Review Article

Eating Orders: Markets, Menus, and Meals*

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Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, some few to be chewed and digested. (FRANCIS BACON, “Of Studies”)

“Food studies” has arrived. Or so it would seem from the books under review and others that could have been included, many of them published since the third millennium began. Times have certainly changed. Only a few years ago it was commonplace to bemoan the lack of academic respectability for discussions of food. Not so today. As anyone who has leafed through scholarly journals or browsed in general bookstores can attest, the last decade has produced a great number of works related to food in one or another of its many forms—as material object, as symbolic form, as social process. True, most of these works fly the familiar disciplinary colors of economic, social, or cultural history, of sociology or anthropology, of literary criticism, or of more conventional disquisitions on

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nutrition, health, and diet. Even so, more is involved in this veritable glut of work than an extension of disciplinary horizons might suggest. Food has acquired an intellectual presence as a subject all its own. To appreciate the excitement of this work and its attractions for scholars of almost every persuasion entails an understanding of the issues that divide the world of food as well as the concerns that bring it together.

The topicality of food has altered the terms of the debate—and debate is the right word. For there is little agreement on how food should be studied, or whether food studies, however classified, exists at all as a distinctive discipline. On the one hand, university courses and degrees, journals and reviews have carved out a niche for food in the academy. On the other, no theory, no method gives these many studies a common denominator. On the contrary: at its most penetrating, analysis of food takes inquiry closer and closer to the central issues of several fields, and that centrality keeps studies of food from establishing food studies as a separate intellectual domain. Although they necessarily reach across disciplines, investigations of food in the past as well as in the present make the most sense, just as they make their greatest contribution, within disciplinary contexts.

The complex nature of food itself bears partial responsibility for the lack of consensus over what, intellectually, is to be done with food. The inherently unstable character of comestibles, along with the material destruction required by their consumption, dictates the many forms that food assumes in the world we live in. From production to consumption, from the material to the symbolic, food is all about transformation—of the material foodstuff, of the consuming individual in body and in spirit, and of the eating order that encompasses products and people. From production and preparation to physiological and symbolic consumption, every stage of the food cycle turns food into something else. This defining convertibility, along with the ubiquity of food in individual and social life, makes it highly unlikely that “food” as such can constitute a stable object of scrutiny of the sort needed by a proper academic field.

Does food serve as the subject or the object of explanation? Is it taken as a means or an end? Is it considered a given or a social construct? These and other questions come up repeatedly, and it is not at all clear that the common focus on food means that the works that pose them are all talking about the same thing in a useful way. Nevertheless, such theoretical and methodological diversity should not obscure the equally evident commonalities. It is essential to grasp the enterprise as such. Rather than registering disappointment at a certain absence of systemic coherence, we should applaud the sense of intellectual exploration that characterizes the best of this work. The quasi-missionary zeal, the conviction of opening up new worlds, the exhilaration of discovery—here is the vision of the intellectual and cultural territory that food studies rightly claims as its own. In short, in producing so much new work, food studies has rather suddenly and unexpectedly launched a great adventure in and for our times.

There are many means of mapping the territory that food studies has staked out for itself, and, with this need in mind, I suggest “markets,” “menus,” and “meals” as categories that enable us to identify the singular yet interconnected phenomena in the world of real foods and identifiable foodways. Markets bring foodstuffs to the consumer; menus, symbolic and real, articulate our food choices; and, finally,
meals transform the individual experience of eating into the collective enterprise of dining. Together, these categories help us to distinguish the eating orders that we inhabit and shape. They also allow us to see clearly, taking our cue from Claude Lévi-Strauss, just how good food is to think with.¹

I

Its manifest “terrestriality,” as one eighteenth-century French cookbook dubbed it, invariably affects the uses and understandings of food, drawing us back to the earth, to the grocery store, to our plates, to the inescapably material object.² Anthropologists have long made much of the material nature of food and its potent influence on the ways we view the world. Along with the ethnographers who have reconstructed the foodways of far-off peoples, historians have considered food and habits of consumption as vital elements of culture. Although unremitting attention to the material might seem to narrow rather than expand the scope of analysis, the very best work shows how powerfully the material acts on the symbolic and the social. Although the three works I have classified under material culture—Reynald Abad’s *Le Grand Marché*, Silvano Serventi and Françoise Sabban’s *Pasta*, and Pierre Boisard’s *Camembert*—all approach the foodstuff as their primary object, each takes the analysis much further. For none of these writers is food is ever “just” food. The material object always works within complex networks of social, economic, and political relations.

The distribution system that gets food from producer to consumer offers a telling example of how these food networks operate. Abad’s exhaustive investigation of the food markets in ancien régime France makes a major contribution both to food studies and to ancien régime historiography. He extends Steven Kaplan’s ground-breaking work on bread to the markets created by meat, fish, and a selection of *menues denrées*: vegetables; butter, cheese, and eggs; game and poultry; spices and olive oil.³ In contrast to bread, which was considered an absolute essential for every social class, Abad’s greater range of foodstuffs, more various and more expensive, reached fewer potential consumers. The food world delineated here is highly stratified. At the top of the hierarchy, the wealthy indulged with little re-

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¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, trans. Rodney Needham (1962; Boston, 1963), 89. Lévi-Strauss refers specifically to the choice of animals as totems for their symbolic value as opposed to their economic value as edibles. In later works, however, Lévi-Strauss demonstrated massively that what is good to eat is also good to think. See his *The Raw and the Cooked*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (1964; New York, 1969); *From Honey to Ashes*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (1967; New York, 1974); and *The Origin of Table Manners*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (1968; New York, 1978).

² “Terrestriality” (“terrestriée”) cited from *Lettre d’un patissier anglais au nouveau Cuisinier français*, appended to *Le Cuisinier gascon* (Amsterdam, 1747), 199.

straint in fresh fish, choice cuts of beef, young vegetables. At the bottom, the vast majority made do, and then infrequently, with the much cheaper preserved salt cod or herring and dried vegetables. The short life of most foods, the imperfect calibration of supply and demand, and the extravagance of aristocratic households turned *les regrattiers*, the resellers of foodstuffs, into significant agents of redistribution.

The different markets Abad examines all show the decisive link between the nature of the foodstuff—determined chiefly by its particular kind of perishability—and the organization of the relevant market. But none of the markets studied is anywhere near as simple as the prototypical association of producer and consumer assumes it to be. Even the most fundamental categories were neither obvious nor straightforward. To take one example, beef cattle were typically born in one province (*pays naisseur* or *pays d’éleve*) and worked on a farm in another for several years (*pays d’usage*) before a final fattening in a third (*pays d’embochue* or *pays d’engrais*)—all prior to the last march to the markets at Sceaux and Poissy, which supplied Paris butchers, either directly or through intermediaries. Which of the multiple sources of the *aloyau* on one’s plate should determine its origins or apportion the taxes to be paid? The extreme fragility of fish (along with the surprisingly important oysters) posed even more delicate problems of transport. As with fish today, speed was of the essence. In light of the formidable obstacles to quick transit as well as the primitive conditions of refrigeration, it is, then, absolutely astounding to find a claim in 1786 that fish could make it from the fishing vessel to Paris via the Normandy coast in fourteen or fifteen hours (405)! How many Parisians today, three-star chefs excepted, can count on similar celerity?

