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Global Gourmets: Food Writing and Its Fancies of Transculturation

I will begin with quoting what I consider the foundational trope of transcultural food writing - the passage is a lot older than many of you might assume. But - by way of handing you the menu - let me read it first:

"Of these various components of a connoisseur's dinner, the principal parts are of a French origin, such as the meat, fowl and fruit; some are imitated from the English, such as beef-steak, Welsh rarebit, punch etc., some come from Germany, such as the sauerkraut, Hamburg smoked beef, Black Forest fillets; some from Spain, such as the olla podrida, garbanços, Malaga raisins, Xerica-pepper cured ham, and sweet wines; some from Italy, such as the macaroni, Parmesan cheese, Bologna sausages, polenta, and liqueurs; some from Russia, such as the dried meat, smoked eels, and caviar; some from Holland, such as the salt cod, cheeses, pickled herring, curacao and anisette; some from Asia, such as the Indian rice, sago, curry, soy, Shiraz wine, and coffee; some from Africa, such as the Cape wines; and lastly some from America, such as the potatoes, pineapples, chocolate, vanilla, sugar etc.; all of which provides sufficient proof of the statement we have made elsewhere: that a meal such as may be had in Paris is a cosmopolitan whole, in which every part of the world is represented by its products." (Brillat-Savarin, 275)

Maybe you guessed? This is from Brillat-Savarin, lifted from *The Physiology of Taste*, first published in 1825, which set the table for food writing in the West. In its narrative strategies, language repertoire and terms of address it prefigured the genre of food writing from the *enlightened gourmet's* point of view; thus, it must be seen as a crucial subtext to the material I want to look at today.

As an amuse gueule, I am serving just a few references. Homage has to be paid to Sidney Mintz without whom global food studies would be unthinkable. He brought critical historiography into a field dominated by anthropological (post Levi-Strauss) sociological, psychoanalytical, or semiotic (post Barthes) paradigms. Food as an object of academic study has become a topical boom phenomenon over the past 10 years, to the point of MLA and ASA subdivisions, a society for the study of food in the US, and a host of publications ranging from ecological treatises to attacks on imperialism in food production, from analyses of changes in food consumption to observations on food styles, from histories of food industries to critiques of food marketing. Many of those recent studies attempt to

read patterns of human life with/in food as culturally encoded: gender biased, class structured, ethnically embedded, race specific etc. (Mühleisen, Counihan et.al.) The question of *how* those patterns are being played out in narrative dissemination, however, has not yet been a subject of much concern.

As you of course know, contemporary food writing dates back to Epicure; it has brilliant predecessors like the Brillat-Savarin I just quoted, it appears in many textual forms (cook books and autobiographies among them); a few years ago it made a move into electronic media; it even detoured into a small sub-genre of films. As you may imagine, the food for thought here is a bite bigger than I could possibly digest; thus I will restrict myself to gourmet magazines in our present transcultural moment. My point will be precisely that over the last decades those glossy North American, European, and somewhat more recently, Australian gourmet magazines have not just been increasingly transported by globalisation, and so called transculturalisation but have themselves mobilized and articulated it to a great extent.

My readings have been taken primarily from the US-American *Gourmet*, *Bon Appetit* and *Food & Wine*, but also from the German *Essen und Trinken*, from French origin *Elle Bistro*, and from *Vogue Style*, the Australian issue. There are, of course, more German, British, Italian, French, Scandinavian and other European magazines on the market - mostly for the practical reason of language incompetence I have not dealt with them here.

Both, *Bon Appetit*, and *Gourmet*, are being published by the Conde Nast Publications, out of New York; *Essen & Trinken* comes out with Gruner und Jahr; the publisher of the otherwise inconspicuous *Food and Wine* is the American Express Publishing Corporation; *Elle* is on the market thanks to *Elle* Verlag of Burda in cooperation with the Paris-based Hachette Filipacchi Press - so we are definitely talking *up market* here. I haven't yet found any information about circulation numbers. The magazines *are* being sold the world over in drugstores, airports, magazine shops, department stores and supermarkets - so their implied readership is presumably much larger than the tiny elite group of upper middle, and upper class consumers which the life-style advertisement in those magazines explicitly targets.

