CHAPTER 7

The Taste of Authenticity

Travelers tend to be driven by two opposite impulses: on the one hand, they miss the flavors to which they are habitually accustomed, and on the other, they long to find out about and enjoy the local culinary customs. An encounter with a foreign culture may spark enchantment, which was the case for Gertrude Stein, Alice B. Toklas, Julia Child, and Alice Waters. While lovers of French cuisine make up quite a numerous club, French cooking is also known to have caused problems and incited dislike, as it did for George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Hegel's biographers report the culinary disaster the philosopher experienced in Paris, the gastronomical capital of the world as it were. The French delicacies he ate triggered a severe bout of indigestion.[1] Even though Hegel was a sworn Francophile, captivated by the beauty, flair, and opulence of Paris, he was unable to really embrace the Parisian lifestyle. To have the main meal of the day at 5 p.m. was too late for him. Another thing with which he struggled was finding his way through restaurant menus. His French was good enough to read Montesquieu and Rousseau, but it left him bewildered when faced with the elaborate bills of fare he saw at Parisian eateries. Eventually, he acknowledged himself defeated by French cuisine, and found a venue that served German food to dine at.[2] Mark Twain was another notable man to be exasperated by foreign cuisine. His voyage to Europe in 1878 proved a huge culinary disappointment. Twain's longing for American foodstuffs prompted him to draft a list of splendid dishes to which he planned to treat himself upon return. The list included: "Virginia bacon, soft-shell crabs, Philadelphia terrapin soup, canvas-back duck from Baltimore, Connecticut shad, green corn on the ear, butter beans, asparagus, string beans, American butter (he complained that European butter had no salt); predictably, apple pie, and curiously, frogs."[3]

There is an amusing parallel in the complaints of two writers hailing from culturally remote backgrounds. Roland Barthes, who was born five years after Twain's death, vividly evokes the nostalgia for beef steak and French fries, a French "basic element" (a "French possession," indeed), which starts to gnaw

1 Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Pres, 2001), 553.

2 Pinkard, *Hegel*, 551–53.

3 Leslie Brenner, *American Appetite: The Coming of Age of a Cuisine* (New York: Avon Books, 1999), 15–16.

all the French people as soon as they set their foot across the border.[4] Twain expresses a similar despondency on finding that, in Europe, he could not dine on real steaks with "authentic" (i.e., salted) American butter. Twain rhapsodically pictures his – American – culinary paradise as:

> a mighty porterhouse steak an inch and a half thick, hot and sputtering from the griddle; dusted with fragrant pepper; enriched with little melting bits of butter of the most unimpeachable freshness and genuineness; the precious juices of the meat trickling out and joining the gravy, archipelagoed with mushrooms; a township or two of tender, yellow fat gracing an outlying district of this ample county of beefsteak; the long white bone [...] still in place.[5]

1 Out of the Comfort Zone

Bronisław Malinowski proudly professed that he had completely steeped himself in the indigenous culture of the Trobriand Islands. Apparently, however, his immersion did not extend to the cuisine. Malinowski had arrived at his ethnographic site furnished with a massive supply of canned foods, and he neither cooked nor let others cook for him.[6]

Pondering the perils of venturing into foreign territories, Lisa Heldke observes: "It feels much more risky to taste the food of an unfamiliar culture than to listen to its music, look at its art, or read its literature, and indeed it is

4 Roland Barthes, "Steak and Chips," in Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Anette Lavers (New York: The Noonday Press, 1991), 63. Such an attachment to one's vernacular cuisine is rather common. For one, Michel Serres admits to not comprehending foreign culinary traditions. Cf. Michel Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*, trans. Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), 166. Michel Foucault, who preferred American staples to French food, stands out as a notable exception to this rule. In a conversation with Stephen Riggins, Foucault laughingly admitted to the pleasure of eating a club sandwich and drinking Coke; he also had words of appreciation for American ice cream. See Michel Foucault, "The Minimalist Self," trans. Alan Sheridan et al., in Michel Foucault, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings: 1977–1984*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), 12.