Any one of the three sections of Abad’s exceptionally rich book could stand on its own as an independent treatise; together, they allow him to claim that ancien régime France constituted a national market. The claim is probably excessive. That Paris drew provisions from all of France did not signify a highly integrated national market in the modern sense of the term, especially given the highly skewed distribution of sources of supply (see Abad’s conclusion, 797ff.). Yet Abad succeeds in bringing to life—and in detail as precise as it is illuminating—the diversity of the many discrete markets that fed Paris, the great numbers of individuals and institutions engaged in provisioning the capital, and, finally (following a model that became characteristic of the French economy), the articulated interest of the state in those markets as part of a concerted effort to keep the capital contented. A wonderfully revelatory citation points to the long standing of this French conception of state regulation. The “invisible hand”—the metaphor by which Adam Smith characterized the self-regulating market in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776)—turns up as early as the first part of the eighteenth century in a royal official’s injunction to the state to exercise unobtrusive but firm control of the grain market (60)—almost as if a Jansenist *rex absconditus* took it upon himself to ensure that food markets worked correctly.

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Le Grand Marché is a dense text, drawing on a truly impressive array of archival and published sources. Even so, Abad does not lose sight of his overall narrative as he expertly weaves certain figures throughout the book, making connections that would otherwise be obscured. He commonly returns both to major figures, such as Louis XIV’s finance minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert (who openly maneuvered to ensure the centrality of the beef market at Sceau, where he held land and would therefore receive revenue), and to figures only glimpsed in court cases that ended up in archives. Privileged commentators provide other links, from the successive Lieutenants Généraux de la Police to the English visitor Arthur Young to the apparently ubiquitous and invariably perceptive Louis Sébastien Mercier. Indeed, Mercier serves as a barometer of sorts, particularly because so many of his observations in Le Tableau de Paris (1781–88) turn out to be accurate indicators of market operation and consumer habits.

Despite the detail that makes Le Grand Marché so invaluable a source, Abad never forgets the larger context that makes sense of his research. He reaches across a broad spectrum of more or less well-known published sources, from memoirs to essays to works of political economy, not excluding minor poems on cheese from Brie and Pont l’Évêque. There are, in short, many hooks for readers whose knowledge of ancien régime France does not extend to beef either on or off the hoof, the finer points of fish transport, or official versus unofficial vegetable gardening. Abad fills in the particularities of each food market and charts patterns of supply lines. In some places further explanations would have been helpful for those of us less familiar with the precise working of ancien régime economic institutions such as the Ferme Générale or the Pied Fourché, and the nonspecialist and specialist alike will find the toponymic index less useful than a full topical index would have been. All readers will find it worth their while to make careful and copious notes as they thread their way through the maze of markets that the author navigates with such ease.

This work, then, uses food to open a large window—even, we might say, a full-length French window—onto the ancien régime, the many worlds of commerce, the role of the state, and the functioning of the corporations. Abad presents a world where everyday life meets the political, where the economic debates over supply and demand translate into pricing policies and guild activity, where language fluctuates along with the norms. A veritable detective in the archives, he ferrets out the telling point as well as the revelatory text. There is, however, one element that is largely missing from this world, and that is, of course, consumption. The evidence is indirect at best. Abad calculates purchases and sales of merchandise to shops only, not to individuals. Even production figures must rely on intrepid estimates, and the absence of reliable figures obviously frustrates the historian as much as it previously did the governmental officials charged with assessing revenues and setting prices.

The intellectual tradition to which Abad belongs considers foodstuffs primarily as commodities in a market. The foods in question are taken essentially as givens, even though debates over quality and fluctuations in supply put their very existence at risk. Other studies provide a balance of sorts by concentrating on foodstuffs as such and then working outward. For Pierre Boisard, who takes on a single cheese
in *Camembert*, and Silvano Serventi and Françoise Sabban, who take a similarly focused approach in *Pasta*, the very existence of the food is the primary issue. Where and when did these products first appear? What is the relationship between that first pasta and cheese and the pastas and cheeses that we consume today? Each of these works looks to the origins of the foodstuff in a particular time and place and as it adapts to new conditions and various sociocultural contexts.

If a great many works celebrate the joys of one food or another—just poke around in the cooking section of any bookstore—few such works have anything like the scope that Serventi and Sabban give to their investigation of pasta. In the first place, their context is comparative. They take into account not only Italy, as expected, but also, in a welcome though tantalizingly brief chapter, China and its different yet equally pervasive noodle/pasta civilization. The cross-cultural comparison offers a valuable corrective to the European orientation of so much historical work on food, though much more needs to said about pasta in Europe outside Italy. *Pasta* has the added advantage of making the material qualities of food more salient and more relevant than ever to social and cultural analysis.

The differences between culinary traditions based on a similar foodstuff make the discussion of food use especially compelling. With its exceptional variety of forms and incomparable culinary adaptability, pasta fulfills Serventi and Sabban’s claim for universality. The two pasta civilizations are complementary—hard wheat flour Italian pasta, fresh Asian noodles made of soft wheat flour—even as they remain separate and unconnected by any larger claim of relationship. (Marco Polo’s legendary importation of spaghetti to Italy from China turns out to be the fabrication of an American trade journal [10, 211].) Despite the comparative perspective, Italy dominates the discussion. Although the first mentions of pasta date only from the Middle Ages, pasta was actively traded by the twelfth century, and it rapidly became a constituent element of Italian identity. The final chapter of *Pasta*, somewhat as a serendipitous afterthought, offers excerpts from Boccaccio, Casanova, and Goethe, among others, to revel in the strong association of pasta with Italy.

A major thrust of *Pasta*, and to my mind its greatest contribution, lies in the detailed and meticulously documented technical discussions of the lengthy, complex, and delicate process of making pasta by hand and, eventually, by machine. The techniques varied by region, dependent often enough on climatic conditions. Engravings and woodcuts of pasta ovens, presses, kneading machines, and drying racks illustrate the gradual impact of industrialization on the making and marketing of pasta. Some readers will look to the sections that chronicle other pastas—from Germany, Russia, France, and Portugal—or to the discussions on the changing tastes in pasta (the chewy, al dente pasta characteristic of Naples eventually triumphed over soft pasta). Others will want to follow pasta from Italy to America and back again. For all of these subjects, Serventi and Sabban refuse to simplify. The story that they tell, like the culture that they bring to life, is neither plain nor simple. Drawing on linguistic and archaeological evidence, on work in anthropology and geography, on economic and social history, Serventi and Sabban still manage to exhibit that most elusive of scholarly virtues, humility. They do not hesitate to speculate, but they calibrate their claims to the nature of the evidence.
For these virtues, and for the ubiquity of the food concerned, the transnational and historical range of the investigation, and the inclusion of consumption as well as production, *Pasta* will serve as a reference for some time to come. Although it describes more than it probes, *Pasta* shows how much is to be gained by looking at historical change through the lens provided by a single, “universal” food product.