Ready for the hors d'oeuvre? Now, here is *Food and Wine* July 2002 under "news and notes," with its sensuous echoes of Brillat-Savarin clearly audible: "Fish out of water. Risotto with a side of sashimi? Start getting used to it. Suddenly haute restaurants all over the country are installing sushi bars. Sure, sushi is only a small step away from the tartars, carpaccios, and other raw-fish creations that are ubiquitous on menus these days but the trend may even have a simpler explanation: In an increasingly cutthroat restaurant business, sushi is a sure thing. ... Sushi might seem an incongruous addition to

a menu that includes dishes like caramelized swordfish 'au poivre' and glazed veal chops with bone-marrow flan. But chef Oringer reasons: 'Sushi is a natural extension of my style of cooking. The older I get, the more I believe in the Japanese culinary aesthetic of very pure, clean flavors'.... The trend is not limited to large metropolises. The sushi bar at Portland, Oregon's new Portland City Grill, which serves Pacific Northwest cuisine -- like *macademia nut-crust mahimahi with pineapple-passion fruit curry sauce* -- offers individual sushi and combination plates. As for the international scene, the owners of Canoe in Toronto decided a sushi bar would fit nicely into their concept of modern Canadian cuisine, which includes everything from fiddlehead purée to gnocchi with salsify and pine nuts. For Canoe's homegrown interpretation of sushi, made with ingredients like bluefin tuna, Arctic char roe and maple-marinated bean curd, the staff even coined a catch name: Canushi." (35). I hope you will permit me to deter you from those catchy seductions for now; there *are* more courses to come on the menu.

The appearance of numerous food magazines is a relatively recent and still expanding phenomenon which owes its existence to the 1980s "de luxe decade," in which lifestyle exploded in print, tv, and other media. The important exception here is *Gourmet*, the mother of all food magazines, which first appeared in 1942, as the then editor's "decidedly optimistic act, an impulsive vote for the triumph of good sense and the value of good taste". Says the now Editor-in-Chief, well-known food journalist Ruth Reichl in her "Introduction" to the 2002 anniversary book collection of 60 years of *Gourmet* writing, itself filled with writers as popular and reputable as MFK Fisher, Ray Bradbury, Claudia Roden, Annie Proulx, Paul Theroux, Laurie Colwin and James Beard.

The first editor of *Gourmet* installed it as a most belletristic, stylish, and non-cook-book like "epicurean magazine", as Reichl describes it: "MacAusland (that editor) lived large, and in conceiving America's first epicurean magazine, he thought big. In a time when food was not considered a serious subject, he believed it was the only one. To him food included hunting and fishing, history and science, politics, anthropology, and fiction. It certainly included drink. Refusing to limit his imagination, he invented a food magazine that roamed the world long before it had been shrunk to its current size by the speed of jets. (*or internet, one might add*, my italics) He encouraged *Gourmet*'s writers to venture far and send back reports from the front. They went by rail, by bus, and by ship, and they covered every continent. Sometimes they brought back recipes, often they did not. In later years food magazines would come to rely on recipes, but in MacAusland's *Gourmet* they did not hold pride of place. In looking back, what stands out is the breadth of coverage and the quality of the writing." (Reichl X)

There is, indeed, no arguing against her judgement in terms of the alleged quality of the writing. If one

appreciates food journalism seriously as a genre at all, *Gourmet*'s standards have undoubtedly been honed and kept well. Being a long-term aficionada myself, I would venture to say that many of the reportage articles about the world's cuisines stand out from the surrounding impressive doses of advertisement - which of course all these magazines heavily depend on - like small literary gems of their own. Actually, I have often speculated if it might not benefit our students immensely to expand the range of their vocabulary by way of reading *Gourmet*, *in class*, that is.

