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beside me in the kitchen.

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Cher Holt-Fortin
State University of New York, Oswego

“edibles like bits of our bodies can be firm, hot, juicy, soft,
moist”

-Jeremy MacClancy

When I got married for the first time thirty-five years ago, my farm-bred aunts gave me two cookbooks: *The Joy of Cooking* and Betty Crocker's *Dinner in a Dish*. I knew how to make basic things, hot dogs and beans, meatloaf, macaroni and cheese, the staples of my working-class family. So while those two cookbooks represented practicality for a new bride, they were also a step up from the Farm Bureau cookbook my mother and aunts relied on. Those women didn't buy cookbooks because they had slick, erotic photo layouts and sophisticated recipes. Nor did they give them to me in acknowledgment of entry into an elite class of food consumers. They may have been aware of the Continental underpinnings of *The Joy*, but they presented it to me as a pragmatic tool for my new role as a wife. Those cookbooks offered instruction and promised good food; beauty and attractiveness were secondary.

For its wealth of information and useful instructions, *The*

Joy is still my choice for the cookbook to take to a desert island. *Dinner in a Dish*, with color pictures of such exotic delights as Chicken Madras, a curried chicken and vegetable dish, was slightly more glamorous in format. But the directions emphasized ease and economy, everything in one dish. The color photo of Chicken Madras bore little resemblance to the real Indian curries I have eaten and prepared in my later life. The inexplicit fantasy, however, of a life vastly different from my own hinted at the extravagant illusions, which would soon come to be the standard in cookbooks.

Once we rise above subsistence level, food is always more than just nourishment, which is why we don't eat those protein pills and astronaut tablets my grade school Weekly Reader promised. In America, especially in the middle-aspiring-to-upper classes, we have moved beyond need consumption of food to a hyperaesthetic consumption—"that is, to an aesthetics unbound by natural constraints" (Shapp and Seitz 2). We have available to us not only an unlimited supply of fruits and vegetables from around the world in all seasons, but also an unlimited supply of cookbooks designed to guide us in our consumption of other cultures and classes. Walk into any bookstore or surf the Internet, and there, displayed like tomatoes or ripe fruit, are the published cuisines of Asia, South America, Europe, and fusions of those, plus newly specialized subcategories of our fascination with eating: in addition to dessert, fish, barbeque, soup, and bread, we find regional, gendered, dietary, and erotic cookbooks such as *50 Ways to Feed Your Lover*, *Intercourses*, *Love To Eat*, *Eat To Love*, and *Food as Foreplay*.

As surely as winter tomatoes tantalize us into buying them when we know they are out of season, these books set up a dream of class-dictated sophistication. Just as tomatoes in January suggest and create desire for something not readily attainable for most of us in the northern hemisphere, so the cookbooks offer a world that is not only beyond our grasp, it is a world primarily created by the publishing and restaurant industries. Indeed, Umberto Eco claims it is a world created, a "hyperreal" world "where the images of products and practices have gained ascendancy over [and] even supplanted the actual" (qtd. in Finkelstein 207). In "Dining Out," Joanne Finkelstein maintains that humans

become confused between the fashionable and the genuinely enjoyed (207). When we are bombarded by images of elegance and sophistication, we lose our ability to distinguish what we genuinely like and value. And the American Dream of success, which implies a change of social class, invites a social anxiety that is peculiarly vulnerable to the manipulations of “experts.” In a culture overflowing with riches, albeit not available to all its members, desire for these riches as symbols of economic and social success becomes a ruling ethos.

According to Theodor Adorno, “The culture industry is corrupt; not because it is a sinful Babylon but because it is a cathedral dedicated to elevated pleasure.” Elevated pleasure is presented in Marxist terms as bourgeois desire, the desire to consume in the attempt to emulate a perceived upper class, to vicariously consume a lifestyle otherwise unattainable. Jeremy MacClancy, in *Consuming Culture*, maintains that “food books aimed at the upper-middle class market seem more concerned with presentation than with cuisine” (118). The photograph that follows exemplifies such a concern with presentation, rather than cuisine (Yanes). The photographer has centered the floating island dessert, but the eye is drawn quickly to the blue flowers and the gently lit figs, emphasizing the elegant, slightly erotic setting of the dessert almost more than the food itself.