Still within the realm of material culture, Pierre Boisard too picks a single food, but he restricts his time frame and defines his subject more precisely. As the title proclaims, his work examines not cheese in general, not even the three-hundred-odd cheeses of France as a group, but Camembert. Boisard argues, in effect, that this cheese is more equal than others. Born of legend, Camembert became the stuff of myth, associated with the country as a whole in ways the many other cheeses produced in France were not. The tale that Boisard recounts, quite different in this respect from the narratives in Abad’s or Serventi and Sabban’s books, emphasizes the creation of a national identity through food. Boisard begins with this single product and moves outward to raise questions of national character, modes of modernization, and the fate of artisanal products in the age of standardized industrial production. Unlike its neighbor cheese Pont l’Évêque, which by the seventeenth century was indelibly associated with Normandy, Camembert did not make its appearance until the middle of the nineteenth century, and then under circumstances that remain shrouded in mystery. Yet, if its origins are cloudy—one persistent tale assigns maternity to a local farm woman who allegedly learned the secrets of cheese making from a defrocked priest who had fled Brie during the Revolution—its popularity is secure. Since the 1920s, Camembert has been the most popular cheese in France, and it remains so today, identifiable by more of the French than any other cheese.

Cheese, as the author usefully reminds us, is a living organism, and therefore subject to the vagaries of time, place, and its components—most importantly, milk. The white-crusted Camembert that we know today (pictured in close-up on the cover of the book) is far from the cheese that first turned up in the mid-nineteenth century. We would be hard pressed to spot the original artisanal cheese with its crust that varied from bluish gray to orange pink primarily because of the different molds that developed to ferment the cheese. Moving to a national (that is, Parisian) market made some degree of standardization predictable. The round wooden boxes with colorful labels that designated the maker for a nonlocal market had the further advantage of making Camembert readily available as a whole cheese in a small size, as the otherwise fairly similar Brie, for example, is not. Commercial rennet, a curdling agent, permitted greater control of the process needed to turn milk into cheese. The introduction of stable, laboratory-produced *Penicillium candidum*, as the mold, gave the cheese the creamy white form that proved so important for attracting consumers. Long the primary supplier of *Penicillium candidum*, the Pasteur Institute also brought Camembert into the domain of science.

Does the now-classic white cheese taste the same as its gray blue ancestor? Likely not, though we have no way of telling. Boisard raises—he cannot answer—the complex question of taste. We cannot know how Camembert tasted in 1890 or even in 1935. In the first place, the cheese is made differently today (pasteurized milk being only the most obvious indicator of the industrialization of Camembert...
production beginning in the 1950s). Just as important, our twenty-first-century palates have been formed—or deformed, according to your alimentary persuasion—by a great number of foodstuffs that did not exist fifty, one hundred, or even twenty years ago. For better and for worse, fast foods as well as once-exotic fare have shaped our tastes no less than our foodways.

Even those who turn their noses up at cheese will recognize the larger tale of Camembert. It is above all a story of emerging national identity, which was not infrequently set against the local interests of the producers. On the one hand, there is the insistence on the association with place, or terroir (all those cheery cows on the labels prompt associations with the Normandy countryside). On the other hand, the clashes among individual producers, and in particular the lack of agreement on basic procedures, long left this cheese unprotected by the regulatory mechanism of the AOC (Appellation d’Origine Contrôlée). Where Camembert is concerned, the local becomes the national by means of a more efficient mode of transportation and distribution. The terroir itself is integrated into a national patrimony, an identification aided substantially by the distribution of Camembert rations to soldiers during World War I. It is regrettable that the American edition of this book does not reproduce any of the colorful box labels from the late nineteenth century through World War I; they literally represented Camembert to the public. Still, the American edition features an index, which, in keeping with usual French publishing practice, is lacking in the original edition.

II

As any cook knows full well, consumption entails far more than just eating. The printed menus that conjure up meals imagined or remembered remind us that, to quote one prominent French chef, “We eat more myths than calories.” Broad recognition of this abstract element in the constitution of foods and foodways owes more than a little to Claude Lévi-Strauss’s monumental work on food as myth.

1 Kolleen Guy argues that Boisard’s nostalgic “ethnohistory” shapes, and at times skews, his analysis; see http://h-france.net/vol4reviews/guy2.html.


Eating Orders

Even though a well-defined, historically articulated perception of specific foods and particular foodways runs counter to the high structuralist approach of a Lévi-Strauss in almost every respect, few works that consider food today, however firmly anchored in their historical base, disregard the representations that do so much to shape the uses to which food is put.

For beyond the foodstuffs and their provisioning networks lie the conceptions of self and place that tell us what we want to eat or, just as powerfully, what we think that we ought (and ought not) to eat. If scholars have taken time to discover just how good food is to think with, every one of us has long known that food is not only good but essential to think about. For although *Homo sapiens* is an omnivore, individuals and societies are not. Both make consumption decisions according to the possibilities offered by supply and by the cultural menus that reveal what foods are thinkable at that time and place. How we think about food and eating dictates what we do in fact eat, just as what a given society thinks about food shapes the practices of diet and dining that we call foodways.

Just how subject we are to cultural understandings of alimentary possibilities can be seen from Ken Albala’s *Eating Right in the Renaissance*. In this intellectual history of theories about foods and how they operate on and in the body, Albala examines the dietary prescriptions that evolved in Europe from the late medieval period to the seventeenth century. The differences from our own constructions of food, and the origins of these prescriptions in what we now label a premodern mode of thought, undoubtedly strike readers today as strange, even alien. The philosophic system that Albala recovers makes these ideas seem both reasonable and plausible. That people undoubtedly consumed foods that were deemed noxious and proscribed, Albala argues, points up the significance of transgression in food practices. It also points to the general problem that impairs Abad’s (and every other) discussion of early modern food markets: we know a good deal more about the representations of consumption than about the practices that these accounts were meant to inform. Following the lead of Norbert Elias in *The History of Manners* (New York, 1982), Albala reads his era through a highly prescriptive genre—in this case, the immensely popular dietaries that told people what they should make a point of eating and also what they should avoid. Written mostly in the vernacular and based largely on a theory of humors, these nutrition guides were astonishingly widespread in Europe from the late fifteenth century, where Albala begins, well into the seventeenth century, when the growing diversity of available foodstuffs made it virtually impossible to reduce consumption decisions to a single structure. The coherence of the theoretical explanations in dietaries ill prepared their practitioners to cope with new foods, and yet, of course, cope they did. Practice, as inferred from the repeated reference to “prohibited” foods, must have diverged from theory, often dramatically. Thus, while these cultural menus offer nourriture dans la Bible,” *Annales E.S.C.* 4 (July–August 1973): 943–55, translated as “The Semiotics of Food in the Bible,” in *Food and Drink in History: Selections from the Annales E.S.C.*, ed. Robert Forster and Orest Ranum (Baltimore, 1979), 126–88. For a striking empirical application of structuralist thinking to food habits, see Joelle Bahloul, *Le Culte de la Table dressée: Rites et Traditions de la table juive algérienne* (Paris, 1983).
no information about what foods were consumed in fact or by whom, there emerge
nevertheless, from the interstices between proscription and prescription, charac-
teristic patterns of consumption, models of behavior, and modes of thought. They
show us, in other words, how eating right, to follow Albala, requires, thinking
right.

