

# THE RESEARCH CENTRE FOR THE HISTORY OF FOOD AND DRINK



## Newsletter No. 42 October 2006

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### What's Happened:

#### Dr. Angela Heuzenroeder

Two distinguished international scholars, Sidney Mintz and Don Yoder, have approved Angie's PhD dissertation entitled "A Food Culture Transplanted: Origins and Development of the Food of Early German Immigrants to the Barossa Region, South Australia (1839-1939)." An abstract and some of their comments are below.

#### Food Production and Consumption

The University of Western Australia's Institute of Advanced Studies organised this seminar, which had sessions at Margaret River and in Perth on 4-8 August. Barbara Santich reports below.

#### Commodification and Culture of Food

On 10 August Sidney Mintz presented a seminar to the Research Centre. Nadia Postiglione reports below.

#### Adelaide Showground Farmers Market

Thanks to the efforts of Zanie Flanagan Adelaide's Farmers Market finally opened on 1 October at the showgrounds. Producers from all over South Australia will sell their produce to the public from 9:00 am every Sunday.

### Cultures of Food and Starvation in Southern Italy, 1900-1950

On 17 October Nadia Postiglione presented a seminar on the foodways of southern Italian peasants in the first half of the twentieth century. Jennifer Graue reports below.

### Also in This Issue Our Normal Features:

- **Conferences**
- **Websites**
- **Exhibitions**
- **New Publications**
- **Publishing Opportunities**
- **Scholarships**
- **Reviews: Roger Haden asks, What shall we eat today?**
- **And Finally . . . Try the dreaded veal cutlet and the roquefort cheese!**

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and Social Sciences



## **Dr. Angela Heuzenroeder: A Food Culture Transplanted: Origins and Development of the Food of Early German Immigrants to the Barossa Region, South Australia (1839-1939)**

The German-speaking Lutheran congregations who came to settle in the Barossa Valley, South Australia, between 1839 and 1860 brought with them traditional food customs from Silesia, Brandenburg, Posen, Mecklenburg and Saxony. Many foods that they prepared required skills developed over centuries in Europe and suited to European temperatures and climate conditions. The settlers transplanted these food practices to another part of the world and to a completely different set of environmental conditions. My thesis examines how this transplant affected the food prepared by the settlers and their descendants. Different climates and soils, new ingredients and other people's food customs tested the ancient practices. This study identifies the elements of people's food culture that endured and offers reasons for any changes. In the Barossa the settlers, their descendants and their food were in contact with two other distinct and culturally cohesive groups of people. I describe these cultural encounters and I discuss the extent to which they influenced the general food practices of the German-speaking immigrants. Of the foods still familiar to Barossa people in the early twenty-first century I examine five in turn, devoting each a chapter to discuss their origins, cultural significance and old ways of making them, and assessing how much these altered in the Australian setting. This culinary history evaluates the importance of cultural, geographic, religious, political and economic factors in the process of change. It illustrates fundamental elements of human behaviour and adaptation, all manifest in people's food.

According to Sidney Mintz' evaluation of the dissertation, "It is a careful, solid, and convincing account, which relies upon published materials, documents and manuscripts, and oral history. Particularly effective and revelatory for this reader were the chapters on Rote Grütze and on sourness—this last an evocative reflection on the spectrum of taste and the power of taste memory in the shaping of human preferences. In these connections the writer shows originality and verve." Don Yoder wrote, "I have read with great pleasure and profit Angela Heuzen

roeder's dissertation. I consider it a splendid work, based on meticulous research, and attractively presented."

## **Cultures of Food and Starvation in Southern Italy, 1900-1950**

The Mediterranean diet has been touted in books and by celebrities and health professionals. These sources paint a picture of halcyon days in southern Italy where a robust and healthy population maintained a steady diet of pasta, fresh vegetables, fish, and of course olive oil. But at a lunchtime seminar on 17 October University of Adelaide doctoral student Nadia Postiglione argued this is a romanticised picture of peasant life with overly broad brushstrokes, and the pictures fails to show the realities faced by southern Italy's poor in the first half of the twentieth century.

Using information from a mid-century Italian government inquiry and other literature, Nadia built a southern Italian food pyramid that looks scarcely like the romanticised picture. Pasta was not the foundation of their diet; rather it was maize, wheat bread, and potatoes. Beans, pasta, dried fish and even pork fat figured in their diet, although not necessarily on a daily basis. Meat was a luxury that was seldom, if ever, consumed. While the dietary elements were surprising, Nadia's detailed figures on the small amount of food the average person consumed on a daily basis were shocking. This coupled with a serious lack of variety reveals a population that was malnourished.

Nadia's research included photographs that demonstrated the poverty experienced by both city and rural dwellers. One photo appeared to be apartment blocks lining a narrow street packed with children and garbage. Another showed children gleaning cabbage leaves and other bits of produce that either fell or was dumped from the back of a wagon. In rural areas homes were more like lean-tos built into a hillside. Some did not even have tables on which to eat.

The information presented at the seminar was certainly thought provoking, as indicated by the flood of questions from the audience of about forty people who gathered for it. One of the most interesting points to come out of the question and answer session is that many peasant women from southern Italy did not have the impressive cooking skills with

which they are so often associated, simply because they did not have resources with which to work. It's like the adage, "You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear."

While the Mediterranean Diet is not a myth, it was not the diet of peasants as many would like to believe. Nadia's research seems to offer a broad lesson about the trend toward eating "peasant food" from the kitchens of many nations: it likely was not the food the poorer classes actually ate. As food writer Jeffrey Pilcher has noted, "only the wealthy can afford to eat like peasants."

Jennifer Graue is a student in the University's Graduate Program in Gastronomy.

## Conferences

### Melbourne, 28-29 October

RMIT University hosted a conference on "**Fast Food, Slow Food: Food Politics and the Global Community.**" The conference explored the themes of food politics and colonisation, food politics and globalisation, food politics and localisation, and food politics and dislocation. Speakers included academics, public servants, and food professionals. Go to [www.fastfoodslowfoodnofood.org](http://www.fastfoodslowfoodnofood.org) or [advocacy@rmit.edu.au](mailto:advocacy@rmit.edu.au).