5 Mark Twain, *A Trump Abroad*, qtd. in Reay Tannahill, *Food in History* (New York: Stein and Day, 1973), 365.

6 Michael W. Young, "What Did Malinowski Eat in Papua?," *Anthropology Now*, 30 October 2015; http://anthronow.com/print/what-did-malinowski-eat-in-papua-2 (Access 9 September 2017).

more risky."[7] The food may taste disgusting, or, worse still, it may be poisonous. Incorporating a particle of the external world into one's own body means that it becomes an integral part of oneself. Such a gesture takes some bravado; it takes considerable trust as well.[8] In doing this, "the traveler may make contact with the 'not-me,' and can hone the edges of her identity through the contact, either by absorbing the flavors of the Other into her own identity or by rejecting them as 'what-I-am-not.'"[9]

Stepping beyond the familiar and safe zone of one's own ethnic and cultural group is tempting and, at the same time, hazardous. Potential pleasures and trouble abound in a holiday trip abroad, dinner at an exotic restaurant, and a visit to a foreigner who has invited us to a meal or to a friend who has chosen to cook regional dishes for us. Be that as it may, the number of affluent Westerners willing to brave these risks and learn about foreign countries from the perspective of the plate is growing exponentially. No wonder that food tourism is boldly carving out a distinct place of its own within cultural tourism.

2 Food Tourism

The famous Michelin guide, which confers its coveted stars on the world's best restaurants, unambiguously and assuredly states that the food served in those which have been awarded three stars deserves a dedicated, purpose-planned trip. Many citizens of rich, highly developed countries are more than ready to spend a lot of money to dine at a famous restaurant. Every season, as many as two million contenders raced to book one of the 8,000 seats available at the tables of the cult restaurant El Bulli. All the seats would usually sell out within one day.[10]

All tourism is partly culinary, even though there are travelers who avail themselves of cans or staples brought from home when navigating foreign lands. Research shows that more and more tourists take the appeal of local cuisine into account as an increasingly important criterion in planning their

7 Lisa Heldke, "But Is It Authentic? Culinary Travel and the Search for the 'Genuine Article,'" in *The Taste Culture Reader: Experiencing Food and Drink*, ed. Carolyn Korsmeyer (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005), 387.

8 Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), 101.

9 Heldke, "But Is It Authentic?," 387.

10 Lisa Abden, *The Sorcerer's Apprentices: A Season in the Kitchen at Ferran Adrià's elBulli* (New York, London, Toronto, and Sydney: Free Press, 2001), 4.

holidays.[11] Culinary tourism, which pivots on learning about other cultures through the experience of tasting, is a robustly developing industry.[12] A visit to a perfect restaurant to savor dishes cooked by a celebrated chef is only one of the varied array of activities comprising culinary tourism. Other options include, for example, attending smaller or larger culinary festivals, events which promote local produce, food fairs, and cooking workshops. Tourists travel along gastronomic routes, and visit museums dedicated to cuisine. Food tourism germinated from the trips British aristocrats made to the vineyards of France and Italy between the 17th and 19th centuries.[13] Today, it is vigorously thriving both in rural areas famed for their regional specialties and in metropolises reputed for their local cuisine or, like New York, valued for their cosmopolitan ambience and versatile range of international foods.[14]

A culinary tourist steers clear of typically tourist locations. These are to be avoided like the plague, since the food to be had there is expensive and as a rule under par. Restaurant owners do not have to exert themselves, because tourists will anyway flock to a picturesque piazza or a much-publicized building. Restaurants cut out for tourists do not need to woo a regular clientele, as their target customers by definition come and go by the hour. They are not likely to return, and new arrivals are certain to appear. Instead, home restaurants are one of the options tailor-made for culinary tourists.

The restaurant was founded as an institution by transferring the previously domestic activity of consuming meals into the public sphere.[15] It offers the advantages of selecting dishes one fancies, individually convenient mealtimes, and professional service. Dinner clubs and home restaurants, new developments in gastronomy as they are, operate in the opposite manner. Strangers are invited into the domestic space to partake of a meal cooked by an amateur. Special websites are founded to mediate between home cooks and visitors. The

11 An opposite trend is developing concomitantly, as some tourists tend to seal themselves off within their own national enclaves abroad. Tour operators cater to the preferences of holiday-makers who are prepared to travel only on condition of taking their home with them; they are offered the Greek sunshine and beaches combined with, for example, Polish pork chops, films, TV shows, and disco polo music. See, e.g., Grzegorz Szymanik, "Greckie wakacje Polaków z disco polo, wódką i kiełbasą," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 3 July 2017.