The degree to which our thoughts about food affect consumption becomes clear
from Madeleine Ferrières’s study of food fears, *Histoire des peurs alimentaires*,
which she places squarely within the history of representations. Instead of assessing
the real dangers to human health posed by various foods, Ferrières focuses on the
perceptions of risk involved in alimentary decisions as expressed by individual
consumers; by governmental officials at the local, regional, and eventually national
levels; and by commentators before as well as after the fact. Although, like Albala,
Ferrières makes no claims about the specific relation of the representations that
she analyzes to food practices, reading their two works invites us to make the
connection. We cannot escape seeing in them many of the same decisions about
foods that we ourselves must make today. If we no longer fear (as Albala tells us
that many did in the sixteenth century) that melons kill, we have other fears that
are equally potent, especially given the complex organization of food distribution
in modern and modernizing societies.

Ferrières raises anxieties that are familiar in our own times, roiled as they are
by mad cow disease—notably in the chapters that deal with meat. Eight of the
sixteen chapters concern beef and the recurrent specters of diseased beef that loom
all the larger because of the place that meat has long held in the social imaginary.
Following an insight of Lucien Febvre on the import of security in history, *Histoire
des peurs alimentaires* applies the notion of risk to the foods that we eat, and,
more particularly here, to the foods that, for any number of reasons, we fear to
eat. Rather than examining genuine, verifiable risks, Ferrières turns her attention
to the images of risk—the fears articulated and acted upon. She tracks a series of
exemplary texts and incidents such as a fourteenth-century edict on meats (chap.
1), tracts on plants considered noxious in the Renaissance (chap. 5), and a late
seventeenth-century lawsuit over the proper leavening agent for given types of
bread, bakers, and sellers (chap. 6). The scope of the project is daunting. In her
search for the new (i.e., modern) alimentary order with its articulated consumer
consciousness, Ferrières reaches from the Middle Ages to the early twentieth cen-
tury. Although France is her primary subject, Italy and England supply a significant
comparative context, as does, on occasion, the rest of Europe. The last chapter
crosses the Atlantic to deal with Upton Sinclair’s novel *The Jungle* (New York,
1906), with its exposé of the meatpacking industry in America at the beginning of
the twentieth century.

*Le Monde* called Ferrières’s book an essay, which may sound a bit odd for a
work of 438 pages plus a lengthy bibliography of primary and secondary sources
as well as an index (of names only). Montaigne would no doubt wonder at the heft
of his progeny, but French publishers commonly apply “essay” to works that are
not overwhelmed with footnotes and scholarly apparatus and that address a general
audience. *Histoire des peurs alimentaires* is just such an essay. Its scholarly foun-
dation is solid and extensive, and although there is no original archival research,
the author has gone straight to the primary texts. Her broad historical purview has led Ferrières to read selectively, but she has read well and has chosen her texts and incidents with care and an eye for the dramatic. With this range some slips and errors are to be expected. Carême, not Escoffier, was known as “the chef of kings and the king of chefs” (the description may well have been applied later to Escoffier, but I’ve not found it). The complexities of the historical context are treated in greater depth elsewhere—she relies on the work of Abad and Kaplan. If the episodic structure of her book produces a disconnect between chapters, Ferrières, at her best, makes good on her ambitious agenda of linking decisions about food and the assessment of alimentary risk to law, history, and government, as well as to agriculture, botany, culinary history, and medicine. 

_Histoire des peurs alimentaires_ also guides the reader to a wealth of sources. More noteworthy still, Ferrières’s perceptive reconstruction of “fearful” episodes in the history of food prompts reflection on the complexity of consumption decisions, those in the past and our own today. In today’s globalized world, visual verification no longer offers the security it once seemed to give. As foods have come to be distributed farther and farther from their places of origin, discourse has had to provide the reassurance no longer possible through direct contact. Whereas the fourteenth-century consumer could insist on seeing the live animal to be assured of the quality of the beef, we who inhabit the twenty-first century must demand other criteria of health and sanitation to ensure our peace of mind. Food security today mandates the removal of slaughterhouses from central cities. That distance, in turn, calls for vast and complex structures of surveillance to mediate our contacts with food and to allay the fears inherent in consumption. Although the particular theories that Albala analyzes faded into antiquarian status, the nutritional concerns that made those theories so prominent are more present now than ever. Today, as did the people who inhabited the Renaissance, we fret about the correlation between the foods that we eat and our well-being. Our larger questions and concerns remain recognizably the same as theirs, and such similarities bring home to us the ostensibly strange worlds of these earlier dietaries and food fears.

III

The markets that turn the material object into a commodity and the menus that set forth our culinary options naturally evoke the meals that express food as a distinctive attribute of a given social order. Here we encounter the familiar categories of social class, of community, of nation. Here studies show how food—socialized and organized as meals—establishes an eating order. The organized meal tells us not what food is as a product or what it means as a sign or symbol but, rather, what it does and what it makes people do. In this more manifestly cultural perspective, food is not so much a product as a process—or, more accurately—a cluster of processes that create and sustain collective identity. And when we speak of identity, we also speak of social control. Food plays its part in the acts of inclusion and identification, exclusion and rejection by which communities no less than individuals define themselves. Food takes part, in other words, in achieving the social world as we know it.
Notwithstanding the significance of material culture and symbolic construction, the greater part of work on food fits more or less appropriately under the rubric of cultural or social history. There is growing appreciation of the intimate connections of food and eating to the ways we think and talk, worship and blaspheme, work and play, live and even die. On a more theoretical plane, three concepts from the social sciences have added force and direction to research on food and foodways as social processes in modern society. First, “conspicuous consumption,” identified by Thorstein Veblen as elite social behavior under advanced capitalism, broadens the notion of consumption from the physiological to the social. Second, the “civilizing process” of increasing self- and social control, which Norbert Elias claimed as the defining movement of Western society since the late Middle Ages, places strictly culinary chronology within the more general evolution of society as a whole. Finally, the social mechanism of “distinction,” proposed by Pierre Bourdieu as a crucial factor in the reproduction of the social order, suggests food as itself a social agent. In point of fact, none of these social scientists takes food as a primary subject of inquiry: Veblen does not deal with foodways at all, while Elias and Bourdieu consider them only among a host of other social indicators. Nonetheless, it seems clear in retrospect that each of these concepts infused traditional nutritional and culinary history with an expressly theoretical urgency.