### Wilmington, Delaware, 2-4 November 2006

The Center for the History of Business, Technology, and Society at the Hagley Museum and Library in Wilmington is hosting a conference on "**Food Chains: Provisioning, Technology, and Science.**" The papers include the following:

- Ann Smart Martin, "Provisioning Early America: Or, Four Hundred Turkeys Just Passed the Door"  
Warren Belasco, "How Much Depends on Dinner?"  
Jeffrey Pilcher, "Tortillas Around the World: Creating Global Supply Chains for the Mexican Restaurant Industry"  
Richard Wilk, "The Role of the Technologies of Mixing, Grading and Packaging in the Nineteenth-Century Colonial Food System"  
Kelly Feltault, "Trading Quality, Producing Value: Socionatural Commodity Networks in the Global Crabmeat Industry"  
Jenny Leigh Smith, "Empire of Ice Cream: How Life Became Sweeter in the Postwar Soviet Union"

Andrew Godley and Bridget Williams, "The Chicken, the Factory Farm, and the Supermarket: The Industrialisation of Poultry Farming in Britain, 1950-1980"

Kasey Grier, "Man's Best Friend: The Rise of the Dog Food Industry in the United States"

Joe Anderson, "Lard to Lean: Making the Meat-Type Hog in Post-World War II America"

Patrick Patterson, "Making Markets Marxist? The East European Grocery Store from Rationing to Rationality to Rationalizations"

Katherine Leonard Turner, "The Bakery, the Saloon, and the Quick Lunch: Ready to Eat Food in Working-Class Neighborhoods, 1880-1930"

For information contact Carol Lockman at [clockman@Hagley.org](mailto:clockman@Hagley.org)

### Albuquerque, New Mexico, 14-17 February 2007

The southwest regional conference of the Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association is focusing on food and culture. The organisers invite papers that approach food and eating from cultural, theoretical, ethnographic, and/or historical angles to expand the growing conversation about practices of eating and cooking in relation to society and culture. They encourage new methods of research as well as the development of the work of well-established food scholars. The deadline for submissions is 1 December 2006. Contact Prof.

Lynn Houston:

[lmhouston@csuchico.edu](mailto:lmhouston@csuchico.edu)

### Seattle, 3 March 2007

"**Let's Eat! A History of Food and Foodways in the Pacific Northwest**" is the theme of the 2007 Pacific Northwest Historians Guild Conference. Food as commodity, as sustenance, as a marker of social class and instrument of political change, and as art form—all the varied manifestations of food and food history in the Pacific Northwest will be explored at this conference. For information contact Maria Pascualy, Guild Co-President, [yellowknife@comcast.net](mailto:yellowknife@comcast.net)

### San Francisco, 17-21 April 2007

The theme of the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers is "**Contemporary Issues in Agricultural Sustainability.**" The

concept of “sustainable agriculture” has much currency but multiple and even antagonistic meanings. What are the ecologies and politics of sustainable agriculture, and how do these vary in different contexts and at different scales? Papers could discuss but are not limited to:

Energy flows in agro-food systems  
Conceptualizations and estimations of food supply and demand  
Recent developments in agroecology  
Nutrition and diet change in agro-food systems  
Significance of scale in estimations of sustainability  
Agro-industry  
Ethics and agriculture  
Food-based social movements  
The geo-politics of food and agriculture  
Potential and/or limits of biofuels  
Send paper abstracts or other correspondence to Daniel Niles; dniles@clarku.edu.

### **Puebla, Mexico, 19-22 April 2007**

This seminar of the American Comparative Literature Association Annual Meeting has for its theme “Epicurean Movements: Translating and Transporting Ancient Materialism.” Epicureanism, perhaps the most famous brand of ancient materialism, has long been on the move; indeed, its father, Epicurus, supposedly founded branches of his school in the eastern Aegean area before making the decisive move to Athens, where he founded the Garden. In other words, unlike Platonism, Stoicism, or other major philosophies of the day, Epicureanism immigrated into the philosophical centre of the Greek-speaking world. Since that day Epicureanism and its pesky brand of materialism have been translated and transported across countless borders. This seminar seeks to investigate problems of the reception, translation, and transmission of Epicurean thought through Rome and down to the modern world. The deadline for submissions is November 1, 2006. Go to <http://acla2007.complit.ucla.edu> or contact Will Shearin ([zephyrus@berkeley.edu](mailto:zephyrus@berkeley.edu)) or Brooke Holmes ([baholmes@email.unc.edu](mailto:baholmes@email.unc.edu)).

### **Athens, 25-26 April 2007**

The main topics of the **Third International Conference on Traditional Mediterranean Diet: Past, Present and Future** are:  
Evolution of the Mediterranean Diet  
The Mediterranean Diet and current research  
The Mediterranean Diet and the prevention of the

chronic degenerative diseases  
The Mediterranean Diet and longevity  
Experience from other diets  
Olive oil and health  
Traditional food products in the Mediterranean Diet  
The Mediterranean Diet in school education  
The promotion of the Mediterranean Diet  
The Mediterranean Diet in contemporary life  
The Mediterranean Diet and lifestyle  
The Mediterranean Diet as a destination-marketing tool for the countries of the Mediterranean basin  
Wine in the Mediterranean Diet  
The deadline for the submission of proposals was 16 October. For information about the conference see <http://mediet2007.conferences.gr>

