

The Nouvelle Cuisine Revolution: Expressions of National Anxieties and Aspirations in

French Culinary Discourse 1969 – 1996

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of
Romance Studies in the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This dissertation posits that Nouvelle Cuisine brings together two of the most powerful cultural forces involved in constituting French national identity: food and revolution. As a result of this privileged position, Nouvelle Cuisine offers scholars a particularly rich object of study that can be related to larger issues at play in the formation and performance of national identity. In this work, I will argue that the revolutionary rhetoric used in the articulation of Nouvelle Cuisine serves several distinct and, at times, oppositional purposes. On the one hand, the revolutionary rhetoric is intended to create a break with a tumultuous and painful past, while asserting a new paradigm of national strength. On the other hand, however, the revolutionary rhetoric of equality and freedom also somewhat paradoxically participates in and supports the dark side of democracy, which includes but is not limited to behind-the-scenes jockeying for power and the elimination of groups that threaten or curtail either the power at the top or the legitimacy of the revolution itself.

This work will also argue that because of the very malleability of the revolutionary rhetoric and because French cuisine is considered such an important expression of the French nation, Nouvelle Cuisine and the contemporaneous culinary discourse transforms France's fine dining domain into a sort of theatre where national attitudes are not only represented to a socially diverse French public, but where the public itself is invited to participate in this performance of the nation: rehearsing, refining, and rejecting what it means to be French and, as a result, projecting both aspirations and anxieties of nationhood through this culinary landscape.

In writing this dissertation, I have drawn heavily on my training in literary studies, but have tried as much as possible to allow the subject matter to dictate an inclusive and interdisciplinary approach. I engage frequently with a wide variety of scholars such as Homi Bhabha, Roland Barthes, Michel Winock, Jean-Robert Pitte, Claude Fischler, and Stephen Mennell. Consequently, my argument places the classic literary tools of linguistic and semiotic methods alongside investigations that call on cultural studies, history, anthropology, sociology, political philosophy, and of course food studies. I use cookbooks, guidebooks, newspapers, magazines, menus, interviews, and multiple editions of the Larousse Gastronomique to provide first and foremost the context but also the evidence for this dissertation. I concentrate the bulk of my critical energies on the food and leisure magazine Le Nouveau Guide (founded by food critics Henri Gault and Christian Millau) and the cookbook series entitled "Les Recettes Originales de...", paying particular attention to Nouvelle Cuisine foundational chefs Paul Bocuse and Michel Guérard.

The narrative of Nouvelle Cuisine is equivocal, but it does not defy conclusions. My final analysis in this dissertation is that in the production and articulation of Nouvelle Cuisine, we see how food and revolution are used to reorganize the hierarchies and composition of a society. We see a reorganization that restores bourgeois, patriarchal values and clings to a hexagonal interpretation of France that prioritizes resistance over incorporation. We see a revolution that is perhaps less the French Revolution than the July Revolution. We see a revolution that is an alibi for restoration.

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Of the many ruses I employed to urge myself forward in the dissertation process, the most enjoyable (and least deceptive) was imagining the moment when I could finally write my acknowledgements. It is the Oscar speech of graduate school, but without the music to truncate the joyful expressions of gratitude, so settle in.

Nearly every doctoral candidate begins the acknowledgements by admitting that the dissertation would not exist but for the support and encouragement of the advisor. I now understand that, if these writers are like me, they are not, as I always suspected, simply parroting the grand and overly gracious compliments of their predecessors. They are actually stating the facts, maybe even understating them. I have had two brilliant advisors in my corner, and to speak as plainly as possible, I could not have completed this dissertation without them. First, there is Linda Orr. From my earliest days as a recruit, before seminars and prelims and dissertations were even a blip on my radar, Linda Orr was a steadfast believer in my work, in my brain, in the validity of my quirky, meandering, lumbering process. Over the years, she has been an exemplary mentor, possessing an uncanny ability to understand what I needed to hear. When I felt stymied by traditional modes of academia, she encouraged me to forge and trust my own path. When I ranged too far afield, she reeled me back in. She has been a patient, challenging, and generous interlocutor, willing to plum as many depths of discussion as I could introduce on a given topic. She is a close and careful reader, a conceptual hawk with a

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Introduction

It all made very good copy—something revolutionary, at last, to talk about. [...] Obviously, somebody was pulling somebody's leg, but it was happily consumed, along with the truffles.

—Julia Child, on Nouvelle Cuisine

“Une Révolution” proclaims the November 1974 cover of Le Nouveau Guide Gault-Millau. These words—all-caps, boldface, and in huge font—do more than just introduce the lead story for a monthly food and travel magazine. Their mission is to announce the triumph of the light and innovative Nouvelle Cuisine Française over the heavier and substantially more regimented culinary style that had dominated France, and indeed the world, for decades. What had been known as simply *la cuisine française*, a meticulously codified and rigorously observed set of cooking practices, had apparently been dethroned, and it bore the appended descriptors (*la cuisine classique* or *la cuisine ancienne*) to prove it.

The overwhelming influence of Nouvelle Cuisine in the 1970s generated a major shift in the way food operates in culture. The status of cuisine and cooking was convincingly and definitively elevated from *artisanal* to art. Even today, we can see—from celebrity chefs in their glitzy urban restaurants to the organic section of the local small-town grocery store—that the French phenomenon known as Nouvelle Cuisine sowed seeds that have had a profound and lasting impact, not just on French cuisine, but on the international food scene as a whole. But this is not the first revolution to pass through French kitchens, nor is it even

the first to call for a lighter, simpler national cuisine. In the seventeenth century, chefs like La Varenne (Le Cuisinier françois, 1651) and, later, Massialot (Le Cuisinier roial et bourgeois, 1691) revolutionized French culinary practice with cookbooks that according to food historian Stephen Mennell represented “both a clear break with medieval food and the recognisable beginnings of the modern French cuisine” (71). In the late 1730s, François Marin (Les Dons de Comus, 1739) and Menon (Nouveau traité de la cuisine, 1739) were among the revolutionaries responsible for what was known as *nouvelle cuisine*, a style of cooking that lightened sauces by using flour instead of breadcrumbs and simplified flavors by admonishing cooks who over-spiced a dish rather than letting its natural flavors come out (Mennell 77-78). After the French Revolution changed the culinary landscape, along with the social and political landscape, Antonin Carême (Le Cuisinier parisien ou l’art de la cuisine française au dix-neuvième siècle, 1828) created yet another rupture between old and new cuisines. According to Amy Trubek, in the introduction to Le Cuisinier parisien, Carême “compares menus and recipes of the cuisine ancienne and the cuisine moderne to show the ‘vast superiority’ of the cuisine moderne because of its ‘simplicity, elegance, and sumptuousness’” (7). The end of the nineteenth century brought a second, named incarnation of *nouvelle cuisine*, when Philéas Gilbert, Châtillon-Plessis and the editorial staff of the food magazine L’Art Culinaire published a manifesto announcing the need for a massive overhaul in French cuisine: “In this *nouvelle cuisine*, we need—to use a famous expression—new men, and a new *culinary grammar*” (qtd in Mennell 169). That call to arms was ably filled by Auguste Escoffier (Le Guide culinaire, 1903) and his immense reorganization and streamlining of French

cuisine—until, that is, his *nouvelle cuisine* was rendered *classique* by the 1970s revolution and the new Nouvelle Cuisine. What does it mean that each culinary revolution appears to argue for a lighter, simpler version than what came before? And can a revolution with so many antecedents really be termed a revolution?

The cover line mentioned above (“Une Révolution”) goes with an article that is subtitled “Le Nouvel art de manger en 1975” and is a mini-manual, a “savoir-manger” that offers to help its readers navigate “les règles d’un nouvel art de vivre” (59). But, significantly, somewhere between the cover of the magazine and the article inside, “le nouvel art de manger” becomes “le nouvel art de vivre,” suggesting that in France eating and living are easily conflated. Such unqualified elision between food and life should come as little surprise given France’s history of linking food to its image of national identity. Indeed, according to historian and food writer Pascal Ory, cuisine not only expresses French identity but carries the whole of France’s history and personality in its expression:

L’Histoire de la gastronomie confirme les traits distinctifs de la nation France: un vieux pays catholique doublé d’un vieux pays laïque, porté par sa tradition des clercs à intellectualiser son unité et sa centralité, mais aussi durablement partagé, dans sa durée comme dans sa société, par la rupture révolutionnaire. (Discours Gastronomique 194)

As Ory points out, France’s complex relationship to its Catholic past is never far from its culinary values. But it is the French Revolution and the enduring impact it has had on French national identity that make the appearance of a “revolutionary” rhetoric in culinary discourse worthy of attention. Does the revolutionary rhetoric of Nouvelle Cuisine merely reflect the “traits distinctifs” of what Ory describes as a fractured nation?

Or does it more actively sustain and produce an alternative image of what it means to be French?

These questions raise an important theoretical challenge that anyone working on cultural studies and national identity must address before moving forward. A somewhat simplified version of the conundrum resembles the famous chicken and egg debate: does culture produce the nation or does the nation produce the culture? In the last few decades, theories of nation and nationhood have sought to identify discourses, institutions, technologies, agencies, cultural apparatuses, and other factors capable of influencing or constituting ideas of national identity. From Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities" to Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's "invented traditions," many of the recent formulations of nation posit that patriotism and national identity result from a "culturally constructed" sense of community shared by a population, a collective "imaginary" that informs or creates a national consciousness.

This emphasis on the imagined or constructed is not meant to introduce a binary whereby a "constructed" national image exists in opposition to a "real" one. Instead, I think it asks us to challenge any seemingly unified or singular interpretation of nationality at a given historical moment. Furthermore, given the constant and complex interplay that exists between internal (the imaginary) and external (the "historical") forces, it is also clear that concepts of nationality, like the nation itself, are always in flux. Although I fully support the fluidity of Anderson's assertion that cultural and discursive factors (like "print capitalism") are capable of producing "the possibility of a new form of imagined community" (315), I do not accept the unidirectional and wholly unequivocal

model proposed by James Donald, who claims, “The nation is an effect of these cultural technologies, not their origin. A nation does not express itself through its culture: it is cultural apparatuses that produce ‘the nation’” (qtd in Ashley et al. 81).

Instead, I submit that it is precisely this murky exchange between a nation “expressing” itself and a nation “produced” that we see in powerful cultural phenomena like the Nouvelle Cuisine culinary revolution. In writing about Brunot’s Histoire de la Langue Française, Jean-Claude Chevalier attempts to balance what he sees as an unavoidable contradiction in the study of the French language: “La langue n’est ni le reflet de la société ni un organe autonome obéissant à ses lois internes comme le voudrait la philologie allemande, contradiction que résume et dissout le système des vocables, qui, à une époque donnée, a ses modalités propres” (441). One thing at stake in this dissertation is the belief that although a similar incommensurability may exist between cuisine and national identity, it is nonetheless valuable and even productive, if not to attempt reconciliation, then at least to investigate the movements of these intertwined forces.

To that end, much of my analysis of the relationship between culinary discourse and French identity has been informed by what Homi Bhabha describes as “the Janus-faced ambivalence of language itself in the construction of the Janus-faced discourse of the nation” (3). Bhabha invokes the two-faced god to emphasize the ambivalence of meaning and cultural authority as a nation-space is in the process of articulation, and I would point out that, here too, we have a figure whose “prodigious doubling” (3) indicates plurality rather than a simple binary. The use of the Janus metaphor, with its

emphasis on masks and multiple public guises, also draws attention to the “performativity of language in the narratives of the nation” (3).

Bhabha suggests that if we are to make sense of (or perhaps, more realistically, if we are to begin the work of untangling) the multiple versions and interpretations of a nation-space, then we must approach the nation through its “narrative address.” He warns, however, that during times of political argument or debate, one side of that hybrid national discourse can be silenced and dominant ideologies taken at face value, a factor that will be particularly relevant to this dissertation, given that Nouvelle Cuisine emerged during the intense social, political, and economic upheavals of the late sixties and early seventies. Focusing, as Bhabha advises, on France’s narrative address reveals that the common linguistic thread running through the disparate and seemingly non-overlapping segments of French life during this moment in history is this rhetoric of “revolution.” As I observed how widespread, yet varied, revolutionary framing was in this post-May 68 France, I realized that before I could effectively study the articulation of Nouvelle Cuisine as a revolution in a highly specialized culinary domain, I first had to acknowledge the import of revolutionary framing in a national context.

The “Janus-faced ambivalence of language” referred to by Bhabha is certainly on display in the word *revolution*. Contained in its definition are both the promise of something new (a revolt puts an end to the old) and the guaranteed reappearance of what is *not* new (a completed cycle returning what has come before). In “English and French National Identity: Comparisons and Contrasts,” Krishan Kumar argues that England’s national identity is wrapped up in an *evolutionary* understanding of history, where the

present is an accretion of layer upon layer of past events and experiences. By contrast, he says, France has based its image of nation and history on an idea of *revolution*, where aspects of an undesirable past are reimagined or repressed after an abrupt break or shift in the continuity of political, social, or cultural practices. This emphasizes and reproduces the linguistic doubling of the word “revolution,” because, according to Kumar, the past and present remain commingled. He cites French historian Anne Sa’adah to explain:

The British [sic] achieved closure on most of their disputes. The French did not, and so for them the past, dense with colliding ideas, individuals, and groups, remains present. It shapes how people articulate their aspirations, and assess the possibilities of political life. It provides the key to the codes in which current conflicts are framed and fought. (414-15).

If, as Kumar asserts, the past remains present, and if revolutions create unhealed fissures that result in a new series of revolutions, then the act of revolution in France is both a rejection of the past and a reinforcement of national tradition. But national traditions, as Hobsbawm and Ranger so effectively lay bare in The Invention of Tradition, are themselves constructions, which helps to explain why images of revolution, though widespread, are so variable. Historian Michel Winock argues that, “Au fur et à mesure que le régime républicain s’est renforcé et a été reconnu par le plus grand nombre, la Révolution est devenue un héritage commun, où chacun a puisé ce qui lui convenait” (45). In other words, the Revolution (event) performs as a nostalgic site of shared history in France, producing an “imagined community” and conformity of experience that shapes Frenchness (“un héritage commun”). But, at the same time, the revolution (ethos) holds the promise of individuality (“où chacun a puisé ce qui lui convenait”), creating a site of

resistance by making a clean break with the past and offering an idealized pick-and-choose future instead.

In Headless History, Linda Orr explores how the French Revolution, particularly the toppling of the king and the move toward democracy, affected the way historians were able to write history, and I believe this analysis is relevant to the way images of the revolution continue to cycle through French culture. In her argument, the metaphor of the beheaded king represents the loss of a clear authoritative voice in the histories she examines. Instead, the new and vast democratic possibilities promoted by the Revolution opened the door for historians to produce works that were later scorned for their equivocality, unreliability, and even lyricism—as if the move to a more literary style sounded the end of history with a capital H. Of course, before-and-after depictions are rarely as straightforward or as easily discernible as we would like them to be. As Orr puts it,

It would be easy to say that the ‘only essential difference’ between the ‘then’ (Old Regime) and ‘now’ (Empire) of the text is the Revolution—and this would be true, except that the Revolution would be seen only as an imperceptible step toward the Empire or the displacement between two historical objects (Old Regime and Empire) that are almost identical. The Revolution would then be defined as the invisible difference between two similar moments. (100)

She refutes such carelessly drawn distinctions by showing, for example, how the structures and movements of the Revolution eventually invert or turn on themselves to the point where the principal conceits of Toqueville’s L’Ancien Régime et la Révolution are betrayed and L’Ancien Régime est la Révolution emerges as the only viable title. “The book was supposed to characterize ‘the specific character’ (*génie propre*) of the

Revolution, ‘to consider it only in and of itself.’ As it turns out, these are the very tasks Tocqueville cannot do” (100).

Flash forward to another revolution and another *Toque Ville*.¹ As the sixties (a decade that, not just in France but around the world, has become synonymous with rebellions, resistances, liberations, and rejections of things past) came to an end, one more “revolution” slid in under the wire. In March 1969, Paris Presse lifestyle writers Henri Gault and Christian Millau launched Le Nouveau Guide Permanent, a magazine whose primary intention was to question the unquestioned and unquestionable authority of the Michelin Guide’s restaurant rankings. In their view, newer and younger chefs, with newer and more audacious cooking techniques were being ignored by the monarchical Michelin establishment. By 1973, they had found a label and a rhetoric to market the cooking style and the chefs they were promoting. They also found a French public that was all too happy to buy into the revolution of *Nouvelle Cuisine*.

The first indication that the revolutionary rhetoric of *Nouvelle Cuisine* is performing at least in part in a culturally appealing disguise (as opposed to offering a straight historical comparison to the Revolution) is the somewhat haphazard way images of revolution are constructed. Of course, as I have just noted, the spirit and language of revolution was prevalent during the late sixties, and the events of May 68 further guaranteed the resurgence in France of revolutionary ideas, terms and imagery. However,

¹ I am indebted to Rao, Durand, and Morin for the term *Toque Ville*, which they use in the title of their article "Institutional Change in *Toque Ville*: *Nouvelle Cuisine* as an Identity Movement in French Gastronomy" to refer to insider world of French gastronomy.

even though Nouvelle Cuisine's founding chefs and food critics may certainly have picked up on the liberatory spirit and language embraced by the May 68 supporters, I did not find direct references to May 68 or to any of its specific revolts (worker's rights, gender equality, student's rights) in the culinary discourse articulating Nouvelle Cuisine, except, in one case, to retroactively deny any intentional association: "Non, nous ne préparons pas un Mai 68 culinaire au cours duquel seront abolies toutes les traditions de bien-manger hexagonal!" (Gault and Millau, "La Nouvelle Cuisine, C'est la Grande" 14). Nor, however, does the literature support the idea that Nouvelle Cuisine was intended to be a purposeful representation of the 1789 Revolution.

Instead, the revolutionary rhetoric appears to gesture only casually to a generic, non-specified revolution-like esprit. For example, democratic and liberatory values are a constant focus of Nouvelle Cuisine discourse and could be associated with the 1789 Revolution, but could also be associated with countless other revolutions. Magazines like Le Nouveau Guide appear to make more overt references to the Revolution, using images of chefs drawn to parody Delacroix's "La Liberté guidant le peuple" (the painting of a partially bare-breasted "Marianne" leading the people over the corpses of the defeated aristocrats as she hoists the *tricolore*) or superimposing an article that details the "dix commandements" of Nouvelle Cuisine on an image evocative of the tablets used to represent La Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen de 1789. But although the image of the "dix commandements" printed like La Déclaration certainly links Nouvelle Cuisine with the French Revolution, the image of Marianne in Delacroix's painting is, in fact, a reference to the July 1830 Revolution. While such slippage of revolutionary

imagery has become commonplace, it nevertheless points to a certain superficiality of the rhetoric.

Here it should be noted that food writers, food historians, and all manner of other scholars have debated extensively the merits and validity of Nouvelle Cuisine's revolutionary claims. Was there a true break with the past or was it a brilliant marketing ploy? Is it simply a warmed-over version of previous incarnations of *nouvelle cuisine*? Or, just a natural evolution in cuisine that was exaggerated, and at times vulgarized, by imitators, parvenus, and over-eager food writers? Although such debates offer many important insights, I make no attempt in this dissertation to join the fray, nor will I offer any alternative, monolithic definition of what Nouvelle Cuisine "really" was.

Instead, I am interested in its functional value. Why did a country whose culinary traditions are so strong embrace a culinary movement that seemed so invested in dumping those traditions? In 1966, Julia Child and her Mastering the Art of French Cooking coauthors Simone Beck and Louisette Bertholle placed tradition and familiarity alongside proficient technique as the cornerstones of French cuisine: "The French are seldom interested in unusual combinations or surprise presentations. With an enormous background of traditional dishes to choose from [...], the Frenchman takes his greatest pleasure from a well-known dish impeccably cooked and served" (viii). But, just a few years later, "unusual combinations and surprise presentations" were exactly what, not only interested, but galvanized French cuisine. Paradoxically, despite the emphasis placed on its originality, innovation, and rejection of the past, Nouvelle Cuisine inscribes

itself in a highly traditional and well-worn French trope by defining itself with revolutionary rhetoric. This dissertation plunges into that paradox.

Before I can begin an in-depth analysis of the construction of Nouvelle Cuisine as a revolutionary model, it is both useful and illuminating to understand where it fits in a much broader historical context. In Chapter 1, I sketch a broad-strokes socio-political history of the relationship between food and national identity in France. In addition to providing a comparative context with which to analyze the “revolution” of Nouvelle Cuisine, this approach reveals that although culinary changes are not directly or causally related to political changes (and vice versa), there is nonetheless a complex set of overlaps and liaisons that make it impossible to fully separate the two domains. The writing and research of this chapter, a chapter that was not conceived in my original dissertation plan, provided some of the great surprises that I experienced over the course of this dissertation. It also led to insights that not only informed my interpretation of Nouvelle Cuisine but actually challenged or changed my original suppositions. Believing early on that I had contained my topic to a twentieth-century phenomenon, I intentionally resisted “diluting” my reading with inessential, albeit canonical, historical texts. But during a side trip to Dijon, I remembered that the Bibliothèque Municipale de Dijon houses the nation’s *fonds culinaires*, and my week-end excursion turned into an extended exploration of cookbooks and journals that stunned me with culinary philosophies and linguistic formulations that I had originally believed unique to Nouvelle Cuisine. I certainly have a new appreciation for the expression “Always historicize!”

In chapters 2 through 4, I have divided the Nouvelle Cuisine revolutionary narrative into three constitutive parts: its rupture with the past (the new); its elimination of classical elements, such as sauces (the purge); and its subsequent struggle to assert a unified, streamlined identity (the quest for purity). Regardless of the validity of Nouvelle Cuisine's revolutionary status from a culinary history standpoint, the repeated revolutionary rhetoric does have real substance, which I believe these three elements demonstrate. Consequently, I argue that Nouvelle Cuisine really can be termed revolutionary insofar as it articulates novelty, a purging of the past, and a quest for purity.

This dissertation posits that Nouvelle Cuisine brings together two of the most powerful cultural forces involved in constituting French national identity: food and revolution. As a result of this privileged position, Nouvelle Cuisine offers scholars a particularly rich object of study, because the construction of it as a culinary revolution and the discourse it engenders can be related to larger issues at play in the formation and performance of national identity. The revolutionary rhetoric used in the articulation of Nouvelle Cuisine serves several distinct and, at times, oppositional purposes.

On the one hand, the revolutionary rhetoric is intended to create a break with a tumultuous and painful past while asserting a new paradigm of national strength. In Chapter 2, I examine the formation of the New. By revolting against culinary practices that are described as decadent, outmoded, unhealthy, inferior, and restrictive, Nouvelle Cuisine both models and enacts an erasure of the past, a past that on the national level saw France diminished by two world wars, decolonization, political instability, social unrest, and the loss of its dominance in the arts and other cultural domains. Nouvelle

Cuisine replaces this past with an image of triumphant victory. This new image of French cuisine is guided by its enlightened values of democracy. According to its claims, food should be lighter and simpler, not dominated by ostentation or pretension. Chefs and diners alike should be liberated from oppressive traditions that dictate every aspect of the meal, so that innovation, creativity, and excellence are once more the hallmarks of French cuisine, and by extension, France.

On the other hand, the revolutionary rhetoric of equality and freedom paradoxically participates in and supports the dark side of democracy, a subject that is further explored in both Chapters 3 and 4 (“Purges and Sacrifice” and “Purity”). My notion of the “dark side of democracy,” which borrows from both Michael Mann and Etienne Balibar, includes but is not limited to behind-the-scenes jockeying for power and the elimination of groups that threaten or curtail either the power at the top or the legitimacy of the revolution itself. In this capacity, the Nouvelle Cuisine narrative hides or misrepresents the truths of its own creation as well as its strategies for continued dominance. While promoting the new freedoms of a whole generation of male chefs, for example, the revolutionary rhetoric of Nouvelle Cuisine masked the appropriation of traditional women’s cooking and the subsequent exclusion of women from haute cuisine kitchens.

Throughout the dissertation, I will argue that because of the very malleability of the revolutionary rhetoric and because French cuisine is considered such an important expression of the French nation, Nouvelle Cuisine and the contemporaneous culinary discourse transform France’s fine dining domain into a sort of theatre where national

attitudes are not only represented to a socially diverse French public, but where the public itself is invited to participate in this performance of the nation: rehearsing, refining, and rejecting what it means to be French and, as a result, projecting both aspirations and anxieties of nationhood through this culinary landscape. This speculative nature of food and dining in France yields a highly instructive and productive way to engage with French culture. It allows me, for example, to demonstrate how verifiable cultural or political debates regarding such issues as immigration, modernization, and class distinction are played out, or, in some cases, even instigated, in the culinary domain. This in turn, affords me an informed perspective from which to reasonably speculate on unverifiable or repressed anxieties and longings in the French imaginary, whose expression, though clear in the culinary realm, might resist discovery or articulation with a different methodology.

In writing this dissertation, I have drawn heavily on my training in literary studies but have tried as much as possible to allow the subject matter to dictate an inclusive and interdisciplinary approach. Consequently, my argument places the classic literary tools of linguistic and semiotic methods alongside investigations that call on cultural studies, history, anthropology, sociology, and political philosophy. Though I have found a tidy structure on which to build my argument, the argument is itself stubbornly untidy. Like the movement it examines, it is prone to inner contradictions, circularity, and inconsistencies. My challenge has been to grant these complexities the space to breathe rather than rush to nail them into a tight and unified statement more suited to a courtroom drama. It is my hope that in exposing the argument's frailties alongside its strengths, I not

only honor the profound nature of my object of study, but also provide readers with additional and fruitful points of engagement where alternative or tangential readings may present themselves.

Cookbooks, guidebooks, newspapers, magazines, menus, novels, films, interviews, multiple editions of the Larousse Gastronomique, and my own personal experience of living in France during the 1996 “guerre des chefs” provide first and foremost the context but also the evidence for this dissertation. This overwhelming constellation of sources testified to the fact that unarticulated social and political attitudes permeate and find form in the nation’s culinary discourse.

To be fully conversant in the culinary discourse on both sides of the Nouvelle Cuisine revolution, I read an exhaustive sample of Nouvelle Cuisine detractor Robert Courtine’s food writing column (signed, “La Reynière”) in Le Monde, focusing primarily on the seventies and eighties. I also read well over a hundred issues of what I came to call “Nouvelle Cuisine’s in-house magazine,” Le Nouveau Guide Gault Millau, a task that was significantly complicated by the fact that the Bibliothèque Nationale de France had removed the entire archive for restoration during nearly all of the year and a half that I was in France researching this dissertation. In addition, the library was missing some of the most important issues of the magazine for a study on Nouvelle Cuisine, such as the article that outlines the “dix commandements.” To my profound surprise and delight, the University of Georgia Science Library has a remarkably extensive collection of the magazine, with nearly every issue from 1973 to 1991 available for review and, best of all, photocopying. In talking to current, successful chefs in Paris, I learned of the continued

importance of the cookbook series edited by Claude Lebey entitled "Les Recettes Originales de..." With many of these cookbooks unavailable at libraries and often difficult to come by both online and at the specialized culinary bookstores in Paris, I began an earnest attempt to collect as many as I could for my personal library, but for the purposes of this dissertation, I focus most intently on the cookbooks of Paul Bocuse, Michel Guérard, and Georges Blanc.²

The sheer magnitude of culinary discourse either by or about individual chefs after the late 1960s is a persuasive testament to the shift in their status and the value of their authority. According to Sidney Mintz, "The use and application of power frequently enter into changes in a society's food consumption habits. Where its power originates, how it is applied and to what ends, and in what manner people undertake to deal with it, are all part of what happens when food habits change" (17-18). I'd like to return briefly to Orr's analysis of the shift in representational authority engendered by the French Revolution, because I believe it presents a fascinating set of parallels and contrasts with Nouvelle Cuisine. In a slightly oversimplified but hopefully useful condensation, I would

² To put the French fascination with culinary literature in perspective for the American reader, I once made a deal with a bookshop employee for the increasingly hard-to-find 1996 version of the Larousse Gastronomique. We arranged in advance that I would come to the shop at closing time, but that I should not speak about it. When she began to gather her things to leave, she gestured that I should meet her outside, where she informed me that it was too dangerous to keep the book on site and that she had stashed it elsewhere for safekeeping. During the subsequent 40-minute metro ride and walk across Paris, I marveled that I had stumbled onto a sort of black market for cookbooks. She even asked for my cash in a darkened doorway before we walked into a perfectly average looking café. When she disappeared toward the toilets, I imagined that I'd been scammed, but she came back a few minutes later with the giant encyclopedia wrapped in about 10 plastic bags. At my quizzical look, she told me she had lodged it way up toward the ceiling between the wall and the toilet tank, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

argue that if hers is an examination of the “beheading” of history, Nouvelle Cuisine, and the culinary movements it almost immediately spawned, provides the contrapuntal (but cyclical) “reheading” of history.³ Despite the chef’s status as a liberated/liberating revolutionary, the reality that peeks through the different accounts of this movement is that of the chef who becomes the uncontested leader in his industry and whose authority is reminiscent of an absolute monarch’s.