Current discussions of food in social life look back to empirical as well as theoretical work. An important track can be traced to Annales historians, Fernand Braudel in the forefront, who turned attention to the structures of everyday life in which food justifiably figured prominently. American and British scholars, however, were more likely to look to three major works that claimed the study of food for the social sciences: the anthropologist Jack Goody’s Cooking, Cuisine, and Class: A Study in Comparative Sociology (Cambridge, 1982); the sociologist Stephen Mennell’s All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present (Oxford, 1985); and the anthropologist Sidney

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9 Much of the research that dominated the field in the nineteenth century and beyond was undertaken by enthusiastic, and knowledgeable, amateurs. For an example in the French domain, see Alfred Franklin, La Cuisine, La Vie privée d’autrefois: Arts et métiers; Modes, moeurs, usages des Parisiens du XIIe au XVIIIe siècles d’après les documents originaux et inédits (Paris, 1888). The English journal Petits Propos Culinaires: Essays and Notes to Do with Food Cookery and Cookery Books, founded by the late Alan Davidson in 1979, exemplifies the often quirky anecdotal and somewhat antiquarian bent of much (though by no means all) of this research. For more determinedly scholarly work, see the journal Food and Foodways, founded in 1985 as a Franco-American coproduction; see also Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, “La Gastronomie en revues,” Critique 685–86 (2004): 584–93.

Mintz’s *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York, 1985). These works, appearing in the 1980s, set an agenda that has inspired more than one generation of food scholars. Moreover, in the extensive empirical research that each brought to bear in support of a strong theoretical argument, these works established high standards of how to study food to good purpose and to good effect.

In *Cooking, Cuisine, and Class*, Goody posed a conundrum. Contrary to the familiar Western hierarchy of the aptly labeled haute cuisine at the top of the social scale and the culinarily dissimilar popular cuisine(s) at the bottom, Goody discovered an entirely different culinary order in the Ghanaian tribes that he studied at length. Unlike societies in early modern Europe, the African tribes translated higher social standing into greater abundance but not a distinctive cuisine. The wealthy members of these tribes simply ate more of what everyone else ate. Mennell, for his part, in *All Manners of Food*, framed his inquiry in terms of national, not class, difference. Given the fundamental similarities of medieval cuisines in England and France (as in Europe generally), what explains the almost paradigmatic contrasts in the national cuisines that developed after the Renaissance? The geographical proximity and cultural ties between these two countries make the culinary difference all the more intriguing. Working within the frame of Norbert Elias’s theory of state development in the modern West, Mennell situated that difference in the divergent paths taken by the emergent nation-states: a centralizing French monarchy that set cultural and culinary priorities, on the one hand, and an English state characterized by dispersed power and a diffuse cultural life, on the other. Mennell and Goody were not alone in making the shift from assertion to question, from anecdote to close analysis of relevant texts and evidence. In *Sweetness and Power*, Mintz traced the introduction of sugar into Europe and followed the far-reaching consequences of the new foodstuff for European foodways and for Caribbean agriculture and markets. From a food studies perspective today, we can see that however differently these three works conceived their intellectual enterprises, they concurred in taking food as more than a product, more than a commodity, more than the material object that it manifestly is. For these pioneers showed just how revelatory an indicator of the social order food can be, how striking a cultural marker, how precious a clue to social and cultural identity.

To these works by social scientists should be added Barbara Ketcham Wheaton’s *Savoring the Past: The French Kitchen and Table from 1300 to 1789* (Philadelphia, 1983) and Steven Kaplan’s works referred to in part 1 above, notably *Provisioning Paris: Merchants and Millers in the Grain and Flour Trade during the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY, 1984). Wheaton transformed culinary history from a chronicle of foods and dishes into a dynamic record of social relations grounded in production and consumption, the kitchen and the table, while Kaplan’s examination of bread, a staple that touched every household in the countryside as well as the city, showed how a single foodstuff can afford a privileged point of entry into the workings of an entire society.

These works—Goody, Mennell, and Mintz, Wheaton, and Kaplan—appeared in something of a culinary wilderness in the Anglo-American scholarly world of the 1980s. Severally and together they did much to legitimate the study of food in
a broader intellectual and disciplinary context. On the Continent, too, food and
gastronomy acquired greater intellectual legitimacy and a broader scholarly as well
as general audience. In addition to investigations of nutritional and culinary history
by Annales historians, other works confronted contemporary foodways. Of these,
the most influential was undoubtedly sociologist Claude Fischler’s *L’Homnivore: Le Goût, la cuisine et le corps* (Paris, 1990). Fischler’s originality was to situate
the discussion of food at the intersection of the social, the psychological, and the
physiological and to take the connections seriously. Questions and concerns that
had been treated largely in isolation came together in Fischler’s wide-ranging dis-
cussion of the “gastro-anomie” evident in consumer preferences, issues of diet and
nutrition, and eating disorders from obesity to anorexia.

However important these various works, food studies in Europe today owe the
most to the guidance of Jean-Louis Flandrin and Massimo Montanari. Their work
and their teaching, not forgetting their support of culinary research generally, cul-
mminated in their joint editing of *Food: A Culinary History from Antiquity to the
Present*. This publication offers a convenient benchmark for the coming-of-age of
scholarly inquiry about food.11 That the American edition followed within three
years of this book’s original publication in Europe also marks the prodigious
growth of interest in such work in the United States. Without neglecting foodstuffs,
*Food: A Culinary History* changes the focus from food to cuisine, from agriculture
to culture, from markets to social networks.12 Sensibly chronological, the presen-
tation is divided into seven sections, beginning with prehistory and early civiliz-
ations and moving first to the classical world and then to the early and late Eu-
ropean Middle Ages. An important section, “Westerners and Others,” offers an
enlightening comparative context. The final section, on the contemporary period,
takes us to the industrialization of food and concomitant issues of health. From
the Etruscans, Romans, and Greeks to present-day societies, Europe centers the
analysis. The welcome chapters on Arab cuisine, food culture in ancient Egypt,

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or so theses from the 1980s to 2003, 123 concern food or cuisine, and only 20 of these are in
history; see her “Introduction à l’histoire de l’alimentation: Éléments pour une approche des liens
Csergo (Dijon, 2004), 25, n. 3.

12 This work appeared simultaneously in Italian and French in 1996 with forty-four authors
from ten countries (with the great majority from France and Italy). The American edition has been
edited considerably (forty chapters and 553 pages of text, compared to the forty-seven chapters
types of foods only, relying for other references on the detailed chapter headings in the table of
contents (characteristic of French scholarly publications); the American edition features the stan-
dard laconic table of contents (which, however, lists authors with their chapters, unlike the French
edition) but includes a 37-page general index. Many of the chapters append a very useful, if
summary, bibliography.
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and the Jewish Mediterranean medieval diet, as well as on the intersection of food, health, and morality in America, remind us that foods and cuisines have always traveled widely. From cookbooks to restaurants, particular culinary practices and specific institutions are the basis for the majority of chapters. If the discussion is weighted toward France and Italy, that is because so much solid historical work, much of it motivated and guided by Flandrin himself, has used France to trace the materialization of a recognizably modern food system.