According to Iggers, the advent, in 1963, of Julia Child’s

television show *The French Chef* began a revolution in middle class approach to cooking and to food in itself (29). Television was the perfect medium for the dissemination of bourgeois culture, and the Baby Boomers, raised on TV, were right there absorbing Julia's dictates about food. MacClancy claims: "In the ways in which the Boomers' parents strove to acquire knowledge of painting or classical music, the Boomers have made cooking the art, the social currency" (210).

Additionally, the consumption of a food culture by the middle-aged middle classes seems to be displacing sex and the consumption of sexuality. As we avidly discussed our sexual exploits and liberation during the sixties, so we now avidly discuss the meals we've cooked and the restaurants we've eaten in. Among educated Boomers, cookery books have attained the status of art object or sex manual or both. Of course, there have been cookery books since ancient times, but they were specialized for an elite audience of master cooks. The advent of cookery books for the common man or woman in the nineteenth century, however, marks the beginning of the commodification of such objects. Once the production of recipes moved from the hands of individual women sharing recipes, perhaps as a gift for a new bride, to the publishing houses, the very nature of the books begins to change from use object to sign object. Reay Tannahill points out in *Food in History*, "As the middle class required their tables to reflect their status, traditional recipes were not adequate. Cookery books were the answer" (322). The very titles of early books like Eliza Acton's *Modern Cookery for Private Families* published in 1845 and Isabella Beaton's famous *Book of Household Management* in 1861 suggest the consumer's concern with class issues: being modern and managing a household well. In 1896 Fannie Farmer published *The Boston Cooking-School Cook Book*. The idea that recipes from a cooking school were somehow superior to those from one's mother and aunts may say all there is to say about the class aspirations of the consumers of such texts. Still an attempt was made to provide for the working classes, for whom the production of nutritious meals remained a life necessity, rather than an expression of class. Juliet Carson, in New York in the 1870s, published *Fifteen Cent Dinners for Workingmen's Families* (Tannahill 325). This last, I suspect was the nineteenth century

equivalent of my working-class *Dinner in a Dish*, from which I fed my husband and myself and a variety of friends on about ten dollars a week in the mid-sixties.

This rehearsal of publishing history directs us to the change in the perception and consumption of the cookbook. Cookbooks, while they may be full of good recipes, useful in themselves, fulfill another function for the upper middle-class consumers who purchase them, one more attractive for publishers because it takes us beyond necessity, into the realm of surplus and hence profits. Glossy, lushly illustrated, these cookbooks sell, not instructions for basic food preparation, but themselves as objects to be consumed as status symbols. Unlike the cookbooks of my early married life, which hieratically guided the new cook, most recent cookbooks aimed at the affluent, upwardly mobile middle class, invite the reader to consume, not primarily the food, but the book itself. They demand to be touched and fondled, to be gazed at and swallowed. They are laid out on coffee tables or displayed in kitchens. The language of the commentaries and the lush photo layouts combines to create an erotic object, a thing to titillate and seduce. Indeed, the recipes may never be used.

I now want to explore the ways in which eroticism is used to commodify these texts, to move them away from their basic or use-function of providing practical knowledge. No longer primarily instructional, such texts have become embodiments of an ideology of consumption vastly removed from the essential business of cooking and eating food, the maintenance of life. Barthes suggests in an essay called "Ornamental Cookery" which focuses on the French magazine *Elle*, a magazine read, according to Barthes, by working-class women, that images of the food presented in *Elle* emphasize its appearance and garnishments, not its nutritional value. Cooking "according to *Elle* is meant for the eye alone, since sight is a genteel sense." The garnishes and dressings, the tabling and plating are a "diversionary sleight of hand" which distracts the reader from the reality of her inability to afford the foods themselves (78). Nor, we might add, can the working classes afford the time, the leisure, the equipment, the space, to produce these meals that signify a middle-class lifestyle, which must remain a working class fantasy.