The narrative of Nouvelle Cuisine is equivocal, but it does not defy conclusions. My final analysis in this dissertation is that in the production and articulation of Nouvelle Cuisine, we see how food and revolution are used to reorganize the hierarchies and composition of a society. We see a reorganization that restores bourgeois, patriarchal values and clings to a hexagonal interpretation of France that prioritizes resistance over incorporation. We see a revolution that is perhaps less the French Revolution than the July Revolution. We see a revolution that is an alibi for restoration.

³ Given the large number of scholars who contest the newness of Nouvelle Cuisine, we might also say “reheating” of history.

1. France and National Cuisine: An Indivisible Union

Les dîners, comme toutes les manifestations de la vie, sont l'image des peuples et des gouvernements. Il y a une politique gourmande, comme il y a une politique...politique.

—Châtillon-Plessis

In “La Gastronomie,” an essay included in Pierre Nora’s Les Lieux de mémoires, Pascal Ory explores the substantial role that French cuisine plays in the expression and formation of French national identity, both past and present. Two of the questions he poses over the course of his essay are particularly revealing. The first question bestows on gastronomy a certain supremacy over other definers of Frenchness: “La cuisine serait-elle ce qui reste quand on a tout oublié?” (823) The implication seems to be that its very endurance proves its essential nature. The second question extends the reach of that supremacy: “Pourquoi ce primat?” (of French cuisine over the other cuisines of the world)¹ (835). We begin to understand the import of that assumption when Ory asks us to consider the metonymic role that French cuisine plays in the culture: “il s’agit de conclure métonymiquement, *via* la suprématie, jugée évidente, de la cuisine française, à la supériorité de la ‘civilisation’ française” (823).

But in an article that is now standard reading in food studies, “How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India,” Arjun Appadurai debunks the idea

¹ Ory establishes and clarifies this primacy earlier, saying, “Le primat français est donc dédoublé. Il concerne en effet aussi bien la gastronomie que la cuisine, l’éloquence de la première ayant, implicitement, entretenu l’image hégémonique de la seconde” (829).

that the concept of a national cuisine can be understood as simply the combination of its two unique terms: “national” plus “cuisine.” Instead, he argues that the term *national cuisine* refers to a concept that is itself constructed and carries within it all sorts of messages that have nothing to do with food: “The appearance of structural devices for organizing a national cuisine is accompanied by the development of a sometimes fairly explicit nationalist and integrationist ideology” (20). His argument highlights the artificiality of the term by suggesting that a “national cuisine” is the work of “organizing” and “structural devices.” At the same time, however, he emphasizes that even if a “national cuisine” represents a constructed relationship between nation and cuisine, it nonetheless also represents a contingent relationship, in that national cuisines are nearly inseparable from the promotion of a nationalist agenda.

In a book that appeared some years later, anthropologist Sidney Mintz restates this concept with an even greater insistence on the constructed nature of national cuisine, going so far as to argue that “national cuisines” cannot exist, except as a constructed political project: “A national cuisine is a contradiction in terms; there can be regional cuisines, but not national cuisines. I think that for the most part, a national cuisine is simply a holistic artifice based on the foods of the people who live inside some political system, such as France and Spain” (102).² Certainly Mintz’s use of France as an example

² In *Un Festin en paroles*, a book that traces the history of cuisine in France, Jean-François Revel also makes this argument saying, “Pour être plus précis encore, je dirai qu’à mon avis il n’y a pas de *cuisines nationales*: il y a la cuisine internationale qui doit rester d’une souplesse extrême, et des *cuisines régionales*. La cellule gastronomique c’est la région, et non point la nation” (234).

is far from arbitrary. The prominence and longevity of “French cuisine” is well established, even if it is quite a bit more difficult to pin down exactly what that term signifies, and to/for whom. And images of France are almost certain to contain overt references to the nation’s rich culinary or vinous heritage. If, as both Appadurai and Mintz suggest, one cannot divorce a national cuisine from its political context, then it seems reasonable to propose that in a case like France, where the national cuisine plays such an integral role in the nation’s image, food may be particularly well suited to offer scholars a privileged look at a nation’s political and ideological priorities.

In this chapter, I will briefly sketch some of the most significant culinary shifts and trends in France’s history, beginning with the birth of haute cuisine in Louis XIV’s court and ending with the precursors of the twentieth-century version of Nouvelle Cuisine. Reviewing the historical relationship between food and national identity makes it possible to demonstrate how strong the link is between the articulation of French cuisine and the articulation of the French nation. However, what also emerges from this approach is the understanding that despite the strength of the relationship between food and national identity in France, it is also clear that this relationship is not static. At times, it is tempting to assume that cuisine is simply passively reflecting the nation, while at other times, cuisine appears to be actively participating in the creation of the patrimony. As was demonstrated in the introduction, with Homi Bhabha’s discussion of culture and nation, the role of food in the production of the nation resists easy characterization. Although the following chapters will spend more time elaborating these ideas, this chapter begins the work by tracing the evolution of the role played by cuisine and

culinary discourse in France and by establishing the culinary domain as an important but often camouflaged site for the anxieties and aspirations of the French nation.

1.1 French Cuisine as an Emblem of Patrimony

Food historians situate the birth of *haute cuisine* in the seventeenth-century court of Louis XIV (Trubek, DeJean). And I would add that in the birth of haute cuisine, we also discover the moment that “cuisine as an expression of patrimony” became an important part of the French national consciousness. Louis XIV was keenly aware that a demonstration of excellence in all artistic endeavors would solidify his standing and bolster the image of his absolute power. Music, theatre, architecture, landscaping, ceramics, painting, and many other applied or visual arts either thrived or took shape during his reign. And, as he poured money into showplaces for these arts, such as Versailles, a heightened appreciation for *les arts de table* also developed. Historian Joan DeJean argues that Louis XIV’s emphasis on food taste created new means of expressing sophistication, so that while food had obviously existed before Louis XIV, what was new was its promotion from necessity to luxury.

From then on, the domain of cuisine was ruled by values such as refinement and elegance. During the second half of the seventeenth century, French cuisine began to be described with terms never before part of the food writer’s vocabulary: “dainty,” “delicate,” “refined,” “courteous,” “civilized.” The movement that started with La Varenne made food share in the values promoted by all the standard-bearers of the new French style, from *couture* to *café*; it made food essential to the new civilization of good (French) taste. (108)

What is critical here is not just the establishment of haute cuisine and the notion of culinary arts, but the elaboration of cuisine’s embodiment of luxury and elegance as an extension of national pride and character. As DeJean points out, the adjectives used to

describe the food both help to reinforce (reproduce) the image of a refined, cultured France and bring the values of food and nation into a seamlessly naturalized alignment.

To a modern-day eye, France's imperial dominance under Louis XIV may seem evident, but to a monarchy not blessed with such hindsight, France was constantly fighting off threats from England (Kumar, Mennell), Holland and the eastern alliance (Schröder), and the Ottoman Empire (Longino). Louis XIV's strategy to mount grandiose and successful ventures artistically, financially, and militarily can be viewed as a response to these potential threats to both his empire and his absolute power, a way to send a message of dominance to France's people and to any would-be challengers. Consequently, the cultivation and promotion of cultural excellence was never framed in a context that acknowledged or even suggested potential vulnerability. Instead, the assumption during the seventeenth century, and one that has been carefully woven into the national narrative, was not that France's culinary dominance was a construction that helped create a sense of national dominance but rather that French food dominated simply because it was French. French cuisine was thus an expression of French dominance. DeJean recounts that among the first words of La Varenne's seventeenth-century cookbook Le Cuisinier françois is the phrase "Our France." These words begin what she calls "a prelude to an extended eulogy of the superiority of the French 'way of life'" (108). And indeed after this extended praise of France, Le Cuisinier françois goes on to encourage others to conform to France's superiority: "les autres nations pourront être piquées du désir de se rendre conformes à celle qui, excellent à toutes rencontres de la vie, ne peut ignorer le moyen de la conferuer contente et paisible" (Cuisinier françois,

front matter).³ This example is a seventeenth-century analog to Pascal Ory's twentieth-century assessment (from *Lieux de mémoires*, quoted at the beginning of this chapter) that the dominant mythology holds that because France is superior, so, too, is its cuisine.

It makes sense that strength begets strength, and, clearly, *la gloire de la France* is very much in evidence during Louis XIV's reign. But here is an early indication of what Bhabha called the Janus-faced discourse of a nation. The ideology taken at face value is France's superiority, so much so that its hegemony in cultural, political, and military domains appears natural and expected. But historian John Lynn reverses this ideology, arguing that the silenced narrative is France's vulnerability. He maintains, "Louis and his advisors came to view France as a beleaguered fortress. In Vauban's words, 'almost in the middle of the most considerable powers of Christendom, she is equally in range of blows from Spain, Italy, Germany, the Low Countries, and England' " (198-199). He notes that by 1664, the Ottomans had moved into Vienna, further increasing potential

³ The passage to which DeJean seems to be referring is not actually part of La Varenne's text but, rather, is taken from a section of front matter entitled "Le Libraire au Lecteur" in the 1651 edition of *Le Cuisinier françois* published by Pierre David. In his own author's note, La Varenne writes that he served as *écuyer de cuisine* to the Marquis d'Uxelles and thus had the opportunity to oversee food served to members of the French Court and aristocracy. He thanks his patron in the obsequious style that is very much in keeping with other courtly arts of the time. These types of introductory *éloges*, for example, that combine, as food historian Stephen Mennell puts it, "cringing social humility with professional pride" (71) would also have been found at the start of theatrical works written by the nation's top playwrights, such as Corneille or, particularly, Racine. According to Mennell, La Varenne's book is significant to French cookery not only because of its openly nationalistic tone but also because it is "generally accepted as first showing both a clear break with medieval food and the recognizable beginnings of the modern French cuisine" (71). Even though Mennell warns against viewing La Varenne as an "isolated revolutionary" (72), he nonetheless emphasizes that the book was "uniquely popular, circulating widely in numerous editions for the best part of a century and appearing in English translation as early as 1653" (72). Other popular cookbook writers during the second half of the seventeenth-century whose books reveal this shift from medieval cuisine to a specifically French cuisine are Nicholas de Bonnefons, Pierre de Lune, L.S.R., and Massialot, to name a few.

threats to France. According to Lynn, it was the perception of these threats that prompted Louis XIV's aggressive and expansionist campaigns: "For all his obsession with *gloire*, the king had more fear of invasion than lust for conquest. Clausewitz concluded that 'it had become almost a question of honor for Louis XIV to defend the frontiers of the kingdom from all insult, as insignificant as it might be' " (199). This defensive strategy was not limited to the military or geographic frontiers, as is made clear by the king's own recognition that a nation needs more than an army to protect itself: "Reputation is often more effective than the most powerful armies. All conquerors have gained more by reputation than by the sword" (qtd in Lynn 186-87). The development of a dominant culinary model, while perhaps not the most essential weapon in France's arsenal in the seventeenth century, contributed nonetheless to the overall image of *la gloire de la France*, which, according to Lynn, was itself "a potent weapon of intimidation and a vital deterrent" (187).

The use of French cuisine as one of the premier expressions of the French nation continued long after Louis XIV's ambitious expansion projects. Reading nineteenth-century food writer Brillat-Savarin, we note that whereas Louis XIV's reign produced a food culture dominated by words like "magnifiques," "fameux," "invention," and not surprisingly, "rivaliser" and "annexé" (151), the courts of Louis XV and Louis XVI produced an altogether different expression of French cuisine. Brillat-Savarin points out that food during this time takes on a new level of gaiety and conviviality in France, with an overt emphasis on inessential, frivolous foodstuffs, demonstrated by the success and even creation of new food professions focused on *friandises*, such as "pâtissiers de petits

fours (nuance entre les pâtisseries proprement dits et les confiseurs), spécialistes des biscuits, des macarons, des meringues...” (151). He suggests that such lighthearted and social fare was an expression of a jubilant France relieved of 60 years of war:

Dix-huit ans de paix guérirent sans peine toutes les plaies qu’avaient faites plus de soixante ans de guerre; les richesses créées par l’industrie et répandues par le commerce ou acquises par les traitants firent disparaître l’inégalité des fortunes, et l’esprit de convivialité se répandit dans toutes les classes de la société. (151)

With no apparent self-awareness, he describes changes in food in a way that hints at the changes and values that came to be seen as central to the French Revolution. His emphasis above, first on the appearance of frivolous luxury foods like “macarons,” then on concepts like “inégalité” and “toutes les classes de la société” foreshadows France’s eventual impatience with excessive luxuries precisely because of this desire for a more egalitarian society.

Until that time, however, luxury and conviviality were the hallmarks of the French meal, which, according to Brillat-Savarin, also took on more order, cleanliness and elegance during this time. With French diplomats now entertaining in countries where peaceful relations were being negotiated and maintained, the French meal itself became an exportable product, in the form of political and state banquets and dinners. Louis XIV’s armies may have pulled back, but they were quickly replaced by this alternative French presence.

1.2 Culinary Diplomacy

Talleyrand, a famous diplomat and statesman both before and after the French Revolution, offers a fine example of the link between France’s culinary hegemony and its

imperial expansion. Despite being a political figure, Talleyrand's name is more prominently linked to food than policy in the mind of the French public. A large number of dishes, food styles, and other gastronomic nomenclature are named after him; and throughout France, one finds cafés, bistros, and restaurants that bear his name. He did so much to advance the cause of French cuisine and export it to the rest of the world that he merits his own entry in the Larousse Gastronomique. Classifying Talleyrand as an “homme politique,” the Larousse goes on to affirm his status as a gastronome, but shows how his preoccupation with food transcends ordinary gourmet appreciation and reveals an awareness of food as a political and social tool. The entry maintains that for Talleyrand, “l’art culinaire n’était pas simple plaisir de gourmet, mais aussi et surtout un allié précieux de prestige des gouvernements et de leur diplomatie.” (Larousse Gastronomique 1996: 1024). So confident was he in the power of France’s cuisine as the nation’s greatest emblem that he is rather famously supposed to have told Louis XVIII, “Sire, j’ai plus besoin de casseroles que d’instructions” (Larousse Gastronomique 1984: 959).⁴

⁴ This quotation and several other anecdotes illustrating Talleyrand’s use of food as a diplomatic and personal power tool appeared in both the 1984 and 1967 editions of the Larousse Gastronomique, but were edited out of the 1996 Larousse. Another noteworthy quotation that was cut from the 1996 Larousse was “C’est à table qu’il obtint les grands avantages pour la France” (LG 1984, 959). It is also interesting to note that the English translation of the 1967 edition for this entry includes these quotations but adds commentary on Talleyrand’s dubious moral character that is absent from the French versions. Additionally, the English version changes some of the anecdotes, choosing stories that further highlight Talleyrand’s lack of scruples in getting his way rather than crediting his diplomatic skills. That the “translation” changes the anecdotes in the entry is remarkable not only because it demonstrates how actual content and meaning are transformed in translation, but also because the resulting disparity so closely parallels the national stereotypes that set France and Anglophone countries in opposition. The French edition portrays Talleyrand as a wily

In this regard, he was helped more than a little by the excellence of his kitchen. In particular, Talleyrand relied on the skill of his pastry chef Antonin Carême, who went on to become one of the most famous cooks and cookbook authors in French history. With Talleyrand as his patron, Carême was able to fully indulge his extravagant and creative impulses. The arrangement left him free to develop and expand his talents, enabled him to take advantage of the most expensive ingredients, and provided gala occasions that showcased his work and enhanced his reputation. Similarly, with Carême in the kitchen, Talleyrand was able to stun his guests with overwhelming displays of opulence and creativity. Most of all, he could certify to all who experienced or heard about his dinners that French cuisine was proof of the nation's mastery and dominance.

The power of food to convey national superiority and strength is emphasized by the fact that Carême himself is unable to resist the impression of national strength that the glamorous banquets impart. After the defeat of Napoleon and the inauguration of Louis XVIII in 1814, a banquet was thrown to celebrate the reconciliation of the royalist and Bonapartist factions of the army, thereby demonstrating to the world that France was once again a unified and glorious military power. According to Carême biographer Ian Kelly, "Twelve hundred covers were laid on 12 tables, each table celebrating a famous

statesman, an avid lover of fine food and wine, but one who is clever enough to recognize its persuasive properties. Whereas the English-language version, consistent with an image of the British and Americans as moralizing puritans, finds new material to focus on his libertine and dishonest ways, further proving the difficulty of separating national ideologies from writing on food and culture.

military hero. Carême made *extraordinaires* in his favourite style of the period—giant military trophies—in sugar and mastic, up to two metres high, one for each table” (115). Even though Carême contributed to this performance of national power, by designing and crafting the props with his own hands, he still yields to the belief that the credit for France’s display of culinary excellence should go to its national superiority, not to his individual talents, “Despite our recent troubles, what nation on earth could mount to an astonished universe such an august reunion! I was proud to be French” (qtd in Kelly, 115). The effectiveness of French cuisine as a triumphant and reassuring diplomat is further emphasized by the fact that Carême is confident enough in France’s return to glory to characterize significant national humiliations—the long series of military defeats, for example, that saw France’s boundaries vastly reduced, allowed non-French forces to occupy Paris, and resulted in the abdication of France’s emperor and restoration of its once-deposed monarchy—as merely “our recent troubles.”

The overt use of cuisine and banquets as propaganda for the post-Revolution incarnation of France did more than merely establish the excellence of France’s cuisine. By promoting and popularizing the use of menus written in French at state dinners—a practice quickly imitated not only by French dignitaries but by diplomats and heads of state around the world—Talleyrand began a practice that established French as the official language of dining. This seemingly small detail ensured that the French language spread through the world along with French cooking practices both in the kitchens and at the most prestigious tables where those in power were assembled:

Les menus, composés en français aussi bien à la cour d'Angleterre qu'à celles d'Allemagne, d'Espagne, d'Italie, des royaumes scandinaves, de Russie ou de plus lointains empires comme l'Ottoman ou celui du Japon, retirent toute possibilité de souverain de se servir du contenu pour établir sa propagande. (Mordacq 31)

Furthermore, as Mordacq points out, not only did the menus extend the French language into foreign countries, they also prevented the host nation's ruler from using the menu to assert his own propaganda. The similarity between Louis XIV's *défense aggressive*, which prevented invasions through expansionism, and the success of the French menus, which also effectively shut down a foreign sovereign's ability to express his nation, is remarkable (and instructive). Expansion becomes an important weapon, both in the establishment and maintenance of French culinary supremacy and in the overall defense of French cultural dominance.

1.3 Culinary Expansion and the Birth of Gastronomy

As France continued its creation/evolution of the culinary profession, the importance of language in food culture was not limited to menus or to the spread and use of the French language. Rather, it developed into an even more powerful weapon of mass dissemination: food writing, a new discourse devoted entirely to French cuisine. The birth of *gastronomie* (a term whose meaning I will consider in greater detail in a moment) is generally put at the end of the eighteenth, beginning of the nineteenth century (Ory Discours Gastronomique; Mennell, Poulain and Neirinck, Rambourg). Consequently, it is also nearly always linked to the French Revolution. By extension, its attendant changes in food practice are granted a certain amount of political import:

Ainsi, la Révolution permet à la haute cuisine de sortir du milieu de cour. Des clients qui n'avaient jamais goûté ni truffe ni chambertin et qu'on se serait attendu à voir mettre leurs actes en accord avec leurs idées politiques et sociales se précipitent chez les restaurateurs pour s'en délecter. (Pitte, "Naissance" 773).

As Pitte suggests, prior to the Revolution, French haute cuisine was found almost exclusively in the homes of French aristocrats, who employed private cooks and administrators to run their kitchens, or in comparably elite circumstances abroad. After the French Revolution, however, there is a major shift in both culinary practice and rhetoric.

While, internationally, French cuisine continued to reflect France's imperial power, domestically, cuisine was transformed to reflect France's newly acquired democratic values. When the Revolution ended aristocratic rule, private cooks found themselves without employment. Many of these chefs opened public establishments where they could continue their trade, which perforce opened the experience up to a much larger segment of the French population. This was essentially the birth of the restaurant, although cooking for a public restaurant was only one option available to cooks after the Revolution, as private homes and clubs also continued to engage personal cooks and maître d'hôtels.⁵ The elite status of haute cuisine continued to live on after the Revolution, but did so in a public forum, reinforcing the nation's shift to more democratic values: "Gourmandises, like elections, had moved from the 'summits' of society to its

⁵ For a more thorough examination of the complexities of restauration and culinary history during this time, see Amy Trubek's Haute Cuisine: How the French Invented the Culinary Profession and Rebecca Spang's The Invention of the Restaurant: Paris and Modern Gastronomic Culture.

‘lowest classes’” (Ferguson 87). As Amy Trubek points out, this new, public version of haute cuisine not only helped gastronomy perform its metonymic role but also reiterated the essentialist view that French cuisine is simply a “natural” extension of the Frenchness that produces it:

[...] in the new social sites of the nineteenth century, French haute cuisine became simultaneously national and supranational: in these locales haute cuisine became both natural *to* France and representative and symbolic *of* France. (37-38)

This new “national” and “supranational” version of haute cuisine also complicated the relationship between food and nation, however, because haute cuisine, like France’s conception of democracy, was meant to appear accessible to all and, yet, also simultaneously needed to continue to project an elite status in order to represent French superiority.

To respond to the demands of France’s new image, culinary language had to change. Whereas the presentations of cuisine before the Revolution emphasized elegance and privilege, culinary descriptions after the Revolution had to uphold the image of excellence while simultaneously prioritizing democratic access over exclusivity. Included in that access was obviously the food itself, but also increased opportunity for the acquisition of food *knowledge*. As epicurean Blanchard Jerrold aptly noted in 1868, “If the princely kitchens have decayed, the number of people who know how to eat has vastly increased. [...] The Revolution has democratized the kitchen” (qtd in Trubek 44). Essential to that democratization was not just the appearance of the restaurant, but the establishment of food writing as a genre, because as food writers like Grimod de la Reynière understood, new accessibility meant a new audience. And thus an entirely new

population had to be educated, taught both to appreciate and be discerning about this previously unknown gastronomic world opening up to them. It is the tension of this “double consumption” that scholars call the birth of gastronomy:

L'œuvre culinaire, une fois consommée, peut ressusciter par les paroles du convive. L'esprit s'approprie les moments de table et les réinterprète par l'écriture; la narration devient littérature: c'est la naissance de la gastronomie.
(Rambourg 18)

In other words, food is consumed first at the table and then again in the public's reading of a critic's response to his meals at restaurants or private dinners. Gastronomy, as defined by Rambourg, is not simply the public's comprehension of cuisine as an *art de table* (governed by recognizable regulations and practices) nor just the emergence of a discourse or critique that responds directly to that cuisine, but rather the interplay between the two.

In order to abet the public's navigation of this new territory, food writing and cooking manuals were published with unprecedented frequency to an increasingly eager, and increasingly populous, audience.⁶ According to Ferguson, “it was this expansive culinary discourse, not the dishes and meals of a confined culinary practice, that is responsible for the iconic status of the culinary in French culture” (92). Though cookbooks had of course existed in France for centuries, Carême's publications, particularly *L'Art de la cuisine française au dix-neuvième siècle*, began a process of codification and regulation that defined a version of French cuisine that wasn't seriously

⁶ The number of inhabitants in Paris doubled between 1800 and 1850 as a new population of “politicians and businessmen, journalists, writers, and artists flocked to the city and to its restaurants” (Ferguson 87).

challenged until the 1960s. And although the newly published cookbooks were undeniably influential in the public's gastronomic education, it was the appearance and development of an entirely new genre of food writing that really redefined the public's relationship to food and French cuisine.

The most renowned food writers of the time, Grimod de la Reynière and Brillat-Savarin, display the flexibility and breadth of the burgeoning genre. Grimod's Almanach des gourmands is a multi-volume, hastily written collection of thoughts and reactions to a vast array of food topics. Part essay, part criticism, part guidebook, part arbiter of etiquette and food practices, Grimod's writing creates a bridge for the expansion of France's culinary empire. Before French cuisine could spread throughout the world as a recognizable export, it had to be packaged or "domesticated" at home. To that end, Grimod was important, according to historian Michael Garval, because his writings and guides joined the newly emerging and increasingly curious food consumers with the purveyors and merchants anxious to feed them. Furthermore, by lauding individual establishments and educating the public about why certain foods or artisans were deserving of notice, he established a standard of excellence that could be copied and recognized first throughout France, then beyond:

Through judicious criticism and praise of culinary *artistes*, Grimod's Almanach catalyzes *émulation*.

(...) Superior culinary achievement begins in Paris, then spreads to the provinces, and eventually to the rest of the world. *Émulation* thus engenders *rayonnement*, or cultural "radiance." (Garval 63)

Garval's description of Grimod's desire for *émulation* and *rayonnement* reasserts that the gastronomic project in France reproduces the strategies of the nation's imperial project.

Grimod's attitude towards the use of foreign foods in French cuisine also betrays the degree to which colonial privilege is accepted as an unquestioned, even natural, right of Frenchness:

Enfin nos grands artistes, non contents [sic] des découvertes nationales, dues à leur génie et à leurs études tournées vers les sciences abstraites, n'ont pas rougi d'explorer les terres étrangères, et de mettre à contribution toutes les Cuisines du Continent; sauf à rectifier, à approprier à notre goût, les mets qu'ils ont rapportés de leurs voyages. (Grimod 59)

The assumption behind Grimod's quotation is that foreign tastes, ingredients, recipes, cooking practices, or ideas about food are there to be appropriated, transformed, and used as necessary, or desired, to enrich French cuisine. It is the innate "génie" of the French "artistes," not the independent quality of the foreign import itself, that produces its culinary value. Such writing inadvertently, but clearly, demonstrates the existence of a naturalized belief in *le génie colonisateur de la France* as a dominant political ideology. Consequently, Grimod's widely disseminated publications participated in the development of French identity because they not only supported but also spread the ideology that, France is, to borrow from an uncannily parallel formulation in Baudelaire's "L'Invitation au Voyage," a "pays singulier, supérieur aux autres, comme l'Art l'est à la Nature, où celle-ci est réformée par le rêve, où elle est corrigée, embellie, refondue" (27).

In contrast to Grimod's frequent and rapidly written guides and thought pieces, Brillat-Savarin, who is far better known by today's audiences, worked and reworked his Physiologie du goût for more than thirty years. As Garval points out, Brillat began work on early versions of Physiologie about the time that Grimod's Almanach was selling so successfully. He also contends that although Grimod's name is never mentioned in

Brillat’s work, “many of the preoccupations and points of view, and even specific formulations and anecdotes thought to exemplify Brillat-Savarin’s originality, first appear in Grimod’s Almanach” (59). As proof, he supplies several of Brillat’s famous aphorisms and weighs them against similar constructions and sentiments found in Grimod. I’d like to look at two of Garval’s comparisons here.