In this spirit, what interests me here for the moment, though, is the interesting way in which Reichl's passage about the essence of *Gourmet* is so nicely complimentary to the work of Brillat Savarin. In both cases, the gist is acquisitive of "the world" (no less!) - even though the go-getter Americans in the 1940s knew they had to leave their seats, whereas the 19th century Parisian connoisseurs could comfortably figure themselves at the center of things. In both cases the schooled interest in food is seen as a badge of cosmopolitanism, of an aggressive anti-provincialism without even so much as a nod towards acknowledging that class privilege and imperial hegemony were and are inseparably tied to the ability to "bring home recipes or not." Also, in both cases there is an acute understanding, but *not* a critical reflection of the question of how much the issue of food has to do with literally everything else in society - even if MacAusland's particular patrician list (hunting, fishing, anthropology, and drink...) seems to be somewhat idiosyncratic, to say the least. In the same league, Brillat-Savarin managed in his text to be materialistic enough to look at world economy, trade, industrial production, distribution and marketing, yet he also remained fully dedicated to the self-interested idealism of a world harmoniously bonded by food flows and "exchanges", as he wrote in the *Physiology*, under the heading "Advantages of Gourmandism:"

"From the point of view of political economy, gourmandism is the common bond which unites the nations of the world, through the reciprocal exchange of objects serving for daily consumption. It is gourmandism which sends wines, spirits, sugar, spices, pickles, salted foods, and provisions of every kind, down to eggs and melons, across the earth from pole to pole. It is gourmandism which determines the relative price of things mediocre, good and excellent, whether their qualities are the effect of art or the gift of nature. It is gourmandism which sustains the hopes and the spirit of rivalry of the host of fishermen, huntsmen, farmers, and others who every day fill the richest larders with the result of their labors and discoveries. And lastly, it is gourmandism which forms the livelihood of the industrious throng of cooks, confectioners, bakers and others of all descriptions concerned with the preparation of food, who in their turn employ other works of every kind for their needs, thus giving rise at all times to a circulation of funds incalculable in respect to mobility and

magnitude by even the most expert brains. Let it be remembered too that the industry which has gourmandism as its object enjoys the special advantage that it depends on the one hand on the greatest fortunes and on the other on the recurring needs of everyday life. In the present state of society it is difficult to imagine a race which could live on bread and vegetables alone. Such a race, if it existed, would infallibly be subjugated by any carnivorous army, like the Hindus, who have successively fallen prey to all their assailants..."(134)

Lest we get lost in historical meditation I need to bring you back up to contemporary concerns, not without drawing out the subtext of Brillat-Savarin's united food lovers' enthusiasm. Quite nonchalantly, he has to look past imperial hegemonies and their stomach wrenching facts to be able to make his tasteful point. Past, for example, the indelicate connection of sugar to slavery, or spices to colonialism, past the unsavory fact that the "fishermen's labor" filled other people's "rich larders," not their own, as well as past the available knowledge that those impressive "discoveries" were quite disgustingly tied to military and other kinds of aggression.

Even though questions of food are tied to a social context of production and consumption so obviously that as an intelligent person, one cannot entirely ignore it, the sometimes violent, sometimes more benevolent but no less exploitative history of global food transculturation has to be absented in gourmet writing. Between Brillat-Savarin and *Gourmet*, the narrative which food writing constructs around its seductive sites and delights, its life-style arrangements and recipes, achieves no mean feat. It has to be altogether world-wise, hip to the times, hard (in the sense of "no frills, no smock") and aggressively conscious of the global network of consumption (which is after all, the *raison'd'être* of its agency). Its dose of real life context, however, has to be very carefully measured, precisely in order not to disturb those global marketing flows.

Here is your spiced up first course, this time from *Shades of Noir, Gourmet July 2002*. The article begins right in the heat of it: "I stomped on an imaginary brake pedal as my driver swerved violently across the road. A wiry fellow in his forties, Lucien was once again indulging his unnerving habit of gunning our pick-up truck straight at pedestrians, yelping obscenities at the women. Meanwhile, an insane disco version of the creaky old heavy-metal war-horse *In a gadda da vida* blared from his cassette player as rich orange earth, giant fern trees and lush stands of wild ginger flashed by. ...Suddenly, Lucien pulled up, tires screeching, at yet another barrage. ...I had grown accustomed to these checkpoints... manned by grim-looking soldiers. ...Violence was in the air. Just before I arrived in the country, a mob had hacked two men to death and thrown them into the sea for stealing vanilla. But *my* worries had nothing to do with civil disturbances or illicit pods; *I was upset* because I had