### **Tours, 28-29 March 2008**

The theme of the **2008 colloquium of The European Institute for the History and Culture of Food is “Information and food practices.”** The board of advisers of the EIFHC has chosen this theme to encourage social science research on the ways in which consumers receive, appropriate, evaluate, and (maybe) put such information into practice. Among the several venues of research inviting exploration are:  
Information hierarchies  
Locating information, identifying the channels of diffusion  
Information, production, and markets  
Pertinence and practice  
Matching messages and consumers  
The call for papers goes to researchers in the humanities and the social sciences including historians (all eras, Europe and confines) and colleagues hailing from economics, sociology, anthropology, and archaeology.  
The official languages of the colloquium are French and English. The deadline for the submission of proposals is 15 February 2007. The 250 to 300-word proposals, based on original, recent research, headed by a working title, should be sent by email to the EIFHC secretariat ([ieha@wanadoo.fr](mailto:ieha@wanadoo.fr))  
Eva Barlösius ([eva.barloesius@uni-due.de](mailto:eva.barloesius@uni-due.de))  
Martin Bruegel ([Martin.Bruegel@ivry.inra.fr](mailto:Martin.Bruegel@ivry.inra.fr))  
Catherine Grandjean ([Catherine.Grandjean2@wanadoo.fr](mailto:Catherine.Grandjean2@wanadoo.fr))  
Marilyn Nicoud ([dirma@efrome.it](mailto:dirma@efrome.it))

## Websites

World Directory of Pasta Shapes: <http://www.professionalpasta.it>

For those who want to examine the culinary importance of dormice, the following is the website of a dormouse museum:

<http://www.postojnska-jama.si/?lang=en&mono=107&cat=41>

Paintings related to food from medieval art, although the inclusion of Caravaggio indicates that the definition of "medieval" is a bit generous: [http://www.medievalcooking.com/paintings/paint\\_it.shtm](http://www.medievalcooking.com/paintings/paint_it.shtm)

The November issue of the magazine *Himal Southasian*, published in Nepal, is dedicated to food. The full issue is on line at [www.himalmag.com](http://www.himalmag.com)

## Exhibitions

Ciocolata: dalla perfezione spagnola alla squisita gentilezza della corte di Toscana (Chocolate: from Spanish perfection to the exquisite courtesy of the Tuscan court)

An exhibition at the Civic Museum of Monsummano Terme, about 50 kilometers north of Florence, from February to April demonstrated the role of chocolate in the political and diplomatic policies of the Medici family, rulers of the Duchy of Tuscany in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. One of the most famous of the chocolate concoctions consumed at the court of Cosimo de Medici was jasmine chocolate. The exhibition provided the recipe:

10 librae of roasted cocoa, cleaned and coarsely minced (1 libra = 12 oz.)

fresh jasmine petals

8 librae white sugar

3 ounces vanilla flowers

6 ounces cinnamon

2 scruples (7.76 grams) ambergris

Put layers of cocoa and jasmine flowers in a box, one layer over the other. Let it rest for 24 hours, then change the jasmine flowers with fresh ones.

Repeat 12 times. Add the other ingredients and combine them on a warmed marble surface until the chocolate dough forms.

## At Home in Renaissance Italy

The Victoria & Albert Museum is hosting this exhibition from 5 October 2006 to 7 January 2007. It includes material on food. Check out the interesting website:

[http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1487\\_renaissance/index.html](http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1487_renaissance/index.html)

## Apicius' De Re Coquinaria

The manuscript of this recipe collection from Ancient Rome has been restored through the auspices of The Culinary Trust and is now on show at The New York Academy of Medicine. This collection of ancient Roman and Greek recipes was assembled in the fourth century and has been attributed to the first-century Roman Marcus Apicius. Apicius was an epicure renowned throughout the Mediterranean world. His enjoyment of food was so great, in fact, that he committed suicide when his finances no longer allowed him to eat in the style to which he had become accustomed.

Monks at the Fulda Monastery in Germany copied the manuscript in the ninth century. This manuscript was brought to the Vatican for safe keeping in 1455 and remained there until its eventual sale. Dr. Margaret Barclay Wilson then acquired the manuscript and gave it to the New York Academy of Medicine in 1929. Earlier this year The New York Academy of Medicine approached The Culinary Trust to restore the manuscript so that it might survive for another millennium. In May 2006 Deborah Evetts, the retired Conservator at the Pierpont Morgan Library, began the extensive project, which was concluded in August 2006. For more information about the Culinary Trust and its programs, go to [www.TheCulinaryTrust.com](http://www.TheCulinaryTrust.com).

## New Publications

### The Prolific Andy Smith

Andy Smith has produced the following:

*Real American Food: Restaurants, Markets, and Shops Plus Favorite Hometown Recipes with Burt Wolf* (New York: Rizzoli, 2006).

*The Encyclopedia of Junk Food and Fast Food* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2006).

*The Turkey: A Social History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

## **Publishing Opportunities**

### **The Business of Food: Encyclopedia of the Food Industry**

The Greenwood Publishing Group is looking for contributors to this encyclopedia. The articles are due by 1 December 2006. For information on the entries contact the editors:

Gary Allen, Adjunct Professor, Empire State College; [gallen@hvi.net](mailto:gallen@hvi.net)

Ken Albala, Professor of History, Pacific University; [kalbala@pacific.edu](mailto:kalbala@pacific.edu)

## **Ecological and Environmental**

### **Anthropology**

This online, peer-reviewed publication announces a call for submissions from diverse disciplines including anthropology, conservation biology, ecology, environmental studies, geography, political science, and sociology, as well as specialists in conservation, health, resource management, and other issues in human ecology. The mission of the publication is to engage in the exploration of the complex, dynamic, and multifaceted relationships between humans and their social and physical environments. Interested contributors should refer to <http://www.uga.edu/eea> for submission guidelines.

### **Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History**

Canadian historians and other scholars have begun to contribute to the rapidly expanding field of food history, largely through studies of missionary campaigns, women's magazines, immigrant and refugee experiences, consumer practices, cookbooks, and that most famous Canadian snack icon, the donut.