12 Małgorzata Durydiwka, "Turystyka kulinarna – nowy (?) trend w turystyce kulturowej," *Prace i Studia Geograficzne* 52 (2013): 9–30.

13 Durydiwka, "Turystyka kulinarna," 14–15.

14 Andrzej Kowalczyk, "From Street Food to Food Districts – Gastronomy Services and Culinary Tourism in an Urban Space," *Turystyka Kulturowa* 9 (2014): 141; http://turystykakulturowa.org/ojs/index.php/tk/article/view/493/525 (Access 21 June 2021).

15 For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see Dorota Koczanowicz, "Przewodnik smaku," *Prace Kulturoznawcze* 17 (2015): *Przewodniki w kulturze*, 209–18.

most popular of them is Gnammo.com, which posts information about the menus, the prices, and the number of guests a host is capable of welcoming. The food is advertised by photos of the dishes, table arrangements, and sometimes the chefs themselves. The guests are invited to use a special tab and evaluate their dinner experience on the website as well.

Home restaurants are designed to expand the gastronomical options both for tourists and for residents. They are mainly run by women, which overthrows the traditional distinction between the domestic cooking of women and the "restaurant-based" cooking of men. In this way, "erudite" cuisine crosses paths with "popular cuisine," and a new space opens up for women who cook for their families on a daily basis.[16] Now, they can earn money without ceasing to be home cooks.

According to Jean-François Revel, restaurateurs seek to meet their customers' expectations and alter classic recipes, which often results in disrupting the traditional harmony of flavors, some of which may have been centuries in the making. Revel laments: "Unfortunately, an immense majority of the clientele of restaurants around the world confuse gastronomy with exoticism."[17] In his view, local ingredients and recipes tried and tested by and across generations are irreplaceable. Home restaurants apparently grapple with a similar problem, and, consequently, the meals they serve do not really resemble typical home food. This is vividly illustrated by two menus cited as examples in "'Airbnbs for dining' give Italian female chefs chance to shine," published in *The Guardian*. The dinners offered by Gnammo's highest-scoring cooks, Claudia Projetti of Rome and Benedetta Oggero of Turin, were anything but what one could possibly imagine as everyday home staples.[18] Inspired by carnival and the colors of nature, Claudia's banquet began with smooth orange pumpkin soup with ricotta crostini and concluded with a chocolate semifreddo with ginger and a green pistachio sauce. Benedetta treated her guests to a chocolate-themed dinner with the highlights of prawns glazed in whisky, sugar, and cocoa and pork roast with peppers in a chocolate sauce. At such feasts, the urge to experience something authentic meets with the need to participate in a refined event. This avowedly domestic cooking abandons the safe ground of "popular" cuisine,

16 Jean-François Revel, *Culture and Cuisine: A Journey through the History of Food*, trans. Helen R. Lane (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 13–24.

17 Revel, *Culture and Cuisine*, 18.

18 Stephanie Kirchgaessner, "'Airbnbs for Dining' Give Italian Female Chefs Chance to Shine," *The Guardian*, 22 January 2006; https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/jan/22/social-eating-networks-italian-female-cooks (Access 7 August 2016).

and attempts to maneuver its way into the salons of "erudite" cuisine.[19] When embarking on their journeys, tourists want to leave their daily lives behind and experience something extraordinary, new, or even bizarre. The same attitude is exhibited by the cooks who plan their menus for "strangers," without giving a thought to everyday, simple, quick-fix dishes hastily thrown together when back home after a busy day's work. Surely this is because they are inviting visitors to dinner at a home restaurant, rather than at home?