Brillat-Savarin

III. The fate of nations depends on how they are nourished.

IV. Tell me what you eat; and I’ll tell you who you are.

Grimod de la Reynière

How often has the fate of an entire people not depended on the relatively quick or slow digestion of a prime minister?

Tell me whom you frequent; I will tell you who you are. In two words, that is the secret of braises.

(Garval 60)

Without a doubt, the similarities are striking, and Garval may be quite right when he says, “Brillat’s debt was so overwhelming that he dared not avow it” (59). However, for the purposes of demonstrating the importance of food writing to the expanding role of cuisine in French culture and identity, it is the differences that interest me. In Aphorism III, Brillat echoes key words and the general gist, but changes something so fundamental that it nearly reverses the meaning of the aphorism. Brillat removes the “prime minister” (an individual leader) as the subject responsible for the fate of the nation and replaces him with “they” (the people)—an exchange that quite closely parallels the goals of the French Revolution, and, later, the move to a constitutional rather than absolute monarchy. Furthermore, he switches the word “people” to “nation,” strengthening the role of food as

an important and unified indicator of national strength. By aligning his message more closely with the socio-political mood of the time, Brillat deepens the already stated link between food and country in the mind of his readers. Furthermore in Aphorism IV, while Grimod essentially reframes an old proverb, A man may be known by the company he keeps, Brillat departs dramatically from the deeper sense of the saying, and perhaps even anticipates thinkers like Bourdieu, shifting the very core of man's identity (personal, national, or otherwise) from his social relations to the materiality of his social milieu, or the food he eats.⁷

With Brillat, then, culinary discourse begins to speak about far more than just food, as has been noted by sociologist Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson in Accounting for Taste:

⁷ Rebecca Spang notes that Brillat-Savarin is not the originator of this concept either, pointing out that he borrowed the idea from an existing adage: "'Tell me what you eat and I will tell you who you are,' wrote Brillat Savarin in 1826 (adapting the old German adage, 'Mann ist, was er isst')" (197). Most scholars, however, attribute the German version of this sentiment to philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach's 1850 quotation "Der Mensch ist, was er isst," which in fact postdates Brillat Savarin's formulation. Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson goes on to mention that in M.F.K Fisher's translation of Brillat-Savarin's Physiologie du goût (1949; reprint, Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2000). Fisher "claims that the connection between being and eating was not original to Feuerbach, but she provides no anterior citation other than Brillat-Savarin" (Ferguson 216). Actually, in a note to this aphorism that appears later in the book, Fisher suggests that William Shakespeare had anticipated this connection between eating and being in A Comedy of Errors, citing "Unquiet meals make ill digestion." Fisher points out that "Acid would lead to acidity in the guts, and that in turn makes any soul a sourish thing" (158). She also points out that this interpretation would correspond more to "Tell me *how* you eat..." not "Tell me *what* you eat..."

I'm fascinated that there is so much debate over originality in Brillat-Savarin's work, because it would appear to go to the very core of what I'm trying to untangle here. Brillat-Savarin is simply performing his food writing in exactly the manner outlined by Grimod himself: there is both "emulation" and "rayonnement," and there is the appropriation and transformation of material to one's own devices. In this way Brillat-Savarin and French cuisine are similar. Both appear to get the credit and prestige of being the "standard" despite having borrowed freely and frequently from other sources.

The culinary commentary practiced by Brillat-Savarin and generations of his disciples places gastronomy within the larger intellectual and social universe. Whereas Carême and Grimod de la Reynière took the culinary text as chiefly instrumental, a means to the primary end of producing or consuming what anthropologists term the “food event,” that is, the dish or the meal, Brillat-Savarin made the text its own end. (96-97)

Brillat’s text becomes another meal to digest (remember “double consumption”), and culinary discourse is able to cast a much larger net, because, as a “meal” in its own right, food writing can attract/educate far more consumers than haute cuisine restaurants can. And in the nineteenth century, this style of culinary discourse, which both defined and detailed French dishes and food practices, traveled much farther and lasted far longer than the cuisine itself.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, France had not only successfully exported the concept of haute cuisine but had also crafted an uncontested perception that French cuisine *was* haute cuisine. As such, French became the language of excellence in food and beyond. Despite an emphasis on the democratic access provided by the now public haute cuisine, the diffusive power of culinary discourse (which allowed France to spread its food and language throughout the world) perhaps more accurately ensured that France *colonized* not democratized the table. Amy Trubek writes:

Usually imperialism is understood in association with colonialism; the former as the ideology of domination and the latter as the concrete mechanisms of control and power. [...] But if domination of particular forms of knowledge is considered an important, even vital part of the enterprise of empire, then the history of France’s rule in the culinary domain serves as an instructive case. (109)

What I find interesting here is why Trubek feels that French cuisine is not both imperial *and* colonial. Both culinary discourse and the exhaustive codification (regulations) of French cuisine, meticulously defined and refined by the likes of Carême and, later,

Escoffier, are “concrete mechanisms” that enable the enforcement and governance of proper French culinary practice, implying both imperial ideology and colonial practice. As France continued to expand its borders and its empire, French cuisine along with its elaborate discourse continued to find ways to bolster such national endeavors.

1.4 Toward a Discursive Divorce of Politics and Cuisine?

The drive by chefs and food writers throughout the nineteenth century to establish detailed and elaborate guidelines to govern the preparation and consumption of French food is remarkably similar to the highly authoritarian and exceedingly regulated leadership style deployed by Napoléon I in his drive to expand the French empire. Rebecca Spang notes that, “First empire gastronomic literature set the model for future writing about food and established a *code gourmand* as enduring as any of the legal codes over which Napoléon so famously slaved” (151). However, despite her comparison of food-writing practices with governing strategies, she also maintains that food writing undergoes a major shift during the Empire and the Restoration, effecting a sort of separation of state and plate:

But unlike commentary about the restaurant in the immediate post-Revolution years, the new gastronomies and guides of the Empire and the Restoration demarcated the table as an autonomous realm, one structured by rules distinct from those that governed other aspects of social life. Within this newly circumscribed context, authors might interpret meals without reference to overtly political concerns, either aristocratic or republican. (151)

To assert this absence of politics from food writing, Spang argues that artistic debates were encouraged in the press as a way to divert the public’s mind away from political conversations. She cites an 1812 memo from an official censor that reported on a lack of

material for cultural debate and “warned the administration that if angry crowds and dissatisfied citizens ever ceased to be preoccupied with comparing the talents of rival actresses, or with rehashing the debated merits of Italian versus French music, they were sure to assemble in the streets” (150).

According to Spang, it was to this supposed need for artistic and cultural fodder that gastronomy responded, thus divorcing politics from culinary discourse and transforming the table from an elite diplomatic tool into a stage for a mass audience: “The capital’s most famous restaurants were within the financial reach of only a tiny fraction of the population, but they were in the view and imagination of all” (177). She asserts that dining became a spectacle and that the primary purpose of food writing was to expand the entertainment value of the Table. Spang’s historical evidence (the censor’s memo, the disappearance of “overtly political” references in food writing) is compelling, as is her view of the table as spectacle. In fact, this formulation of a culinary theatre is well established. In Le Mangeur du dix-neuvième siècle, Jean-Paul Aron dedicates a chapter, entitled “Le Spectacle” to this function of the Table. He cites nineteenth-century food writer and editor Châtillon-Plessis to demonstrate that an awareness of this phenomenon was apparent even as it was occurring: “La salle à manger est un théâtre dont la cuisine est la coulisse et la table la scène” (317). Despite the apparent confirmation of Spang’s observations, I find her interpretation of them as evidence of a split between politics and entertainment unsatisfying. For one thing, if transforming food into entertainment is an organized gambit intended to divert the public from their political dissatisfaction, then its so-called apoliticization is already inherently political.

Furthermore, rather than accept at face value the depoliticized content of food writing as proof of gastronomy's new autonomy, where it becomes completely distinct from the political, I maintain that food writing is not so easily divested of its political ideologies. When dining becomes a theatre and food writing an apolitical critique, politics and political ideologies do not disappear, but are rather transformed or inverted until they emerge in an ever-changing array of costumes, as we saw in the case of Grimod's promotion of colonial attitudes and Brillat-Savarin's social commentary and political resituation of Grimod's Aphorisms, and as we will see going forward.

To borrow from Roland Barthes, I would say that, at this critical moment in gastronomy when politics are intentionally banished from the discourse, the character of the lingering political vocabulary in culinary discourse becomes *productive* as well as *representative*. In Le Bruissement de la langue, Barthes argues that in the case of politically productive language, "les mots, qu'ils soient évincés ou promus, sont liés presque magiquement à une efficacité réelle" (119). He points out, for example, that after the French Revolution, "en abolissant le mot 'noblesse,' c'est la noblesse que l'on croit interdire" (119). Such a belief demonstrates this magical link between words and outcome ("une efficacité réelle") because, of course, as Barthes notes, abolishing the language is not the same thing as abolishing the referent. In his example, language is elaborated "dans le mouvement même d'une *praxis* politique" (119), and is consequently more productive than representative in character. In the following description of a late nineteenth-century meal, the author focuses entirely on food; yet, in a move that runs

parallel but oppositionally to Barthes' example, he repeatedly invokes politically symbolic language whose referents have been removed.

Le potage. Brûlant et velouté, c'est lui qui *ouvre la marche*, et "déblaise le terrain" en *débarrassant la langue de tous les goûts étrangers* aux sens gourmands pour y substituer les premières essences nutritives.

Les Hors-d'œuvre froids, *pointe d'avant-garde* du déjeuner ne se servent pas ordinairement au dîner. Hors-d'œuvre chauds, *escorte* mignonne pourront suivre le Potage *Héraut*. Les Relevés, grosses pièces de poisson ou de boucherie sont pour satisfaire *aux premières manifestations* des appétits pressés. Dans les Entrées, chaudes ou froides se feront apprécier les délicatesses de l'art culinaire *pour le fond comme pour la forme* : côtelettes parées en turban, filets d'agneau, de sole, de volaille ; tant et tant de ces jolies et grassouillettes choses avec leurs fines sauces nappées de gelées transparentes. C'est le moment paradisiaque pour le gourmet vrai. Le Rôti qui est pour le gourmand ce que l'Entrée est pour le gourmet ; qui constitue une source de jouissances plus solides, plus toniques, mais moins délicates. Le bœuf est *souverain* de ce service, avec la Poularde-Reine... Voici, *la fin du cortège royal* ; les Entremets de légumes dont la joyeuse *cohorte* provoque un indulgent sourire. Puis, *tout d'un coup, les gendarmes qui ferment le défilé et assurent un bon ordre* gustatif : les fromages ! (Châtillon-Plessis 140-141)⁸

This piece of culinary writing clearly promotes the political ideal of a France that is both imperial and majestic, despite the fact that both the emperor and the monarchy had been abandoned (with the establishment of the Third Republic in 1870). He is able to project a longing for the grandeur of monarchical France ("souverain," "cortège royal"), while at the same time finding comfort and strength in the imperial style of military parades ("la marche," "le défilé"), with their triumphant marches and processions of regiments, here taking form as capitalized courses ("Le Potage Héraut," "Les Relevés," "Les Entremets"). There is even a "sudden" intervention by the "gendarmes" to close the

⁸ The italics are mine.

parade, ensuring “un bon ordre” in the gustatory process, much like “premières manifestations des appétits pressés” are suppressed or “satisfaits” by the ordering of this culinary “society.” He also manages to assert the nationalist ideology that insists on conforming the foreign to the French (“en débarrassant la langue de tous les goûts étrangers”). But despite the author’s description of the French meal as a grand parade of military and royal power—a description that is itself replete with linguistic pomp and circumstance—he still takes care to remind the reader to look for substance behind the embellishments. Asserting French cuisine as a serious practice both culturally and aesthetically (“l’art culinaire”), he says that the *Entreés* in particular will command appreciation “pour le fond comme pour la forme.”

I argue that this language is politically productive because it does more than simply recall or refer to a grand era in France’s past. As Châtillon-Plessis himself notes earlier in this text, “Il y aura beaucoup à dire sur le rôle ‘civilisateur’ de la Cuisine” (61). The presentation and consumption of a meal such as the one described here is a training ground for exhibiting both the nation and one’s place in the nation. At the most basic level, the meal, as described, is a show of plenty. There are nine courses, several of which are meat courses. The cost of preparing such a meal, the ability to acquire all the necessary ingredients, the time and domestic help required for the cooking and serving of the meal in the prescribed fashion, and the luxury of being able to simply take the time needed to ingest, then digest, so much food are all factors that would exclude all but a relatively small segment of the population. The choice, then, of how to simplify the dishes or reduce the number of courses would indicate the station of the host. The menu

selected at a restaurant, even the choice of restaurant, would serve the same function, creating divisions along class lines but also creating new possibilities for inclusion, because the ability to exhibit knowledge of the proper French meal, even if circumstances dictated a simplified version, would itself bestow a certain social cachet on the educated diner or host. Ferguson writes, “Dining became more than ever a matter of savoir-faire. As Brillat-Savarin taught us, we all eat, but a far smaller number realize the higher accomplishment of eating knowledgably and hence well. Like other manifestations of conspicuous leisure [...], flaunting one’s savoir-faire signified power” (153).

Beyond the individual or class distinctions, the “civilizing” rules of the table (enforced “gendarme” style) and the so-called apolitical culinary discourse exemplify the politically productive language referred to by Barthes, because despite the absence of an imperial or royal referent, the language—even when used to refer to food—creates a (magical) mental link between French cuisine and France’s imagined status as an imperial power in the world. The political reality, however, was that while Britain was at the peak of its imperial power at the end of the nineteenth century, France’s Third Republic, a government that was intended to be temporary, lacked the outward pageantry of either a monarchy or an emperor and, according to historian Michel Winock, had failed to respond to the hopes and aspirations of the French people, or indeed any of the major political factions.

Elle ne fut ni la République sociale rêvée par les internationalistes, ni la République pure et dure des néo-jacobins et de l’extrême gauche radicale. Elle ne fut même pas la République radicale des modérés, qui espéraient la fin des armées permanentes, un “Etat faible” et surtout décentralisé. (88)

Châtillon-Plessis's description of a Third-Republic-era French meal dressed up in imperial and royal language is a particularly revealing expression of the political frustration described by Winock. Its ability to articulate what Barthes calls the movement of political praxis is evidenced by its almost uncanny performance of a famous turn-of-the-century slogan quoted by Winock: "La République était belle sous l'Empire" (88).

But this type of culinary discourse does more than simply represent political frustrations. It produces a blueprint for practices and customs in French cuisine that effectively deny or resist these frustrations by creating instead an image of French superiority. In the following quotation, for example, Châtillon-Plessis implies France's superiority over England by making pointed reference to the vulgarity of their serving styles versus the French: "Comparez ce que j'appellerai les *peuples à mets saignants* aux *peuples à sauces*, et voyez si le caractère de ces derniers n'est pas plus policé?" (61). It is assumed and emphasized that the knowledge and enforcement of proper cooking and presentation styles (as opposed to Britain's crude practice of carving animals at the table and serving the meat unadorned) reveals a superiority of character as well as kitchen. His use of "policé" instead of one of its synonyms ("civilisé," "éduqué," "raffiné") serves a dual purpose. First, it emphasizes the link between the notion of cultural and moral superiority and that of discipline or Napoleonic-style regimentation (as in the gendarme-Fromage policing the end of the meal above). But the term also had specific connotations at the end of the nineteenth century because of its frequent use in conjunction with

France's expansion projects, in particular the attempt to "police" the "sauvages."⁹ Consequently, the term reinforces the assumption that France's colonial project was both positive ("civilizing") and patriotic (demonstrating France's superior way of life), an ideology that became increasingly prevalent toward the end of the nineteenth century: "Colonization was of a piece with patriotism and the wish to regenerate France—and it is essential to realize this to understand the founders of the [Third] Republic" (Mayeur and Rebérioux 100). Contrary to Spang's argument, I would argue that even as culinary discourse concentrates more intentionally and narrowly on food, it is by no means able to "[demarcate] the table as an autonomous realm" (151) nor even disengage it from its national or political context.

Instead, with the advanced development of culinary discourse and an enforceable collection of attendant taxonomies, French cuisine does more than simply reflect the nation's dexterous democratic-colonial project; it also performs/produces one of its own. In a system where cuisine becomes a theatre, culinary discourse, particularly in the form of guidebooks, creates the impression that food provides a stage where everyone can perform. By Spang's own account, "Even the poorest reader could repeat the narrator's progression, smelling the roasting meats and ogling the sugared pastries along the way" (154). On the flip side of this equalizing effect, French cuisine simultaneously provides a path to superiority, setting France apart and above all the other nations in the world.

⁹ The list of synonyms, along with the etymological and historical information about the word *police*, comes from the online version of the *Tresor de la Langue Française* dictionary. <http://atilf.atilf.fr/dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/search.exe?32;s=3559645725;cat=0;m=police;>

Thus, cuisine and its discourse can be credited with producing the culture it is said to reflect, as the following quotation from an 1891 issue of the magazine L'Art culinaire demonstrates. After describing the procession of a French meal, which in the author's opinion has the ability to "rendre la nature jalouse," he concludes his summation by saying, "Voilà, à mon avis, la grande cuisine française, à laquelle nous devons notre supériorité incontestée et qui fait dire dans le monde entier. Il n'y a pas de grande cuisine sans cuisiniers français" (Capdeville qtd in Drouard, Histoire 89). Until this point, the superiority of French cuisine has been explained as the natural expression of the superiority of the French nation, yet here the author claims that France owes its uncontested superiority to the excellence of its cuisine, a cuisine that is excellent because its chefs are French. Though the author's argument is certainly begging the question, it nonetheless shows the complexity of the relationship between culture and nation at its fullest. To me, this statement presents not a logical fallacy but evidence of Homi Bhabha's assertion that culture and nation both produce and reflect one another—neither one fully dominant or fully subordinate to the other. We can no more separate France from its cuisine than we can separate French culinary discourse from its socio-political domain.

But, having established the increasingly intertwined relationship between cuisine and politics, it is also important to acknowledge that just as we cannot fully disentangle the two domains, nor can we unconditionally link them. Look for example at the language and logic of gastronome Philippe Mordacq's description of one of France's brief stumbles as the dominant culinary power:

Au début du XXe siècle (de 1900 à 1910), de nombreux pays s'émancipent, en ce qui concerne la gastronomie, de l'hégémonie française— ceci tenant certainement à une déperdition de l'influence de la France dans le monde au profit de nouvelles alliances comme la triplice (Allemagne, Autriche, Italie) ou de la dynamique anglo-saxonne. (32)

Though Mordacq employs a caveat (“en ce qui concerne gastronomie”) to stress, like Spang, the limitation of his remarks to the culinary domain, his choice of loaded political terms like “s'émanciper” and “hégémonie française” serve to emphasize and even concretize the link between food and political power. His effort to depoliticize food by isolating it in a clearly defined domain is further undone when he uses literal political realities (the new political alliances) to explain what he insists are potentially metaphoric but nonpolitical events in the culinary world. In his reading, cuisine and politics cannot operate in completely independent spheres, however, because they are instead locked in a one-way cause-and-effect relationship (“ceci tenant certainement à...”) that insists on the culinary culture's subordination to nation. His argument that the superiority of French cuisine necessarily falters when France's political influence wanes not only fails to recognize the bivalent relationship between the culinary and political sphere but also introduces an argument that is completely inconsistent with historical precedent throughout the nineteenth century. Consider, for example that France experienced no fewer than eight regime changes during the nineteenth century. Applying Mordacq's logic, we would expect to see that same instability in French cuisine. Yet, as Aron points out, “C'est un signe caractéristique du temps que le développement du menu dans les moindres établissements et sa simplification dans les grands. [...] Pourtant, sous cette

évolution une continuité se découvre: ni les régimes fluctuants, ni les modes, ni les sensibilités en devenir ne l'ont affectée sérieusement" (111-112).

Descriptions like Spang's and Mordacq's, which seek to either depoliticize cuisine and its discourse or assign to it a purely passive role (where politics act upon it), inadvertently draw attention to what is perhaps a natural extension of the theories (made by the likes of Appadurai and Mintz) that national cuisines are imbued with the dominant political ideologies of the nation. If national cuisines and national politics are indivisible, it follows that descriptions of those cuisines would also bear the trace of important political forces.

1.5 Defining the French Citizenry

"Carême's cuisine was modern, it was French, and it was for all French people" (52), so says Priscilla Ferguson in Accounting for Taste. According to Ferguson, Carême may have cooked for the very wealthy, but his publishing projects revealed a larger mission. She believes his comprehensive manuals on French cooking were intended to transform the nation's cuisine into a vast and inclusive "system" (52). The unintentional result, however, of a cuisine and a discourse that claim to have opened the nation's table to everyone is its power to reveal the social inequalities hidden by the term *everyone*. In the introduction to L'Art de la cuisine française au dix-neuvième siècle, which Ferguson quotes to support her assessment, Carême exclaims, "Je voudrais que, dans notre belle France, tout citoyen pût manger des mets succulents" (Carême 1: lix). Notice that Carême does not write "tous les Français" or "chaque personne." He writes "tout citoyen," a choice that bears closer scrutiny. First, it is important to note that Carême published

L'Art de la cuisine in 1833, just 3 years after the July Revolution and the ascent to the throne of Louis-Philippe, also known as “Le Roi Citoyen.” Louis-Philippe’s nickname, along with his assurance that he would be *le roi des Français*, not *le roi de France*, demonstrates that despite the restoration of the monarchy (albeit a constitutional one), the conceptual power of *le citoyen* that was so apparent in the aftermath of the Revolution continued to compel the French public. But his word choice does more than reflect the nation’s increasingly influential bourgeois class. It also raises an important question: who is considered a “citoyen” of France? And, by extension, who is not?

After the Revolution ended absolutist rule, the idea of France as one people united under the singular authority of a sovereign was no longer practicable. Defining new criteria to determine status within the nation became an urgent priority, as is evidenced by the drafting of the *Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen* in 1789. But even from this earliest textual incarnation of France’s fledgling democracy comes evidence of the challenges posed by the task of defining citizenship (challenges that plague France throughout the nineteenth century). The title of the document clearly introduces us to what Etienne Balibar refers to as its “fundamental paradox” (40): the schism between the discourse of *les droits de l’homme* and the discourse of *les droits du citoyen*. If, as Marcel Gauchet has argued, the *Déclaration* performs an inversion whereby the indivisible will of the absolute sovereign is replaced by an equally indivisible national will, then the realization of this ideal would rely on the homogenous composition of the nation, such as a citizenry defined by what Balibar calls “the relative homogeneity of a rising social class, which can be called bourgeois” (44). Yet, clearly,

though such a singular vision of nation may be longed for, it is not a social reality. For Balibar, the inherent contradiction of the Revolution is that “the Revolution, from the beginning, is not, is already no longer a ‘bourgeois revolution,’ but a revolution made jointly by the bourgeoisie and the people or the nonbourgeois masses, in an ongoing relation of alliance and confrontation. The revolution is already grappling with its immediate contestation” (44). The insurmountability of these tensions is evidenced by the fact that even after a thorough analysis of the possible distinctions between the discourses of *man* and *citizen*, Balibar finds himself concluding that his work has raised the same question with which he began: “which ‘men’ then are citizens?” (58).

The tension between Ferguson’s statement that Carême’s cuisine was “for all French people” and Carême’s expression of desire that “tout citoyen” be able to experience delicious meals resembles the paradox created by the division of man and citizen in the *Déclaration*. It reveals an inclusion that is immediately contestable, a contradiction or reversal that is apparent even in the culinary discourse of the time. According to Blanchard Jerrold, culinary citizenship may have appeared to extend to everyone of every class, but he disparaged this notion as an elaborate ruse: “The vice of the Paris cuisine is, that it is pretentious enough to serve say a *filet Chateaubriand* to all classes. [...] The pâtés of Amiens, Châtres, Strasbourg, and Périgueux are imitated, because all classes of citizens will be cheated into the idea that they are connoisseurs in partridge pies and *foie gras*” (Jerrold 115). The deception described here is twofold. On the one hand, food and food connoisseurship are used by diners to elevate their social standing artificially. On the other, these same diners are themselves duped by inferior

meals that masquerade as gourmet fare. There is, then, the appearance of a culinary democracy but it is an attenuated version, as is revealed when we put Carême’s “tout citoyen” remark back in its full context:

Je dirai donc avec ma franchise accoutumée: pourquoi ne pas quitter cette manière de couvrir les tables bourgeoises à l’imitation de celles de grands? Cette coquetterie de table ne sert qu’à mieux faire voir tout le ridicule de cette manie, qui coûte beaucoup sans pour cela arriver aux résultats que l’on se propose pour faire bonne chère, et pour la faire faire à ses amis.

Je voudrais que, dans notre belle France, tout citoyen pût manger des mets succulents; et cela est facile quand on est servi à souhait par la Providence. Je proposerai donc de servir désormais quatre mets au lieu de huit [...]. (Carême 1:lviii-lix)

Seen now, Carême’s wish for “tout citoyen” to have access to French cuisine seems quite a bit more utopian. Indeed his aim seems to be to discourage, not encourage, notions of equality among the diverse classes. By warning of the “le ridicule de cette manie” and urging non-wealthy diners to limit their access to the French meal, he emphasizes how class-based exclusions serve to curtail the promise of full citizenship.

Class was not the only potential barrier to the rights of citizenship. Geography also played a role. Paris was the uncontested locus of power in France—politically, culturally, and financially. Frenchmen living in the capital, or even other large urban areas, had far more opportunities to access the benefits of citizenship than those living in rural areas out in the provinces. As Norbert Elias argues in The Civilizing Process, the nineteenth-century perception of citizenship and the role of the citizen developed around “the expression of a new form of self-consciousness, the concept of *civilisation*” (88). The manners, habits, and customs that defined this version of “civilisation” were not only overwhelmingly urban, but for the most part evolved in opposition to anything perceived

as rural or country. French cuisine and the subject of its discourse are a particularly vivid demonstration of the geographical limit to citizenship:

Entertaining grandly was part of this civilized world. Dinner parties and restaurant rendezvous created the social arena needed to exhibit glamour and status, because it would be difficult to maintain class rank without the public exhibition of one's ability to consume in an appropriate fashion. (Trubek 60)

The urban table provided access to privileges of citizenship that were simply out of reach for the rural Frenchmen, and that barrier is clearly visible in a culinary discourse that focuses so heavily on restaurants and dining practices in Paris.

Religion, despite the Revolution's anti-Catholic rhetoric, also became a hidden factor in the establishment or denial of citizenship. Well before l'Affaire Dreyfuss, anti-semitism was evident in France, raising doubts about whether Jews were really considered "citizens" in the post-Revolutionary vision of the nation:

La spécificité juive n'a cessé d'intriguer, de heurter, voire de choquer les sentiments "républicains," dans le même temps qu'elle était caricaturée et diabolisée dans les rangs des nationalistes. Ce double travail de négation et d'exclusion s'est nourri de toutes les passions de l'histoire contemporaine [...] Simultanément, le Juif est censé ne pas exister en tant que citoyen-comme-les-autres, tandis qu'on lui attribue par ailleurs une surexistence maléfique dans la marche du monde. (Winock 201)

Once again, we can see that the Republican view of the citizen was disfigured by what Winock calls this "l'idéal jacobin d'une société homogène" (198). He claims that French Jews who wanted to acquire the full rights of citizenship were forced to assimilate. They had to negate the trace of "particularisme juif" — frenchifying their last names, intermarrying, sending children to public schools, and abandoning religious or ancestral ritual — "en échange du statut d'égalité qui leur était accordé comme à tous les autres citoyens" (198).