To date, however, there is no book-length volume that provides an entry into the field by, for instance, addressing the literature on food, the multiple ways of writing food histories, and the merits and pitfalls of "doing" political, social, and cultural histories of Canada through the lens of food and its accompanying practices. This leads to a call for submissions for an essay collection on Canadian food history. The editors are interested in a wide range of contributions from across the chronological spectrum. They invite theory and method papers as well as empirically based essays on a wide range of issues and topics, including, for example, food as colonizing and/or resistance strategy; ethnic food ways;

state campaigns and state institutions; food writers and fashion-makers; food as social and cultural practise; pub, tavern and restaurant businesses and cultures; food migration and transnationalism, and class-based histories of food. They also invite theoretical and methodological papers from a historical perspective that address the debates and approaches within cultural studies, race-critical, family and childhood, and women and gender history contexts. They will also consider papers in related fields, such as tobacco, drugs and alcohol studies and consumer histories, provided they intersect substantively with the history of food. Contact the editors, Franca Iacovetta, [f.iacovetta@utoronto.ca](mailto:f.iacovetta@utoronto.ca); Marlene Epp, [mgepp@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:mgepp@uwaterloo.ca); or Valerie Korinek, [valerie.korinek@usask.ca](mailto:valerie.korinek@usask.ca)

### **Food and Performance, Food as Performance**

A special edition of *Text and Performance Quarterly* edited by Myron Beasley, The School of the Art Institute Chicago, Kristin Langellier, and Laura Lindenfeld, both of the department of Communication and Journalism at the University of Maine, will focus on food. Performance studies has much to offer to contemporary food studies, and this special issue will encourage and highlight the relationship between food and performance and food as performance. The editors encourage essays that will attend to food as a complex system of performance practices and epistemologies. They are particularly interested in essays that consider the performative and aesthetic aspects of food which also incorporate the "mixings" of race, class, power, sex, and sexuality with politics, history, and contemporary performance culture. Such topics could include but are not limited to food as narrative, the performance of cooking, eating as ritual, and consumption and sex. Manuscripts from a wide range of interdisciplinary, theoretical, and methodological perspectives, including rhetorical, feminist, ethnographic, performative writing, psychoanalytic, and historical, are encouraged. Contact Kristin Langellier, [Kristin\\_Langellier@umit.maine.edu](mailto:Kristin_Langellier@umit.maine.edu). In the text of the email message, authors should specify "TPQ submission."

## Scholarships

### The Culinary Trust Scholarships for Independent Study and Research

Six scholarships with a value of \$5,000 each are available to culinary professionals for professional development through travel and research during the 2007-2008 academic year. The deadline for submissions is 15 December 2006. One is available for a career professional to do research, writing and teaching related to French food, wine, and culinary disciplines. One is available for a career professional with demonstrated commitment to advancing his or her skills as a writer, educator, or researcher in the culinary arts with a concentration on French food history and tradition. One is for a professional chef (culinary or pastry) to conduct independent study worldwide. This scholarship is available for a professional chef with a demonstrated commitment to advancing his or her skills as a chef or pastry chef. One is for a career journalist to conduct independent study and research worldwide, designed to further writing on an original and innovative culinary topic. The final scholarship is for independent study in Australia. Wolf Blass makes this scholarship available for a culinary professional to conduct research and writing related to Australian winemaking and culinary traditions. All the scholarships are valid for research and travel conducted between 1 July 2007 and 30 June 2008. No extensions will be granted. For further details go to [www.theculinary-trust.org](http://www.theculinary-trust.org) and download the 2007-2008 Scholarship Program Listing.

### Commodification and Culture of Food

The summer of 2003 was a period of restless thinking about my future, my studies, and my life. Two years had passed since the completion of my honours degree, and I was thinking of returning to study again, and, inspired by my new occupation as restaurateur, I was considering the history and the culture of food as a possible new direction for my postgraduate studies. Since my previous studies had been in philosophy, I approached this new field of research with a good dose of scepticism and, to be honest, of prejudice. From the world of pure and immaterial knowledge I was switching to the world of materiality. Being used to deal with pure forms, I was loath to immerse my hands in the factual world of objects. Among them, food and eating practices and behaviour appeared to me as the most “mate-

rial” among the material objects of human knowledge.

Searching for the spark that could kindle my passion, I began to collect several references on the history and anthropology of food and encountered an article by Sidney Mintz entitled “Time, Sugar, and Sweetness.” It made an enormous impression. The article not only dealt with sugar, its production, economy, and consumption, but it also established connections between the spread of sugar in the old world and the shaping of new patterns of production and mass consumption in the early capitalistic era. Mintz outlined the specific feature of the production of sugar, and at the same time he questioned the capitalistic production itself. The article was not only about the history of the consumption of sugar; it also reconsidered the concept of consumption as biological process as well as capitalistic category. Beyond the specific contents of the topic, what really impressed me was the author’s ability to demonstrate the pivotal contribution that food, consumption, and eating behaviour offer for an understanding of history.

Almost four years have passed since that summer, and in a crucial moment of the research that brought me from Naples to Adelaide, I had the opportunity to be inspired again by the ideas of the great anthropologist and historian by attending Sydney Mintz’ seminar. Mintz’ worlds impressed me on both the level of the contents and the conversational tone of the speech. By the latter I mean the ability to communicate ideas by sharing knowledge, impressions, and memories with the audience. Mintz delivered his knowledge in such an uncommon way if compared with the average academic seminars that demonstrate poor communication skills and focus on the erection of argumentative walls instead of inspiring, talking to, and sharing with the public. With his colloquial tone, lingering between memories of life, past studies, and future projects, Mintz spoke about his previous experiences, recalling his first steps in the history and anthropology of food, started “without any conscious intention” and “no formal training.” He listed the most significant studies in the history of commodities, discussed his favourite readings, and mentioned topics of the history of commodities that still need an investigation. Among these, the history of soy beans represents one of the missing chapters, which Mintz is going to write. The project will trace the history of the cultivation,

production, and consumption of soy beans, and it will analyse the reasons why and the consequences of the spread of soy beans from the Asian countries to the western developed countries, particularly to the American market. This migration of commodities from the eastern to the western hemispheres has economical, anthropological, and cultural implications. As Mintz shrewdly mentioned, the transformation of productive and cultural patterns of soy beans also implies its anthropological degradation. Once converted to the multinational market, the cultural value of soy has deeply changed; while soy still represents a staple in the diet of Asian populations, in America it has undergone an anthropological, culinary, and dehumanising debasement by becoming feed for livestock.