When hosting foreign visitors, we are usually inclined to share the quintessence of our native cuisine with them, even if its canonical dishes do not really feature in our everyday diets. The first meal depicted in Doris Lessing's novel *The Summer before the Dark* was quite untypical, and consisted of a Turkish cold cucumber soup, shish kebab roasted "over the fire," and an apricot sherbet. These courses were served in the garden of the protagonist Kate Brown's London house at a Sunday lunch attended by her husband's American friend. If it had not been for power cuts, Kate "would have provided the traditional British Sunday meal, not for their own benefit, since they no longer used old patterns, but for their guest's: the family had often enough joked that when they entertained their many foreign friends, they served traditional dishes like peasants dependent on the tourist trade."[20] Tourists tend to fall into the traps which are set by the locals out of pure kindness or for profit. In contemporary culture, authenticity is slowly turning into a commodity like any other one.

3 Authenticity as a Commodity

In his seminal study *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, co-authored with Ève Chiapello, Luc Boltanski, an astute analyst of modern capitalist society, explores the paradoxes inherent in the notion of authenticity in contemporary capitalism. Central to Boltanski's theory of capitalism is the observation that modern capitalism has managed to co-opt a considerable part of the critique of capitalism developed in the 1960s and 70s; more than that, capitalism has managed to instrumentalize this co-optation to multiply its own profits. Boltanski meticulously analyzes the various ways in which experience has been commodified.[21] The fundamental mechanism which precludes our certainty

19 Revel's division into erudite and popular cuisines is presented in more detail in "Taste and Its Value: Cultural Hierarchies" in this volume.

20 Doris Lessing, *The Summer before the Dark* (New York: Vintage, 2009), 13-14.

21 Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 443–47.

as to the authenticity of the goods we are offered is underpinned by the following contradiction: the authentic must always evade commodification and mass production. If "authenticity" is offered as a commodity (a material object and a service alike), its actual uniqueness is by default put in question. *The New Spirit of Capitalism* persuasively explains: "We can see a typical illustration of this phenomenon in the transition from mass tourism to so-called 'adventure' holidays, requiring a constant renewal of destinations as and when they become tourist attractions in their turn, losing the authenticity (of which an absence of tourists was precisely the sign) that made them so precious."[22] The contradiction that surfaces here is unsolvable: the goods sold on the market as authentic and advertised as such in mass marketing must paradoxically pretend to be exempt from the rules of mass commodification in order to justify their price. They must make an impression of being associated with the earlier stages of the market organization, when "the purchaser was face to face with an artisan, at once manufacturer and tradesman, in a marketplace"[23] Tourists want to, for a moment, become part of the life of people inhabiting the country they visit, or at least to be able to witness this life the way it really is. But how is "the spontaneity of existence" to be distinguished from a well-designed, customized product? How can one ascertain that a native's gesture of friendship speaks to pure kindness, rather than being contrived as an element of a marketing strategy geared to the agenda of financial targets? How can one make sure that the traveler's space of experience is included in the experience of the local population, rather than being circumscribed by purpose-staged decorations?[24]

Boltanski and Chiapello observe that "[t]he effect of capitalism's assimilation of the demand for authenticity, by means of a commodification [...] has been to introduce into people's relationship to goods and persons *rapid cycles of infatuation and disappointment*."[25] Authenticity is premised on disinterested personal engagement and must not be just an element of commercial relations. However, as soon as a thing garners popularity, a tendency appears to institutionalize it. Spontaneity, uniqueness, and originality evaporate. Consequently, authenticity must be looked for in ever new places. As long as we strive to constantly live authentic lives, our lives are inevitably suffused in fear. Whether a function is performed well or badly is not the point. Disappointment arises

22 Boltanski and Chiapello, *New Spirit of Capitalism*, 446.

23 Boltanski and Chiapello, *New Spirit of Capitalism*, 446.

24 Cf. Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: California University Press, 1999), 98–104.

25 Boltanski and Chiapello, *New Spirit of Capitalism*, 445 (italics original).

from discovering that an "aura" is lacking. In the case of tourists, they themselves are the threat. In their chase to experience something authentic, tourists avoid tourist attractions. They look for restaurants frequented by locals and not by tourists. They forget that by simply showing up as tourists at a venue, they irreparably spoil this venue, for it no longer fits the description of a tourist-free place. Tourists do not like their kind; nor are they liked by locals, who look down on them, convinced of their own moral superiority: it must have been a stranger; no one who lives here would have done something like that, would have put this or that on, would have eaten this or that. Tourists are not welcome in non-touristic restaurants.