come halfway around the globe to the world's leading vanilla-growing region only to discover that no one would let me watch the harvest." (87) The "I" in question here is David Karp, journalist for *Gourmet*, in search of first hand impressions of vanilla luxury: "Vanilla is the fruit of a tropical climbing orchid native to Mexico and central America. Aztek emperors drank the spice mixed with chocolate, and the Spanish brought it to Europe, where it became popular as a flavoring, medicine and aphrodisiac. Since the specific bees and birds that pollinated the fragrant, pale greenish yellow vanilla flowers existed only in the New World, all supplies came from there until the 1840s, when Edmond Albius, a former slave on the Indian Ocean island La Reunion, discovered a practical method of hand pollination. Cultivation on nearby Madagascar soared after its colonization by the French in 1896: Soil and climate conditions are ideal, and there was plenty of cheap land and labor." (87/88)

The writer does go on to curtly criticize world bank policy for liberalizing the vanilla market, and he contemplates the ensuing vanilla rush that made some small farmers "rich" but also let "all hell break loose" (88), creating a violent *melée* of theft, corruption, and black market manipulations in the vanilla trade. However, the closure of his article has us careening back into colonial terrain. Says one "old Frenchman" who worked on a now ruined research center for vanilla beans: "De-colonization was a total disaster. You see now the ruins of paradise." Karp does quote a Malagasy who begs to differ - but he manages to insert enough contempt to place the reader in at least a very ambiguous position vis-a-vis Madagascar history: Quote: "The Malagasy, naturally, have another view. Vy, a *sly philosophy major and occasional Elvis impersonator* who was making a living as a guide, said, 'Perhaps we'd be better off economically if we were still sucking at the teat of France, but it's more important that we have our independence.'"

The last paragraph of Karp's article then reads as follows: "The future is wildly uncertain. Right now, tens of thousands of acres of Vanilla, planted in Madagascar in the aftermath of the last cyclone Hudah are being harvested, and prices will undoubtedly plunge. Cooks in America and Europe will rejoice, while the Malagasy growers may come to know, yet again, the bitterness of poverty." After that, the last line glows in red - not to be missed: "For where to find Madagascar Vanilla, see Shopping List page 134." (89) - the truly postcolonial irony of which seems lost on *Gourmet's* cynicism.

And there is more, bringing in the next course, appealing to your senses on a somewhat lighter note. This is from *Gourmet* January 1996, by Ian Keown ("Gourmet Holidays - Saint Kitts and Nevis", p. 42 ff.): "It is this feeling of a bygone Caribbean, this down-to-earth-ness, this unassuming-ness that has always attracted me to ... Saint Kitts and Nevis. These sister islands...are where the delights of nature come garnished with romance and history and where old-

fashioned customs and mores still prevail.... All the better, then, to explore and enjoy the sights and vignettes of West Indian life as they slowly pass by: tumbledown villages with narrow, deep-guttered streets, gardens with breadfruit-heavy trees, small frame houses painted the colors of the bougainvillea that drapes their garden fences. If Saint Kitts and Nevis have changed little over the years, the same is not true of the cuisine...nowadays I find myself tickled that one of the pleasures I look forward to most keenly on a trip to the islands - besides the beach and ... the balmy breezes.... - is to sample whatever the local chefs have been conjuring up."

