," but in Tarlo's youth, the taste of India was accessed through her parents' weekly chicken curry ritual. Now an anthropologist, Tarlo recounts how Bolsts Curry Powder (hot) eventually took her into the field. To uncover similarly material

causes for one's own academic trajectory can be an unsettling exercise. Do things really speak through us so powerfully? Number 19 in Mariángeles Soto-Díaz's "On Sugar, Spice, and other Delectable Abstractions" series follows Tarlo's story, and suggests so. Spices "have a peculiar perspective on both culture and history", Soto-Díaz writes, in the artist's statement appended here. It is at this point that you realise that both this painting, and Number 13, introduced above, were actually painted in spices. Spices have functioned as global currency, as domestic enrichment, and now as pigment. Capturing their "peculiar perspective" Soto-Díaz reminds us that art, just like culture and food, bespeaks the material processes which produce us and our histories. Her spices remind us that we take on patterns, from elsewhere. We're abstract.

I was loathe to write this introduction. Texts of this calibre effectively introduce themselves. Moreover, each introduces a world, which is to say, a way of seeing things. I hope my introduction won't blind you to the fact that any of the authors here can be taken as compass to all the rest. I've focussed on that Derridean fact that writing is all around us, within us, through us, and is generally quite happy to reproduce itself regardless of what we think – or rather, until we decide to think. . . I've done so because I want to see the field head in a particular direction.

But mine's not the only compass. If you start with Young Rae Oum's "Authenticity and Representation: Cuisines and Identities in Korean-American Diaspora" you'll read these articles through her reminder of the continuing importance of anti-orientalist critique. The key term here is "lack". As Oum shows, Korean American cookbooks consistently introduce Korean cuisine in terms of what it lacks relative to Western norms (e.g., it lacks a 3 course structure). Her putative Korean equivalent is revealing: "American cuisine lacks the concepts of *dagwasang* (a table of drinks, fruits, rice cakes and cookies), *juansang* (wine and accompanying dishes), or *myongsang* (noodles and accompanying dishes)". One could imagine a whole series of such estranging readings of the Eurocentric West. The important thing to note here, however, is the aim of Oum's project. She is *not* claiming that any culture will read its own blind-spots into its depiction of the other. To the contrary, she is critiquing representations that articulate difference by way of "lack" on the grounds that it is possible to provide better.

Reading the rest of this issue through Oum's work, you are reminded that the function of critique is actually quite similar to that of creative practice. There is a belief in the potential of language inherent to both practices. "So we can make better the truth that we speak." I cite Bobis' words again, and can't help thinking that something like this, all Nietzscheanism aside, fired Said's massive critique too. As for Oum, her critique is paired, in this same article, with a nuanced attempt to outline the specificities of Korean national cuisine. In all its discursive and politically manipulated actuality, there is, for Oum, such a thing. To this end she analyses cookbooks produced in Korea for Koreans. The categories through which that cuisine defines itself emerge as markedly different to those found in the cookbooks I have been citing above. As such, Oum's article begins to remedy a real lacuna in contemporary scholarship: the comparative study of different

INTRODUCTION

cultures' cookbooks (which will have to include the study of their foreign cookbooks too).

I want to take this opportunity to thank Managing Editor Amanda Macdonald for her huge support and guidance in the course of this project.

Notes

- ¹ E Said, *Orientalism, Western Conceptions of the Orient*, London: Penguin, 1978, p. 21.
- ² C Roden, *A Book of Middle Eastern Food*, London: Vintage, 1974.
- ³ C Roden, *A New Book of Middle Eastern Food*, new and enlarged edition London: Penguin, 1985, pp. 67–68.
- ⁴ Roden, *A New Book of Middle Eastern Food*, p. 72.
- ⁵ E David, *A Book of Mediterranean Food*, second revised edition, London: Penguin, 1991.
- ⁶ I Robertson, 'Consuming Conspirators, Platina's De Honesta Voluptate (c. 1466–7),' in *The University of Melbourne Library Journal* 1(3) Autumn/ Winter 1994, pp. 9–14.
- ⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 24.
- ⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 21.
- ⁹ J Clifford, 'On Orientalism,' in *The Predicament of Culture, Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*, Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988, p. 259.
- ¹⁰ The culinary metaphor is perhaps appropriate. As Alvin Koh put it, in 1999, "Orientalism as academic discourse, as methodology and as a whole new way in which to think about relations between East and West, has all but been shoved down the throats of eager and non-eager students alike." A Koh, 'Said's Paradoxical Identities' in *Postcolonial Studies* 4(1), 2001, pp. 105–108.
- ¹¹ K Hom, *Chinese Cookery*, London: BBC, 2001, p. 19.
- ¹² Hom, *Chinese Cookery*, p. 62.
- ¹⁴ David, *A Book of Mediterranean Food*, p. x.
- ¹⁴ M Hazan, *The Essentials of Classic Italian Cooking*, London: Macmillan, 1992, p. iii.
- ¹⁵ Hom, *Chinese Cookery*, p. 17.
- ¹⁶ F F Armesto, *Food: A History*, London, Macmillan, 2001, p. 188.
- ¹⁷ Hom, *Chinese Cookery*, p. 62.
- ¹⁸ Hom, *Chinese Cookery*, p. 15.
- ¹⁹ C Graham, 'Blame it on Maureen O'Hara: Ireland and the Trope of Authenticity,' *Cultural Studies* 15(1) 2001, p. 61.
- ²⁰ Hom, *Chinese Cookery*, p. 8.
- ²¹ E Showalter, 'My Dinner with Derrida,' in *The American Prospect Online* 13(1) 1 Jan – 14 Jan, 2002, accessed on 24/1/04 at <http://www.prospect.org/web/page.ww?section = root&name = ViewPrint&articleId = 6017>.
- ²² David, *A Book of Mediterranean Food*, p. 64.
- ²³ David, *A Book of Mediterranean Food*, p. 2; p. 8; p. x.
- ²⁴ J Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976, p. 9.
- ²⁵ Hom, *Chinese Cookery*, p. 17.
- ²⁶ Hom, *Chinese Cookery*, p. 130; p. 130; p. 134.
- ²⁷ E.g., Roden, *A New Book of Middle Eastern Food*, p. 106.
- ²⁸ Contemporary philosophy often seems quite limited in comparison. Take Andrew Benjamin's assertion that abstraction involves "the effacing of the particular's detail. Given both the distancing of location – the place of the abstract ideal is not the present – and the distancing of time – the abstract ideal is only present as a possible future – it is clear why any recourse to abstraction will have to involve the effacing of the everyday." A Benjamin, 'Having to exist', in Angelaki, *Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 5(3) December 2000 p. 52. For Benjamin, this effacing is of direct consequence to the thinking of authenticity: "Defining that which is proper to human existence beyond the world of the everyday and necessitating the denigration of the ordinary, locates the reach of the authentic as beyond the fact of existence." (p. 53) Benjamin will proceed to reject the very opposition between particular and abstract in favour of a thinking that tackles the simple present tense fact of "having to exist." Which is fine in its own way, and interesting: "to begin to think is to recognise that thinking will have already begun. The fact of existence is already an insistent presence." (p. 54). But the reason "thinking will have already begun" is that any given thought is at once an immediate articulation and a general cultural pattern. Take the word "everyday": it only means something in this sentence because of the practice of