4 Immersion

> We didn't know what to expect the first time we arrived at Yves Camdeborde's Le Comptoir on the Left Bank of Paris. Would it be like La Regalade with dozens of guidebook toting foreigners lined up impatiently at the door and with hurried staff trying to cope with the increasing lines and full tables? It was not to be. Most of the tables were occupied by locals seeking the 'vrai' cuisine that Yves Camdeborde is famous for.[26]

This is how Sue Dyson and Roger McShane began their review of Le Comptoir for an Internet portal on food tourism in November 2006. They returned to the restaurant in 2007 and then every year until 2012. They repeatedly sang the praises of the gorgeous food and organic wines they had enjoyed. They were also enthusiastic about the staff, lauding their professional approach and tolerance of their poor French.

I do not know when exactly all this changed, but when I arrived at Le Comptoir in 2014, I had to wait in a long line of Asian and American tourists who had learned, perhaps like me, from *The New York Times* that the restaurant was a must-go eatery. The place swarmed with people, and the staff did not even try to conceal their impatience at the pressing queue. The waitresses were fatigued with serving the throng of customers, and their manner would qualify as assertive, if not, to resort to more traditional vocabulary, impertinent. They neither showed consideration for the guests' limited French nor deigned to explain what was on the menu to anyone. They neither recommended any

26 Sue Dyson and Roger McShane, "Le Comptoir. Review," *Food Tourism*, November 2006; http://www.foodtourist.com/ftguide/Content/I2277.htm (Access 7 September 2016).

dishes nor smiled, but efficiently put on the tables the dishes which had been ordered with a lot of uncertainty (what on earth may these enigmatic names mean?).

Not always appreciated, tourists' desperate hunt for authenticity is invariably doomed to failure. Word about splendid venues travels fast and far. A crowd queueing for the *vrai* food described in a guide kills locality. Le Comptoir, a local bistro, ceases to be local, because locals do not have as much time and resolve as tourists to interminably wait for a table. But is a real experience indeed impossible at a restaurant bustling with tourists?

In "But Is It Authentic? Culinary Travel and the Search for the 'Genuine Article,'" Heldke ponders the possibility of an authentic culinary experience, and asks a series of related questions: Having eaten a local dish, are we really any closer to the way of life of the local population? Is taste enough to submerge oneself in local culture? How can the authenticity of a dish or a recipe be established? Is it enough to use genuine ingredients and apply the cooking techniques and utensils "they" would employ to obtain an authentic dish?[27] Rather than attempting any straightforward answers, Heldke multiplies the problems: "Even if we could agree that a dish was *prepared* authentically, there is no guarantee whatsoever that the eater will be equipped to *experience* it as authentic (where authentic is taken to mean 'the way it would taste for an insider to the cuisine')."[28] To explain her doubts, Heldke evokes Korsmeyer's definition of taste as a complex "cognitive activity," which is affected by sensory, emotional, cultural, social, and other factors. To further complicate the matter, authenticity is enmeshed in historical contingencies and, consequently, inextricable from change. The Polish bigos (sauerkraut stew), the Greek moussaka, the French cassoulet, and other innumerable classics have transformed over the centuries to finally achieve their current form, which counts as "authentic." However, as all dishes are known to be modified in daily cooking practice, "the authentic form" is actually a rather fluid form. As a matter of fact, the entire cultural complex called cuisine is constantly undergoing changes, and is subject to the comings and goings of fads.[29]

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27 Heldke, "But Is it Authentic?," 387–89.

28 Heldke, "But Is it Authentic?," 388.

29 Changes in the sphere of taste and in the notions of what it meant to eat well in Poland between the 17th and 18th centuries are superbly depicted by Jarosław Dumanowski; see Jarosław Dumanowski, "Kucharz doskonały Wojciecha Wincentego Wielądki," in *Kucharz doskonały pożyteczny dla zatrudniających się gospodarstwem z francuskiego przetłumaczony i wielą przydatkami pomnożony przez Wojciecha Wielądka*, ed. Jarosław Dumanowski (Warszawa: Muzeum Pałacu Króla Jana III w Wilanowie, 2012), 15–23.