And on the author rattles through a list of earthly delights and golf course descriptions to a finale of postmodern decay descending on the islands in the luxury form of mass tourism: the advent of cruise ships, hotel chains and tax free merchandise. This, however, is being narrated as a relative leap forward into civilization: "If waiting on tables or selling tax-free perfumes may not sound like everyone's idea of utopia, it certainly is an improvement on cutting cane or spending long nights alone in a dug out canoe waiting for a net to fill with fish." (82) That *is* comforting to know because it means that his hegemonic field of vision and taste will not be crossed. Quote again, "It's probably the people themselves who attract me to these islands and who bring me to the realization that casinos and cruise ships can never dampen my appetite for Saint Kitts and Nevis." (82) Follow the recipes: Lemon Marinated Shrimp with Bitter Greens and Rosemary Garlic Vinaigrette, Lobster Cakes with Papaya Mayonnaise, Thai Curried Lobster Roti, West Indian Pork Chops With Creole Sauce, Lamb Curry, Papaya and Avocado Relish, Antillean Fruit and Vegetable Stuffing - all replete with cardamom, nutmeg, lime juice, chili, fruit, cilantro, Vidalia onions, olive oil, Thai basil and gingerroot; "available at Asian markets, some supermarkets, and by mail orders from Adriana's Caravan" at the inevitable 800 number - - *so you can eat the Caribbean at home.*

Given all this sumptuous language, and particularly when set in relation to the banality, after all, of ginger and lemon grass as soon as the market down the road sells it next to eggs and bread, one urgent question keeps nagging. Is all this splendor about making food at all, or is it more about some metaphorical act of *eating the other*, some late postmodern culinary version of narrative cannibalism? Gourmet magazines and their transcultural *sexiness* could be read as the last resort of a non-pc Western primitivism that may no longer go unpunished for lusting after the bananas swinging from Josephine Baker's hips. The eroticism needs to be emptied out of any carnal momentum, replaced by the very sensuousness *of language itself* which glories in creating touch -, smell - and taste fantasies at the same time that it claims to be utterly a-sexual, ostentatiously un-gendered and not charged by any all too suspect subject-object relations. Good gourmet writing creates a Proustian sensation of prose in the reader - not of *remembrance*

but of repetitive *anticipation* - of something which enters the flesh as a *mentally* fattening menu, if you can imagine that. It connects its readers by way of metonymic language acts to the *food in question* (ingredients, substances, entire meals), but also to the *allure* of its alleged origins.

These magazines are not mainly about the illustration of global foodways; they are a textual device to install a curiosity - a lust - for something which, at the time of its first narrativization in *Gourmet*, may seem to be *just beyond* the reader's reach (as was Ras El Hanout when one in North Europe *first* read about it a few years ago, or lemon grass, for that matter). Food in this representation turns into an object of a narcissistic desire, of a raw eagerness to find "it", and possibly oneself in "it". This desire will see itself satisfied and stunted at the same time because the very act of seductive narrativization has always already *just* helped to put "it" into market circulation.

The curiosity depends on narrative; transcultural food flows, that is, demand a story, to paraphrase De Lauretis. It is the narrative which creates the fancy to be able to "eat" the world in the first place. The success of a food magazine thus lies in creating narratives (12 months a year, around 4 revolving seasons, at a point of almost total Western saturation with global food knowledge) which feed the reader but create ever more appetite. This is not a simple task, considering that even with a vastly expanded global but still limited supply of food stuffs one can only do so many different things. And why bother, one could ask. It is, after all, not essential for the actual preparation of a spicy meal to know that *the breezes always come in gently from the Atlantic to create a pleasant atmosphere of tropical bliss for a jerk barbecue on the beach* - if the Bremen cook prepares a cardamom and cumin saturated steak in her central heated kitchen; *but* - the profitable transcultural *circulation* of lemongrass et alter depends entirely on a mouth wetting narrative.

Gourmet magazines in the last two decades have kept their clientele constantly in a state of nervous desire to partake in the other - in a way that may enable a sensation of lustful control: of being able to *cook it* instead of being overwhelmed by real excesses of transcultural contact. Everybody wants "the pungent flavors of the Dark Continent," nobody wants Africans (to make the point rather bluntly) - just as everybody wants Indian khorma but nobody cares for Indian slums. The narrativization - its plots and languages - is what severs those signs from their threatening, messy and *dirty* referents. In *Gourmet* writing, food is always miraculously *clean* at the source because readers have to come away clean with it in their kitchens.