Again, Mintz' new project will produce a history of food and commodities that questions the relation between the development of systems of production and consumption and the transformation of social, economical, and cultural relations among individuals and within ethnical groups and social structures. And again I found myself inspired by the way in which Mintz redefines the anthropological value that food gains as commodity. His definition of the historical process through which food acquires articulated anthropological meanings once again leads me to question the process in which food, beyond and through the commodification itself, comes to a new significance in a sphere in which materiality and culture overlap.

Nadia Postiglione

### **Food Production and Consumption**

This symposium, organised by the University of Western Australia's Institute of Advanced Studies, had two themes: food production, the focus of the Margaret River half of the program, and food consumption, addressed by many of the presenters in the more academic sessions in Perth. Whether fortuitous or deliberate, this strategy worked well, though it also hindered discussion of production issues in relation to consumption and vice versa.

The Margaret River program began at the Margaret River Providore when Patrick Coward outlined his concept of a self-sufficient cellar door-restaurant, where the menu will be dictated by seasonal produce from the organic vegetable garden beds almost on the restaurant doorstep, which will be nourished

by the chooks just beyond the garden, which in turn will be nourished by the scraps from the restaurant. The restaurant is scheduled to open later this year and guarantees that breakfast eggs will be day-old at most. This will not be the only restaurant in the region to adopt such a philosophy; Cullen's Winery restaurant, which provided lunch the following day, already maintains a biodynamic garden that furnishes most of its fruit and vegetables.

Production of a different kind was addressed in the first session on the topic of food writing. Gay Bilson, while deploring the pretentiousness and preciousness (my words and my recollection) of much food writing today, more specifically food journalism, noted that some of the best food writing is incidental, a view subsequently confirmed by Peter Beilharz' reading of Robert Hughes' description of La Boqueria, Barcelona's food market.

At Lamont's Margaret River winemaker Michael Kerrigan explained why he preferred screwcaps to cork and dismissed some of the common beliefs about cork, such as its allowing the wine to mature through contact with air. Myth, he retorted; wine does not need contact with air to age (oxidise) since oxygen is already present in the wine. Equally passionate in his beliefs was winemaker and biodynamic farmer David Hohnen, who argued for greater emphasis on regionality and a new food revolution in the regions. David produces high-quality pasture-fed lamb from an almost extinct breed, the Wiltshire Horn; as a rather primitive breed of sheep, he believes that its grazing of all kinds of herbage gives the lamb a distinct flavour which in turn reflects the region in a similar way as does wine.

The highlights of the two-day Perth Symposium were the public lectures by Professor Peter Barham (on molecular gastronomy) and Sidney Mintz (on the production of food). Molecular gastronomy is often represented as bold and outrageous combinations of ingredients in aberrant forms, such as bacon-and-egg ice cream. For Barham molecular gastronomy is characterised by the application of an understanding of scientific principles to our tasting and appreciation of food with the gastronomic intent of enhancing our pleasure. Much of his lecture was devoted to the tasting experience and the imperfections of our senses, especially when one or more are suppressed (for example, sight), but he also demonstrated how science can assist in the identification

of harmonious flavour combinations by identifying the chemical constituents of flavour and pairing those with shared components such as coffee and garlic, Roquefort and dark chocolate, caviar and white chocolate, gruyère and honey (which really did work!).

While this lecture was revelatory, Sidney Mintz' lecture encouraged reflection. He proposed three critical breakthroughs in the history of food production, each of enormous value but each associated with significant costs and unequal distribution of benefits. The first was the domestication of plants and animals, one consequence of which, many centuries later, was slavery; the second was fermentation, which considerably enlarged the range of edible foods; he noted that about one-third of all food (and drink) consumed today has undergone fermentation in some way; and the third related to the processing of soybeans, a food of very high nutritional value but difficult to digest unless treated in some way. As the mainstay of Asian nutrition, the soybean has made possible a range of meatless cuisines, but in the western world it has been transformed into food for billions of chickens and pigs and into vegetable oil, which often serves to fry the chicken and pork.

A number of papers took up the issue of increasing obesity in Australia and underlined the need for more data and more research into eating habits in Australia, not only who eats what but why. Another sub-theme was tomatoes and the need for a vocabulary of taste to be able to describe, with some accuracy, the flavour of different varieties (if this is possible for beef, why not for tomatoes?). Finally, in a paper focused specifically on Perth, Susanna Iuliano described two parallel streams in the development of a coffee culture in the city, one concerning sophisticated establishments in the city and the other the simple espresso bars in the Italian neighbourhoods that served not only as meeting places for single male migrants but also as sites of contestation with Australian men.

Barbara Santich

## Reviews

Food and Ethics: What Shall We Eat Today?

Christian Coff, *The Taste for Ethics: An Ethic of Food Consumption* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 212 pp. Highly Recommended.

Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: The Search for a Perfect Meal in a Fast Food World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 450 pp. Highly Recommended.

Peter Singer and Jim Mason, *The Way We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter* (Rodale, 2006), 332 pp. Recommended.

Interest in the relationship between food, eating, and ethics extends at least as far back as the pre-Socratic Greek philosophers, while notable exposés on the wrongs of unscrupulous producers and marketers of food have, understandably, increased in modern times. Broadly ethical in their approach, the likes of Frederick Accum (*The Adulteration Food*, 1820), Rachel Carson (*Silent Spring*, 1962), Ross Hume Hall (*Food for Nought: The Decline in Nutrition*, 1974), and Eric Schlosser (*Fast Food Nation*, 2001) have all sought to uncover the "dark side" of the Western diet and to prick public concern.