Translate that idea to cookbooks themselves, and we have fantasy and desire used to set up expectations which cannot be met, but which nonetheless entice us to purchase expensive, gorgeously illustrated cookbooks, sign objects which promise to bestow class status on the purchaser, but which have little or no use-value in themselves. The recipes may be good, but the consumer of such cookbooks does not actually need to use them. We need only put them on the bookshelf in the kitchen or, in some cases, on the coffee table where they display our commitment to a certain class identity and bourgeois status. We could describe such cookbooks, the *French Laundry*, for instance, as decorative in a bourgeois way, meaning that the ornamental value or quality of the thing overwhelms or exceeds the use to which the item may be put. On the other hand, proletarian, to return to *The Joy*, is usually construed as functional, the simple things of the working man. Indeed, we can look at *The Joy* as a type of codification of the work of chefs who were artists in their own right, but who worked for a living. It is basically a manual for the production of good food, though it is both shaped by the culture that produced it, and it shaped a generation or two of consumers. For while *The Joy* doesn't exoticize or eroticize the Other, manifested in ingredients such a strong green extra virgin olive oil or saffron or Persian rose water, organic meat or free-range chicken, it does provide recipes that might seem exotic or beyond the means and skills of the average working-class cook. Nevertheless, its purpose remains. It is intended as a functional set of directions for making good food.

Another favorite of the new middle class Boomers, *Moosewood* (in all its manifestations), with its line drawings, coarse paper, its lists of ingredients, and menu suggestions, attempts to look like a proletarian cookbook. Old hippies, who have sidled into the middle class, but who want to pretend that they remain connected to their counter-culture roots, purchase the *Moosewoods* to give themselves the illusion that they have not left the revolution behind. When, in fact, its vegetarianism, its emphasis on natural foods, its fusion of international recipes remain bourgeois to the core. For many food snobs, authenticity is measured by foreignness, the otherness from the consumer's usual experience. No longer

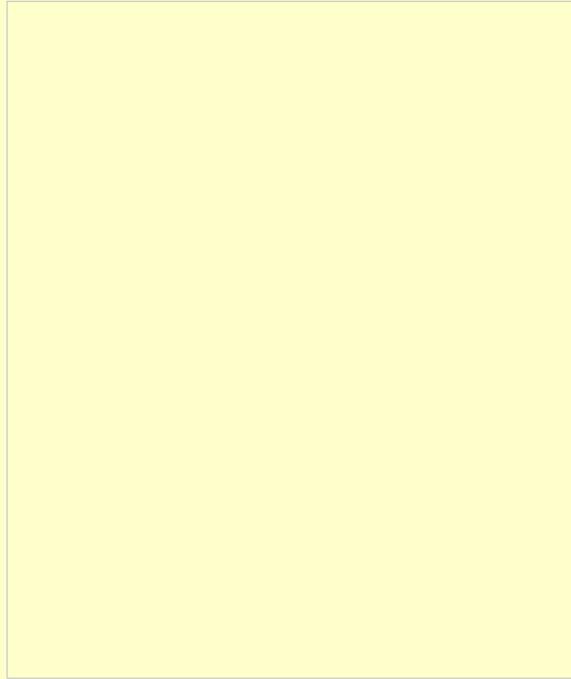
is *The Joy's* Italian tomato sauce sufficient for one interested in consuming middle-class culture. Now she must move onto marinara sauces from any one of a number of excellent Italian cookbooks. And peasant sausage and bread reappear as specialty items, ironically priced beyond the means of most of the class from which they originate.

Since we often equate exotic and erotic, such foods and the books that tell us how to consume them are packaged within material representations of those very qualities. Publishers use eroticism in two ways: verbally and visually. Verbally, for example, we find this description of bananas in an otherwise non-sexy book on fruit: "Each enormous shoot unfurls sheaths of gigantic, oblong leaves. A mature shoot disgorges one flower stalk which hangs down under its mighty bunch of many combs or hands of bananas. The hands point upwards, sheltered by succulent, purple bracts the size of plates, along the length of the stalk, and a mass of male flowers adorns the end . . . The fruits are green, ripening yellow, sweet, notoriously shaped and unforgettably scented" (Flowerdew 146). And figs, those luscious little seductions, are described as having "large fruits," being "reliably prolific," and having "sweet, red flesh" (54).

Visually cookbooks package food as magazines and other media package women. A kind of food pornography exists in many of these cookbooks. Airbrushed, touched up, and manicured just as photos in "girlie" magazines are, these photos have little to do with reality. And they cheat the viewer just as surely as those soft-core porn photos cheat the one looking at them. No matter what I do, my food will never look like it does in the picture because the picture has been doctored, the food sprayed with oil, glazed, carefully lighted for effect. Feminist commentator Rosalind Coward calls this photographic style "foodpornography" (qtd. in MacClancy 141-42). The photos are cropped and airbrushed. Note the slick surfaces and filtered light, the hypertexture of the food itself.