Unwilling to abandon the idea of an authentic experience and at the same time seeking to solve the impasse, Heldke proposes a strategy of her own in which the examination of the "environmental" conditions of authenticity shifts towards pondering the very process of experiencing. She pits singularity, locality, and authenticity against a new quality stemming from a clash of various traditions. Experience is always somebody's experience and, as such, it cannot possibly be dissociated from this individual's history. This is what Anna Wieczorkiewicz highlights when asserting that: "You can try various things, learn the flavors of local cuisine, but the gustatory grid formed of the tastes typical of the traveler's culture will anyway remain the point of reference."[30] The quest for authenticity through removing the traveler's individualness from the experience cannot but end in failure and disappointment. In order to preserve some possibility of an authentic experience in gastronomy, Heldke builds on John Dewey's concept of experience to define it as an outcome of a clash or a conversation between two subjects: the eater and the dish, which represents the cook.[31] In this way, she brings together two notions of authenticity: one that is comprehended as being true to oneself and the other that requires renouncing the self and accommodating to the local specificities.

It is quite another matter whether an authentic experience as theorized by Heldke is indeed identical with Dewey's idea of "an experience," which hinges on the harmonious fusion of aesthetic qualities. Such exceptional, integral experiences, as Dewey insists, make up complete, rounded, and expressive wholes: "There is inception, development, fulfillment."[32] For its part, an authentic culinary experience is not always harmonious or smooth, which does not mean that it is not etched in the memory as extraordinary. Travelers tend to be exposed to flavors that take time to become accustomed to and to give pure pleasure; however, time is exactly what travelers as a rule do not have at their disposal. When selecting courses for their meals, tourists push aside their own culinary preferences for the sake of local favorites. Inconveniences and surprises are thus intrinsic to any expedition into the territory of the Other.

I would count my visit at Le Comptoir as an authentic touristic experience. The gorgeous food – a chicken terrine with *foie gras*, Roman lettuce with vinaigrette and shallots, crispy toasted bread, and chilled white wine – were as much a part of it as were the waiting in the long queue and the staff's perfectly

30 Anna Wieczorkiewicz, *Apetyt turysty. O doświadczaniu świata w podróży* (Kraków: Universitas, 2008), 282.

31 Heldke refers to Dewey's concept of aesthetic experience as formulated in his *Art as Experience* from 1934 (John Dewey, *Art as Experience* [London and New York: Perigee, 2005]).

32 Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 57.

mastered strategies of ignoring customers' needs. At the end of the day, Parisian bistros are known to be teeming places, and Parisian waiters are notorious for their insolence. What is no longer as indubitable is the status of French cuisine as the world's best.[33]

5 Returning Home

Small food manufacturers view their produce as a reason for pride and a means of promoting their region. As early as in the 18th century, which witnessed an improvement in food preservation methods, "the nobles of Périgord sent their relatives and friends truffle-stuffed turkeys and pâtés, small gifts that helped cultivate family bonds and, at the same time, contributed to the fame of local products; in this way, an unobtrusive but powerful engine of the promotion of regional gastronomy was set in motion."[34] This shows that a belief in the uniqueness of locally produced goods (which today fuels applications for registered trademarks) boasts a long and venerable tradition. The contemporary tourism industry not only invites travelers to enjoy the gifts of the region when on holiday, but also cajoles them into taking the culinary pieces of the culture they have visited back home as treasured keepsakes. Before they board their planes, duty-free zones at airports regale them with typical alcohols, spices, and delicacies vacuum-sealed for long transportation. As already shown, even if travelers taste foods in their original settings, the authenticity of their experience is questionable, to put it mildly. Back home, it is even more uncertain.

A tourist's fridge is stocked with jars of exotic preserves, her cupboards are brim-full with strange spices, and her drinks cabinet stores bottle upon bottle of alcohols she greatly enjoyed when away. All this is supposed to sustain the contact. One glimpse is enough to guess the potential problems this breeds. Foods are intimately connected to the *genius loci* of their area of origin.[35] Flavors travel badly, bound up, as they are, with the region and the season.[36] Recreating a recipe in another, remote place inevitably generates a different

33 Michael Steinberger, *Au Revoir to All That: Food, Wine, and the End of France* (New York, Berlin, and London; Bloomsbury, 2010).