Altogether, Food: A Culinary History stands as a remarkable achievement, not least because it addresses the general reader no less than the scholar. Historians will use this book to discover how much the culinary tells us about social, political, and economic history; “foodies” will dig into the historical grounding for conventional as well as unusual culinary narratives. The editors’ discerning introductions to each part lay the groundwork for the chapters that follow. Chronological rigor notwithstanding, this book should be approached less as an ordered meal than as a buffet, a smorgasbord laden with a dazzling display of dishes to be consumed as one’s interests and mood dictate. Those concerned with recent trends will likely be disappointed, because the last section covers not just the twentieth century but all of the nineteenth century too. Only one article, Claude Fischler’s on the rampant “McDonaldization” of food cultures today, deals directly with globalization and its discontents.

With its firm temporal and geographical grounding, Food: A Culinary History sets itself apart from many, perhaps most, works about the subject. Take, for example, Felipe Fernández-Armesto’s Near a Thousand Tables, which is ambitiously subtitled A History of Food—in contrast to Flandrin and Montanari’s description of their venture as “A Culinary History” (Wordsworth supplies Fernández-Armesto’s title). The author disclaims any intention of replacing existing histories of food, in which he properly includes the work of Flandrin and Montanari. Proposing instead a “genuinely global perspective” that treats food history as a theme of world history, he structures his freewheeling tour across thousands of years of history around eight “revolutions” in the basic relationship of human beings to food. The “revolutionary” categories include the invention of cooking, the ritualization of eating, the move from food collection to cultivation, the management of plant life, social differentiation, cross-cultural exchange, ecological exchange, and, lastly, industrialization. No one can possibly gainsay the significance of these themes, and no one will deny the verve and the imagination that drive this work. Fernández-Armesto has read extensively and brings to his book a decided flair for the well-turned phrase, the telling anecdote, and the apt epigraph. He draws his material quite literally from all over the place, from classical and contemporary Europe to Asia, Africa, and the Americas. He also makes good use of a great number of scholarly studies, novels, poems, memoirs, and travel writings in many languages and across a great many cultures. Finally, this historian has a definite gift for suggesting links that are as unexpected as they are speculative. The work is pure pleasure to read.

The problems encountered here derive from the absence of precision. Quite unlike Food: A Culinary History, which scrupulously situates its chapters in relation to past research, the serendipitous Near a Thousand Tables will be of little
help to scholars. There are no footnotes and no bibliography, though Fernández-Armesto conscientiously identifies quotations and acknowledges prior scholarship, which he uses to good effect. There are, in truth, too many tables for this repast and too many dishes on each of them. As with the banquets of yore, the spectacle dazzles the onlooker but fails to sustain the diner. *Near a Thousand Tables* invites comparison with any number of food works aimed at the general public rather than scholars. It is far more intelligent than most and proposes novel perspectives on vital issues. But it remains withal an idiosyncratic work whose basic recognitions and insights fall short of sustained analysis.

There could hardly be a greater contrast to the infectious exuberance of Fernández-Armesto than the meticulously detailed and precise research of Jean-Louis Flandrin. His last (and unfinished) work, *L’Ordre des mets*, capped a career dedicated to the defense and illustration of food history. Working from his own research over several decades, Flandrin proposes a culinary history that takes gastronomy as a broad social phenomenon. Relying on cookbooks, as one might expect, but also on memoirs, travel literature, and essays, *L’Ordre des mets* follows the distribution of types of food within meals over several centuries. The detail will likely daunt the most committed reader, though, fortunately, numerous tables and graphs summarize its major implications. Even so, the path can be tortuous. Still, the reader who perseveres will be amply rewarded, and food historians will be mining this book for years to come. Others will retain the lesson of the mutability of eating orders, even, perhaps especially, those that we thought we knew well. Aside from notes for a projected comparative section, Flandrin confines himself to the French culinary tradition. In spite of that self-imposed limitation, his detailed demonstration of the great variation over time in the composition of meals effectively undermines the transhistorical claims so often made, notably by the more zealous promoters of things culinary in France.

*L’Ordre des mets* draws attention to the sequence in which food is served in a formal meal. Although every culinary history mentions service, none has conceived this order as so fully a historical phenomenon. As Flandrin shows in great detail for France, food service has altered a great deal over time. The whole concept of the meal was reconceived as diners responded to social, economic, and cultural changes. If Flandrin engages these questions as the eminent historian that he was, his conception of the project is properly sociological, or, as the book’s back-cover copy claims, “anthropological.” Take, for one example, the move in the early nineteenth century from the linear service *a` la franc¸aise*, in which several dishes were laid out on the table at one time, to our modern sequential service *a` la russe*, in which each dish is served on its own. Rather than the dramatic innovation that it is often made out to be, Flandrin presents this shift to service *a` la russe* as one more mutation in a set of ever-changing culinary customs. The diversity that Goody and Mennell find in space, Flandrin locates in time. From his base in the seventeenth century, he moves with ease back to the late Middle Ages and forward into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to track a remarkable variability simply in the progression of a meal. The sequence of a meal turns out to be far more variable than other scholars have realized, with respect to not only the order of service but also the content of the dishes in each service. The entrée, which now seems a
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misnomer because it comes nowhere near the beginning of the meal, at one point did indeed begin the meal. Which foods were actually served was dependent on the fasting periods decreed by the church. Inevitably, the move from the three fasting periods of the medieval church calendar to the single liturgical season of Lent that we know today had significant consequences for diners and for the conception of the dinner.

As Flandrin shows in this important book, particularly in relation to fasting, the culinary has long been invoked as a vital component of social control. In few places has this tactical surveillance been exercised as consciously as in France. Calling on an extensive collection of culinary texts, from cookery books to treatises, many have shown how this acute sense of a unique culinary identity emerged in France as early as the seventeenth century. And distinctiveness has tended to imply or assume distinction as well. French cuisine was different, and it was better. It could borrow from other cuisines with impunity. That the basic brown and white sauces of French cuisine are known as espagnole and allemande led no one to doubt the fundamental integrity of French cuisine. Importing the Russian order of service in the early nineteenth century altered the meal without affecting the cuisine.