Women had even fewer claims to citizenship. According to Carol E. Harrison, who analyzes citizenship in nineteenth-century France by studying *les cercles*, “Female sociability was domestic while male association was civic. Women could mimic the practices of citizenship, but their performance did not fool those men who were the natural occupants of the public sphere” (223). The *Déclaration de droits de l’homme et du citoyen* was a tremendous disappointment to women like Olympe de Gouges who had fought for the Revolution with the belief that its liberating and democratic principles would apply equally to women as well as to men. She responded by writing Les Droits des Femmes in 1791, which contains “La Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne,” a rewriting of the 1789 *Déclaration* point by point for women. In her introduction she challenges the notion of any natural superiority accorded to men, asking, “Homme, es-tu capable d’être juste? C’est une femme qui t’en fait la question; tu ne lui ôteras pas du moins ce droit? Dis-moi? qui t’a donné le souverain empire d’opprimer mon sexe? ta force? tes talents?” (5). Despite the fact that women represented the French nation in a variety of symbolic ways, as in the form of Marianne, for example, Olympe de Gouges pointed out in brutally frank terms that they were excluded by law from practicing citizenship in their own country. From the first line, her demand for women’s full citizenship is clear: “Les mères, les filles, les sœurs représentantes de la nation, demandent d’être constituées en assemblée nationale” (6). The inclusion of women in civic life proved to be a treasonous suggestion, and because her writings and opinions were found to be a danger to the nation, she was executed, placing enormous irony on

one of her most oft-quoted lines: “La femme a le droit de monter sur l’échafaud; elle doit avoir également celui de monter à la Tribune.” (9)

According to philosopher and historian Geneviève Fraisse, the notion that women should be permitted to leave the domestic sphere was viewed as a reckless idea that would endanger both women and French society. After an example in which she cites Prudhon saying that women should be kept “en réclusion,” she neatly summarizes the flawed democracy and the perception of danger that kept women contained throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century.

Devant le danger d’une démocratie capable de s’introduire dans le foyer avec une demande d’émancipation de la femme (émancipation voulant précisément dire autonomie de l’individu, signe distinctif de la démocratie), Prudhon réitère le geste de coupure entre le public et le privé: aucune contagion n’est envisageable du public démocratique au privé phallocratique (19-20).

Fraisse’s assessment of the division between public and private is important because of the nuance she brings to the typical interpretation of the duality. While many scholars have pointed out the public sphere is male, and the private sphere is female, Fraisse asserts that, in fact, both spheres are male, and that what changes is simply the representation of this maleness. In the public sphere, where women are not allowed, there is a claim to democracy. In the private sphere, because there are women present, democracy must give way to phallocracy. The genius of this articulation is that it sets up French democracy as public, and therefore performative, or at least partially artificial. In opposition to the performance is the private, or “real” system of governance, phallocracy.

Cuisine is in an interesting object of study with regard to the role of women in the nineteenth century because although we can clearly see how cuisine contributed to and

reflected women's limited citizenship, it does not perform in quite the same way as other similar arts of the time. According to Aron, it goes without saying that in the nineteenth century, women were excluded from fine dining just as they were excluded from civic life: "Au culte la femme n'a pas accès. Si elle y apparaî, c'est en parasite ou en visiteuse. Elle ne saurait communier" (325). What is interesting here is that cuisine appears less adept at imposing strict gender boundaries than other pursuits that might also have been viewed as "feminine." Harrison points out that in the case of both music and horticulture, two activities that were perceived as primarily feminine, men were able to redefine or reorganize the practice, transforming it into a masculine endeavor. The following describes how artificially created gender divisions turned a "feminine" pastime into a masculine art:

Unlike smoking or billiards, music was not by definition a masculine pursuit. Indeed, music was a recommended pastime for the bourgeois lady, an ornamental means of occupying feminine idleness. Associations became a strategy by which bourgeois men took possession of music and transformed it into a manly activity. Women presided over domestic and salon music-making, but the musical association was for men alone. Music itself could remain feminine, represented by Saint Cecilia, its patron saint. [...] There was no need to deny music's femininity because honouring, protecting, and possessing music was an assertion of manliness. (103-104)

She goes on to explain that the distinction between women's domestic music and men's performed music was easy to enforce because women learned primarily piano music and played alone ("to improve character") or in a salon to a small audience, whereas men favored large orchestral works or opera scores. Consequently, "men's musical ambitions were on a larger, more public scale than those of female accomplishments" (105). In the case of horticulture, women become associated with flowers and poetic sensibilities

whereas men's horticulture attends to vegetables and vines, placing particular emphasis on scientific language and elaborate classifications to protect the nation's food supply.

It is possible to see how similar arguments could be made to create gender divisions in cuisine, and indeed they were. Philéas Gilbert, a frequent contributor and eventual editor of the nineteenth-century publication L'Art culinaire wrote: "Certains ont dit que la cuisine était l'apanage de la femme. Je l'accorde dans une certaine mesure car, comme il y a fagot et fagot, il y a cuisine et cuisine, et nous ne songeons pas à contester aux ménagères le pot-au-feu et le ragout de mouton traditionnels" (Gilbert qtd in Aron 329). Men's cuisine, therefore, should have divided easily from women's (much like music and horticulture were able to) by asserting its grander scale and degree of complexity. In Gilbert's quotation, we also see a distinction made between men's creative cooking and women's "traditional" cooking. But though the barriers were mounted, for the most part successfully, the fact remains that enforcing this exclusion appears to have been a constant struggle.

Women had been employed as cooks in petit-bourgeois homes since the seventeenth century. Of course, even then, the hiring of a woman to head the kitchen in a large, aristocratic home would have been unthinkable, but in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, women began to encroach on men's hold over prominent positions. Like Philéas Gilbert, Châtillon-Plessis bemoaned the shift in hiring practices on the grounds that women were neither strong enough nor creative enough for these larger endeavors:

"Les cuisinières ne sont pas rares, à notre époque, bien qu'on puisse regretter souvent les raisons d'économie qui, dans certaines maisons, les ont fait substituer à des chefs. [...]"

Il est certain que jamais la cuisinière ne pourra donner à une table importante les attraits de fond et de forme que le cuisinier peut y apporter. La profession a des travaux fatigants que l'homme seul peut affronter, et des éléments d'ingéniosité que la femme ne saura jamais mettre en oeuvre." (90)

This threat to male domination in the industry prompted Gilbert to call women "la scorie de la profession" (qtd in Drouard, *Histoire* 73), and around this reaction to the menace presented by women, the myths about women chefs that still dominate the profession began to solidify or take shape:

Que la majeure partie des cuisinières ne prétende pas s'immiscer dans nos travaux, d'abord trop fatigants pour leur complexion de femme, ensuite beaucoup trop étendus pour leurs faibles connaissances et dont elles ne peuvent rendre, quoi qu'elles fassent, qu'une très imparfaite, je dirais même, une très mauvaise imitation. (Gilbert qtd in Aron 329-330)

Such diatribes attempted to exclude women from cuisine on the grounds that they are not strong enough for the physical rigors of the job, that they're not as creative or intelligent as men, that they're not able to lead, that they are incompetent and should by nature exist as objects of beauty to be admired not as subjects commanding a kitchen. But despite these gendered boundaries, by 1893, a report from the *Office du Travail sur les métiers de la restauration* suggested that not only was the competition between men and women fierce, but it was women who were coming out on top. According to Stephen Mennell, "This competition between the sexes helps to account for the continuing concern amongst French chefs to emphasize the distance between their own *grande cuisine* and the ordinary domestic cookery associated with women" (204). The exclusion of women from the French citizenry was not achieved without extreme measures. Excluding women from cuisine proved a good deal more difficult than the same task was in music or other feminized domains. When observed in the context of

Mennell's explanation, the energy and labor that went into codifying French cuisine takes on a much greater national urgency.

1.6 Classic French Cuisine in the Twentieth Century

Though Carême started the job, the man most widely credited with defining and classifying French cuisine is Auguste Escoffier. Nicknamed “le roi des cuisiniers et le cuisinier des rois,” Escoffier took command of classic cuisine with the publication of Le Guide Culinaire (1903), which was considered “the definitive text until well into the 1970s” (Gillespie 114). Despite his desire to lighten and simplify culinary preparations, his most significant contribution was the formalization of cuisine as a science and the establishment of the militarized “partie” system, complete with a hierarchical structure of chefs that included *brigades, maîtres, commis, et apprentis*. (Poulain and Neirinck, Gillespie). In a move that is reminiscent of horticulture's increasingly complex and science-based codification, Escoffier took Carême's already exhaustive system of defining sauces and multiplied both the complexity of the system and the number of possible sauces: where Carême had identified five base sauces (“grandes sauces”) to which ingredients could be added to create new sauces (“petites sauces”), Escoffier added yet another layer of classification:

“Une petite sauce peut alors devenir le point de départ d'un nouvel éclatement. Ainsi la sauce “normande”, qui a pour base une “grande sauce” (le velouté de poisson), à laquelle on adjoint de l'essence de champignons, du jus d'huîtres, que l'on lie à la crème et aux nouvelles sauces: la “diplomate,” l' “écossaise,” la “régence,” l' “anchoise,” l' “huître,” la “véron.” (Poulain and Neirinck 105)

This same exacting style of organization was applied to every aspect of the restaurant, enabling him to “[streamline] work practices and conditions to allow for the smooth

running of his kitchens, just as he streamlined the food being served to clients” (Gillespie 114). On the one hand, Escoffier’s system was an economic and managerial windfall for large-scale cooking, such as in hotels or for banquets—a sort of Taylorization of haute cuisine. On the other hand, it served to create a specialized lexicon and a larger base of knowledge that would help distinguish haute cuisine from other forms of cuisine, such as the feminized cuisine bourgeoise, which had closed the gap substantially by the turn of the century:

Cette Haute Cuisine ne se distinguait pas de “la grande cuisine bourgeoise” pour reprendre le titre d’un ouvrage d’André Guillot. Toutes les deux étaient l’œuvre de cuisiniers de maison, maîtres dans leur art, artisans autant qu’artistes. Toutes les deux utilisaient des produits de luxe pour produire tous les jours des chefs-d’œuvre éphémères.

Alors que la Haute Cuisine est une cuisine d’hommes, la cuisine bourgeoise est une cuisine de femmes, faite de plats cuits longuement et lentement, de plats mijotés. Elle est l’œuvre de cuisinières qui pouvaient faire des “chefs d’œuvre” sans avoir jamais appris la cuisine. (Drouard, Français et la table 122)

The above quotation shows that in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the only thing really differentiating haute cuisine from high-level bourgeois cooking was the gender of the cook and perhaps the public nature of the venues. With Escoffier’s elaborate formulas, systems, apprentice structure, and hierarchies in place, however, the distance between the cooking styles was greatly increased and, as the quotation above illustrates, even women talented enough to create “chefs d’œuvre” did so, in a sense accidentally, because the impression was that without haute-cuisine training, they cooked “sans avoir jamais appris la cuisine.”

During Escoffier’s time, another subtle but important shift occurred in the way national image and culinary culture interacted in France. In a reversal of the tendency to

divorce politics from cuisine seen in the nineteenth century, in 1920, then-President of France Raymond Poincaré made a highly public presentation of the prestigious national medal of service, the Légion d'Honneur, to Escoffier at the Carlton in London. Symbolically, this gesture served as an international reminder that excellence was still defined in French, the implication being that even though the Carlton is in London, its reputation and quality is due not only to its French cuisine but also to the French restaurateur capable of executing it. Presenting the medal in England rather than in Escoffier's native France also sends the signal that France's cultural power extends well beyond the hexagon—even to rival England, and into the Carlton, one of the most “English” of establishments.

But the presentation of the Légion d'Honneur to a *restaurateur* also indicates an overt shift in the State's understanding of who or what participates in the creation of patrimony in France. Typically awarded to soldiers, statesmen, scientists or government employees, the medal was the first such national award created after the Revolution and was intended to recognize both military and non-military citizens who established or defended the principles of the Republic. Established by Napoléon in 1802, the official legislation defines qualification for the medal as follows:

Sont membres de la légion tous les militaires qui ont reçu des armes d'honneur. Pourront y être nommés les militaires qui ont rendu des services majeurs à l'État dans la guerre de la liberté. Les citoyens qui, par leur savoir, leurs talents, leurs vertus, ont contribué à établir ou à défendre les principes de la République, ou fait aimer et respecter la justice ou l'administration publique. (Titre 2, Art 1er)

[...] Les grands services rendus à l'État dans les fonctions législatives, la diplomatie, l'administration, la justice, ou les sciences, seront aussi des titres d'admission (Titre 2, Art 7)

Clearly Escoffier's promotion to Officier of the Légion d'Honneur indicates a newly expanded version of what genre of service constitutes diplomacy or science (as seen in Article 7). Or, could the execution of French cuisine in an international context fall into a broadened understanding of "the establishment and defense of Republican principles" (as mentioned in Article 1)? Regardless of how Escoffier's medal was justified, it nonetheless signifies the full recognition and promotion of the culinary arts as essential to the patrimony, which would appear to indicate that French national identity was at least partially produced by its dominant and dominating cuisine. Its heightened role in civic life further reasserted the profession as a masculine pursuit.

Of course, the shifting relationship between the culinary domain and the formation of national identity was not consciously articulated, and as one might expect, the prevailing attitude about Escoffier expressed in French culinary discourse simply credits him with the restructuring of and promotion of French cuisine (particularly abroad). Even Escoffier himself saw his work more as a reflection than a creation. His goal in restructuring French cuisine and writing Le Guide Culinaire was, he said, to "adapt" classical French cuisine *in accordance with* the "impératifs de la vie active de la

clientèle de cette époque” (Poulain and Neirinck 101).¹⁰ In Histoire des cuisiniers en France, Alain Drouard notes that during Escoffier’s career, France’s national identity was in crisis and though he is able to suggest a parallel between cuisine and political instability, he nonetheless still depicts French cuisine as a mirror, whose role is limited to the direct reflection of France’s political health. He also indicates that chefs and gastronomes of the time largely shared this impression: “La fin du XIX^e siècle et le début du XX^e siècle ont vu s’affronter les nationalités et s’exacerber les nationalismes. En France, chefs et gastronomes tentèrent de définir la cuisine ‘nationale’ et les plats ‘nationaux’ qui la représentent” (83).

Despite the claim that chefs were simply trying to define a national cuisine and the dishes that best represent it, the political underpinnings of such an undertaking, as Appadurai and Mintz noted, difficult if not impossible to escape. Uncovering or interpreting these political undercurrents as they manifest in the culinary domain is however more complicated than the meticulously defined and singular notion of classical French haute cuisine would indicate. Even after Escoffier’s simplification of Carême’s

¹⁰ A contemporaneous analog to Le Guide Culinnaire and a parallel that bears closer study is Ferdinand Brunot’s massive codification of the French language, L’Histoire de la langue française, a project that consumed him from 1905 to 1938. Like Escoffier, Brunot characterized his work as both science and art. Also like Escoffier, Brunot’s immense project contributed to the illusion of a wholistic and singular object that could be classified as “national”: *the* French language as opposed to, for example, the various *patois* that the Republicans fought to eliminate after the Revolution. For more on Brunot and the HLF, see Jean-Claude Chevalier’s essay “L’Histoire de la langue française” in Les Lieux de mémoires, Vol.2 (421-459), ed. Pierre Nora. For more on the use of language and its homogenizing and centralizing role in France after the Revolution, see Une Politique de la langue by Michel de Certeau, Dominique Julia, and Jacques Revel (Gallimard, 1974).

extravagant menus and presentations, the style that came to represent France's national cuisine throughout the world was still elaborate and impressive for its grand scale: the wealth of choices, the size of the portions, the simplified but still lengthy parade of courses and so on. Cooks at the top restaurants were entirely faithful to the rules codified by Escoffier, and with so much precision, his rules traveled well and furthered France's "civilizing" mission, as he demonstrates when discussing the many chefs he trained who carried his formula beyond France's boundaries: "La plupart d'entre eux ont fait souche dans ces pays, et l'on peut dire que c'est autant de grains de blé semés dans des territoires incultes" (qtd in Lazareff 34). His language of fertility emphasizes the goal of *rayonnement* at the same time that it echoes nationalistic terminology that stresses the importance of the nation of origin. The term *français de souche*, for example, is used to distinguish "real" French (born and raised in hexagonal France) from less valid forms of Frenchness. In a similar way, Escoffier-trained chefs were the "real" French chefs.

As with the chefs, haute-cuisine restaurants in the first half of the twentieth century bore the mark of Escoffier's regimentation. They offered quasi-identical menus that reflected the uniformity but also the often unmanageable expansiveness of his multi-layered codification of French cuisine. Dishes like Tournedos Rossini, L'Homard à l'Américaine, Côtes de Veau Orloff, Rougets à la Colbert, Potage Maintenon and so forth appeared with predictable regularity, but the sauce or preparation methods for one dish could be applied to any number of meats and vegetables, thus multiplying the already extensive array of choices. As Weiss and Schehr explain,

In the codification of classic French cuisine, each dish has a formal name, with a set group of garnishes and the right sauce encrypted in the name of the dish. A formal dinner or a classic menu is both a parade of dishes and an instantiation of a culinary theory, each of which has historical connotations, be it the name of the garnish or the historic reference to its creation. (1)

Keeping in mind Weiss's observation that the name of a dish is embedded with its historical significance, "Rougets à la Colbert" may sound like a specific dish that was perhaps created by or served regularly to the man himself. But, in fact, the designation *à la Colbert* is a cooking style and would not be limited to *rougets* but could appear on the menu in a variety of permutations. The term signifies any beef or fish preparation that has been grilled and served with butter; alternatively, it can also refer to a turkey consommé garnished with finely diced vegetables and poached eggs (Larousse Gastronomique 1996: 300).

This manner of naming dishes, so common to classic French Cuisine, rewards diners with variety but builds in the comfort of name recognition and predictability. It also keeps French haute cuisine firmly planted in an aristocratic tradition not only by referencing elite names but also by drawing attention to the tradition of patronage in culinary history. Historian Jean-François Revel notes that personalization of a dish and competition between the cooks to distinguish themselves (with informed diners able to act as arbiters) is where innovation and gastronomy flourish, and though he warns that the designations in classic cuisine rarely indicate a creative signature, he argues that this form of mécénat lays the groundwork for real innovation in the future:

Avec la gastronomie, la cuisine cesse d'être collective. Chacun se targue d'exercer son jugement original et d'apporter éventuellement sa création personnelle.

[...] Il ne faudrait certes pas croire que tous les plats, toutes les sauces et toutes les garnitures appelées “Richelieu,” “Conti,” “à la Maintenon,” “à la Colbert,” furent effectivement créés par la main même des grands personnages dont ils portent le nom. Mais qu’ils aient été créés à leur intention, peut-être à leur instigation, qu’ils aient été placés sous leur patronage [...] montre la formation progressive d’un mécénat gastronomique capable de subventionner l’esprit de découverte. (166-167)

Revel strengthens his claim that gastronomic patronage encourages innovation and creativity by using language that is identical to characterizations of the next major movement in France’s culinary history: Nouvelle Cuisine. Words like “original” and “création personnelle,” for example, recall “Les Recettes originales de...,” the series of cookbooks responsible for introducing Nouvelle Cuisine chefs and their personalized creations to the public. Moreover, his argument that culinary mécénat is able to “subventionner l’esprit de découverte” appears to be borne out by the tremendous success of Henri Gault and Christian Millau, the lifestyle critics turned food writers, who relied on the promise and allure of discovery to market both Nouvelle Cuisine and their own magazines and guides.

But while Revel’s argument that gastronomic patronage can spur creation and competition sounds plausible, the language overlap with Nouvelle Cuisine that appears to confirm his point may instead indicate a case of history being rewritten to fit its future. Because even though culinary patronage eventually gave way to a movement that credits itself with the fullest expression of creativity, originality, and discovery, this transition was not only exceedingly slow, but the time between Escoffier and the advent of Nouvelle Cuisine is often described more as a time of culinary stagnation than innovation:

La gastronomie s'endort doucement dans la nostalgie d'un paradis à jamais perdu, celui de la grande cuisine, celle du XIXe siècle. Les sommets de l'art ont été atteints hier, et ce que peut faire de mieux un Chef, c'est d'interpréter avec talent les œuvres composées par les grands maîtres. (Poulain and Neirinck 116)

In contrast to Revel's suggestion, the authors of this quotation view French cuisine (at least from the turn of the century to the late 1960s) as a somnolent affair whose chefs do little more than ably imitate or reproduce the already famous culinary masterpieces.

1.7 The Father (and Mothers) of Modern Cuisine: Fernand Point et "Les Mères"

Despite the enduring evidence of Escoffier's ideas on nearly every aspect of restauration, there was a profound drawback to the highly regimented recipes and practices that he established:

Ce rayonnement de la cuisine française ne pouvait se maintenir que si elle se renouvelait. Or la réussite sans précédent d'Escoffier avait paradoxalement conduit à figer la création dans les décennies qui ont suivi. Deux générations après sa mort, l'univers de la cuisine semblait bouché en France. Les chefs n'avaient guère le droit à la parole et souffraient de leur statut d'employés. (Lazareff 35)

Chefs bound up in strict adherence to a master who was no longer even present were unable to renew or update France's cuisine because innovation and creativity had no place in Escoffier's militaristic style. Though changes to haute cuisine are seldom as abrupt or as attributable to a single chef or group of chefs as repeated histories suggest, there are two factors that had immediate and obvious impact on the culinary world in the twentieth century: the World Wars and the introduction of the automobile. With the advent of the automobile, cuisine's geographic axis shifted. The ability to flee Paris and dine *en route* was a new privilege for the elite. To encourage motorists to travel, and by

extension to buy their tires, Michelin provided their customers with a comprehensive guide to restaurants all over France. Dining in the provinces suddenly became an urban, leisure activity rather than a rural one. As a consequence, chefs outside Paris had unprecedented opportunities to showcase their talents. The wars released chefs from Escoffier's shadow because food scarcity and changing dietary habits required chefs to approach their new circumstances with both innovation and adaptation. Of all the chefs struggling to assert themselves in a post-Escoffier culinary world, one stands apart from his peers in nearly every version of culinary history: Fernand Point.

Fernand Point differed dramatically from Escoffier in that he both owned and operated his restaurant. La Pyramide, named after a nearby roman monument, was not in a grand hotel or a glitzy vacation town, but in Vienne, a small town about 20 miles south of Lyon. What made this location interesting, however, was that it was halfway between Paris and the Riviera—a perfect stopover place for the new motorists. Another major difference between Point and Escoffier lies in the presentation of their methodology. Whereas Escoffier's writing and culinary philosophy underlined the exacting, scientific aspects of the profession, Point's interviews and methodology stress the subjective and the visceral:

Fernand Point's cuisine is singularly different from that of Escoffier in the sense that it is much less methodical. When Escoffier calls for an ounce of salt, he does not mean two or three ounces. With Fernand Point, although the proportions may be important, it is the last minute intuition that often dominates.

Point believed strongly that great cuisine is intuitive. A solid base in the fundamentals is vital, but ultimately it is the senses—smell, taste, sight, feel—that tell the cuisinier when a dish is great and not merely adequate. (Kulla and Kulla 82)

This “intuitive” approach to cuisine allowed Point to treat his classical training as a foundation on which to build as opposed to a blueprint to be meticulously copied. As a result, innovation became more important than uniformity; and pleasing the diner by appealing to his senses was prioritized over dazzling the diner with impressive displays of luxury. To that end, his menu changed every day according to his larder, and he insisted on buying his own food at markets to ensure the best possible ingredients (Gillespie, Wechsberg). His formula was enormously successful: he received three stars from Michelin in 1933, the first year the guide book awarded three stars nationwide and was quickly recognized by food critics and other chefs as the best chef in the country. His country location drew statesmen, movie stars, tycoons, and all manner of gourmets from all over the world. And his restaurant became the most sought after training ground for apprentices with haute cuisine aspirations. Because of these rather significant departures from the practices of classic haute cuisine, Point is “recognized as the father of modern gastronomy” (Gillespie 118).

Certainly some of Point’s contributions and popularity must be attributed to his non-conformist and inventive personality. However, Point’s innovations cannot be viewed in a vacuum any more than other culinary trends. As I have already mentioned, increased mobility generated new clients for restaurants in the provinces. Alongside that development, however, was the swell of a conservative political movement that sought to restore France’s monarchy and build a national image based on the promotion and strength of France’s diverse regions. This agenda was easily extended into the culinary domain:

L'esprit régionalistes a remplacé, chez les gourmets, l'Union sacrée: L'Action française les dote d'une légitimité nationale. [...] Dans cet après-guerre, grandeur et décadence sont inversées, les pointes de l'innovation aiguillonnent le coq gaulois non vers une aviculture rationnelle et un four électrique mais vers la fin la plus exquise: une casserole et un verre de très bon vin rouge. (Capatti 227)

The political reaction against “décadence” and “grandeur,” along with the move away from the “rationnelle” in favor of the simple pleasures of a “très bon vin rouge,” certainly seem to place the ideas and priorities of Fernand Point in a much larger and national context. However, it is necessary to recognize that the apparent overlap in values does not attest to a conscious or intentional alignment of political sentiments on Point's part with the likes of Charles Maurras, Léon Daudet, or other leaders of the monarchist movement behind L'Action française. In fact, during the war, while the AF group aligned themselves with Vichy, Point was famously anti-Occupation, preferring to close his restaurant rather than serve Nazis and giving refuge to those fleeing the German or Vichy police (Wechsberg, Kulla and Kulla, Capatti). Nonetheless, regardless of Point's personal politics, the overwhelmingly positive reaction to his refusal to comply with the hyper-rational and luxurious Escoffier style indicates a readiness in France to redefine how patriotism is practiced, and packaged.

The patriotic move toward simpler, regional French cooking provoked, in Capatti's words, a “conséquence capitale.” As we have seen, the opposition to the extravagant and masculine haute cuisine was the domestic, feminine bourgeois cuisine. Predictably, then, “les cuisinières, reléguées au second rang par les chefs, par les culinographes et par les clubs gastronomiques masculins, prennent leur revanche.” (Capatti 232). As this quotation indicates, women had not stopped cooking during

Escoffier's time, they had simply been excluded from the discourse and from the respected ranks of the profession. Nonetheless, starting in the late nineteenth century, women who had likely lost their employment as cooks in private homes began opening small restaurants where they served only a limited menu but offered simple meals of the highest quality. This modernized version of *cuisine bourgeoise* became known as *cuisine de femme*, and it was a trend seen most in the area around Lyon. In keeping with the domestic view of women, the cooks who operated these restaurants became known as "Les Mères." Les Mères were among the first chefs in France to own and operate their own restaurants (Mesplède). By the 1920s and 1930s, they had become both commercially and critically successful. Inspired by the call to promote a regional view of the nation, food writers like Curnonsky and Marcel Rouff traveled throughout the country searching for excellence in local restaurants and were effusively positive about the quality of food found in some of these establishments (Capatti).

The year Michelin awarded its first set of three stars to restaurants nationwide, two women chefs made the list along with Fernand Point: Eugénie Brazier and Marie Bourgeois. In 1951, Marguérite Bise of Le Père Bise in Talloires also ascended to three stars, but her husband Marius is often credited as the chef even though he ran the front of the house, not the kitchen. In the case of Eugénie Brazier, a woman's accomplishments in cuisine actually exceeded what any male chefs had achieved. In 1933, she was awarded three stars for not one, but two restaurants—a feat not repeated until 1998 by reigning restaurateur juggernaut Alain Ducasse. She is also the only person to have been promoted directly from one star to three in a single year (Mesplède 79-84). Not being

chefs classically trained in the Escoffier style, Les Mères developed their own way of running their kitchens, shopping every day for the freshest food, working very long hours, creating an ambiance relaxed enough for them to circulate amongst their diners (Poulain and Neirinck 114).