Exotic spices in well-stacked supermarkets in solidly middle-class neighborhoods would not be palatable, and thus not marketable, in their original status as foreign without the mediation of food writing. True

aficionados might dare an Asian store in some more or less rundown neighborhood. The fourth friend down the line, however, after having tasted the *Gourmet* reader's **Caribbean cilantro fish stew** recipe will not (have to) be that adventurous. So, even that kind of rather humble transcultural encounter in the real world, like walking into a store where you'd have to speak with hands and feet to obtain the required cooking accessories will be displaced by the no-people-no-mess display on the supermarket shelf - all lined up by various degrees of strangeness - from Italian to, these days, Russian by way of Indian, Thai, Chinese, Caribbean, Greek and other edibles. This is, of course, what the food magazine has anticipated as well as engineered: a narrative of production and consumption has been assembled which is void of human agents except for the "you" in the magazines' address of its readers. The occasional African barbecue cook in a swell vacation resort, or the roti baker in a newly discovered London restaurant are safely remote from the "you"'s actual cooking and eating environment; they serve as mere props in the food scenarios, anyway.

As in, *piece de resistance*, Elle bistro from January 1997 (p.94): "Feine Strände und Königspalmen, die sich im Passatwind wiegen, warme Luft, die vom Lachen der buntgewandeten Kreolinnen erfüllt ist - das ist Grande Terre Die Menschen, Nachfahren von afrikanischen Sklaven und libanesischen Händlern, von indischen Tagelöhnern und französischen Kolonialherren, sind Überwiegend dunkelhäutig - in allen nur denkbaren Farbschattierungen. Die multikulturelle Gesellschaft, hier ist sie: lebhaft, bunt und fröhlich. . . Ein Duft von Zimt und Nelken, Muskat und Vanille schwebt über der lärmenden Gesellschaft. Ein Überfluß an saftigen, reifen Früchten, an Fischen und Langusten liegt auf den hölzernen Karren aus. Dunkelhäutige Frauen in schrill bunten Gewändern verhandeln und schwatzen miteinander. An Stränden und in kleinen Kneipen gibt es die inseltypischen Gerichte: Accras, scharfe, frittierte Fleischbällchen; Boudin Creole, eine exotisch gewürzte Blutwurst; Colombo, von Indern importierte Currygerichte; die ragoutartigen kreolischen Gerichte mit Schwein und Huhn, mit Früchten und Gemüse, ein schmackhaftes, scharfes Durcheinander von vielen Zutaten, und immer wieder Fisch: Vinaneau, Thunfisch, Schwertfisch, ganz schlicht zubereitet, mit Knoblauch, Kräutern und Zitrone, einfach himmlisch."

On the one hand, the reader here is being interpellated as connoisseur; the magazine's interaction with him or her being constructed as an artful correspondence between like-minded sensibilities. On the other hand, since in our late postmodern times, marketing does not need camouflage, one is rather un-elegantly targeted as a plain consumer. Thus, the exquisitely glamorous and anti-parochial appeal of the magazine's narrative strategies breaks down in those sections which more directly address the readers' needs for pragmatic food-and-cooking related information - most regularly around the time of festivities like Easter, Christmas, Thanksgiving, New Year's celebration and the like. As

an aside, one needs to mention here, that in *Gourmet*, at last, the Jewish calendar has entered the magazine's rhythm of repetitive **big display** occasions, and there **are** winterly Thai spiced dinners in **Christmas-tree-free** decorations - whereas most other magazines remain blissfully indifferent to a possible re-composition of their readership along transcultural lines - teaching us a thing or two about the intransigence of wealth in the West, I suppose.

Here is what it tastes like, in a quote from *Essen & Trinken*, January 2005:

"Küchenseligkeit. Der Wok ist das Ziel. ... Laotse hat's schon immer gewusst. Und wir geniessen Asiens Aromenwunder in der **Garküche der Sieben Kostbarkeiten** und im **Land des Lächelns** und der süßen Verführungen." Of course, even what with all the Thai asparagus, sushimi, bamboo sprouts, cilantro, mango chutney, Chinese noodles, ginger and red curry the reader will want to taste, decoration is of the essence, and the magazine will not let us down for want of supplies. At the bottom end of all the culinary items we read under the headline **Asia Stores. Ingredients and Deco-Objects**: "Asia Stores are no longer found only in big cities. There you will find decoration objects ...and, of course, all the necessary ingredients for our recipes. Some products however, like sweet chili sauce, or sambal you will find in local supermarkets or in department stores." (109) In the same vein, the recipe for "Lebanese Chicken Salad" in the issue of *Food and Wine* July 2002 tells us, in case we were worried: "Don't be put off by the long ingredient list here. All are available in supermarkets, and the salad is easy to assemble." (72)