Less assured of their distinctiveness, and therefore of their identity, other culinary traditions have proved more vulnerable to external influences. Such was the case for the Russia from which France took its modern sequential order of service. In culinary as in other domains, the forced Westernization under Peter the Great wrought great changes. By the end of the eighteenth century, as Darra Goldstein has established through a meticulous, culinarily informed reading of a great number and variety of documents, the wholesale importation of foreign foods had rendered the cuisine characteristic of Moscow more sophisticated and more complex, as well as less identifiable Russian, than it had been a century earlier. Echoes in our own times are not altogether illusory: as culinary and linguistic imports alike raised the hackles of traditionalists seeking the Russia of their forefathers, so too there has been an outcry against the invasion of allegedly foreign foodstuffs in present-day France. In one respect the situations are quite different. France has long boasted a strong culinary identity, and no tsar imposes either foods or foodways there. But the perception of assault is no less real, as is, with the Russian traditionalists, a sense of an entire civilization at risk. Like their counterparts in

13 Aside, perhaps, from a rash commentator in the 1820s whom Carême, the great nineteenth-century chef, put in his place. They may well have come from elsewhere long ago, but “these foreign sauces are so changed in their preparations that they have long since been entirely French.” See Antonin Carême, Le Cuisinier parisien, ou L’Art de la cuisine française au dix-neuvième siècle (1828; Lyon, 1986), 25–28. This supposedly innate gift of the French for everything to do with food and wine finds credence even today, and not only among the uninitiated.

14 See the tantalizingly brief prolegomenon to a comprehensive culinary history: Darra Goldstein, “Gastronomic Reforms under Peter the Great: Toward a Cultural History of Russian Food,” Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas 48 (2000): 481–510. The absence of cookbooks in Russian before the end of the eighteenth century severely complicated Goldstein’s assessment of the food culture, as did the far greater attention paid to drinking. Excessive they undoubtedly were. Even so, the extravaganzas of food were no match for those of drink.
eighteenth-century Russia, traditionalists today combat a certain modernization, although, unlike their predecessors, who were opposed by the full authority of the tsar, French culinary advocates can often count on support from the state.15

This same sense of a culinary culture at risk underlies Jean-Robert Pitte’s *French Gastronomy: The History and Geography of a Passion*. In a series of loosely connected essays, Pitte sets the much-touted French singularity in matters of food within the broad perspective that one would expect of a geographer who has written extensively about the French landscape. He dismisses the facile, quasi-mythic explanations that trace this distinctiveness to supposedly unrivaled French produce, matchless French soil, or even an ineffable culinary soul that somehow “naturally” predisposes the French toward savoir faire in matters of what Montaigne called the science of the gullet. Pitte fixes his explanatory elements in the eminently effable and analyzable: the relatively benign attitude of the medieval Catholic Church toward sins of the flesh, the gastronomic extravagance at the seventeenth-century court that prized culinary creativity, the effervescence of the capital city that gave birth to the modern restaurant, the tourism that carried this new culinary institution to the provinces and abroad. None of these factors is new, of course, and Pitte paints his picture with a broad brush. But his determined rejection of the culinary predestination still rampant in some circles, his insistence on the contingencies of time and space, and his willingness to puncture claims devoid of evidence make this an exemplary work for food studies.

If a strong culinary identity is all but a given for the French, for the Italians a sense of culinary self remains more a matter of conjecture. In view of the usual dismissal of a fully Italian cuisine, Alberto Capatti and Massimo Montanari’s *Italian Cuisine: A Cultural History* makes a persuasive case for a distinct and identifiable Italian culinary tradition. Their reconceptualization of culinary history leads them to consider Italian cuisine as a whole rather than in terms of the parts into which it is more often divided. The two authors make an ideal culinary duo as they range over a thousand years of cooking on the Italian peninsula.16 In their hands, as Jacques LeGoff points out in his introduction to the French translation, the study of food becomes total history, a remarkable lens that takes in the entire country. The authors adopt a contrarian approach, puncturing the commonplaces that have passed for culinary history and that have led so many to claim that there is no truly national Italian cuisine. Cooking and cuisine, Capatti and Montanari insist, should not be reduced to something else—to manifestations of political

15 Like most countries, France has long regulated the production and distribution of foodstuffs to ensure a food supply free of disease (see the discussion of Abad, in part 1 above). However, France stood apart, if not alone, beginning most emphatically in the early twentieth century, with the protection (i.e., extramarket) accorded traditional methods of production and the scrutiny of quality and authenticity of certain foodstuffs, as in the *appellations d’origine contrôlées* granted wines and other traditional products such as Roquefort cheese. Today, the concerns of both health and quality/authenticity play out in the transnational forum of the European Union and in an increasingly, and increasingly contested, global food market.

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history, or stages in the growth of civility, or expressions of a lesser art. Capatti and Montanari portray the Italian peninsula as a site of intense culinary exchange, and they uncover Italian cuisine not in recipes or treatises but in the “dense network of customs, habits, and styles of living” (xiv).

Rather than dismiss Italian cuisine as a collection of regional dishes based on local products, they situate it in a vibrant set of culinary practices determined by the uses of those products. Not that Capatti and Montanari overlook the particular foods that are indelibly associated with Italy. Indeed, in marked contrast to French cuisine, which largely exported codes of preparation and consumption—la cuisine française as systematized in the nineteenth century—Italian cuisine as seen from abroad has been intimately tied to products: to the Parmesan, the mortadella, the prosciutto, and the olive oil that come to stand for the country as a whole. However, these products, as Capatti and Montanari show in detail and in depth, cannot themselves be separated from an ever-shifting assortment of techniques of preparation and patterns of consumption. A given product may originate in a particular territory, but when it turns up in a recipe or on a menu, the result is invariably a hybrid of different regions or localities (xv).

Italian Cuisine is not simply another history of Italian cuisine, although the wide-ranging bibliography and extensive notes certainly offer more than enough material for such a history. Rather, as the Italian subtitle announces, their ambition is to lay out the history of a culture—a culinary culture created and sustained by the circulation of texts, techniques, and products, a national culture developed from a Roman legacy, enriched by imports from the Far East and the Near East, shaped significantly by the Fascist regime in the 1920s and 1930s, and carried to the far corners of the earth as Italians emigrated to the New World as well as throughout the Old World. In place of a model that assumes the more or less rigid culinary separation of social classes and a world where peasant cuisine remains separate from upper- or even middle-class cuisines, Capatti and Montanari establish their claim for Italian cuisine on the dynamic of exchange that created and sustained an identifiable Italian culinary culture across subcultures as across regions, and this some time before unification of the Italian state in the late nineteenth century. Well before Garibaldi, cuisine was at work making the relationships that took Italians beyond their regions to a larger sense of collective self, and this despite the undeniable influence exercised by the French culinary standard from the eighteenth century onward.17

Nor is this the only instance in which Capatti and Montanari write against the grain. They tackle the gender question with an insightful analysis of the shifting, lively interaction between the (male) professional cook, the innkeeper, and the woman in her kitchen at home. As with their treatment of culinary class relations, their discussion of culinary identity shows its emergence not from opposition but, instead, from communication. Then too, contrary to the usual association of gastronomy with abundance, they argue persuasively for a famine gastronomy. As they demonstrate with telling examples, the meanest and culinarily least propitious

of conditions reveal time and again the culinary choices made by ordinary people and the ingenuity involved in those choices. When flour was unavailable, bread was made from linseed; in the absence of vegetables, milk thistles were cooked with mint.