its usage within English generally, the history of its prior utterances and the future trajectory of its receipt on this page. You can't even speak without being split through by time and space; that is what ex-sistence, or standing outside, involves: the "effacing of the everyday" is the everyday. And that is why it is susceptible to transmission. You only have to compare Claudia Roden to realise the comparative conservatism of Benjamin's view of the "ordinary." In her introduction to *A Book of Middle Eastern Food*, Roden mentions her study of Al-Baghdahdi's 1226 *Kitab al-Tabikh*, and the anonymous *Kitab al-Wusla* of 1261, adding that she included a few of the recipes from these manuscripts "because they appealed to me, and I would like to be permitted to return them to the culinary repertoire of the Middle East." (CR 17). For Roden, the "everyday" is so code-oriented that you can actually program it to assume alien (in time, or space) cultural functions, which may become "everyday" (again!) through this very process. That's positively cybernetic – and disturbing; for it opens up the possibility of appropriating what you read and putting it into practice.

²⁹ Armesto, *Food: A History*, p. 135.

³⁰ A L Bower, 'Our Sisters' Recipes: Exploring 'Community' in a Community Cookbook,' in *The Journal of Popular Culture* 31(3) Winter 1997, p. 138.

³¹ Bower, 'Our Sisters' Recipes', p. 140.

³² Roden, *A New Book of Middle Eastern Food*, p. 18.

³³ S J Leonardi, 'Recipes for Reading: Summer Pasta, Lobster à la Riseholme, and Key Lime Pie,' in *PMLA* 104(3) May 1989, p. 340.

³⁴ Leonardi, 'Recipes for Reading', p. 340; p. 342; p. 344; p. 346.

³⁵ C S Peirce, 'How to Make our Ideas Clear' in *The Essential Peirce, Selected Philosophical Writings, Vol.1, 1867–1893*, N Houser and C Kloesel (eds), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992, pp. 124–141.

³⁶ L Heldke, cited in E Showalter, 'My Dinner with Derrida.'

³⁷ Heldke in Showalter, 'My Dinner with Derrida.'

³⁸ M Visser, *Much Depends on Dinner, The Extraordinary History and Mythology, Allure and Obsessions, Perils and Taboos of an Ordinary Meal*, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987, p. 235.

³⁹ D Cuthbert's short review essay 'Beg, borrow or steal: the politics of cultural appropriation', in *Postcolonial Studies* 1(2) 1998 pp. 257–62 provides a fine overview of the problems, and makes the important point "with particular reference to indigenous peoples, that in the absence of access to land as an economic base, cultural property (whether in music, craft, art or literary genres) and intellectual property (in areas such as medicinal applications of plants, and other environmental knowledges) represent not just a base from which to maintain the specificities of culture and identity, but also the potential for an economic base." (p. 259).

⁴⁰ R Schwarz, 'Beware of Alien Ideologies,' in *Misplaced Ideas, Essays on Brazilian Culture*, ed. with intro by John Gledson, London: Verso, 1992, p. 34.

⁴¹ Schwarz, 'Beware Alien Ideologies,' p. 34.

⁴² Schwarz, 'Brazilian Culture, Nationalism by Elimination,' in *Misplaced Ideas*, p. 15.

⁴³ F Moretti, 'Planet Hollywood,' in *New Left Review* 9, May/June 2001, pp. 100–101.

⁴⁴ E G Bassnett, S and T Hariss, 'Introduction, Of Colonies, Cannibals and Vernaculars', in *Post-colonial Translation, Theory and Practice* London: Routledge, 1999, pp.1–18.

⁴⁵ F Moretti, 'Planet Hollywood,' in *New Left Review* 9, May/June 2001, pp. 90–103.

⁴⁶ Schwarz, 'Beware Alien Ideologies', p. 36.

⁴⁷ S Kierkegaard, in, *A Short Life of Kierkegaard*, W Lowrie, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970, p. 14.