The cooking style of Les Mères sounds very similar to the innovations credited to Fernand Point. Because the woman chefs lack classic professional training, their understanding of cooking is necessarily based more on intuition and instinct than codified knowledge. It is interesting, then, that so much emphasis would be put on the intuitive nature of Point's cooking without ever remarking on the typical association of intuition with the feminine. If Point paves the way for the Nouvelle Cuisine chefs, he does so with traditionally feminine attributes and methods that borrow heavily from *cuisine de femme*. His ability to step away from Escoffier and the monotonous rules of classical cuisine toward a more creative and independent modern cuisine certainly qualify him for the nickname Father of Modern Cuisine, but if modern cuisine is going to recognize its parentage then Les Mères are inadvertently well named and should be included in discussions of the reproductive process that led to the culinary developments at this time.

In sketching some of the major factors and developments in French culinary history, it becomes increasingly evident that though the links between food and national identity are undeniable, the ways in which they interact can rarely be taken at face value. Changes in cuisine can neither explain nor be explained by changes in politics; however, they cannot be dissociated from one another either. Moving forward then, I will

demonstrate how Nouvelle Cuisine and its discourse works both with and against its revolutionary framing as it responds to and acts on the culture of which it is a part.

2. La Cuisine Française Est Morte. Vive la Nouvelle Cuisine Française!

I've seen the future, and the future's nothing new.
—The Alternate Routes

Before it was a revolution, before it was Nouvelle Cuisine “in caps,” before it was grabbing headlines, before it was launching careers, the culinary movement that excited French imaginations had to be something else: new. It seemed necessary to establish that French cuisine was not simply evolving; it was creating something completely different. Editor Claude Lebey emphasizes this distinction in the preface to Michel Guérard’s La Grande Cuisine minceur, the first in a new series of cookbooks dedicated to introducing the new style of cooking, “Il n’est pas exagéré d’affirmer qu’il a inventé là une nouvelle cuisine, fait unique dans ce domaine où tout n’est habituellement qu’évolution lente” (8). As soon as he states that his claim is no exaggeration, he indicates the likelihood of precisely such a critique, preparing the reader for the idea that the subject may well be the site of a potential battle. Furthermore, his description of Guérard’s achievement as a “fait unique” across a multi-century history of culinary supremacy, creativity, and invention might appear to belie his denial of overstatement, but it also focuses the reader’s attention, whether skeptically or not, on the idea that here is a culinary event remarkable enough to inspire such strong language. The chef’s biography on the facing page also raises the battle flags, insisting that Guérard was “las de la discipline classique” (9), underlining a rupture with the establishment and suggesting the makings of a “modern-day” revolutionary hero.

Why “modern-day?” Because, as Roger Griffin notes in his book The Nature of Fascism, the notion of “revolution” has shifted in modern times. In a discussion on the “palingenetic political myth” and its relation to fascism, he articulates how the “new” has been recast in current conceptions of the term “revolution.”¹

A similar ambiguity is inherent in the word “revolution,” which within a cyclic scheme of history meant returning to an idealized vision of an earlier stage of society. But in an era dominated by linear conceptions of time and progress, “revolution” now generally denotes the emergence of a substantially *new* order of society, no matter how much it is inspired by historical precedents or the myth of a past golden age. (35)

It is precisely this need to create the impression of “a substantially *new* order”, regardless of the reality of “historical precedents” that becomes apparent in the phenomenon of Nouvelle Cuisine. As socio-anthropologist Claude Fischler has pointed out, the debate over whether Nouvelle Cuisine was revolutionary—which in this instance corresponds, as Griffin suggested, to whether it was truly “new”—has occupied scholars, food writers, and chefs almost since the term appeared, creating a large surplus of polemics on the subject and splitting most commentators into one of two camps:

¹ Griffin maintains that the presence of a “palingenetic political myth” only becomes particular to fascism when it is found in combination with a populist form of ultra-nationalism. He introduces the above reflection on “revolution” as a parallel to the notion of “palingenetic political myth,” because both terms possess an etymology that appears at odds with the way they are currently understood or represented. In this case, “palingenetic” seems to imply a myth derived from looking backward, which would announce a rebirth of the same, or a nostalgia for the past. Instead, he proposes that the political myths in question claim to look forward and call for the creation of a new order. The “palingenetic” aspect comes into play when we consider that the purpose of the myth is to establish a “new birth” that exists in the particular context of occurring “*after a period of perceived decadence*” (36). I believe such a distinction is especially useful to my analysis of Nouvelle Cuisine, because, as this chapter argues, a significant way that claims of the “new” function in the discourse of Nouvelle Cuisine is to rely on their contrast to the perceived complacencies and pretensions of France’s culinary past. That such articulations of a new culinary order also contain commentaries on nationalism suggests a potential for additional areas of intersection.

Selon les uns, le prétendu bouleversement culinaire—réforme, renaissance ou révolution—n'aurait jamais eu lieu : le label "nouvelle cuisine" n'aurait été que l'habile détournement d'une tradition relevant pour ainsi dire de la transcendance, celle de la "Grande Cuisine Française." D'autres admettent la réalité du changement, mais contestent que Bocuse, Guérard ou les frères Troisgros en soient les héros et Gault-Millau les hérauts. (Homnivre 237)

Fischler's remarks underscore the degree to which research has focused on the legitimacy of either the label or the label makers. My interest in the "new" is slightly different. For my purposes, it is not enough to contest Nouvelle Cuisine's claim to newness, but rather to study precisely how and to what end those claims are made. Consequently, in this chapter, I will look at *what* aspects of Nouvelle Cuisine are cast as new, *how* those claims are substantiated, and what the *effect* of such claims to novelty might be in this post-colonial, post-68 society, even, or perhaps especially, when those claims to newness don't hold up.

2.1 Nouvelle Cuisine Defined

As indicated by Fischler, the contribution of food and lifestyle writers Henri Gault and Christian Millau to the formation of Nouvelle Cuisine is hard to estimate. However, it is certain that the 1973 article "Vive la Nouvelle Cuisine" that appeared in their monthly food and travel magazine (Le Nouveau Guide Gault-Millau), in which they elaborated the "Dix Commandements" of what they identified as the revolutionary new cooking style, remains the clearest (and most consistently analyzed) attempt to distill this broad and geographically disparate set of culinary trends into a unified movement with an explicit formulation of its newness. Given the chefs' cooperation with the authors at the time of the article, and given the import attributed to the article by scholars who focus on

food, I maintain that this article serves as the initial manifesto or statement of purpose of Nouvelle Cuisine. Considering its central role in the dissemination of how Nouvelle Cuisine defines itself, and given that I will have occasion to return to “les dix commandements” throughout the dissertation, I’d like to quote at some length from this article that, in a cross-pollination of revolutionary rhetoric, bills itself as a sort of declaration of independence from classic French cuisine, in addition to its more obvious biblical parallel. Here, from the article “Vive la Nouvelle Cuisine” by Gault and Millau, are “les dix commandements,” albeit in considerably abridged form:

1. **Temps de cuisson réduit** (à la chinoise) [...] Les haricots verts de Bocuse, le poisson de chez Le Duc, le canard de chez Guérard, les écrivisses de chez Troisgros [...], entre autres, en sont l’illustration confondante.
2. **Nouvelle utilisation des produits.** [...] a) faire ce que nous appelons la *cuisine du marché*, celle que l’on prépare avec les produits choisis et achetés le matin même (les nouveaux chefs se lèvent tôt) [...] b) ils *font* avec ce que le monde moderne n’a pas encore abîmé, ou qu’il a rendu plus accessible et maintient plus frais.
3. Cette méthode conduit les cuisiniers à **diminuer le choix de leur carte.**
4. Les nouveaux cuisiniers **ne sont pas systématiquement modernistes.** [...] Au contraire à la vieille école qui vous servait un buisson d’écrivisses gelées, [...] les nouveaux cuisiniers jouent le réfrigérateur avec doigté.
5. En revanche, ils ne poussent pas de cris de vierges violées devant tous les appareils de cuisson, de conservation, de nettoyage, de confort que leur offrent les **techniques d’avant-garde.**
6. Ils ont banni de toutes leurs préparations les principes dits culinaires (et en réalité de triste conservation) qui exigeaient que le gibier [...] fut mariné. Les nouveaux chefs servent le **gibier rassis mais frais**, et les épices qui cachent leur fermentation ont disparu de leur panoplie.
7. Peu à peu, la nouvelle école admet la prétention, l’inanité, la médiocrité des sauces riches, des sauces lourdes, **ces terribles sauces brunes et blanches**, ces *espagnoles*, ces périgieux, ces financières, ces grand

veneur, ces béchamel, ces mornay, qui ont assassiné tant de foies et couvert tant de chairs fades.

8. De ce point de vue, on peut dire qu'ils **n'ignorent pas la diététique**. [...] ils découvrent les grâces des plats légers, des salades habiles, des légumes frais et simplement cuits, des viandes saignantes.
9. Ils ont également compris, dans le même ordre d'idée, le **danger des présentations truqueuses**, destructrices, dont le redoutable Carême lança la mode il y a 150 ans. Ils aiment encore à parer, à embellir, mais connaissent les limites à ne pas dépasser et découvrent l'esthétique de la simplicité comme la vanité des appellations ronflantes.
10. Enfin. **Ces gens-là inventent**. [...] Tout est permis [...] ils introduisent des ingrédients nouveaux ou méconnus (poivre vert, basilic, aneth, fruit de la passion, etc), ils retrouvent des plats oubliés, les aménagent, et les font aimer (quenelle de lièvre, jambon de mouton chez Senderens)...

[...] Et si vous permettez, puisque nous jouons aujourd'hui au deus ex machina de la nouvelle cuisine française, nous allons ajouter un onzième commandement que les chefs de maintenant n'ont pas attendu de voir codifier : l'amitié.

[...] Ils s'aiment bien, ne se jalouent pas, se repassent des recettes, des idées, des adresses et même des clients. Et c'est bien pour cela que ces gens ont tant de talent, tant de fraîcheur, et qu'on peut crier à la face du monde : vive la nouvelle cuisine française ! (66-69)

Although I did not include each commandment in its entirety, the authors use a variation of the words “nouveau,” “découvrir,” or “invention” at least once (usually much more) in every single “loi” that is defined. The distinction of “newness” is first and foremost in this elaboration. Correspondingly, the authors also refer, whether by implied comparison or explicit mention, to what was “avant,” “ancien,” or “vieux” in every commandment, as well. Consequently, Nouvelle Cuisine is defined as much by what it is not as by what it is.

In addition to the cooking innovations, which I will return to in a moment, the other “new” being presented here are the chefs themselves. The commandments make a point of naming chefs' names and their dishes, which serves to let the readers know who

the leaders (“chefs” in the non-culinary sense) of this revolution will be. And, finally, a third “new” that is qualified here are the non-culinary values associated with this new style of cooking: the social values and ethics of the chefs and their cooking practices form a not very veiled subtext to the overall explanation. All this—the new cuisine, the new chefs, and the new accompanying social order—is set in contrast to a past whose practices, practitioners, and even values are found to be wanting, dangerous, or destructive in every aspect of French cuisine that is mentioned.

As Gault and Millau list the ten cooking innovations that characterize France’s Nouvelle Cuisine, what emerges are the culinary values associated with the changes: freshness, lightness, simplicity, transparency, honesty, purity, creativity, and liberty. Even equality becomes a culinary value, as old-fashioned vegetables (*topinambour*, or Jerusalem artichokes) and dishes associated with country or regional cuisines (*quenelles*, a type of dumpling, often made from fish paste) are recast for the haute-cuisine table. As I mentioned in the introduction, a closer analysis of these ten culinary innovations shows that not only do the commandments in this article *describe* a culinary revolution but they also *reproduce* a simplified version of a revolutionary process: the creation of a new order, a purging of the past, and the regulation and ongoing purification of the new order.

To elaborate, commandments 2, 5 and 10 are all explicit promotions of creating new cooking styles and practices: the use of new ingredients and cooking styles, the use of new technologies, and the appearance of new leadership in the form of chefs with the new-found freedom to create entirely new menus, flavor combinations, and presentations. Commandments 3, 6, and 7 promote a determined expulsion or purging of the most

entrenched of French cuisine's classical traditions and practices: the abolition of the enormous old menus, some of which the authors claim had 500 choices on them; the elimination of the marinades and spices used to cover the odors and flavors of rotting meats, along with the termination of the traditional practice of *faisandage* (the hanging of game birds such as pheasant until they reach a complete state of putrefaction); and perhaps the most radical of the purges, the prescribed disappearance of French sauces. Lastly, commandments 1, 4, 8, and 9 all refer to achieving a disciplined and unadulterated, or pure, version of what French cuisine *should* be: reducing cooking times allows the true taste of the food to be revealed; discerning when to be modern prevents the meal's originality from being diluted by affect; maintaining a watch on dietary rules contributes to simpler, purer food preparations to promote a clean, healthy digestion; and the enforcement of transparent presentations and dish names protects the cuisine's authenticity from the contamination of pretentious names and over-elaborate food sculpting as popularized by the likes of Carême.

The article appears to consider only one explanation for the innovations occurring in cuisine: les nouveaux cuisiniers. Forces like the evolution of society, changing consumer habits, or restaurant finances don't enter into their elaboration of this rupture with the past. They place the responsibility and the credit for change firmly on the shoulders of this new breed of chef whom they call "nos nouveaux dieux" (67). These chefs invent, create, and work hard (commandment 2 tells us "ces chefs se lèvent tôt"). They are masculine: unlike those who would "poussent les cris de vierges violées," the new chefs remain unfazed by the surge in new technologies and new appliances that are

transforming the kitchen. They are independent enough to abandon traditional menus and entrenched cooking practices but discerning enough not to be “systématiquement modernistes.” They shun the pretensions of grandiose titles or presentations for their dishes and favor the simplicity of an easily digested meal. They are all over France and at different stages of their careers, but one quality links them all and even necessitates the addition of an eleventh commandment just to describe an essential particularity of these chefs: “l’amitié.”

Gault and Millau consider the characteristic of “amitié” so important that they deem it the reason—“c’est bien à cause de cela”—for the realization of the chefs’ talents and freshness, and, by extension, for the reemergence of a strong French cuisine on the world stage. Furthermore, their use of the word “amitié” and their description of its characteristics inscribe this ad hoc commandment, like the first ten, into a recognizable, even familiar, model of revolution. Certainly, “amitié” recalls the grand democratic value “Fraternité,” but even more specifically, the term *amitié* itself has been used in conjunction with the French Revolution, both in theoretical texts and historic texts, as in the following excerpt from an essay published in 1882 by Emmanuel des Essarts.

Ceux qui furent véritablement patriotes et qui ont épousé la gloire en même temps que la mort apparaissent, dans leur vie privée, débordants de sensibilité, dévorer d’un immense besoin d’aimer et d’être aimés. L’amitié retrouva dans leurs cœurs les autels que l’antiquité lui avait dédiés par la voix de ses philosophes autant que de ses mythologues. [...] L’amitié chez eux fut aussi puissante que cet amour dont le prophète a dit, “plus fort que les dieux et que la mort.” (920)

Like Gault and Millau, Essarts links the success of the revolutionaries (and their willingness to die for their shared ideals) to the strength of their friendship, which is even

“plus fort que les dieux et que la mort.” Given the generative powers that this “amitié” seems to possess, I would argue that commandment 11 functions, along with commandments 2, 5, and 10, in the formation of the “new.” It resembles the kind of collaborative resistance to established power that prefigures or even creates the earliest sparks of revolutions. Emile Durkheim, for instance, uses the word “effervescence” to refer to the fomenting properties engendered by the act of gathering together in this type of creative cooperation: “Men seek each other’s company and assemble together more often. The general effervescence results which [sic] characterizes revolutionary or creative epochs” (231).² Furthermore, the emphasis that Gault and Millau place on communal goals and partnerships (ils [...] ne se jalourent pas, se repassent des recettes, des idées, [...] et même des clients”) suggests that an initial assumption of *égalité*, perhaps as much as “amitié,” is a crucial factor in the successful expansion of their culinary style. Referring back to Essarts, he argues that, contrary to the Girondins who were occasionally set back by jealousies and power struggles, the Dantonists experienced the “puissance d’expansion” (925) because of an equal and open exchange between

² Durkheim’s elaboration of the term *effervescence* appears in an exploration of religion—its function, its rituals, and, among other things, how the sacred is socially determined. The term is, however, particularly appropriate to a discussion of revolutions given his own application of the term to explore particular aspects of the French Revolution. His notion of effervescence and religion with regard to the French Revolution has been extended and advanced by numerous scholars. Lynn Hunt, for example in “The Sacred and the French in the Revolution” notes that, “The history of the French Revolution shows that the sacred did indeed have a critical social dimension. The new society tried to set itself up ‘as a god’ through new rituals (federations, festivals), a new relationship between the individual and the community (embodied in various oaths), and new symbolic representations (liberty trees, Liberty, Hercules, among many others). A Durkheimian perspective has proved essential to understanding the sacralizing project underlying these diverse and sometimes peculiar phenomena” (87).

Danton and the Dantonists, where, unassailed by jealousy, each was willing to give everything for the other. Because there was no prior tradition of chefs sharing in this way and because it signaled a revolutionary solidarity, the inclusion of this *amitié/égalité* commandment with its description of chefs so willing to share equally and openly goes a long way to demonstrating (in language that parallels previous articulations of revolutionary successes) a rupture with the past that would be significant enough to be recognized as “new.”

Despite the emphasis on an egalitarian camaraderie amongst the chefs, they are nonetheless described as “nos nouveaux dieux.” This characterization is somewhat diminished by the fact that, a few lines earlier, Gault and Millau refer to themselves as the “*deus ex machina*” for having identified and outlined the Nouvelle Cuisine formula. But lest readers think that Gault and Millau are claiming a share of the power or authority accorded the new chefs, they insist that they are merely chronicling, not creating, this movement, and they point to a leadership that is already in place:

Ce n'est pas nous, piètres cuisiniers, qui inventons et décrétons ces dix commandements. Nous ne faisons que préciser les contours d'une cuisine mise au point par la nouvelle école des chefs français qui s'appellent, [Paul] Bocuse, [Jean et Pierre] Troisgros, [Paul] Haeberlin, [Claude] Peyrot, [Christian] Denis, [Michel] Guérard, [Jacques] Manière, [François] Minot, [Alain] Chapel, etc... et à d'autres titres, Girard, [Alain] Senderens, [Raymond] Oliver, [Jean et Paul] Minchelli, [Charles] Barrier, [Roger] Vergé, [Jean] Delaveyne, etc... (67).

Of the sixteen chefs anointed here, it is Paul Bocuse and Michel Guérard whose names are the most indelibly linked to the Nouvelle Cuisine phenomenon. According to Alexandre Lazareff, journalist and former director of the Conseil national des arts culinaires (CNAC), it may have been Gault and Millau who coined the term Nouvelle

Cuisine, but “tout s’est ensuite organisé sous l’autorité de Paul Bocuse” (36-37).

Furthermore, Gault and Millau claim to have “discovered” Nouvelle Cuisine while having lunch at Paul Bocuse’s restaurant, a story long ensconced in the pantheon of culinary lore:

Nous voulons quelque chose de léger... Alors Paul Bocuse nous servit une simple salade de haricots verts accompagnés de tomates. Une splendeur, l’odeur du jardin, une saveur inoubliable. Ensuite, il apporta des rougets de roche, très peu cuits. Là encore nous fumes comblés de parfums oubliés. Nous venions de découvrir la Nouvelle Cuisine. (“La Nouvelle Cuisine, c’est la Grande” 16)³

When the article on “les dix commandements” was published in 1973, Paul Bocuse was a well-established, three-star chef who argued that the lightness described above could be achieved through a less-is-more approach, simple foods prepared simply. His “cuisine du marché” style (La Cuisine du marché is the title of his first signature cookbook) was built on the principle of simply buying the freshest, highest quality ingredients available and letting that determine the menu. His rise to culinary stardom followed a fairly traditional trajectory: he apprenticed with three-star chefs Eugénie Brazier, at her Col de la Luère restaurant, and Fernand Point, at La Pyramide in Vienne; rounded off his culinary training in Paris at Lucas Carton before heading back home to take over from his father; and won the Meilleurs Ouvriers de France (MOF) distinction in 1961. At least a fourth-generation chef, Paul Bocuse was assured a place in the family’s restaurant just outside

³ Though this anecdote is recounted in a 1980 magazine article, the authors mention that Bocuse had not yet received his third star when this lunch occurred. Assuming their memory is accurate, that detail places the famous lunch before 1965, well before the article outlining “les dix commandements,” and, surprisingly, at least four years before the first issue of Le Nouveau Guide Permanent.

Lyon, in Collonges, and though it was he who earned the restaurant's three stars, he did so in a location that had been attracting diners since the nineteenth century and in a town where the Bocuses had been chefs since the eighteenth century.⁴

In contrast to Bocuse, the other face of Nouvelle Cuisine, Michel Guérard, was a young chef searching for a restaurant in 1973. He had earned two stars in 1971, despite flouting convention by opening a small, 30-cover bistro in an obscure Parisian suburb (Le Pot-au Feu in Asnières). His reputation for creative, unexpected meals had exceeded the inconvenience of his location, and the bistro was successful with both critics and fashionable Parisians. But new highway construction and other financial considerations forced him to close the restaurant. Despite early plans to relocate in Paris, Guérard eventually ended up, in 1974, in the restaurant of a hotel and spa owned by his wife's family in Eugénie-les-Bains, another remote location, in southwest France.⁵ His approach to lightness contrasted with Bocuse's in that it required more experimentation with technique, and it did not necessarily spare the chef a complicated preparation on the route to simplicity. For example, La Grande Cuisine minceur, which was published in 1976, promised a new way to diet that would eschew the standard "grillade-haricots verts à l'eau" (11), proposing instead "une ronde allègre de repas de fête pour maigrir" (12). Although recipes like "Turbotin clouté d'anchois à la vapeur de safran" or "Mousseline

⁴ See Le Feu Sacré (2005) by Eve-Marie Zizza-Lalu, a biographical account of the life and career of Paul Bocuse written with his participation.

⁵ Sources for the biographical information on Michel Guérard include JP Gén  's "Michel Gu  rard: L'Empereur de la cuisine minceur," Alain Drouot's Histoire des Culiniers en France, and autobiographical information sent to me by Gu  rard on 22 March 2007.

de grenouilles au cresson de fontaine” were light in calories and simple to digest, a certain complexity of preparation is evidenced by the inclusion in the cookbook of sections with names like “Analyse et principes des liaisons et des sauces.” However, even though Guérard’s style and methods differed markedly from those of Bocuse, his originality and inventiveness nevertheless fit the Nouvelle Cuisine model, and with the huge success of Cuisine Minceur, which was translated into 12 languages, this “inventor of the revolutionary way to cook beautiful French food without the calories”⁶ appeared on the cover of Time magazine and, along with Bocuse, became an international poster boy for Nouvelle Cuisine.⁷

2.2 An Articulation of Newness

Although the term “Nouvelle Cuisine” did not appear as a label until four years after Gault and Millau identified a shift in France’s culinary practices, the expression and articulation of “new” was always foremost in the presentation of what was to become Nouvelle Cuisine. In the first issue of their significantly named Le Nouveau Guide Permanent, Gault and Millau introduced the men who would become Nouvelle Cuisine’s founding chefs as the “jeunes et très grands chefs qui donnent à la cuisine française une vigueur nouvelle” (“Les Six jeunes grands” 5). Even the magazine’s approach to food is

⁶ This attribution appears on the cover of the American edition of his book, entitled Michel Guérard’s Cuisine Minceur, published in New York by William Morrow and Company in 1978.

⁷ The story of Guérard’s Time cover appears in numerous scholarly and journalistic works, but it’s worth noting that he must have been on the cover of a European edition of Time, because the American edition in which his profile appears (Mar 29, 1976) features the release of the film All the President’s Men and uses photographs of Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman on the cover.

new, as we learn in Gault and Millau's inaugural editors' note: the magazine "ne ressemble pas aux autres"; and its mission is something "encore jamais entrepris" ("Suivez le guide" 3). The ambivalent tension of language and its relationship to this culinary movement is apparent from these earliest articulations of newness. First, the chefs credited with bringing about this newness are described as "jeunes" but also "très grands." The emphasis on their youth supports the idea of new by evoking inexperience and freshness, and also effectively situates them *outside* the established order, giving them the room to be revolutionaries. In an almost immediate reversal, however, the insistence on their elevated status and national recognition ("très grands") establishes them as powerful *insiders*, which undercuts the notion of new by implying, at the very least, a continuity with the then culinary status quo. Similarly, the magazine's own insider/outsider duality is clear because its exclusion from "les autres" first requires that we recognize it as a part of the "autres" that it does not resemble. And the expression "encore jamais entrepris" juxtaposes an unborn future ("jamais") with an established past and present ("encore"). Despite the multiple interpretations and tensions that surround the word *new*, food writers and chefs employed the term until it was taken at face value. The rupture in cuisine is realized; and the revolution, once pronounced, is perceived.

It should be noted that, in the case of Nouvelle Cuisine, it was not very difficult to convince a French public that another "new" movement or even another "revolution" was at hand. Under the definition of "nouveau, nouvelle," Le Trésor de la Langue Française gives individual subentries to eleven "new" movements that appeared in the second half of the twentieth century (*nouveau roman, nouvelle philosophie, nouvelle*

histoire, nouvelle histoire économique, nouvelle cuisine, nouvelle droite, nouvelle gauche, nouveau féminisme, nouvelle pauvreté, nouvel ordre, énergies nouvelles). Also mentioned are *nouvelle vague* and *musique nouvelle*. Furthermore, the uprisings and debates associated with May 68 reintroduced the public to a rhetoric of revolution more so than any other event in twentieth-century France.

2.3 In the Wake of May 68

It would be easy then to see Nouvelle Cuisine as either a product of May 68 or as a spin-off of some larger trend in the arts, a culinary version of successful movements like *nouveau roman, nouvelle vague, musique nouvelle*. In one of the few studies that focuses on Nouvelle Cuisine as an identity movement, authors Hayagreeva Rao, Philippe Monin, and Rodolphe Durand suggest a combination of such views. They first define *nouveau roman, nouvelle critique, nouveau théâtre, and nouvelle vague* as “antischools,” claiming that each sought to displace the logic of authority in some way. *Nouveau roman*, for example, tore down expectations about plot and structure; *nouvelle critique* (led by Barthes and Derrida) challenged the centrality of the author and his or her intentions, and so on. For Rao et al., Nouvelle Cuisine is an “echo of these antischools” (804), a

“wavelet” amplified by the larger “antiauthoritarian wave of May 1968” (803).⁸ Their argument posits May 68 as an “initiator movement” whose “master logic” of protest is repeated and diffused in spin-off movements like Nouvelle Cuisine.⁹ Certainly at first glance, Nouvelle Cuisine does offer some compelling parallels to the other “new” movements. Each stressed minimalism and overtly claimed to seek freedom from the established authority. However, even if Nouvelle Cuisine initially bears a broad-strokes resemblance to the master logic of May 68 and its spin-offs, a completely different picture comes into focus when we place Nouvelle Cuisine’s rhetoric of novelty alongside certain claims of newness made in the political realm.

As we have already seen, cuisine often produces a Janus-faced discourse whose messages and meanings are more complicated than they appear. In the case of Nouvelle Cuisine, the discourse of newness may appear to support or line up with the political

⁸The authors credit the use of the term *wavelet* to socio-anthropologist Claude Fischler; however, it should be noted that the term has been translated and recast here to suit the authors’ theoretical model, not Fischler’s. In his book, *L’Honnivore: Le goût, la cuisine et le corps*, Fischler uses the term *vaguelette* in his explanation of changes in haute cuisine at the end of the sixties. He points to a primary *vague de fond* (“amples mouvements sociaux et économiques qui avaient transformé la société française et continuaient de la travailler”) and to smaller *vaguelettes* (“celles que le changement global entraînait indirectement dans les métiers et les marches de la cuisine et de la restauration”). His argument does not posit that, as a *vaguelette*, Nouvelle Cuisine was swept along by an initiator movement as in Rao et al.’s argument. Rather Nouvelle Cuisine takes a much more active, and indeed initiating, role: “la haute gastronomie cristallise et précipite des tendances latentes dans le course central de la société” (239).