Easy to assemble functions as the organizing trope for food writing's momentum of transculturation. The legacy of history has to be erased but food writing is always already there, assembling the latest economic, cultural, and ideological shifts, registering new developments in the global village sometimes before they take effect in other realms. The Far Orient, after having been crowded out somewhat by closer-to-home Mediterranean and West Coast pleasures, has alerted not only global political and economical radars but also Western kitchens for some time now, as in **Veal Schnitzel with Gingered Lime Onion Sauce and Coconut Bok Choy Salad**. South Africa, which boomed to connoisseur stardom after apartheid ended, has lost some of its ritz again what with rising prices, and the wear and tear on the rainbow nation. The most striking feature of all this transcultural sensitivity is, however, that food magazine readers are always being overtaken by fresh and as yet unexplored global bounties in narratives which block out all relevant reference while they redirect us to perennial tenets of colonialism, racism and orientalism.

A last dip? From *Essen & Trinken*, September 2004:

"Kulinarische Globalisierung. ...Wagen Sie es! ... Eine Prise Asien steht dem Klassiker ganz ausgezeichnet - lassen Sie sich **Überraschen!** Fernöstlich interpretierte Vichysoisse: Zitronengras,

Kokosmilch, Ingwer und Kurkuma verleihen der lauwarm servierten Suppe das raffinierte Aroma. Thunfischtatar mit Koriander unterstreicht die asiatische Note." Further on in the text, the "Land des Lächelns" (remember Madame Butterfly?) brims with "hot chaos," beckoning us in all too familiar ways.

The recent global transculturation signified *and* orchestrated by food writing has moved far beyond "exotic imports" like Hawaii toast aesthetics of the 1950s, as well as beyond Pizza, Döner and Taco assimilation acts. It is a showcase practice evolving around the invisible center of US-American market hegemony. In the Western perception of the global *flow* of things consumers do not necessarily recognize that rucola (a used-to-be weed common to all of Europe) came to middle and upper class tables all over European cities within the span of a year (1984/85) and in the form of a campy version of green salad - dressed up with Italian cheeses and *extra virgin* olive oils - via a premier appearance in *Gourmet* Magazine. It happened *back* in Europe, that is, as both the textual and material part of a ubiquitous but non-tangible US-American marketing circuit; as have the lure and the tastes of cilantro, ginger, and Harissa. All those might have made entirely different routes but they were narrativized for a Western public by *Gourmet* first, to be then picked up by other European magazines, in mostly identical textual packaging, encoding, and performance - down to the *cool* kinds of table decoration, ceramics, silverware, supple clothing style of eaters and other background fittings employed in the photography.

Gourmet and other magazines are thus given to consumer education as a momentous program of *lean cuisine pedagogy* staged rather smoothly over and against the actual conditions for production and consumption in the 3rd world. *One* of the rather telling effects of those acts of narrativizing and marketing - as the underside of aggressive but helpless anti-fatness campaigns against less affluent parts of Western populations - is the disappearance of starch (pasta, bread, rice, potatoes) from the ultra-postmodern chic of event buffets and more elaborate public dinners in Western metropolitan circles. A literal spoonful of *ginger/cilantro/tuna tartar* will fulfill the pedagogical impetus as well as the prospective eater's ambitious slim line format. The transcultural narrative here re-enacts the campaigns to civilize national bourgeois appetites from the late 18th through the early 20th century: thou shall lust after the exotic - but only in disembodied moderation. (see Counihan, 326, 328)