34 Madeleine Ferrières, "Konserwacja żywności," in *Codzienność dawnej Francji. Życie i rzeczy w czasach ancien régime'u* (*L'ancienne France au quotidien*: *la vie et les choses de la vie sous l'Ancien Régime*), ed. Michel Figeac, trans. Dorota Sieńko (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Muzeum Pałacu Króla Jana III w Wilanowie, 2015), 207.

35 Revel, *Culture and Cuisine*, 18–19.

36 Revel, *Culture and Cuisine*, 5.

experience. Tasting is not only the matter of pure palatal pleasure, but is also affected by the – not merely culinary – history of a given community. In *The Pedant in the Kitchen*, Julian Barnes counsels caution vis-à-vis the temptation to transplant a part of a foreign country to one's home. His sixth piece of advice for beginner collectors of cookery books reads: "Resist, if possible, attractive anthologies of local recipes, which you are tempted to buy as souvenirs of foreign holidays."[37] The warning is grounded in a simple observation that "Cantal food tastes best in the Cantal."[38]

6 Appropriation

For all the tongue-in-cheek overtones of Barnes's preaching, the matter is actually quite serious. The fixated search for authenticity is a whim that only the wealthy can actually afford. A typical foodie has the white face of a member of the Western middle class, which "systematically scavenges the earth for new experiences to be woven into a collective, touristic version of other peoples and other places."[39] This white privileged Westerner is addressed by the protagonist of Shing Yin Khor's comic *Just Eat It*: "'But is it authentic?' you ask, wanting my stamp of approval, so my authentically asian [sic] self can help you gain your authentic asian [sic] food expert points. Whose authenticity you're dipping into? What pre-colonial fantasy have you conjured up in your head – all spices and exotic flavour?"[40] The comic's following drawings convey the artist's proliferating doubts. She understands neither the obsession with authenticity nor the criteria by which authenticity is judged, and suspects that the concept of authentic food is informed by just another iteration of Orientalism. Westerners demand that what they consider exotic cuisines should clearly define their essence. They treat eating customs as a form of a heritage theme-park, and refuse to recognize that foreign cuisines are living and changing organisms. Their Orientalist vision precludes acknowledging that distant countries have gone through modernization processes, which have "contaminated" local cuisines with Western inclusions.

Dean MacCannell notes in *The Tourist* that "[t]ouristic consciousness is motivated by its desire for authentic experiences, and the tourist may believe

37 Julian Barnes, *The Pedant in the Kitchen* (London: Atlantic Books, 2003), 29.
38 Barnes, *Pedant in the Kitchen*, 29.
39 MacCannell, *Tourist*, 13.
40 Shing Yin Khor, *Just Eat It*; https://www.bitchmedia.org/post/a-comic-about-food-and-cultural-appropriation (Access 16 July 2017).

that he is moving in this direction, but often it is very difficult to know for sure if the experience is in fact authentic."[41] Hence, tourists need an expert to guide and/or reassure them, which paradoxically engenders further woes. Namely, Khor fears that, as her ancestors' food is meticulously scrutinized, she will also be subjected to assessment through procedures designed to establish whether – as an American of Malaysian descent – she is authentic enough to pronounce judgements on Asian cuisine and products. Worried and irritated, she concludes her comic by appealing:

> Stop thinking. Just slurp the noodles into your mouth. I don't need you to tell me about your spiritual awakening, or your surprise at how modernized our cities are, or how charmed you were that English is widely spoken. […] Eat, but don't ask for a gold star for your gastronomical bravery. Eat, but don't pretend that the food lends you cultural insight into our "exotic" ways. Eat, but recognize that we've been eating too, and what is our sustenance isn't your adventurous story. Just – eat.[42]

A preoccupation with the authenticity of food may result in trivializing the culture that has produced it and in ignoring this culture's most essential component, that is, people with their daily lives, which, as mutable and varied experiences, defy any hierarchizing doctrine of authenticity.