⁹ I’m intrigued by the parallels between this formulation of a “master logic” that spawns smaller spin-off movements and Escoffier’s sauce codification that posits “grandes sauces” (also called “sauces mères”) which give birth to “petites sauces.” Further study might investigate the impulse that generates this type of reproductive model. In addition, the gender distinction in the naming of the root or base element highlights a fascinating opposition between the masculine and the feminine, where the “*master logic*” describes cognitive or epistemological concerns and the category “sauces mères” describes nutritive or nurturing elements.

philosophies of May 68, but it may also be an appropriation of a discourse belonging to either a dominant or potentially threatening force. To quickly review, May 68 was more than an attack on Charles de Gaulle's government, it was a revolt against a much larger national ideology built around France's conservative, bourgeois, Catholic values. The youth, the working class, and women were trying to wrest power from the conservative elite, challenging traditional views on family, religion, class, gender, and more. Yet for all that collaborative protest, many liberal groups, particularly those directly implicated in the events of May 68 felt that the revolt had failed to dislodge the French from their political complacency: "Les Français ont paru se reposer sur leurs vieux lauriers historiques, non seulement de 1968, mais quasiment de 1957" (Internationale situationniste archives qtd in Dumontier 208).

Indeed, one of the remarkable facts of French political history (and a primary piece of evidence used by those who argue that May 68 was a political failure) is that the apparently massive dissatisfaction with de Gaulle and his party on display in May 68 did not translate into electoral dissatisfaction, at least at the presidential level. Not only did de Gaulle stay in office for a full year after the protests, even though he temporarily fled his country during the May 68 crisis, but France elected two more conservative presidents in consecutive elections after him.¹⁰ According to Maurice Agulhon, neither Pompidou nor Giscard offered any real political change. He describes Pompidou's presidency as

¹⁰ It's worth noting that during the same time period, the United States also elected a conservative president (Richard Nixon) to consecutive terms (1968 and 1972) amidst a similar backdrop of political protest and social change.

“gaullisme sans de Gaulle,” and goes on to say that Giscard was no less conservative than de Gaulle or Pompidou despite his relative youth and practiced air of relaxed modernity (384). Just holding onto power in their own country after May 68 was a large enough task for two Gaullist politicians,¹¹ but they also had much greater aspirations to modernize France and reassert the nation’s economic and cultural strength on the world stage.

How in the wake of massive political demonstrations did the conservative right maintain political control of the highest elected office? Of course that is a complicated question that I will not be able to fully address here, but one strategy in particular that contributed to their success is worth looking at. Historian Tony Judt has remarked that there exists in France “a social arrangement where a new secular ruling class availed itself of the former language of opposition to secure its own status against the claims of the revolutionary class below” (232). In keeping with this strategy of power, we see that in order to allay the threats to the government waged by the riots and protests of May 68, both Pompidou and Giscard adopted the revolutionary rhetoric, if not the actual politics, of the protestors. Specifically, they launched their own version of a “new” movement. Pompidou appointed the popular Jacques Chaban-Delmas as his Prime Minister and put him in charge of dealing with the social problems facing the country. Chaban-Delmas critiqued what he referred to as a “société bloquée” and called for a “nouvelle société”:

¹¹ Though originally part of the Gaullist party, Giscard founded and presided over another conservative party, the FNRI (National Federation of Independent Republicans), in 1966.

Le nouveau levain de jeunesse, de création, d'invention qui secoue notre vieille société peut faire lever la pâte de formes nouvelles plus riches de démocratie et de participation, dans tous les organismes sociaux comme dans un Etat assoupli, décentralisé. Nous pouvons donc entreprendre de construire une nouvelle société. Cette nouvelle société, quant à moi, je la vois comme une société prospère, jeune, généreuse et libérée. (qtd in Benassaya 65)

This quotation, taken from a 1969 speech, reveals a very nimble and effective appropriation of the May rhetoric and implementation of the “new.” Chaban-Delmas’ new society simultaneously sounds like a capitulation to the *soixante-huitards* but also an advancement of the conservative position. To emphasize a quality of newness, he repeats words like “jeune” and “jeunesse” and places them in positions of stress, bookending his thought with them in almost chiasmic construction. Such emphasis on youth is in obvious recognition of the student population that was so central to the May uprisings. And it also plays into the cult of youth that had started as early as the fifties in France with the likes of Jean Seberg and *les enfants terribles* and continuing on into the sixties with the yéyé girls.¹² Internationally, of course, the unparalleled success of groups like the Beatles testified to the growing importance of a younger generation. The spirit of revolution is in almost excessive evidence in his vision. He repeats the word “new” no fewer than four times in a three-sentence thought, and he calls on themes like democracy, participation, and liberation to further recall revolutionary values. For the intellectual and artistic left, there is the valorization of “création” and “invention;” and for the *ouvriers*, or even the

¹² For an excellent analysis on the importance of youth and the cultural production of gender distinction in France immediately preceding May 1968, see Susan Weiner, *Enfants terribles: youth and femininity in the mass media in France, 1945-1968* (Boston: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

struggling lower classes, he offers the promise of a society that is both “prospère” and “généreuse.”

This quotation also reveals that rhetorical appropriations between culture and politics travel in both directions. If culinary discourse makes frequent use of political imagery and metaphors to assert its weight and significance, here we see food imagery deployed in political discourse to appeal to the French public’s affection for its strength in cuisine. Chaban-Delmas refers to youth, creation, and innovation as a *levain* or leavening agent. He extends the metaphor into his next thought, saying that these qualities will *faire lever la pâte* (make the dough rise) of new forms of democracy. Highlighting the activating effects of youth and creativity on society with such an accessible and demonstrative food comparison seems an effective and positive strategy. But comparing a nation’s democratic forms to a popular though unsubstantial food item—one that’s mostly air and thus prone to crumble and fall—is significantly less inspiring. It is nonetheless perhaps unintentionally appropriate; because, as everyone knows, the pastry/bread metaphor did not serve Marie-Antoinette very well. And when read alongside a separate but similar iteration taken from culinary discourse, Chaban-Delmas’ seemingly innocent food rhetoric sounds its own undoing, much like “Let them eat cake.”

I’d like to compare the formulation of “nouvelle société” to an explanation of Nouvelle Cuisine by one of its founding chefs, Paul Bocuse. In the following excerpt, Bocuse describes Nouvelle Cuisine and defends his own inclusion in the movement by offering an elaboration of his signature dish, “Le Loup de Mer en Croûte.”

Des journalistes viennent me voir, des clients m'interrogent... Ils veulent tout savoir sur ce que l'on appelle la "Nouvelle Cuisine." La "Nouvelle Cuisine," au fond, c'est la vraie cuisine. [...]

L'un des principes de la Nouvelle Cuisine est également qu'il faut laisser aux choses leur propre goût: il s'agit de mettre en valeur la saveur originelle des mets. Dans l'ancienne cuisine, les raisons étaient plus *tape-à-l'oeil* que culinaires. Dans la nouvelle cuisine tout a une raison d'être. Prenons par exemple l'une des "spécialités Bocuse": le loup en croûte farci d'une mousse de homard. Le loup est mis dans la pâte mais on n'est pas obligé de manger la pâte. Elle est là pour garder le fumet du loup. On n'est pas obligé de manger la farce que je mets au milieu non plus... car elle est là pour maintenir une certaine humidité sans laquelle le loup a une tendance à sécher... (Cuisine du Marché 6)

Bocuse, like Chaban-Delmas, has made "la pâte" central to the illustration of his point. In other similarities, he gestures to the excitement and curiosity Nouvelle Cuisine is inciting; he prioritizes the new over the old; he valorizes transparency ("vraie cuisine," "laisser aux choses leur propre goût," "saveur originelle"), innovation ("tout a une raison d'être") and creativity (the self-referential "spécialité Bocuse"). However, the very dish he chooses to represent Nouvelle Cuisine (particularly as concerns the pastry) does more to deflate than to support his point.

The famous dish featured a fish whose flesh was very delicate—*loup* or sea bass. In some variations, a luxurious lobster-mousse stuffing accompanies the fish inside *la pâte* or the puffed-pastry shell. The pastry shell he describes is meticulously crafted to resemble a fish, complete with fins, scales, eyes, and mouth. But his claim that this pastry exemplifies the primacy of *raison d'être* over *tape-à-l'œil*—he says the pastry protects the fragile meat during the cooking process and seals the fish in its own stock—is undone by Bocuse's own recipe for the dish.

2. D'autre part, étendre au rouleau à pâtisserie deux minces abaisses de pâte feuilletée de la longueur du loup. Poser celui-ci sur l'une d'elles, le recouvrir

avec l'autre abaisse de pâte, Pour souder la pâte, appuyer tout autour du poisson de façon à bien *l'enrober* et à *reconstituer parfaitement sa forme initiale*.

3. A l'aide d'un couteau très fin, découper la pâte qui est en trop en laissant un peu de celle-ci pour *simuler* les nageoires. Sur ces nageoires, faire quelques stries en longueur et avec le surplus de pâte *imiter* les ouïes du poisson ainsi que son œil.

4. Après avoir doré la pâte au jaune d'œuf, pour *donner une allure plus ressemblante* au poisson *imiter* également les écailles ; celles-ci peuvent être *reproduites* avec un petit emporte-pièce en forme de demi-lune. Ce *minutieux travail* demande beaucoup de *patience* et une certaine *dextérité*.¹³ (131)

In Bocuse's recipe, three of the four numbered instruction points ("éléments") deal with the elaborate fish ruse (2, 3, 4) and two deal uniquely with this fabrication (3, 4).

Immediately following this section called "Eléments" is a section called "Méthode," written in paragraph form and in which he uses only three brief sentences to indicate his choice of cooking pan, the cooking method, oven temperature, reduction of oven temperature, and an approximate cook time. From the structure of the recipe, the language of the recipe (see italics), the amount of content dedicated to the pastry, and the amount of time, skill and patience required to construct the pastry, it is apparent that the primary focus in this recipe is the pastry. Furthermore, these same elements suggest that contrary to his assertion of what's new about Nouvelle Cuisine, the "tape-à-l'œil" factor remains the primary, though camouflaged, "raison d'être" for this dish. The language in this recipe is overwhelmingly skewed toward dissemblance ("simuler," "imiter," "donner

¹³ The italics are mine.

une allure,” “ressemblante,” “reproduites”), all of which undo or seriously diminish his strong claims of simplicity and authenticity.

In addition to the language, the complex preparation and elaborate simulation also seem to contradict such primary tenets of Nouvelle Cuisine as simplicity, transparency and honesty. Although this theatrical contrivance does serve to reassure the diner that he has ordered fish, the outer “fish” is nonetheless nothing more than a puffed pastry creating a “new” fish while hiding or disguising the skinned and fragile fish inside. His language performs the same feat: creating an image of new culinary practices and philosophies, which disguises the adherence to traditional practices, values, and ideals. Consequently, it is both a literal as well as linguistic repackaging of the classic or *ancienne* cuisine he seeks to distance himself from. Unlike Rao et al., who see Nouvelle Cuisine as an anti-authority, revolutionary wavelet of May 68, I propose a scenario that more closely lines up with Judt’s theory that the French have historically protected their power by appropriating the opposition’s language to serve up their own agenda. Though there may be overlaps in the language of Nouvelle Cuisine and other wavelets of May 68, applying Judt’s theory to the culinary discourse suggests that the success and packaging of Nouvelle Cuisine more closely resembles the conservative right’s reaction to May 68, led by leaders such as Pompidou and Giscard, than the iconoclastic impulses that actually prompted the events of May 68.

2.4 A Nouvelle Cuisine for a Nouvelle Société

Throughout the sixties and into the seventies, political actors on both the left and the right employed language of the “new” to create a favorable image of a strong French

republic for their agenda. But how much of Pompidou's policies and attempts to shape France followed or supported his government's revolutionary and democratic rhetoric? According to Michel Winock, Pompidou's "nouvelle société" (like Bocuse's *loup en croûte*) was an appealing but carefully simulated version of reality. Winock argues that rather than fulfilling its promise of change and liberating reforms, "nouvelle société" was instead an "illusion passagère" (528). Pompidou may have launched his "nouvelle société" with reformist Chaban-Delmas and a liberatory rhetoric, but Winock maintains that such language disguised a much less liberating sort of reform. It is true that Chaban-Delmas, with his vast network of political alliances and his willingness to work with the opposition (he appointed several people to his ministry from opposing political parties—including eventual socialist Jacques Delors), helped enact some basic social reforms, such as enhanced rights for married women and children, and the implementation of monthly pay for hourly workers. However, politically, France was building an identity based on limiting democracy not enhancing it. In 1970, the "anti-casseurs" law made it easier for the police to charge and prosecute demonstrators by holding them responsible for damages committed during rallies. In 1971, the government tried to expand that prosecutorial power even more by limiting one's right of "association," but that effort was blocked by the Conseil constitutionnel, a group that oversees the constitutionality of laws (Agulhon 378). By 1972, Pompidou's posture and promises of reform began to crumble away. This shift was signaled rather dramatically by his surprise firing of Chaban-Delmas. To the now vacant position of Prime Minister, Pompidou appointed loyal Gaullist Pierre Messmer, a man known more for his military and colonial

experience than his political acumen.¹⁴ Given Messmer's military background, it is perhaps not surprising that Pompidou's government moved toward a much more top-down conception of power: "Pompidou et Messmer sont en parfait accord sur la Constitution: le pouvoir est et doit rester à l'Élysée. C'est le président de la République qui impulse la politique générale de la France; le Premier Ministre, lui, la met en oeuvre" (Winock 528). It was this appointment, according to Winock, that put paid to the promise of a "nouvelle société" that Pompidou and the majority government had used to seduce the country. In fact, once the more conservative Messmer was at the helm, the government even overturned some of the liberalizing reforms that Chaban-Delmas had helped push through (Sa'adah 138). With the effective disruptions of May 68 still fresh in the public's mind, and the future of the Gaullist party insecure after de Gaulle's resignation, Pompidou minimized the threat to the conservative government by using discourse, specifically the language of the "new" to project a desirable but created (non-conservative) version of reality:

Face à une contestation purement négative, à un conservatisme condamné d'avance à l'échec, c'est par l'action et le mouvement que peut se construire l'avenir. Il ne suffit pas de restaurer cette vieille et illustre maison qu'est la France, il faut encore la rénover et l'éclairer de nouvelles lumières. (Pompidou quoted in Benassaya 65)

¹⁴ Messmer's loyalty appears to have contributed to a knack for benefiting from the removal of his predecessors. In 1960, after the Week of Barricades in Algeria resulted in the firing, reassignment or resignation of many of de Gaulle's top military brass, Messmer was promoted from reserve officer to Minister of the Armies. According to historian John Talbott in *The War Without a Name*, the previous minister Pierre Guillaumat resigned when the barricades crisis made it clear that his loyalties were divided between de Gaulle and "his sympathy for his soldiers" (161).

All the while, however, he was tightening not loosening the reins on social control and harnessing an even greater degree of power in the office of the president. And like Bocuse, whose “vraie cuisine” recipe is peppered with words like “imiter” and “simuler,” Pompidou’s call to action is marred by linguistic slippages. His reference to “nouvelle lumières” is certainly intended as a nod to the Lumières and the Revolution, and his claim to have abandoned the “conservatisme condamné” performs a sort of verbal acquiescence to or acknowledgment of the discontents of May 68. However, his use of “restaurer” and “rénover” undercuts the surface meaning of his sentence, showing that the action, or verbs, of his agenda are more attuned to Restoration than Revolution.

Pompidou’s call to overhaul the “vieille maison” of France brings us to a particularly instructive intersection in political and culinary discursive strategy. Gault and Millau also raised the alarm that the “old” Michelin Guide was ignoring all but the stodgy, conservative restaurants, and suggested that the real future of French cuisine lay not just in the hands of the young, new chefs but also in the expertise of the new critics (themselves) who could identify and explain this new cuisine to a new French public whose tastes and purchasing habits had changed radically after WWII.¹⁵ The new Gault-Millau magazine and their guidebooks were primary tools in the movement to renovate classical French cuisine. Only in this case, the “vieille maison” is the restaurant industry and many of those associated with it, from guidebook authors to critics to chefs to

¹⁵ This stated project to act as experts qualified to educate the public about new food preparations and practices is remarkably similar to Grimod de la Reynière’s early nineteenth-century undertaking with his Almanach des Gourmands, as has been noted by historian Michael Garval.

maîtres d'hôtels. The initial title of the magazine Le Nouveau Guide Permanent illustrates how the practice of appropriating revolutionary language can often reveal an unintentional incommensurability about the project. In retrospect, the juxtaposition of “new” and “permanent” sounds an obvious dissonance: how can something that is permanent—which suggests long-lasting, stable durability—also be new? Conversely, how can something stay “new” in perpetuity? Ironically, the self-contradictory nomenclature of the title actually sums up one of the foundational problems not only with *Nouvelle Cuisine* but all manner of “new” movements: that which claims to be new or revolutionary is either already or eventually becomes indistinguishable from that which was established or overthrown. But given the title’s short duration (the magazine changed its name to Le Nouveau Guide after less than a year), it seems the authors or editors became aware of the problems raised by the title.

In its most banal formulation Le Nouveau Guide Permanent announced the arrival of a new guide that would appear in regular monthly intervals. (In French the word *permanent* can refer to something that recurs with a set frequency, like the word “standing” in a standing appointment.) In addition, and perhaps more important, the *new* permanent guide implied the replacement of an *old* permanent guide, which, for readers at the time, was an obvious allusion to Michelin, even though the red guide was published only once annually and in an entirely different format. Nonetheless, the magazine’s first cover trumpeted, “Michelin, n’ignorez plus ces 74 étoiles!,” making it clear that the authors were staging a coup in this post-68 society where establishments were ripe for toppling. The first sentence in the cover story begins the important work of

creating the idea that Michelin is indeed “la vieille maison” that needs replacing: “Le Guide Michelin est une institution” (7). This seemingly innocent sentence is actually quite important, because in order to assert themselves as new and revolutionary, the authors must first create an old and entrenched establishment to overthrow.

Despite the fact that Michelin’s 3-stars designation for restaurants had only been around for 36 years, or that the guide originally came about in the early 1900s as a surprisingly modern (and clever) publicity gimmick for Michelin’s tire sales, the Nouveau Guide Permanent authors wanted to ensure that the Michelin guide appeared old and overly conservative, emphasizing values like snobbery, caution, and a lack of imagination:

Né avec le siècle, le Guide Michelin a un âge vénérable. Aux découvertes, il préfère la sécurité. Cet excès de sagesse laisse dans l’ombre un certain nombre de restaurants, à Paris et en province, qui mériteraient mieux qu’une banale paire de fourchettes, quand ce n’est pas un silence absolu (7).

With comments like “Aux découvertes, il préfère la sécurité,” Gault and Millau define an agenda for Nouvelle Cuisine that is committed to newness, to discovery, to invention. The impression is that theirs is a revolution of *uncovering*, not hiding “dans l’ombre.” This is another reason why it is so curious that Bocuse and his *loup en croûte* recipe (which both covers and protects the fish) become the hallmark chef and dish of Nouvelle Cuisine. The reality doesn’t match the language.

Furthermore, by using language like “venerable” to describe the Michelin guide, Gault and Millau created an image that only *appeared* to reproduce the anti-authority, revolutionary esprit that characterized the artistic and political movements of the sixties. Like Chaban-Delmas and Pompidou, Gault and Millau picked up on the rhetoric of May

68 and the “new” movements and sprinkled their magazine with opportunities for their readers to break down barriers, challenge authority, and find themselves on equal footing, in situations where they would have felt shunned before. In a column called “On conteste dans le rang,” the authors urge the readers to challenge the high-brow establishments, not to feel overawed by them. They want the readers to share stories about the snobberies, failures, or pretensions of the top restaurants, giving examples like the *maître d’hôtel* at Bofinger who rebuffed a client for his insufficient order, saying the price of such a small meal wouldn’t even cover the laundry expenses for the tablecloth. Gault and Millau defended the practice of denouncing members of the restaurant aristocracy by dressing it up as a patriotic duty, calling the restaurants “les monuments nationaux que sont nos grands hôtels et nos grands restaurants méritent d’être sauvés par tous les moyens” (“On Conteste dans les rangs” 81). Challenging the established order and calling for more equality becomes a way not just to restore but to save France’s “monuments” and sounds very much like the mission of “nouvelle société” as laid out by Pompidou. Like the conservative government that uses liberal language to promote its own agenda, Gault and Millau want to have it both ways. On the one hand they say they want readers to publicly decry snobbishness, exclusivity, degrading service, or lapses in quality among *les grands restaurants*. But, at the same time, they say those same restaurants are national monuments that need to be restored and brought back to their original glory, a move that would reinforce old inequalities, hierarchies, and even cooking styles, sounding more like culinary restoration than revolution.

2.5 La Bande à Bocuse versus Madame Saint-Ange: The Making of Revolutionary Heroes

Despite the aforementioned contradictions, both Le Nouveau guide and the democratizing cuisine it introduced seduced the French public with the highly valorized tradition of revolution, both rhetorically and practically. As we have just seen, the movement asserts itself as a challenge to the culinary status quo. And just as the government reached out to the youth or *nouvelle génération* to sell their “nouvelle société,” images of La Bande à Bocuse as a group of pranksters and free-wheeling rebels make it seem like the young chefs had more in common with cool, new rock bands than with buttoned-down rule-makers like Escoffier. In reality, however, the chefs that became the faces of Nouvelle Cuisine, though young, were already well established in the industry. A 1973 article on L’Association de la Grande Cuisine Française, (GCF) describes the Bande à Bocuse nickname and the group of chefs in a way that completely reverses any implication that they could be considered either outsiders or bad-boy rebels of the culinary industry:

La Bande à Bocuse? Oui, c’est ainsi que, pour rire, on surnomme une très sérieuse association, qui, sous la présidence du cuisinier le plus photographié du monde, réunit onze vieux amis [...] Quand elle se met à table, cela vaut le coup d’œil. On se croirait entré à l’Olympe des cuisiniers. (“La Bande” 87)

Far from operating in the “silence absolu” described in an earlier citation, Bocuse is characterized as the most photographed chef in the world. Similarly, of the twelve chefs mentioned in the article—identified once more as “amis”—eight already held three Michelin stars and three others received their third star within five years of the article. Or seen from a slightly different perspective, in 1972, there were only twelve Michelin

three-star restaurants in all of France. Eight chefs representing seven of those restaurants are members of the GCF. If the Bande à Bocuse account for nearly 75% of the chefs who make up the established culinary elite, how exactly are they able to rebel against the establishment and institute a discourse of newness?

Just as Gault and Millau asserted their magazine's revolutionary status by setting up Michelin as a straw-man traditional establishment to overthrow, they developed the chefs' claim to newness by identifying classic, canonical entities in the culinary world and then defining the Nouvelle Cuisine chefs in opposition to them. For example, in "Vive la Nouvelle Cuisine Française," Gault and Millau identify Curnonsky ("Le Prince élu des gastronomes" and "porte-voix de la cuisine de l'avant-guerre) and Mme Saint-Ange ("parangon des vertus bourgeoises dont La Bonne cuisine continue de passer aujourd'hui pour un bon livre") as the reigning culinary powers who need to step down and join the likes of Brillat-Savarin and Carême on the sidelines: "Notre but n'est donc pas de précipiter Curnonsky à bas de son socle, mais de prier ce gros monsieur farceur d'en descendre gentiment et d'aller s'asseoir dans les rangs, avec ses camarades Brillat-Savarin, Carême, et autres beaux parleurs" (67). Considerably less effort is spent feigning respect for Mme Saint-Ange or her cookbook:

Attentive à nous décrire par le menu les gelées de viandes, les roux et les sauces blanches, elle règle en quelques lignes le sort du court-bouillon, bon, nous dit-elle, pour tout poisson dont la fraîcheur est douteuse. Peut-on écrire une aussi colossale bêtise. Il faut dire que les temps de cuisson indiqués, dans ce livre, comme dans les autres d'ailleurs, sont tels que, frais ou non, le poisson était transformé en papier mâché. (67)

Here, her book, her competence, and her intelligence are unequivocally maligned, with no grudging acknowledgement of her contributions as was the case with Curnonsky.

Specifically, her “colossale bêtise” of suggesting a court-bouillon for fish that wasn’t at its freshest goes against the commandment of buying and using only fresh ingredients. Additionally, either her taste is too pedestrian to notice or her recipes are so poorly written that the fish in question would be cooked to mush according to her specifications. Remember that reducing cook times is the very first commandment of Nouvelle Cuisine, so certainly this criticism of Mme Saint-Ange sets her up as the antithesis of the modern cooks.

But the attempt to cast Mme Saint-Ange and Curnonsky as forces of power in French cuisine is disingenuous, not only because neither of these figures had been active in cuisine for many, many years, but also because neither of them were haute cuisine chefs. Saint-Ange intentionally made no claims to Escoffier-style cuisine, highlighting instead her cuisine bourgeoise (by then *cuisine de femme*) background. Similarly, Curnonsky, despite his enormous fame as a food critic, supplied no basis for comparison with the haute cuisine chefs, apart from his avid championing of women chefs who practiced the detested *cuisine de femme*, such as Eugénie Brazier, Marie Bourgeois, Paulette Blanc, and other women chefs who prepared simple classic food in small homey restaurants. It would appear then that classic bourgeois cooking becomes the “old” to be overthrown in this revolution. Interestingly, this choice represents a fairly significant departure from the formula of the 1789 Revolution, which, as historian Lynn Hunt has noted, established itself by killing the “father.” An attack on the “fathers” is decidedly absent from the Nouvelle Cuisine manifesto, whether in the form of Escoffier, or the chefs’ mentors, and certainly no attack can be launched against the reigning culinary

aristocracy, composed as it is by these very same new chefs. It is important to acknowledge, however, that even though it was tacit, a strike against Escoffier was very much in evidence. The Ten Commandments of Nouvelle Cuisine are often in conflict with Escoffier's methods, but the chefs and the critics go to great lengths to mediate their implied criticisms with praise and gratitude, thus absolving him from blame for cuisine's stagnation and situating it instead on *cuisine de femme*.

Of particular importance to the establishment of Nouvelle Cuisine's discourse of newness is the defining and promotion of its cooking styles in opposition to a recognizable "old" style: "Ce problème du temps de cuisson va d'ailleurs nous permettre d'aborder le fond du problème et de tirer les traits qui séparent la vieille de la nouvelle cuisine française" (67). As stated above, the recipes in Mme Saint-Ange's cookbook serve to prove that the horrors of the "old" style must be replaced. That such a harangue is the rhetorical labor of a constructed opposition instead of a genuine, informed criticism becomes clear when one compares her actual recipes to the Nouvelle Cuisine chefs' recipes. Because fish is the example given here, and because Bocuse's *rougets* were part of the menu that inspired Gault and Millau's discovery of Nouvelle Cuisine, I have selected a *rouget* recipe from each to compare:

Mme Saint-Ange: Poser sur feu doux, non couvert. Surveiller la prise d'ébullition et, aux premiers symptômes, retirer immédiatement le plat sur le côté du fourneau. Couvrir et tenir le liquide assez chaud que possible *sans ébullition*. [...] Compter 10 minutes de pochage à partir du moment où le plat est retiré sur le côté du fourneau." (354)

Bocuse: Préparer un court-bouillon avec les ingrédients ci-dessus que vous faites bouillir un quart d'heure. Mettre les rougets dans la casserole, amener à ébullition et retirer du feu immédiatement en laissant pocher un quart d'heure. (138)

Despite the complaints about Mme Saint-Ange's court-bouillon, both Mme Saint-Ange and Bocuse feature preparations that use a court-bouillon to poach their *rouget*.

Furthermore, the cook time of her fish, which is a major factor in establishing her style as outmoded and inedible (turning her fish into "papier mâché") is in fact five minutes *less* than the cook time proposed by Bocuse.