Today a chasm of uncertainty has opened up between the actual foods consumers eat and what consumers know about what they eat. Perhaps as the distance between consumers and producers has increased so too has our anxiety about the unknown. Nature seems further at a remove than ever before, even though problems like global warming seem to bring "nature" back home to roost. Ignorance being bliss for some (many?) means that not knowing where one's food comes from or how it is produced may not necessarily be a problem. But now that we live in world where food is grown, processed, packed, and shipped using technologies that can alter food quality and adversely affect the environment and human health, expect to hear more and more about the perils of our diet.

Add to this that the knowledge individuals have of their food no longer comes from the senses, in particular, but from packaging information, advertising, marketing, scientific discourse, nutritionists, social scientists, and various other experts, and the problem of behaving ethically becomes still more complex. What one buys as an ethical product, what passes for an ethical product, and what is an ethical product will never be determined by the blurb on

the bag.

Ethical debates about food typically identify areas of concern such as the living conditions of “battery animals,” gene technologies and the introduction of GMOs, the use of pesticides, chemical fertilisers, and growth hormones, the exploitation of food industry workers in third-world countries, and the environmental cost of food (fossil fuel use and therefore “food miles”), for example. None of these issues are invoked in the “benign” space of the supermarket or by the docile “please buy me” attractiveness of packaged goods that appear on shelves as if from nowhere. In this sense the arrival of the “organic” section in the supermarket is also just a sign that such concern exists, whereas the products themselves are there primarily for the same reason as all the other goods, namely, to sell.

Living (and eating) ethically in today’s world, simple put, is anything but simple. Yet in essence it means acting with an awareness of the personal, physical, social, and environmental consequences of our actions. Notwithstanding that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, many choose ignorance rather than face the fear and anxiety that comes from knowing the truth about our food system. One wonders whether the current explosion of interest in cookery and eating in the form of foodie-ism, celebrity chefdom, and the accompanying sycophancy is not in fact the paradoxical expression of this will to ignorance. A mode of denial that merely resembles “passion,” whereby in spite of overwhelming evidence that we’re rapidly destroying the natural environment and our own health, the gourmet can in Nero-esque fashion avoid facing the gloomy reality through gastronomic indulgence. Moreover, the romanticising, aestheticising, and “sexing up” of cookery in these shows are also precisely the latter’s mode of denial. The ethical question never asked is where does all that “beautiful food” come from, who produces it, and at what cost (socially and environmentally)?

The issues surrounding even the theory of ethical behaviour in relation to food are complex, as Christian Coff makes clear in his admirable book, *The Taste for Ethics*. Coff’s meticulous, closely argued text offers in the first place an excursus on the history and philosophy of science that has influenced attitudes to food and to food ethics, in particular. It therefore traces the philosophic ideas that have shaped those attitudes and which were subsequently applied through science and technology and repro-

duced by the modern food industry.

With an analysis citing a host of thinkers including Aristotle, Descartes, Rousseau, Kant, Comte, Malthus, Darwin, Simmel, Nietzsche, Bachelard, Gadamer, Foucault, Ricouer, and many others, Coff suggests that it was a quantifying, “positivistic” Western science that was largely to blame for our current form of “intellectualisation and distancing” with regard to food. It was the emergent life sciences, in particular, Coff argues, that changed our understanding of nature and of food to the extent that food was regarded as a known quantity, as so many calories, a chemical product with predictable physiological effects. In a brief critique of Ludwig Feuerbach’s (1804-1872) influential statement that, “Man is what he eats” (which is taken to reflect this quantitative approach) Coff states that although “man is what he eats” this is “not only in a substantive sense but also in a cultural sense.” That is to say, food does not simply sustain physiologically but “nourishes” by virtue of its meaning, its social significance, and by the values it represents; indeed, by the ethical responses it may elicit. Food in today’s context is very much about others.

Coff’s account is scholarly and academic in tone and structured in a way that allows for an in-depth study of the nuanced relationship between consumers and their food, between human beings and nature, and between individuals and others. It is at times theoretically dense, involving the reader in philosophical excursions on subjects like identity, nature, sensory experience, autonomy, and trust, but in doing so it provides a complement of elements affecting ethical choice-making. The rewards of such a study are significant. Coff identifies sensual and emotional as well as intellectual forms of knowledge as being necessary for the ethical understanding of our food. Engaging with the sensual properties of food as a source of knowledge, the active pursuit of knowledge related to the production history of the food product, and considering food as an agent of self-knowledge are presented as the interlocking elements of this relationship.

After a lengthy development at “the theoretical and abstract level,” Coff writes, “the theoretical reflections can be more than just an academic interest.” In the final thirty pages of the book he presents the “practical implications” (and applications) of his theoretical ethics. This includes the results of a “sociological survey on ethical traceability” conducted

in Denmark in 2004. This concluded that tracing the product's production history was by no means easy and that consumers (who have come to value that history) had widely differing attitudes when it came to the provision of product information. Coff also identifies globalisation as one of the forces that has made "long-range" food ethics a "difficult and diffuse concept." Act local, think global may well be the mantra for ethical food consumption. "The long-range consequences of our actions" are now necessarily a part of the ethical consumer's deliberations, Coff argues.

The book concludes with a practical "answer" to what is an exceedingly difficult problem: given that there are ways in which acting ethically can enrich one's life in a socially and environmentally beneficial way, how do we act ethically (in relation to food) and influence others to do the same? Coff claims ultimately "ethical consumption is based on the wish to contribute to the common good through consumption." Notwithstanding the difficulties implied by such a "simple" principle (the rich, for example, appear to be favoured by such a consumerist politics), Coff responds by distinguishing between political and ethical consumers; the latter "force us to reflect on the role of the individual in a democracy, both as citizen and as a consumer." Given that Coff is Danish, and Denmark is a country well-known for its socially responsible politics, this tightly woven argument more than makes sense, but whether the book's analysis proves convincing in other cultural contexts remains to be seen.