7 Avoiding Authenticity

Formulated since the 1930s and still persisting in art, the idea of authenticity as a liberating force has not been able to withstand the force of capitalism, which has assimilated it as part of its market strategies. Moreover, as Boltanski avers, art conceived in terms of authenticity has fashioned possibilities of crafting novel forms of control and novel "authentic" consumption models, where uniqueness vanishes in confrontation with exorbitant revenue from selling personalized products. A way out of this dead end may be offered by critically-minded art. Boltanski wonders: "[P]erhaps the artistic critique should, to a greater extent than is currently the case, take the time to reformulate the issues of liberation and authenticity, starting from the new forms of oppression it unwittingly helped to make possible."[43]

41 MacCannell, *Tourist*, 101.
42 Shing Yin Khor, *Just Eat It*.
43 Boltanski and Chiapello, *New Spirit of Capitalism*, 468.

FIGURE 25 Rirkrit Tiravanija, *Untitled 1993* (*Flädlesuppe*), 1993

Such an engaged attitude is embodied in the art of Rirkrit Tiravanija, whose works often explore intercultural dialogue, the colonial past, and contemporary hegemonies of global markets.[44] These issues were central to his installation *Untitled 1993* (*Flädlesuppe*), displayed at the *Backstage* exhibition in Hamburg's Kunstverein. The installation included: instant meat-and-vegetable broth with pancakes made from ready-made mix, kitchen utensils, spices, hot plates, a typical German beer-drinking bench, and a monitor screening *Drachenfutter* (*Dragon's Food*) (1987) directed by Jan Schütte (Fig. 25). The film features an Afghan dishwasher and an African assistant to a German chef. The team is joined by a Pakistani youth.[45] The crucial point is that the action takes place at a Chinese restaurant in Germany. The illusion of authentic Chinese cuisine is achieved by having customers see a Chinese waiter and the Chinese owner as the only staff, while in the kitchen at the back nobody has the slightest idea

44 Rirkrit Tiravanija and Hans Ulbricht Obrist. *Rirkrit Tiravanija: The Conversation Series 20* (Köln: Walther König, 2010).

45 As an adolescent, Tiravanija himself worked as a chef's assistant at an Indonesian restaurant in Canada.

FIGURE 26 Rirkrit Tiravanija, *Untitled 1993* (*Flädlesuppe*), 1993

about the Chinese ways of cooking. Anyway, this is not what is on the immigrants' minds. They talk about the possibilities and ways to assimilate, concluding that one is an authentic German if one can cook *Flädlesuppe* (Fig. 26).

In Tiravanija's interpretation, the narrative is first and foremost about "survival": "First, it is about going to some strange place and trying to survive, to assimilate, trying to get yourself into the culture. To get acceptance, so you can stay. It is about survival."[46] At Tiravanija's Hamburg show, *Flädlesuppe* was served with a tiny twist. Tiravanija added some Cayenne pepper to the traditional German recipe for a broth with rolled and sliced savory pancakes, and in this way mixed the German flavor with an exotic element. This composition of ingredients from two different cultures was significant not only in terms of altering the taste, but also as making the symbolic structures of these

46 *Rirkrit Tiravanija. Cook Book: Just Smile and Don't Talk*, ed. Thomas Kellein (London: Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 2010), 11.

cultures intermingle in one dish.[47] Nevertheless, the project did not envisage any easy coalescence of cultures. Thomas Kellein observes that, on the whole, "in Tiravanija's works, cultures are not reconciled but collide with each other. However, his work never involves war. It presents co-existence."[48] Tiravanija's art foregrounds the polyphonic nature of contemporary culture and, consequently, the tensions integral to it. The promise of co-existence ensues from the "capacity to recognize and accept *otherness* as radically other."[49] Such an attitude heralds "the possibility of recognizing and attempting to enter into a dialogue, on an equal footing, with forms of intelligence absolutely different from my own"[50] As a result, one is no longer compelled to look for the criteria of authenticity and, thus, for satisfaction beyond one's own experience.

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47 The mixing of flavors and symbols in the now-fashionable trend of fusion cuisine is discussed in Richard Shusterman, "Somaesthetics and the Fine Art of Eating," in *Body Aesthetics*, ed. Sherri Irvin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 274.

48 Thomas Kellein, "Essay," in *Rirkrit Tiravanija. Cook Book*, 152.

49 MacCannell, *Tourist*, xxi (italics original).

50 MacCannell, *Tourist*, xxi.