Mme Saint-Ange is also used to represent a cooking style that fails to prioritize freshness, yet in her recipe for green beans, another of the transformative foods served to Gault and Millau the day they discovered Nouvelle Cuisine, she not only emphasizes freshness but requires it. "Leur fraîcheur est une condition première" (938). Furthermore it was the *al dente* texture of Bocuse's green beans that set off the revolutionary fireworks for Gault and Millau. The importance of this slightly undercooked bean in the establishment of originality and newness is demonstrated by the frequency of its appearance in the discourse: it is catalogued in the anecdote about discovering Nouvelle Cuisine, in the "dix commandements" article, and in most every subsequent explanation of Nouvelle Cuisine. In "Le Savoir-Manger en 1975," an article in Le Nouveau Guide, the authors report that,

Inaugurée par Paul Bocuse, avec ses haricots verts "al dente," souples, légèrement croquants et infiniment plus savoureux que ces espèces de nouilles vertes ferrugineuses auxquelles étaient habitués nos grands-parents, la mode des légumes peu cuits déferle sur la France. (65)

Clearly, this ever-so-slightly crunchy green bean becomes an emblem for how Nouvelle Cuisine distinguishes itself from the *cuisine de femme* of "nos grands-parents." It may, therefore, be quite surprising to the readers of these articles to discover that not only did Mme Saint-Ange demand that only the freshest green beans be used but her

recommended cook time for green beans is exactly the same as that of Bocuse (Mme Saint-Ange 938-939, Bocuse 350). However, because she herself advises readers that the quality of bean may necessitate an adjustment of this cook time, one might be inclined to surmise that perhaps, given his access to the highest quality of bean, Bocuse's fifteen minutes may not produce the same result as Mme Saint-Ange's fifteen minutes, and that his bean would be crunchy while hers would be soft like a noodle. That surmise, logical though it may appear in light of the claims of Nouvelle Cuisine, would be incorrect. In fact, Mme Saint-Ange describes the ideal *cuisson* of a green bean as follows: "Notez que les haricots verts doivent toujours être un peu fermes, presque croquants sous la dent, toutefois sans exagération" (938-939). The discovery of such a bold misrepresentation is almost shocking, but the goal here is not to prove that Nouvelle Cuisine was not new. Instead, what interests me about the perpetuation of the green-bean myth is not so much that it wasn't new but that it was appropriated from the very source that it is then used to aggressively discredit.

2.6 If You Build It, They Will Come

Another reason it is unproductive to interpret the green-bean myth as evidence of a lack of newness in Nouvelle Cuisine is that for all the potential misrepresentations and linguistic slippages (between, for example, "new" and "established" or "insider" and "outsider") evident in the movement's claims, Nouvelle Cuisine really did usher in a time of tangible and significant change in French cuisine. By articulating what was *supposed* to be new about Nouvelle Cuisine, the critics and practitioners of Nouvelle Cuisine were able to create, if nothing else, a written record of the new model to be packaged for

émulation and *rayonnement*. Eventually, the innovations and revolts catalogued in the culinary discourse were also visible in culinary practice, with results that, according to critics, ranged from the ridiculous to the sublime. For example, despite the misrepresentation of newness that is suggested by the fish recipes in the Mme Saint-Ange and Paul Bocuse cookbooks, prescribed cook times for fish really did change dramatically in the seventies. The Minchelli brothers at Le Duc shocked and challenged the public with not just “undercooked” but raw seafood preparations.

Le chef Paul Minchelli, dans le restaurant de son frère Jean (Le Duc), a imposé la mode des produits de la mer crus: daurade, thon, saumon, coquilles Saint-Jacques, servis en fines lamelles, sans aucune macération, bien salés et poivrés avec un filet d’huile d’olive [...] Rien n’empêche d’inventer dans ce domaine qui fait découvrir le poisson et les crustacés sous un jour nouveau et exquis, contre lequel les interdits et les dégoûts ne résistent pas longtemps. (“Le Savoir-manger” 62)

In the quotation above, the appearance of raw fish is “new” enough to prompt the authors to expect “les interdits et les dégoûts.” It is difficult, today, with “sushi” so culinarily normalized that it exists in fast-food form, to imagine how outrageous raw or even *rose à l’arête* fish would have been to a 1960s and 1970s French public. But remarking on the Troisgros brothers successful transformation of their “Saumon à l’oseille” into a “véritable monument national,” Benedict Beaugé described the *cuisson* as “très rose à l’intérieur, quasi ‘saignant’” (Aventures 100) and went on to express his surprise that such a style caught on with the French public: “Mais comment, au début des années 60, faire admettre une telle cuisson à des clients qui ne supportent le poisson que surcuit?” (Aventures 100). An article in the 1968 issue of *Les Annales*, entitled “L’Europe à table,” confirms Beaugé’s impression. While discussing the wide variety of culinary practices in

Europe, the author refers to the apparent passion that the Scandinavians and Dutch demonstrate for eating raw herring or other undercooked fish. By comparison he notes, for the French, “il est évident que le mot ‘cru’ éveille en nous de vagues réminiscences de vie rude et misérable, à la façon des Eskimos [...] Pour ceux qui n’y ont pas été initiés, l’idée de dévorer du poisson cru soulève le cœur” (Moulin 36).

Other “real” changes also supported Nouvelle Cuisine’s claim that it liberated the chef from the tyranny of the restaurateur and of the attendant expectations of uniformity in the dining experience. Much was made of the chef’s new freedom to write his own menus, create his own dishes, or even reimagine the very vocabulary used to describe each course. A hallmark of Nouvelle Cuisine was the surprise factor of the menus. No longer fettered by the once rigid set of rules, the chefs of Nouvelle Cuisine would stray from customary appetizer, entrée, dessert terminology and ingredient choice and mix them up in new or shocking ways. In Alain Chapel’s La Cuisine, c’est beaucoup plus que des recettes, he includes a “millefeuille d’épinards” and a “charlotte d’asperges vertes” “millefeuille” and “charlotte” are words typically reserved for desserts, but here they’re dressing up vegetables.

While it is certainly noteworthy that one of the changes on the menu involves linguistic appropriation—using old terms to mean new things—vocabulary isn’t the only thing that migrates. Vegetables and fruits, once assigned a fixed place in the meal-time regiment (Flandrin), also began to move from course to course in ways that were both new and destabilizing for diners accustomed to rigidly consistent preparations. In Chapel’s cookbook, tomatoes and cucumbers find their way into the dessert category as

featured ingredients in “Yaourt aux concombres” and “Confiture de tomates vertes Alain Chapel.” And although both these dishes have familiar, foreign antecedents in the form of raita or fried green tomatoes, reconceiving them as desserts demonstrates the intentional irreverence for the familiar that Nouvelle Cuisine inspired, a trait that has even become part of the official definition of Nouvelle Cuisine, as seen here in the Larousse

Gastronomique:

Food offered by the 'new cooks' includes crisp vegetables, resplendent in their natural colors, and elegantly trimmed, flanking thinly sliced meat; airy mousses accompany pink and firm fish; while vegetable purées become the stars of the culinary repertoire. Astonished gourmets scan their menus and find *gigot* applied to fish, not mutton; *darne* to meat, not salmon. They may also find gruels, rare produce, compotes not of fruit but of vegetables, and perhaps even soups as dessert. (Larousse Gastronomique 2001: 802)¹⁶

Language play and surprising ingredient combinations on the menu were such a hallmark of Nouvelle Cuisine that eventually it became the subject of cartoons and other parodies of the new culinary style. Here, a poem by Alain Chevrier, taken from one of his “Menus contraints” creates a set of choices that should sound preposterous, but part of the poem’s humor lies in the fact that these so-called absurdities may not actually look out of place on a Nouvelle Cuisine menu:

¹⁶ I have chosen to cite the English version of the Larousse Gastronomique to emphasize how immediately obvious these language distortions would be to a French audience. In the English translation, the author takes care to point out, for example, that while a diner might see the term *gigot* applied to fish, it was ordinarily applied to mutton. In the French version, familiarity with the typical culinary linguistic pairing is taken so for granted that the entry merely states that diners might find “gigot de poisson” on a menu, with no further explanation of how odd that would seem. (Larousse Gastronomique 1996: 718).

Nouvelle Cuisine

Terrine de petits légumes	<i>ou</i>	jardinière de lapereau
Darne de porc	<i>ou</i>	rôti de morue
Blanquette de langoustines	<i>ou</i>	coulis de veau
Daube de bananas	<i>ou</i>	glace au bœuf
Bavaroise de poivrons rouges	<i>ou</i>	salade de framboises
Soupe de fraises	<i>ou</i>	charlotte aux poireaux
Bûche de saumon	<i>ou</i>	chocolat fumé

(47)

This poem is part of a larger group of poems, or “menus,” all of which follow the Oulipian style of constraints.¹⁷ The poem mocks Nouvelle Cuisine’s claims to innovation, as each of the menu-pairs presents a play on both language and dish placement. In most cases, the choices are between foods that would typically be in different categories (appetizers, main dish, desserts). In addition, the language migrations characteristic of Nouvelle cuisine here are used to create dishes that have been distorted by words that would normally appear with the dish on the other side of the “ou.” So, as with Chapel’s cookbook, we see the unlikely use of the word “charlotte” paired with a vegetable. Or, in the final choice, the immediately familiar linguistic formulation of “bûche de chocolat” is combined with the equally familiar “saumon fumé” to create an

¹⁷ Oulipo, like the Situationnistes before them, show a particular interest in food and the way it interacts with society as well as the way we interact with it individually in our day-to-day lives. The publications of Georges Perec, in particular, demonstrate a heightened awareness of and interest in the meandering role of food. See, for example, *Les Choses. Une histoire des années soixantes* (Paris: Julliard, 1965), *La Vie mode d’emploi* (Paris: Hachette, 1978) and “81 Fiches-cuisine à l’usage des débutants” in *Penser/Classer* (Paris: Hachette, 1985).

especially dissonant choice between the resulting “bûche de saumon *ou* chocolat fumé.”

The success of this poem is twofold. It draws out the similarities between language elements and culinary ingredients, while highlighting the brain’s hesitance to release familiar formulations or combinations from their anticipated co-valence. But it also challenges what constitutes “new,” exploring the line between creativity and the seemingly random reassignment of values.

Another factor that fostered a new sense of liberation among chefs and resulted in verifiable change or newness was new technology. The Robot Coupe (a precursor to the food processor), for example, not only saved enormous amounts of time and energy with its whirling blades, but also enabled chefs to conform ever closer to the articulated and popular goal of “légèreté ” (Poulain and Neirinck 126). Paradoxically, *conforming* to the new formula proposed by Gault and Millau, allowed for a greater freedom to invent, experiment and personalize. Consequently, real change arrives in French culinary practice, and according to food historians Poulain and Neirinck, we cannot ignore these innovations even if the so-called revolutionary call for simplicity and lightness to unmask food’s real flavors has not one but several antecedents dating back to 1691: “Mais à mettre en lumière cette filiation et ce perpétuel retour des idées, on risque de passer à côté du processus d’évolution des goûts et de ne pas voir ce qui est profondément original dans la cuisine contemporaine” (121). This profound originality expressed itself as the chefs embraced the revolutionary esprit that described them. Yet even as they went about flouting the rules of Classical French cooking, they were already establishing an arguably

even more draconian code of their own, complete with a set of rulers and their own Ten Commandments.

2.7 The Polemics of Friendship

Mapping the locus of power and privilege before and after the Nouvelle Cuisine revolution offers one of the most revealing examples of a movement's ability to create a seemingly one-sided or ideologically based reality, while masking a tense, even contradictory understanding of the events and language of the movement. In this case, a primary way that Nouvelle Cuisine asserted or presented its newness was the promotion of *amitié* as the eleventh commandment, particularly its emphasis on the familiar and highly prized Revolutionary value of *égalité*. Much was made about how the Nouvelle Cuisine chefs were "friends" and that rather than compete with one another, these chefs were willing to share the secrets of haute cuisine with one another. In the *avant-propos* to his Cuisine gourmande, Guérard highlights this *amitié* as a major factor to his success:

Vint enfin l'époque bénie des papas-gâteaux, ceux qui m'aidèrent comme leur fils ou leur petit frère, et surent tisser entre nous des liens au ton de complicité empreinte d'amitié sourde, chaude, mûre, et féconde. Ils s'appelèrent d'abord Jean Delaveyne, Paul Bocuse et les frères Troisgros; ils s'appellent aussi "tous les autres"...mes amis. (15)

In this quotation, Guérard expresses that despite his youth, he is eventually treated as an equal. His description of himself relative to the Nouvelle Cuisine chefs moves from "fils" to "petit frère" to "ami." His use of words like "tisser," "liens," "complicité," and "empreinte" emphasizes the unusual strength of the friendship but also suggests a tightness that might have made that equality difficult to access in spite of his all-inclusive "tous les autres."

Another manifestation of the new *égalité* was visible in the shift in the relationship between the chef and diner, such that the chef could leave the kitchen and circulate amongst the diners as an equal. However, here a complicated and somewhat contradictory presentation of this equality between diner and chef emerges where in some instances the narrative is that of the working-class chef finally breaking free of the chains that kept him toiling in the kitchen for his upperclass patrons, and in another version of the articulation of equality between the chefs and the public, it is the all-knowing, powerful chefs who create a new equality by opening a previously restricted world to a larger audience. The first characterization of the servant-like cook breaking free is best exemplified by Paul Bocuse's description of the profession and the changes he claims he enacted: "Chez Maxim's en 1950, on ne connaissait que le chasseur qui était une vedette. Le cuisinier, enfermé, reclus dans son sous-sol enfumé, était aux ordres, et sans réel pouvoir création" (Bocuse qtd in Fischler, Homnivore 259). According to Bocuse biographer Zizza-Lalu, Bocuse changed that dynamic: "Tous les cuisiniers de sa génération le savent, la 'révolution Bocuse' commence par l'abolition de l'esclavage en cuisine" (157). With his *cuisine du marché* style, Bocuse discovered that a new burden of responsibility fell to the chef but so did the chance to establish a creative signature. "En accédant au rang de patron, le cuisinier doit affronter directement le jugement des clients et du monde" (Fischler, Homnivore 259). Bocuse has said many times that encouraging the chefs to leave their kitchens, circulate in the dining room, do their own food shopping, and become their own boss is his proudest contribution to cuisine. (Mesplède

152; Fischler, Homnivore 259; Zizza-Lalu 157). In nearly every account is some formulation of “J’ai fait sortir les cuisiniers de leur cuisine.”

The opposing presentation of the chef-diner dynamic, in which—far from the servant—he is the all-knowing expert, is apparent as early as the first issue of Le Nouveau Guide Permanent. A headline trumpets, “Les ‘six jeunes grands’ des provinces françaises vous livrent leurs secrets” (5) with the promise that “Quel que soit le problème culinaire qui se pose à vous, il vous suffit d’écrire [...]” (5). The notion that anyone could have access to *les grands chefs* is evidenced by the shift in cookbook sales and publishing. Whereas before *Nouvelle Cuisine*, cookbook publications were of a modest number per year and rarely highlighted the work of one chef in particular, *Nouvelle Cuisine* saw a dramatic growth in cookbook sales and popularized the personalized cookbook that displayed not only the chef’s signature style, but also his right to claim that style as his own (Giard et al. 217). The emphasis, however, was not just on the originality of the chef, but also on the fact that his original work was now available to all. Just like the new cuisine that appeared after the Revolution, this incarnation of *Nouvelle Cuisine* staked a large part of its claim to newness on the notion of culinary democratization, or *égalité*. A catalogue search at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France showed that the term “livre de cuisine” produced only five results when limited to books published between 1960 and 1970. By contrast, the same search performed for books published between 1970 and 1980 yields 155 titles. Television cooking shows took this symbolic equality one step further, bringing the chef and his expertise directly into the home of anyone who could afford a television. The appearance of this type of increased accessibility to chefs,

to their food knowledge, and to the practices of haute cuisine is often viewed as proof of the new and increasingly class-blind democratization of French cuisine, and indeed French culture.

One of the most compelling pieces of evidence used to support Nouvelle Cuisine's claim to a new and effervescent *égalité* was the success of chefs with no formal training. Until Nouvelle Cuisine, membership in haute cuisine, like citizenship in nineteenth-century France, was both complicated and conditional, and inclusion required the pursuit of a deeply-grooved path. A chef's "formation" began with an arduous apprenticeship, followed by additional training and increased responsibility at top tables in France, and often internationally as well. Eventually this intense training resulted in recognition or awards that earned a chef the reputation or the capital investment to assume sole command of a restaurant. With its emphasis on *égalité* and its commitment to developing an illusion of culinary creation ex nihilo, Nouvelle Cuisine opened the door for autodidacts to move into the highly exclusive circle of haute cuisine chefs.

Dans ces années 80 commençantes, les institutions mises en place par Henri Gault et Christian Millau, le guide pour la France et leur revue, sont encore solides. Grâce à elles vont surgir quasiment de nulle part des cuisiniers étonnants, pour ne pas dire franchement surprenants certaines fois, autodidactes souvent, ou ayant eu une formation des plus conventionnelles, loin des bruits et des lumières de la scène culinaire. (Beaugé, Aventures 173)

Even in the seventies, food critics were "discovering" chefs who seemed to have come from nowhere—a feat that might have been impossible when the concept of excellence was so tightly enmeshed with training in the culinary industry.

Jacques Manière, for example, became an internationally renowned chef despite having followed a very untraditional path to haute cuisine. Below, Gael Greene, a food

writer for New York Magazine during the heyday of Nouvelle Cuisine, describes Manière's new *cuisine de vapeur* and punctuates his success with the exclamation of his autodidacticism:

Manière came to serious cooking at 40, untrained. He began as an office canteen vendor with just one table for friends. And today, a decade later, he is ranked with France's gastronomic superstars. The house of Pactole is unassuming, though you might suspect something momentous from the pileup of cars parked on the sidewalk outside on Boulevard St. Germain. And Manière can be proud, stubborn – at times, alas, uneven. But when he is good, he is brilliant...as when he takes calf's liver and simply steams it, creating a texture as rich and silken as foie gras. (Greene, "Paris is My Oyster" 72)

Though she makes no explicit mention of it, Greene inadvertently reveals a new challenge, but also a new opportunity for power, that this equality presented to food critics. She emphasizes that Manière was untrained and thus came from a background with no culinary mentor to spread his name around. Furthermore, she comments on the "unassuming" nature of his restaurant, suggesting that great chefs may now loom behind the most innocuous of storefronts. For critics, the emergence of the untrained chef meant that new or "unassuming" restaurants couldn't be ruled out as quickly or as easily as in the past, because no critic wants to pan, or ignore, the next Michel Guérard. It also placed additional pressure on the food writer to genuinely know the business since he couldn't rely on culinary lineage to help him size up a new chef. But this emergence of equality amongst the chefs was also a boon for food writers. Diners would not want to spend their time and money trying out every new or "unassuming" restaurant, so they became increasingly dependent on guides and reviews to perform this culinary triage for them. Greene's review reminds readers that, without her, they might miss out on this brilliant chef, even if they happened to notice the crowd of cars outside. The key to maintaining

readers was not just reporting back with a knowledgeable summary of the fine restaurants; it was also being able to find that diamond in the rough to present to readers before they heard about it somewhere else. In this way, prioritizing equality among chefs created mutually beneficial relationships across the board. It fostered greater respect for the untrained chefs, created increased relevance for food writers, and provided a mostly reliable and steady stream of pre-digested “newness” for the public. In the process, it also effected the seeming removal of one of the more intractable barriers along the path to the profession: gender.

With critics eager to find chefs they could present as the next “discovery,” and with the question of training no longer creating artificial divisions between men and women chefs, women attained a new combination of professional, critical, and commercial success. Previously ignored, often self-taught, female chefs, such as Olympe Nahmias and, later, Ghislaine Arabian, provided a new crop from which to harvest the latest “it” chef, suggesting that women were at last being admitted to the all-boys club. Adding to that impression was the high profile media attention paid to a group of these women, a repetitive and frequent style of promotion that often focused more on the social cachet of their clientele or on certain aspects of their femininity than on their food:

It is impossible to tell from the picture of Dominique "Olympe" Nahmias, chef/proprietor of Restaurant Olympe in Paris, on the cover of her cookbook, showing her from the knees up, if she is wearing the three-inch heels in which it is said she usually cooks. Before I read the book, the shoes were all I remembered knowing about Olympe. Having read the recipes, I will have no trouble remembering her food. (Burros 15)

The cookbook review above makes it clear that, for the reviewer, the most memorable feature of the press coverage on Restaurant Olympe is that its chef cooks in “three-inch

heels.” But even though she adds that “the shoes were all I remembered knowing about Olympe,” it is significant that she nonetheless knew who Olympe was. And despite the obvious sexism inherent in reviews that choose to emphasize a chef’s appearance, the shoes are significant, too, because they represent a major departure from the paradigmatic image of Les Mères.

By essentially transforming the new women chefs into young, sexy “celebrities,” who themselves welcomed celebrities to their restaurants, Nouvelle Cuisine was asserting its newness with a clear break from the past. Olympe became the first woman to receive a Michelin star for a restaurant in Paris, and she received 3 *toques* from Gault and Millau (they used *toques* (chef hats) instead of stars for their rating system). Although women had previously achieved three Michelin stars, Olympe appeared to have broken through an equally significant barrier because her restaurants was considered alongside men’s restaurants as a model of the new style of cuisine. And she was not alone. In 1976, Le Nouveau Guide ran an article “mourning” the demise of the cuisine de femme typified by the grand-mère figure in the kitchen, but also pointed out that with Nouvelle Cuisine some women chefs were determined to break that mold:

Mme Conticini [of Le Parc restaurant in Villemomble] est sans doute la plus intrépide et la plus passionnée de ces rares “nouvelles cuisinières” parisiennes dont l’invention, l’audace et la liberté bousculent cette vision phallogratique qui veut que le grand art culinaire appartienne aux hommes seuls. (“Cuisine de Femme” 12)

By the nineties, Ghislaine Arabian had received two Michelin stars for the restaurant Ledoyen, one of the historical, legendary *grands restaurants* so often referred to as a “monument national.”

So despite the need to distance Nouvelle Cuisine from Mme Saint-Ange and the pre-war cooking of styles of Les Mères, the success of Olympe and others indicated that women would be full participants in the liberating culinary revolution:

[Les] jeunes “femmes chefs” revendiquent à leur tour non seulement cet héritage [the cuisine of Les Mères], mais aussi le droit de l’invention. De sorte que, si l’on peut dire, des noces tardives de l’ancienne cuisinière et du chef académique naît, plein de promesses, un nouveau cuisinier (male ou femelle) voué à la révolution de nos palais. (Fischler, “Les Socrate” xvi)

According to Fischler not only did the movement offer “promesses” of a democratic and gender-neutral cuisine, he even indicated that the marriage between these cuisines held to be either traditionally male or traditionally female was “tardive.” It seemed then that this revolution sought to topple *cuisine de femme* not *les femmes* themselves. With an emphasis on *égalité* and *amitié*, the discourse insisted that the new cadre of liberated chefs had ousted France’s old culinary regime and created new democratic systems of training, leadership, and membership to accompany the revolution in the plate.

2.8 Une Démocratisation en Déconfiture

Surprisingly, even detractors of Nouvelle Cuisine admit to the appearance of a new democratization in cuisine (albeit with scorn) as well as to an indissociable link between cuisine and national identity:

Il n’y a pas d’ancienne et de nouvelle cuisine, dit-on quelquefois, mais simplement la bonne et la mauvaise cuisine. C’est juste. On pourrait cependant distinguer aussi la cuisine du quotidien et la cuisine “de luxe.” J’aime mieux cette expression que “grande cuisine,” l’autre n’étant nullement petit! C’est cette cuisine de luxe qui, comme le mode, la haute couture, les artisanats d’art, est le meilleur agent de relations publique d’un peuple. Eh bien! Si la cuisine du quotidien n’est hélas pas brillante, cette cuisine de luxe est, elle, en pleine

déconfiture...J'allais dire en pleine démocratisation, ce qui est la même chose!
(Courtine, "Faisons L'Europe des Casserole" 81)

Le Monde food critic Robert Courtine's assessment that *démocratisation* and *déconfiture* are one and the same is by itself an indication of the degree to which one can't separate politics from culture (or for that matter, cuisine, as his clever choice of the word "déconfiture" implies). His negative opinion of democratization is a reference to the largely unpopular attempt by the government, during the seventies, to drum up French support to move toward a more centralized, democratic European state. He attributes both the mediocrity he perceives in French cuisine and the weakening of the French nation he imagines will occur in a united Europe to the equalizing factor of democracy. With his elision of culinary and national domains, he makes the case that cuisine is not just a mirror of nation but a marketing tool for the promotion of national identity.

Even if Courtine sees the democratization of *cuisine de luxe* as a negative and ruinous turn of events for French cuisine, he nonetheless affirms that the image of the moment was that Nouvelle Cuisine encouraged egalitarian practices. This image of new equality around Nouvelle Cuisine persisted despite the fact that only precious few could afford to eat a meal at any of the temples of gastronomy. In addition, the already high cost of haute cuisine soared to unprecedented levels under Nouvelle Cuisine, while portion sizes and calorie counts decreased dramatically. Such disparity prompted food writer Philippe Couderc to complain, "Le filet de poisson vendu à 70F la portion avec une petite crotte de purée de légumes vous laisse sur votre faim en même temps qu'il allège le portefeuille" (51). The reasons he gives for the public's acceptance of Nouvelle

Cuisine's high costs with empty plates, however, challenges this notion of a democratic culinary revolution: he calls Nouvelle Cuisine chefs "les jeunes loups de la Nouvelle Cuisine" (53) and cites "le vedettariat de certains d'entre eux" (50) and "l'engouement et même la résignation moutonnaire de trop de leurs clients" (50) as factors. Whether because of idolization or resignation, the idea that a few star chefs are able to dictate terms to a seemingly powerless public does not sound like a resounding cheer for democracy. In fact, the disruption of power in Nouvelle Cuisine merely shifted power from one hand to another. Along with the signature cookbooks came other signs that the chef was accumulating more power than ever before.

Les cuisiniers s'affranchissent aussi de la tutelle du maître d'hôtel et imposent le service à l'assiette qui réduit le rôle des personnels de salle à celui de "porteurs d'assiette dont l'activité se borne à soulever dans un bel ensemble les cloches d'argent qui recouvrent les mets." (Drouard, Histoire 129)

Not only had the chefs become proprietors of their own restaurants, often changing the names to highlight their stardom (L'Auberge de Collonges au Mont d'Or became Chez Paul Bocuse, for example), but as Alain Drouard points out in the above quotation, they then curtailed the access to power that had once been spread out among the staff, or even eliminated positions altogether.

Similarly, despite the *l'amitié* that was supposed to create equality amongst the new breed of men and women chefs, the discourse of Nouvelle Cuisine still managed to promote traditional, static gender roles. As Geneviève Fraisse has pointed out, and as we saw after the French Revolution and May 68, the rosy picture of gender equality painted by the passage of reforms does not always lead to the practical reality:

La citoyenneté des femmes se construit non pas abstraitement comme c'est le cas pour les hommes, mais concrètement, à partir des déterminations réelles. [...] Que faire des femmes dans l'ère nouvelle? Deux siècles racontent ces incertitudes faites de doutes volumineux et d'assertions péremptoires. (Fraisie 13-14)

Instead of demonstrating the falsity of the old-fashioned binaries where masculine/ innovative/ creative/ professional was opposed to feminine/ traditional/ reproductive/ domestic, the intense promotion of a few excellent women chefs appeared to actually increase the gap between the sexes, inscribing chefs like Olympe and Ghislaine Arabian into a model like that proposed by Bourdieu's theory of the *miraculé*. According to Bourdieu, a handful of exceptions does not prove the existence of equality or democracy. On the contrary, he feels that the existence and promotion of these miraculous success stories ("les miraculés") actually distract from or hide systemic *inequalities*. In this way, the *miraculés* are exactly what allows the myth of a new democracy or egalitarian cuisine to exist.