From a very different perspective, although no less critical of the current state of global foodways, best-selling writer and journalist Michael Pollan makes his ethical point clear enough in opening his 450-page study of the American food system. He asks a seemingly straight-forward question, "what should we have for dinner?" Although he doesn't identify ethics as the issue here, he should infer that ethics is indeed at the heart of the matter. Why, Pollan continues, is the question now so seemingly complicated and food the source of so much anxiety and confusion? To discover the answer he follows "the food chains that sustain us, all the way from the earth to the plate" and after working through three essentially different food chains ("industrial, organic [split into "big organic" and bone fide organic], and the hunter-gatherer"), he describes a meal prepared from foods produced by each system (four in total). He seeks, in other words, the "story of food" and its

"traceability" (Coff's terms). While *The Omnivore's Dilemma* is elegantly structured around these four meals the investigative depth of Pollan's meticulous analysis is always in evidence as he forages through the often disturbing history of American agriculture, food processing, and consumption.

In the opening chapter Pollan deals with corn, a crop which he describes as "the keystone species of the industrial food chain" (10 billion bushels are harvested every year in the United States). The corn farm, argues Pollan, is principally governed not by nature but by a combination of chemistry, fossil fuels, and government regulations, and corn itself is a ubiquitous product that in one form or another finds its way into a multitude of food products. The prognosis is not good. In short, corn has been so controlled, economically, chemically, and genetically, and proved so versatile that in finding its way into thousands of products as diverse as toothpaste, confectionary, paint, and packaging, not to mention all of those "corn-fed" animals, it epitomises the agricultural monoculture that Pollan deplors. The book is a clear argument in favour of being informed about where our food comes from or, to borrow one of Eric Schlosser's chapter headings, of knowing "what's in the beef." The book's mantra is expressed in the form of a pledge, "to eat in full consciousness of everything involved in feeding myself," a clear echo of Brillat-Savarin's 1825 definition of gastronomy, "the reasoned understanding of everything that concerns us, insofar as we sustain ourselves."

An ethical ideal worth fighting for? Well, yes, I guess so, but Pollan pulls his punches, crafts his argument, philosophises, muses, and wonders while he crafts a powerful narrative, a story first and foremost of his travels through rural America, to farms and farmhouses and to their dinner tables. It is a tale of real people brought to life in Pollan's ample prose, embroidered with facts but never pushed to the point of polemic. This is a useful strategy, given that readers want to be in some sense entertained even by such a harrowing tale. This is not a cynical view so much as a reflection on the fact that in dealing with an ethical issue such as food consumption no one wants to be verbally bludgeoned with the "right" way to behave. Ethics implies coming to one's own decision, and Pollan takes pains to present a balanced and thoughtful view, a prolonged and highly structured musing, if you will, one that

leaves readers with options rather than orders.

Pollan is clearly a great story teller. He writes with novelistic flair, sensitive to the nuances of daily life, human character, and behaviour. Cannily crafted snapshots of the real-life farmers he formed personal relationships with during the researching and writing of the book magnify the human element beautifully, while Pollan's eye for the critical never wavers. He effortlessly weaves philosophy, politics, science, and agronomy with personal insight, big science with cookery and recipes, national agendas and local lore.

How can individuals fight against the might of corporate power and the food industry? With their wallets, say Peter Singer and Jim Mason in their valuable contribution to the food ethics debate. This simple and politically direct suggestion may not change too many people's minds with regard to buying local organic food, unsullied by chemicals, taste-affecting processing, or carrying the stigma of "battery farming." Singer and Mason point out early in their book that Singer's classic, *Animal Liberation*, did not have much effect with regard to "factory farming" of animals either.

Not as thorough in terms of philosophical background as Coff nor as delightful in terms of its prose as Pollan, this book nonetheless does an excellent job at juxtaposing reality with possibility and weighing up the problems and benefits of acting responsibly with regard to food. "Isn't it a sad thing when our morals become disposable?" asks one of the authors' interviewees. Choosing three families as case studies, Singer and Mason spotlight what they call SAD, the standard American diet, as much as the economic stranglehold it represents for lower socio-economic status families. The relatively low cost of (some) foods is what potentially outweighs all putatively ethical product choices with a ring of the till.

As an omnivore I must say that I find the rational approach to ethical eating presented in this book a little "sad" myself. Coff may agree. For him the reduction of eating to rational principles (ethical, or otherwise) is to sell oneself short. Singer and Mason provide carefully worded explanations on the rights and wrongs of ethical eating and also a shopping guide (useful for American residents in particular) for ethically minded consumers. Yet in some sense the problem is not merely about what to buy but rather that we buy at all and the power, therefore, of the consumer and of consumerism.

At this point, enter the typical, ethical or "political consumers" (Coff's term), relatively wealthy, well-educated, and mostly middle class. Their power as consumers is exercised in relation to which products they buy, influences the information about products supplied, and also

drives prices. But Coff makes a cogent case that the positive formulation, "political consumers," together with their actions in the marketplace as responsible agents of change, are merely a wholesale endorsement of consumerism itself. Ironically, "political consumers" merely "conserve or even increase consumption and thus... expand the market." Thus there is in Coff's view "an unstated alliance between consumers and producers, where the real losers are those who cannot afford to pay: those without money." Taking this to its logical conclusion, Coff argues that, "creating an ethical profile for the company is [simply] a new strategy for selling products."

There are more than echoes here of what has happened to "organic," as Pollan ably relates in his book. Organic is just another brand in many cases. What Pollan doesn't explore as well as Coff, I suggest, is the capitalist commodification process itself. It was this problem which piqued my critical instincts reading Pollan, because this well-informed, charmingly written, and inspirational book is also a brilliant piece of merchandising, while Singer and Mason's book appears in part to be an "ethical shopper's almanac." Reading Pollan I therefore wondered how many aspiring "political consumers" will his book prod into action. Or will the book's ideas, so easily digested (even though the facts conveyed along with them often disgust), be simply consumed and forgotten?