Cross-class, cross-regional relations also serve as the point of departure for Hasia Diner’s exploration of immigrant foodways. In Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration, Diner locates the distinctiveness of the foodways developed by immigrant groups in culinary connections with their country of origin. Basing her analysis on an assortment of documents, from letters to reports of social workers and journalists, she examines the Italians, the Irish, and the Jews who arrived in America between 1820 and 1920, giving special attention to the period beginning in the 1880s. As she acknowledges, Italian Americans offer the most striking and most successful instance of a new culinary identity that incorporated new elements as it moved beyond the old. The connections in Italy between the upper class, the laboring class, and the peasant class go far to explain the leading role that food played in the emergence of an identifiable Italian American identity. Because Italian immigrants were familiar with elite culinary customs, they knew how to take advantage of the plenty that they found when they got to the land of abundance.

The culinary connections across classes established in Italy bore fruit on American soil. Diner goes so far as to claim that a fully Italian food culture developed only in America because only there, in the Little Italy sections of the urban centers, did regional differences come together to form a single culinary culture. Although this argument counters the thrust of Capatti and Montanari’s, the process of importing foods and foodways from home that Diner documents does not differ fundamentally from the ideal of exchange that they propose for the establishment of an Italian cuisine. Exchange sharpens as it depends upon the perception of difference: the greater the difference, as between the ambient Anglo-Saxon American foodways and those of the immigrants, the more sharply those newer foodways stand out and the more foreign they seem.

Those bonds existing—or not—in the country of origin, Diner argues convincingly, account for many of the striking differences in the foodways of these immigrants. In contrast to the Italians, the Irish were discouraged from culinary exploration by a number of factors, including their economic oppression, their reliance on a single crop (potatoes), and the fact that elite foodways in Ireland were largely English. Since these Protestant colonialists considered their own culture far superior, keeping to themselves and bringing over servants from England rather than hiring locally, Irish Catholics—unlike the Italians—arrived in America without much sense of a sophisticated culinary culture. The male drinking culture that, Diner argues, centered Irish sociability gave little scope for affirming either community or ethnicity. The corned beef and cabbage now served up to observe St. Patrick’s Day did not appear until the 1930s, well after the major waves of immigration. Importation of foodstuffs never turned into the major business that it became for the Italians, who early on relied on staples such as olive oil and cheese to bridge the gap between the old country and the new. The Jews from Eastern Europe present still another scenario—more conflictual, less triumphal. The reli-
gious inflection of foods placed a special burden on their renegotiation of foodways in America. The ritual requirements of kashruth posed a gigantic political problem. The absence of state-sanctioned religious officials and the pervasive laissez-faire economics, along with the general separation of church and state, left Jewish immigrants in disarray, especially in the remoter reaches of the countryside, where there were few officially sanctioned authorities to supervise food production and preparation. Sometimes there were none at all. The consequent vacuum of authority led to continual battles as Jews struggled to maintain continuity in religious observance through the foods that had been so crucial an element of their identity.

Simone Cinotto takes this narrative of the emergence of a distinctive Italian American cuisine one step and two decades further. Una famiglia che mangia insieme: Cibo ed etnicità nella comunità italoamericana di New York, 1920–1940 follows one Italian immigrant community, in Italian (now Spanish) Harlem in New York City, for two decades. Like Diner, Cinotto demonstrates the degree to which food and commensality centered the immigrant experience. Following time-honored tradition, the food these immigrants prepared resuscitated another time and another place. Yet, in a new land, with new foodstuffs available and new venues (e.g., boarding houses and restaurants), their cooking inevitably connected these immigrants to their new country, both through the Italian foods that made their way into the population at large and the “American” foods that they adapted to their own uses. Cultures might meet in the restaurants and shops set up by the immigrants, though there are definite limits to the relationships made through food. Today, as the plethora of “ethnic” restaurants dramatically attests in Europe no less than in the United States, food seems to offer a ready passport to another world. Knife and fork in hand, we travel on the cheap, risking none of the inconveniences occasioned by displacement to exotic lands. The multicultural plate endangers no values; it undermines no norms; it demands no rethinking of identity. If we recognize commensality as the ultimate integrative social practice, we would do well to remember how exclusionary eating together also can be.

IV

What, then, can we say about food studies? Given the diversity of theoretical perspectives and methodological strategies, food studies is neither a discipline nor a field—for the moment, at any rate. It is, at its very best, an enterprise—one characterized by issues raised, problems confronted, and, perhaps most important, by a determination to go beyond the celebration of food and its glories to an analysis of its sources, its functions, its effects. Moreover, we have seen that the more confined the research and the greater the detail of the demonstration, the more compelling the argument will be. But how can we move from specific investigations to general understandings? Every study in this undertaking of food studies must confront the likelihood that the tools for articulating both the question

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and the conceivable answers will come from the outside, from other disciplines. Greater self-consciousness about the precise nature of this indebtedness will be a key element in the future of food studies.

At its most basic, food signifies movement—between the particular and the general, between the individual and the collective, between times, places, and people as between classes, countries, and cultures. Foodstuffs move from agriculture to culture, from farm to plate, from eating to the meal. Each of these transitions entails transformation, and each one of those transformations calls for sustained, meticulous analysis. Indeed, only through such examination can we avoid the ill-considered generalizations that plague so many popular discussions of food and foodways. Not all the works that come under the rubric of food studies will prove of equal interest to everyone. And that is how it should be. Every study of food confronts distinct historical problems, a few of which frame the works discussed here—production and markets, government regulation, consumption, philosophies and beliefs, values and norms. Food takes us back to economic and intellectual history, to familiar issues of labor and gender, to the much-debated development of the nation-state and the social relations of immigration. Adding food can only enrich these many fields of inquiry.

Like other new areas of inquiry, food studies attracts enthusiastic converts. However various their perspectives and however great their disagreements about the best way to approach the subject, the authors of all these works attach great importance to food. The adventurers of food studies, as I suggested at the beginning of this review, have begun the enterprise.

To what can we ascribe this interest and these enthusiasms as the twenty-first century begins? Many possibilities come into play—the globalization that forces awareness of the foods around us, the publicity given to eating disorders and to the recurrent famines that turn up on our television screens with discouraging frequency, the ever-present concerns with health. There also may well be another factor. While work has long afforded a focus for much discussion of how society functions, pleasure has, on the whole, received less than its due. Food, I would hazard, combines the two. In what may be its ultimate transformation, food offers a pleasure that reaches toward work just as it provides a necessity that converges with the superfluous. “Le superflu, chose trés nécessaire”—Voltaire’s lapidary summary of the intimacy between the necessary and the superfluous, between work and play, may stand as a motto for food studies today. What should happen next is a better understanding of those connections in more formal terms.