So, then, where shall all this heed, when even calorically blissful barbecue goes transcultural? Your magazine knows it all: "Grilling goes global. Whether you live in Seoul, Siena, or St.Louis, it's a fact of life: Food cooked outside over a fire, and shared with friends and family, tastes best. That's why we have chosen flavors from around the world and created seven fresh, bold grill menus with sizzling appeal. We took

our inspiration from some of the world's great barbecue traditions, from the American South to South-of-the-border and across two oceans to Italy, India and Korea. We guarantee they will satisfy your craving for really good 'cue - no matter where you make your home." The headings for the respective recipes are as crossover as they employ traditional appetizing clichés. While the California Grill properly east-westerly features "Yellow Tomato Gazpacho With Cilantro Oil and Avocado", as well as "Coconut Milk Ice Cream with Ginger and Lime" around a *very lean* tuna steak, the "Southern Cookout" revels in "Rib Eyes" and "Warm Peach Shortcakes with Bourbon-Brown Sugar Cream." The Midwest has "Grilled Spareribs with Cherry Cola Glaze" and "State Fair Potato Salad." Properly regionally anchored, food writing here functions rather well as a - however self-ironical - *Zeitgeist* provider and arbiter of how much transcultural taste certain clienteles are going to stomach. Two pages further on, the foreign food cravers are being delivered to: "In India, richly spiced foods are seared to perfection in clay tandoori ovens. Re-create these delicious dishes on the backyard grill - the recipes here make this gorgeous buffet simple." What with all the exoticism, *simple* is the keyword here; the barbecue crowd not being prone to all too much culinary sophistication.

If *Bon Appetit* from which this global grill orgy has been lifted, stayed on the "world food course" even after September 11, other magazines seemed to have felt overwhelmed by transcultural excess and saw a need to reign in the food public's stray desires. *Food and Wine* in their 2002 summer issue - 4th of July being the occasion, of course - thus dishes out the red-white and blue with relish, complete with flags, stars, military insignia and all. Need a digestif now? While food magazines, as a general rule and for the good reason of keeping a readership across political loyalties, clearly try to avoid meddling with the real world, the quite forward ideological impetus of their representations sometimes becomes all too obvious. I have therefore brought in this last example by way of a cautionary tale. The transcultural food *fancies* in my title should be considered literally: fancy as a passing phenomenon, a tasteful fashion for a certain political moment. So we might well be prepared for the return of the Gänsebraten, and the pork roast, amidst all the curries and lime marinades.

Ideological controversy cannot be entirely barred from the medium; *food identity* keeps coming back against too much confusing transculturation specifically at times when essentialism has a high premium, for example at Christmas versus summer holidays. Food writing thus recycles a repertoire quite its own which has proven itself adaptable to different cultural scenarios like our global moment as over and against, and in competition with a need for national affirmation. To remind us of Barthes' insight again: "... in reality, food is also charged with signifying the situation in which it is used. It has a twofold value, being nutrition as well as a protocol, and its value as a

protocol becomes increasingly more important as soon as the basic needs are satisfied..." (Barthes, in Counihan 26).

Food *writing* then, needs to be researched as the protocol of a protocol. If food, Barthes again, "is a sign" then food *writing* is meta-signification; if "food is a situation" in his words, its representation in food *writing* creates a meta-situation, a postmodern genre to boot of which its paraded transculturalism is the most delicious, and most dubious feature.

Delicious and dubious would be a good ending, but, just a second, here comes dessert, pineapple and mango coconut ice cream with lacy noodle crisps: "In Thailand, mangoes often appear on the table for dessert - served both on their own and incorporated into a sweetened sticky rice;" which of course has to mutate into a fragile crunch construction, "light, delicate and dramatic" in the presentation of the *Gourmet* (May 2004) recipe. And, in case your local supplier does not sell fresh mango on a daily basis: "If you can't get your hands on really good mangoes, you'll find that canned mango purée delivers the best flavor for this ice cream. However, many brands taste like peaches, so we recommend Ratna brand, which uses Alphonso mangoes, an Indian cultivar renowned for its bright orange flesh and very intense flavor." Don't panic, however, there is always New York Cheese Cake, and Apfelkuchen, of course.

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