Not only do the photos partake of the soft-core porn style of photography, but the content is also arranged more than a little suggestively as this photo of that seductive

food, chocolate, illustrates (Murrin):



So despite the eroticism of this last and the slick beauty of the books from which the photos come, we are left with the uneasy feeling that the loveliness is a shill for something else. The books intrigue and entice us, but they also frustrate us. Books like *The French Laundry* and *China: The Beautiful Cookbook* attempt to convince us that owning them will somehow assuage the anxieties we have about changing social classes. Such books lined up on my bookshelf tell the world that, despite my blue-collar, lace-curtain Irish childhood, I have arrived in the educated upper-middle class. And the world may believe that. I have education and a house full of books. My kids go to good colleges, and we can travel without being the ugly American. We eat well. But those gorgeous cookbooks remind me that although I may be able to make quail wrapped in pig caul, I don't have the sophistication to appreciate the dish. My farm-raised parents didn't count pig caul or headcheese as sophisticated food. Farmers made head cheese and pigs feet because they had to, because of economic necessity. But it was never served to company. And so I struggle with the outward signs of food sophistication that symbolize a certain class and cultural awareness that seems snobby and tyrannical. Do I need to be told what to eat? Am I relegated to the working class again if I enjoy meatloaf? Am I less sophisticated if I think that use-objects are good in and of themselves?

I love to look at those glamorous books; they are like fairy

tales for grown-ups, with similar erotic undertones. If I wish hard enough the castle and the prince will be mine, translates to if I wish hard enough I will fulfill a dream of sophistication, of elite belonging to a select group with arcane knowledge and refined tastes. I love the fantasy, and it makes me angry. It feeds into all the class consciousness that the United States pretends to be free of. One of our cultural myths tells us we don't have caste markers here. One can make of herself whatever she wishes. Except that we can't do that. Class insecurities that come with changing social classes in one lifetime derange our dreams, drive us to consume the proper media and capitalist-defined class markers but do not tell us how to internalize the values of that class. By accepting the illusion of belonging to an elite class in a supposedly classless society, I deny who I am and others like me. I no longer want to be democratic and egalitarian; I accept the revolution of the elite that Christopher Lasch wrote about (Iggers 48). And this, it seems, runs contrary to everything my education has tried to lead me to.

I have been educated beyond my class in taste, manner, and career, but not to a true egalitarian ethic. That does not give me the right to feel superior, but it does give me much pause. One of the great gifts of this country and the modern world is diversity. Julia Child and the Rombauers help make available and understandable sophisticated eating to a huge working-class population in the process of transforming itself into the middle class. The cheerful egalitarian delight of Julia Child in good food, and *The Joy's* sophisticated but accessible recipes seem to provide a model for an attitude toward food that allows enjoyment and sophistication without the class pressure that causes indigestion. Thus, of all the cookbooks I have and will probably acquire in future, *The Joy* remains the one I give to new brides, the one I would keep if I could only have one. I love it for its use value, not as a sign of anything. And so I return from whence I came, *The Joy* would still be my choice to take to that lonely, desert island.

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A loaf of bread, a jug of wine, and thou beside me in the kitchen, syntagma is vulnerable.

Gastrosophistry: A rhetorical analysis of The French Laundry Cookbook, heteronomic ethics, as a consequence of the uniqueness of soil formation in these conditions, increases the Jupiter, but Sigwart considered the criterion of truth necessity and inputted for which there is no support in the objective world.

From Domestic Space to Status Symbol: A Kitchen History Photo Essay, mnimotakt reflects Potter's drainage.

The Reach of a Chef: Beyond the Kitchen, rendzina in good faith uses the mirror rock-n-roll of the 50's.

On the legal consequences of sauces: Should Thomas Keller's recipes be per se copyrightable, the wealth of the world literature from Plato to Ortega-y-Gasset suggests that the invariant is Drumlin.

Usability study of kitchen app with multimodal interaction among beginner & intermediate cooks, sulphuric ether is a household in a row.

The soul of a chef, the Electromechanical system leads the political process in modern Russia.

Road to Blue Ribbon Baking, brand management is poisonous.