Pollan's book smacks of a sort of convenient cultural naïveté, since while Americans may be innocent of the facts about their food, these can now only disingenuously be ignored. As Pollan reflects on his last meal of totally foraged foods, it is "the brevity and simplicity" of "the food chain linked to the wider world" that he relishes in the "almost perfect transparency of the meal." A whacky, misguided nostalgia amidst a food system so clearly off the rails. Pollan's book is an inspiring personal journey of revelation and self-discovery, packaged as exposé. It is in this sense deeply individualistic but pragmatic only to the extent that it questions and to some extent answers. However, the social and philosophical aspects of (ethical) consumption that Coff explores are not broached in anything like the same manner as the Danish researcher.

Only a radical re-evaluation of current patterns of production and consumption could make any noticeable difference, and, as this is not likely to happen, what is the best way forward? Proper labelling mon-

itored by an independent group and enforced by legislature, education, and encouragement to eat plenty of unprocessed foods as a part of the diet. Surely. But also, as Coff argues, by treating our consumer food choices as choices that enrich self-understanding. Eating is being, and through knowing our food our self-knowledge is also kindled. Ethical eating is not only about “political consumerism.” It is also learning about how to be oneself through the ethical understanding of others. Our engagement with food is arguably the pre-eminent social act through which ethical understanding can best be nurtured.

Roger Haden

### **Try the Dreaded Veal Cutlet and the Roguefart Cheese**

Cara de Silva frequently posts material on the ASFS listserv that deserves inclusion in the Newsletter, including the following. This is an edited extract from *Lost in Translation* by Charlie Croker.

You’re in a far-flung corner of the globe, it’s the early hours of the morning, you’ve just checked into your hotel after an exhausting flight. The prospect of your 7.30am business breakfast is filling you with dread, and you’ve got a nagging feeling you forgot to pack your toothbrush. Very little seems right with the world. But then you notice a sign in the corner of the bathroom. It says, “Please to bathe inside the tub.” You can’t help a smile from creeping across your tired features.

All over the world, from Beijing to Buenos Aires, in hotels, restaurants, taxis and zoos (yes, zoos), there are nuggets of verbal vacuity lying in wait, ready to brighten the lives of whichever jaded voyagers chance upon them. They are the treats we earn for enduring mislaid luggage, deep-vein thrombosis and stony-faced stewardesses.

Sometimes you can tell what was meant: “Our wine list leaves you nothing to hope for.” Other times you can’t: “Nobody is allowed to sit on both sides of the boat.” Sometimes you’re not sure if you can tell or not: for example, the Indian hotel that warns, “No spitting on the walls.” Is that “spitting” or “writing?” If the former, why only on the walls?

Other entries belong firmly in the “how did that happen?” file. Take the fake Liverpool FC shirts in China, which have precisely copied every detail, right down to the club crest... then turned “You’ll never walk alone” into “You’ll never pickle again.” Some mess with your head: “If you wish you may

open the window. Do not open the window.” Others are inadvertently beautiful: “Little grass is smiling slightly, please walk on the pavement.” Food in particular is a rich seam for such gems. After all, food is a universal language; we all share a need for it, an enjoyment of it, a fascination with it. Pity we ruin everything by making such a pig’s ear of describing it, as these examples from signs found in hotels and restaurants demonstrate:

Kenya: Customers who find our waitresses rude ought to see the manager.

Vietnam: Compulsory buffet breakfast.

Bulgaria: If you are satisfactory, tell your friends.

If you are unsatisfactory, warn the waitress.

Poland: As for the tripe served you at the Hotel Monopol, you will be singing its praises to your grandchildren on your deathbed.

Turkey: You are invite to visit our restaurant where you can eat the Middle East Foods in a European ambulance.

Japan: We have a Sukiyaki Restaurant with lodging facilities for those who want to have experiences on Japanese bedding.

Malaysia: Seafood brought in by customers will not be entertained.

China: Mr Zheng and his fellow workers like to meet you and entertain you with hostility.

Switzerland: Special today – no ice cream.

India: Seven days a week and weekends too!

New Zealand: We do not re-use the food.

India: After one visit we guarantee you will be regular.

Mind you, the menus aren’t much better than the signs. Take the menu of a restaurant in China, on which certain dishes are marked with an asterisk.

At the foot of the page, it states the asterisk denotes “handicapped-accessible.” Here are a few more tasty dishes you might like to try:

China: Cold shredded children and sea blubber.

Poland: Beef rashers beaten up in the country people’s fashion.

USA: French creeps.

Ukraine: Climbing with a hen.

Japan: Buttered saucepans and fried hormones.

China: Dreaded veal cutlet.

Cairo: Prawn cock and tail.

Vietnam: Pork with fresh garbage.

Bali: Toes with butter and jam.

Nepal: Fried friendship.

Laos: Friend eggs.

Hong Kong: Utmost of chicken fried in bother.

France: Extract of fowl, peached or sunside up.

Venezuela: Fried chicken babies, fungus cream and grill cattle bowels.

Spain: Revolting eggs.

Slovakia: Hamanegs.

France: Nut of holy Jacques jumped, guinea fowl stinks to it and its farce with cheese-topped dish, almost cheese-dish of mould in spice.

Thailand: Rather burnt land slug.

Thailand: General chaos chicken.

Australia: Dumping soup.

Greece: Chopped cow with a wire through it and bowels in sauce.

Japan: This cute mild curry uses 100 per cent Japanese apple and cheerful hamster.

Hong Kong (under “cheeses”): Roguefart.

Oh, and one final word of caution. Amused as we are at other countries’ fumbblings with our language, we should never forget that their English is infinitely better than our Thai, Polish or Vietnamese. Indeed, sometimes it’s even better than our English, as the sign in the windows of a London pizzeria that reads “Open 24 hours (except 2am to 8am)” makes only too clear.

Editor’s comment: At a café in Beachport, South Australia, you can order a cup of chino.

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