Though they appear effusive while complimenting women chefs like Olympe, the main spokesmen for Nouvelle Cuisine, be it chefs or critics, simultaneously repeated the age-old myths about women and their culinary weaknesses. In their article on the disappearance of *cuisine de femme* bistros, Gault and Millau write, "Or les femmes—en cuisine du moins—ne savent pas commander. Elles n'ont d'autorité que sur elles-mêmes et se montrent tragiquement malhabiles à diriger une brigade" ("Cuisine de femme" 9). They defend their assessment from charges of sexism, however, by insisting that they are merely stating a verifiable sociological fact: "C'est une constatation sociologique, une sorte de constante que confirme par exemple leur absence des écoles hôtelières. Mais qu'explique aussi dans une certaine mesure leur caractère terriblement ombrageux et leur

souci maniaque de vouloir tout [...] faire dans leur cuisine” (“Cuisine de femme” 9). A lack of management skills was by no means their only advertised weakness. Among the chefs, Paul Bocuse was particularly critical about a woman’s ability to think creatively, and he repeatedly scandalized both his interviewers and his readers or listeners with his unapologetic and openly derogatory views regarding women’s abilities in the kitchen.

Je tiens à redire ici ma conviction que les femmes sont certainement de bonnes cuisinières pour la cuisine dite de tradition (...). Cuisine nullement inventive à mon avis, ce que je déplore. (Bocuse cited in Delpont)

[Bocuse] routinely expresses contempt for women in the kitchen. “The only place for them is in the bed,” says Bocuse, adding that “anyone who doesn’t change his woman every week or so lacks imagination.” (Bird-Francke and Sullivan 53)

He even went so far as to insist that women should not be permitted to wear the white chef’s hat, saying, “Il est à déplorer simplement le port illégal de toques, exclusivement réservé aux Phalloocrates.” (qtd in Delpont). In the Bocuse biography *Sacré Feu*, Bocuse admits that he sees many links between the world of cuisine and the world of sex, and he makes no bones about the fact that he sees women as objects of pleasure—recounting his sexual conquests alongside his culinary triumphs: “En 1968, j’ai dit à une célèbre critique américaine pour la provoquer: ‘Le jour où tu me mets sur la couverture, je te mets dessous.’ Quelques semaines plus tard, je faisais la une, et il a bien fallu que je m’exécute...” (Bocuse qtd in Zizza-Lalu 96).

Given his larger-than-life persona and penchant for saying the outrageous, it might be tempting to write off Bocuse’s sexist remarks as just more attention-grabbing grandstanding. He says as much himself, calling himself someone who likes to provoke “mais toujours avec un clin d’oeil. [...] On m’a accusé de misogynie, ce qui est un

comble, quand on me connaît un peu” (“Bocuse vide son sac” 30). But even if his comments are meant to be humorous or only partially sincere, they nonetheless perpetuate a male-dominant ideology. For one thing, they’ve been so widely diffused in newspapers, magazines, and in television interviews that their continued presence serves to sustain and reinforce images of women as inferior, other, object. No less important, Bocuse’s views on cuisine and women chefs hold special significance because of his role as spokesperson for French cuisine. As the leader of the Association de la Grande Cuisine Française (his “Bande à Bocuse”), he was the unofficial mouthpiece both in France and around the world for French cuisine, but he also held an official post as gastronomic advisor to the French government. Consequently, his declarations appeared to express the values and philosophies of a much larger entity, a reality innocently confirmed in his official biography: “C’est bien lui qui porte la toque pour les autres chefs aux yeux du grand public français ou étranger. Parce qu’il sait parler en leur nom, parce que sa carrure en impose” (Zizza-Lalu 163).

Apart from this type of overt sexism, more subtle infringements on women’s equality, perpetrated linguistically and conceptually, called the new democratic *amitié* into question. For example, in keeping with the notion that women in professional restaurants should correspond to a traditional feminine trope, Gault and Millau’s reviews criticize women who do not fulfill their “feminine duties.” In the first issue of *Le Nouveau Guide*, they censure “le caractère tendre, mais parfois redoutable, de la patronne-cuisinière (“N’oubliez pas ces 74 étoiles” 9) despite having praised “la régularité de la cuisine” and the “climat intime de gourmets élégants” (9). Elsewhere in

the magazine, a restaurant loses points because “la patronne a rarement le sourire” (14). Likewise in their guidebooks, women owners in the *salle* are judged more according to their ornamental value than to their skills as restaurateurs. Referring to the owner of Restaurant Jacqueline Félix, Gault and Millau write “La blonde et malicieuse Jacqueline Félix reste, bien sur, le plus beau bibelot de ce chaleureux décor féminine” (Guide de Paris 1983: 121). Similarly, reviews of women chefs or chef/owners are linked more to a woman’s personality and to vague, subjective “feminine” qualities than to the actual cooking or dishes that they present, so their skill along with their identity can be obscured behind firmly entrenched myths of femininity: “Beaucoup d’innocence et beaucoup d’amour, c’est là le secret de Jeanne Huin” (Guide de Paris 1983: 107). Innocence and love, not hard work and creativity, are what make the delicious dishes of Chef Huin.

To be certain that the discrepancy in descriptions of a female chef versus a male chef is indeed reflective of gender distinction as opposed to, say, the quality or style of the restaurant being reviewed, I chose to compare two restaurant reviews (one male chef, one female chef)—each from the same guide book, each with the same numeric rating (14/20), and each with the same descriptive rating (one red toque—which signifies nouvelle rather than classique cuisine). Here, in the interest of space, are just the first paragraphs of each entry:

Chez toi ou chez moi 14/20

La jolie Caroll Sinclair ne vous demande que la peine de vous installer dans sa charmante bonbonnière mauve parmi des bibelots amusants, joliment éclairée de lampes rétro. Puis d’attendre dans les délicieux frissons de l’inconnu, le menu surprise qu’elle compose chaque jour à sa totale fantaisie. (107)

Restaurant Guyvonne 14/20

Fraîcheur de produits et justesse des cuissons restent les qualités majeures de la cuisine que Guy Cros propose avec une régularité métronomique dans ses petites salles paisibles, simplement décorées de quelques bibelots. (101)

In the description of the woman chef, the décor and appearance of both the woman and the restaurant are prioritized. Food, when it is mentioned toward the end of the review, appears only as a list of menu items. Furthermore, instead of lauding her adherence to the second Commandment of Nouvelle Cuisine (“nouvelle utilisation de produits”), which suggests that a chef’s menu should change daily, in accordance with market availability, the authors instead subvert her skill and commitment to freshness by implying that her changing menu is due to the fact that, as a woman, her cooking is at the mercy of fantasy or whim (“le menu surprise qu’elle compose chaque jour à sa totale fantaisie”). In the review of the male chef, food quality and preparation (“fraîcheur” and “cuisson”) are prioritized over the appearance of the chef and his surroundings. Contrary to the “surprise” and “fantaisie” of the female chef, the male chef’s fresh cooking is characterized by its “métronomique” consistency. Not surprisingly the male chef’s physical appearance is not deemed worthy of note.

2.9 A Revolutionary Form of “New”

The initial transition from a critic’s formulation to a reality of change suggests that the organizing power of culinary discourse is capable of not only describing but perhaps enacting changes in French culinary practice. Similar to ideas born from Foucault’s theory of the *énoncé*, the new freedom from rules described by Gault and Millau, as well as by chefs who eventually became the Nouvelle Cuisine chefs, was able

to take shape and develop partly because culinary discourse (working like “speech acts”) gave form and clarity to the type of newness that culinary practice was likely to undergo in Nouvelle Cuisine. The act of calling something “new” or “free” created a sense of newness and freedom that was eventually translated into action that appeared to confirm the statements. But just as Winock argued that Pompidou’s government spoke about a greater democracy while limiting personal freedoms and strengthening its position against future May 68s, we could argue that Nouvelle Cuisine, even in its early stages, reveals the seeds of its eventual destruction. Despite claims to liberate fine food from a snobby aristocratic past and create a more egalitarian environment, we see ways in which the “new” packages hidden impulses that contradict the project, a reversal that somewhat ironically confirms its revolutionary status in the French tradition.

3. Purges and Sacrifice

L'excrément et ses équivalents (pourriture, infection, maladie, cadavre) représentent le danger venu de l'extérieur de l'identité: le moi menacé par du non-moi, la société menacée par son dehors, la vie par la mort.

—Julia Kristeva

In a December round-up of the cookbooks of 1976, New York Times food writer Mimi Sheraton bemoaned the paucity of excellence in the genre, saying, “the pickings are among the leanest in a long time” (“Cooking, Cooking” 271). It is hard to know with Sheraton whether there is any intentional double-entendre to her choice of “lean” as a descriptive adjective, given that two of her seventeen selections deal specifically with France’s revolutionary, new, lighter cooking style (Michel Guérard’s Cuisine Minceur and Revolutionizing French Cooking) and three other selections are dedicated to meatless or vegetarian cooking (Laurel’s Kitchen: A Handbook for Vegetarian Cookery and Nutrition from the United States; The Romagnoli’s Meatless Cookbook; and The Complete Book of Fruits and Vegetables, both books originally published in Italy). What is clear, however, is that France’s lighter cooking does not emerge from a void, despite the near constant refrain of originality and inventiveness in Nouvelle Cuisine’s literature. There is an emphasis on vegetarian cooking in cookbooks from both the United States and Italy. And another American cookbook in the mix, though not promoting lean cooking per se, does articulate the importance of using “seasonal” ingredients, a practice that, because of its commitment to freshness, goes hand in hand with the elimination of

heavy or fatty sauces and marinades that were once used to either dress up old flavorless ingredients or hide the bad smells and tastes that age had left behind.

3.1 “Légèreté”: Promote the Positive, Practice the Negative

Despite all the emphasis we’ve seen on newness and originality in Nouvelle Cuisine discourse, the fact is that in many parts of the world, advances in health science and nutrition had stimulated renewed interest in the relationship between food and health, and in particular with regards to weight. The late sixties had introduced us to super-slim models like Twiggy, and the craze to “reduce” is evident not only in French cuisine but across the international spectrum of the food industry. Though French culinary discourse often focuses on the new French cuisine as if it were operating in a sort of isolation from the rest of the world, the chefs seem to have a greater willingness than the critics and food writers to see their work in a more global context, at least in the early days before Nouvelle Cuisine was so thoroughly packaged. Below is part of a conversation recounted by Roy Andries de Groot in Revolutionizing French Cuisine, where he asked Chef Jean Troisgros to define the “new” cuisine emerging in France. De Groot found himself at a table with not only Nouvelle Cuisine chefs Jean and Pierre Troisgros, but, coincidentally, also with food critic Christian Millau, who showed up in the restaurant and was invited to join the discussion.

“I think we all understand,” Jean added, “that the new international interest in health and weight control is not just a passing fad, but a permanent new direction in gastronomy. So we *cuisiniers* are adding our grain of salt to the new movement. We are helping to make a pleasure out of a necessity.”

“It is much more than that,” Christian said, “Such great cooks as Jean and Pierre, Michel Guérard, Jacques Manière, Roger Vergé and many others are, in fact,

inventing a superb new cuisine, almost without butter, cream, other fats, starches, or sugar. It is *la nouvelle révolution française*.”

[...] This new-new cuisine still gives first priority to the high pleasure of great eating—but it is great eating that is at the same time digestible, healthy, light, natural and simplified by the exclusion of most of the carbohydrates and sugars, of flour-thickened sauces and starchy stuffings. (5)

From this quotation, we see that the lightness of Nouvelle Cuisine responds to and is in concert with growing concerns about health and nutrition that are manifest worldwide. Indeed, Troisgros talks of the French chefs “adding” their own flavor to an existing paradigm not inventing something from zero. However, from both Millau’s intervention and the author’s clarification, we begin to see that as it took form discursively, Nouvelle Cuisine’s particularity lay not in its emphasis on leanness or lightness, but rather on *the way* it achieved and conceived of this lightness. Even though Troisgros speaks of “adding,” both Millau and de Groot express that Nouvelle Cuisine is best defined by what it is not, by what it has purged: it is “a superb new cuisine, *almost without* butter, cream and other fats, starches or sugar.” It is “great eating” that has been simplified by “the *exclusion* of most of the carbohydrates and sugars, of flour-thickened sauces and starchy stuffings” (51).¹ Furthermore, Millau says that the new austere style of cooking is “la nouvelle révolution française.” By describing the trend as the new *French* revolution, as opposed to, say, a new *culinary* revolution, he exaggerates but also reinforces the importance of cuisine in the formation of national identity and culture, as if to say a culinary revolution *is* a French revolution. At the same time, he links cuisine to

¹ Italics are mine.

the highly popular trope of “revolution,” ensuring its appeal to a broad audience and inscribing it within the pantheon of French traditions. Lastly, if this new culinary revolution, defined as it is by exclusions, is, as the author implies, representative of a greater national or cultural revolution, it raises questions: Are there analogous exclusions or purges to be found in the French nation? If so, what might they be?

As Nouvelle Cuisine became more and more popular in the French press, it is this concept of cutting things out or excluding, not discussions on the health and nutritional issues that supposedly inspired the changes in the first place, that dominates the descriptions of the new style and its “lightness.” But why should a cuisine characterized by sacrifice and purging resonate so thoroughly with a French public at the tail end of *Les Trentes Glorieuses*, a time period whose very designation indicates wealth as opposed to sacrifice? This apparent dissonance asks us to look more closely at these images of leanness and lightness. In Chapter 2, we saw how the term *new* was crucial to the launch and popularity of Nouvelle Cuisine, even though its accuracy was contestable and its meaning seemed to shift and morph according to the agenda it was called on to serve. We discovered that if Nouvelle Cuisine was going to succeed as a “revolution,” then the first thing it had to sell was its newness. Discussing the French Revolution, François Furet has noted that once the revolution established its newness, there needed to be a symbol of the old order that would pay for the “reversal in values” (55). Almost immediately, he says, there was a corresponding rhetoric that created a “Manichaeian division of the world into the ‘good’ and the ‘wicked,’ patriots and aristocrat.” Anything perceived as a symbol of the old was subject to elimination, because as Furet puts it,

“Only its formal exclusion from society could lend legitimacy to the new national pact” (55).

Borrowing from this description, I have chosen purging as the next piece of the image-making process that goes into a revolution. In addition, Furet’s own interpretation seems to underline the importance of language and discourse in the revolutionary process, because he pays special attention to the act of naming or labeling as a way of creating or maintaining power. In the Manichaean division of the Nouvelle Cuisine world, light and lean become the good; fatty and heavy become the evil. Furthermore, the symbolic power present in these linguistic distinctions is only strengthened by the fact that creating lean food requires a literal elimination or purging. In the case of “new,” I argued that while historians and critics contest the accuracy of the term, it nonetheless played a major role. We don’t have to wander too far into food criticism and culinary histories to discover that the very term most frequently used to characterize Nouvelle Cuisine—“*légèreté*”—is burdened with its own semantic challenges, but the potential contradictions highlight rather than diminish the rhetorical work being done by the language of Nouvelle Cuisine.

3.2 A Revolutionary Sensation of Lightness

Food historians Poulain and Neirinck acknowledge the obsession with “*légèreté*” that dominates culinary discourse during Nouvelle Cuisine, pointing out the astounding success of Guérard’s Cuisine Minceur (translated into at least 12 languages), and noting,

with a touch of clever wordplay, that the success of the “Cuisine légère” line of food items, packaged by industrial food giant Findus “atteste l’ampleur de phénomène” (122).² As was ordered by commandment 7, and in order to create the light, lean cooking, the chefs eliminated rich, creamy sauces like hollandaise, béarnaise, and béchamel—French sauces so familiar to the world, so fundamental to French cuisine, that not only do they need no translation, they have no translation. Purging the sauces from French cuisine was no small sacrifice. According to culinary historian Patrick Rambourg, the rich stocks and sauces are the “véritable clef de voûte de l’édifice culinaire français” (211). Other sacrificial commandments such as the massive reduction of menu choices (commandment 3) or the “banishment” of preparations with *marinades* or *faisandages* (commandment 6) contributed to dietary lightness, but also to a much more symbolic indication of sacrifice and purging, because so many classic French dishes seemed to simply disappear from restaurant life.

Despite these dramatic purges from the French culinary world, it turns out that what often resulted was more accurately only the *sensation* of lightness. While some of the new culinary creations were stripped bare of calories and ingredients, others seemed light but were far from lean (Beaugé). The scientific reason for this flawed impression,

² What’s clever about the use of “ampleur” here to describe the phenomenon is not the juxtaposition of a “ampleur” with “légèreté,” but the implication that as substance moved off the plate, it found a new home in the popularity of Nouvelle Cuisine and food discourse, which increased enormously during the seventies. Diminishing portions of food are now being digested alongside the expanding amplitude of food writing and references available to the French public. Recalling Rambourg’s definition of *gastronomy* as a “double consumption,” we see that, in this case, an inversely proportional relationship develops, whereby as the literal consumption decreases, the figurative consumption increases.

according to Poulain and Neirinck, is that the mouth associates a clean, slick finish with lightness, so while the removal of flour as a binding agent was a crucial step toward this sensory impression, a short-cut to this sensation, and one that was frequently employed despite the original tenets of Nouvelle Cuisine, was the addition of high-calorie, fatty emulsifiers that would slide easily and quickly off the tongue. Joël Robuchon, also called “Chef of the Century,” admitted, for example, that “Dans ma jeunesse, pour obtenir un litre de sauce, il fallait 30 à 40 grammes de farine et 30 à 40 grammes de beurre. Aujourd’hui, il faut 80 à 100 grammes de beurre. C’est beaucoup” (qtd in Poulain and Neirinck 123-124). The “lighter” sauce in Robuchon’s example represents a roughly 65 percent increase in caloric value and a 150 percent increase in fat content over the “heavy” sauce.³

To be fair, despite his tremendous success as a chef in the wake of Nouvelle Cuisine, Robuchon, who received his third Michelin star in 1984, was not in league with those early Nouvelle Cuisine chefs, and actively promoted many traditional practices, often dismissing those who blindly followed what he considered the fads of Nouvelle Cuisine (Robuchon and Meurville). Thus, I’ve chosen to compare the “lightness” of a dish included in the cookbooks of the foundational Nouvelle Cuisine chefs to a version of the same dish found in the cookbook of that famous *bête noire* of Nouvelle Cuisine: Madame Saint-Ange. In the conversation reported by de Groot that was previously cited,

³ Figure calculated using calorie counts provided by Poulain and Neirinck (124).

Millau claims that the Nouvelle Cuisine chefs are creating “a superb new cuisine almost without butter, cream and other fats” (5). As we have just seen, Robuchon claimed that modern sauces contained more fat than the old styles. Yet because traditional butter or flour sauces were off limits to early Nouvelle Cuisine chefs, I’d like to compare a more basic vegetable dish: *la purée de pommes de terre*. Mashed potatoes are traditionally made with butter and milk or cream, so they offer Nouvelle Cuisine chefs a prime opportunity to reinvent a fatty classic as a “light” and “healthy” sample of their culinary expertise:

Ces produits humbles, naguère bannis de bons restaurants, sont réhabilités et servis au prix des raretés: les pommes de terre (en purée ou même frites), les poireaux, les carottes, la morue, le merlan, la joue de boeuf, etc. (“Face à la mondialisation” 134)

Given what Pitte calls the “rehabilitation” of these “humble” dishes for the grand restaurant, one might expect their recipes to reflect the values and creative innovations characteristic of Nouvelle Cuisine.

According to a recipe entitled “purée de pommes de terre au persil,” taken from Michel Guérard’s cookbook La Cuisine gourmande, the following proportions will serve 4 people:

800g de pommes de terre “Bintje”
1 litre d’eau
15g de gros sel
40cl de lait
80g de beurre
4 cuillères à soupe de persil plat frais haché
(436)

Before I address the issue of lightness, I want to look briefly at what Luce Giard calls the “coded language of this recipe” to see how it is able to transmit its belonging to haute

cuisine despite the everyday nature of the dish. One aspect of this recipe that asserts its gastronomic status from the very first line is the specification of a particular varietal of potato, because it implies a greater degree of classification and, thus, sophistication and expertise. According to the Larousse Gastronomique, the “bintje” is a yellow-fleshed potato grown from September to May in northern France, Brittany, Picardy, and around Paris in the area known as Ile-de-France (Larousse Gastronomique 1996: 832). Guérard’s recipe lends a measure of exclusivity to his *purée* by specifying the exact potato required to recreate his version of the recipe. Not just any ordinary potato will do; it must be a “bintje.” The recipe also affords the reader a sense of insider privilege, because the chef is sharing his secrets. The power of food knowledge described by Ferguson in her discussion of the nineteenth-century applies equally well here. Nouvelle Cuisine initiates, much like their post-revolutionary counterparts, distinguish themselves by *knowing* about haute cuisine food even if they cannot afford to dine in the top restaurants. In this case, the reader learns the exact potato used to create the best *purée*. Here the chef’s recipe also specifies the use of “gros sel” instead of regular “sel,” offering still more distinctions that must be learned and emphasizing that, to the smallest detail, only the best ingredients will suit his haute-cuisine potatoes. As Elizabeth David has noted, regarding the difference between coarse sea salt and its tabletop cousin, “the flavour it gives is so superior to that of a powdered salt that, to people who have grown accustomed to pure salt, it is a deprivation to return to food flavoured with the ‘free-running’ type of table salt, which is mixed with extraneous substances, harmless though they may be” (100). David’s quotation shows how the simple addition of the word *gros* before “sel” transforms

Guérard's recipe from average to superior, placing salt and those with knowledge of it within a clear hierarchy.

Yet for all this care, remarkably, the cooking that made its name with its commitment to lightness and elimination of butter and fats once again uses more of it than the oft-maligned Madame Saint-Ange whose recipe, though more "ordinary," calls for the following:

Proportions: Pour 6 personnes: 1kilogramme de pommes de terre [...]; 75 grammes de beurre; 1 décilitre et demi à 2 décilitres [15-20cl] au plus de bon lait bouillant; sel; poivre blanc; muscade. (981)

Not only does Mme Saint-Ange use less butter and less milk for a larger quantity of potatoes, but she also verbally emphasizes the importance of "légèreté," as well: "Pour être réussie, la purée doit avoir la légèreté et la finesse d'une crème fouettée dont les flacons se dressent en pyramide" (980). This quality of lightness so often espoused by the Nouvelle Cuisine chefs is actually more in evidence in the Madame Saint-Ange recipe than in the Nouvelle Cuisine chef's recipe. Furthermore, much of the exclusivity he creates is also questionable. In his cookbook One Potato, Two Potato, Roy Finamore refers to "bintje" potatoes as an heirloom potato, something of a rarity in the United States, which seems to confirm this allure of a specialized potato for this recipe (20). However, at the time Guérard was writing his cookbook, "bintje" potatoes were actually neither rare nor exclusive. According to data provided by SCEES (Service Central des Enquêtes et Etudes Statistiques), an agricultural statistics bureau in France, and CNPT (Comité National de la Pomme de Terre), in 1976, 95% of maincrop potatoes planted in the northern and Picardy regions of France were "bintje;" and 86% of potatoes put on the

market in France were “bintje” (Parris and Ritson 22). And contrary to the Larousse Gastronomique growing-season guidelines above, potatoes sold in northern France and in or around Paris between October and July were “virtually exclusively Bintje” (Parris and Ritson 22). In other words, in a recipe where no ordinary potato will do, the potato that is specified is statistically the most ordinary potato available in France at that time. Just as Escoffier increased the gap between professional haute cuisine (masculine/professional) and cuisine bourgeoise (feminine/domestic) with elaborate codifications and specialized vocabulary, Nouvelle Cuisine also uses language and the appearance of specialization to create distinctions and hierarchies that appeal to the French public.

As time went on, the image of “light” and “lean” and the emphasis on eliminating old, heavy or rich ingredients persisted as the hallmarks of Nouvelle Cuisine despite the reality that restaurant preparations and recipes were likely fattier and higher in calories than before: “C’est qu’en fait, la notion de légèreté invoquée par tous les tenants (cuisiniers mais aussi gastronomes) de la cuisine actuelle ne renvoie pas exactement à la notion diététique, mais plutôt à la sensation gustative” (Poulain and Neirinck 124). What was truly important, then, as they put it a few sentences later, was “l’aura symbolique de ‘légèreté’” (124). I would posit that this primacy of the symbolic over the literal demonstrates that culinary discourse was performing a larger cultural task than simply the description of food. At the most basic level, the myth enabled Nouvelle Cuisine to simultaneously borrow from and depose the cooking style known as *cuisine de femme*, but the myth’s success also signals that the public had tuned into “légèreté” as a valuable

and necessary concept that was so desirable that it was willing to accept the language of “l’aura symbolique” over what some saw as basic realities.

For example, another major challenge to Nouvelle Cuisine’s claim to the term “légèreté” comes from food writer Philippe Couderc. His objection, however, is not with the nutritional composition of the food. Instead, he suggests that terms like “lean” and “light” are linguistic distractions, masking what’s really missing from the plate: food and expertise. While the practice of *émulation* and *rayonnement* may sound good in theory, Couderc complains that, in the hands of lesser chefs, the trends of Nouvelle Cuisine are copied as an excuse to mark up the prices: “En notre temps de folie le moindre gamin avec quelques mois de pratique dans un établissement un rien connu se prend pour un génie“ (51). He describes the new French cuisine as “l’arnaque du chef” (50), and defends his rejection of the terms “light” or “lean,” saying, “La légèreté que l’on nous propose est celle du manque” (51). This “manque,” he says, goes well beyond the removal of fats and heavy food preparations from the menus. It extends to the plate and stomach as well: “on aboutit à des assiettes qui donnent l’impression d’être vides” (51), and a bit further on, “S’il est vrai que l’on peut quitter un repas l’estomac léger, c’est bien parce qu’il n’y a presque rien dans l’assiette” (51). For Couderc, Nouvelle Cuisine represents a series of undesirable sacrifices (empty plate, empty stomach, empty wallet) camouflaged as something salubrious or attractive.

Here, an obvious question presents itself. If Nouvelle Cuisine was not really that lean or healthy or low in calories, why all the talk of “lean,” “light,” “weight loss,” “without,” “excluding,” “sacrificing,” and so forth? I ask that, because, despite the above

arguments that effectively challenge Nouvelle Cuisine's claims to lightness, and despite the seeming disconnect of a trend that prioritizes cutting back and sacrificing during a decade of unparalleled consumer spending power, culinary discourse remained intensely faithful to the characterization of Nouvelle Cuisine as a cuisine that had excluded its fatty past. In a way, Couderc's assessment of Nouvelle Cuisine as a cuisine of "manque" is actually quite apt. There is always talk of something missing. Although no simple answer presents itself to such a question, the strength and persistence of the rhetoric at least signal that it is worth examining. According to historian Eric Hobsbawm, a cultural invention (like the idea that classic French cuisine was dead and had been replaced by Nouvelle Cuisine as the new traditional French cuisine) mainly succeeds "in proportion to its success in broadcasting on a wavelength to which the public [is] ready to tune in" (263). Nouvelle Cuisine's discourse of sacrificing, purging, excluding, and eliminating certainly found a French public who, at least initially, were overwhelmingly "tuned in" to the culinary style of "manque."

3.3 Algeria and the Rejection of Excess

To begin to understand this response, I want quickly to acknowledge that, as the Furet quotation points out, the rhetoric of exclusions used to describe the lean cooking played effectively and conveniently into a revolutionary esprit that was particularly popular in the late sixties and seventies. But, to go beyond that, I'd also like to turn to food writer Benedict Beaugé, who remarks on a similar trend in culinary and social attitudes after WWII. Recalling both Kumar and Sa'adah's arguments that France forgets or represses its painful past rather than achieving closure, Beaugé describes the post-war

shifts in culture as representative of the need for a cathartic purge. The purge, he argues, effects a sort of forced amnesia, erasing the negative past and replacing it with “le bon vieux temps”:

Lorsque la Seconde Guerre mondiale s’achève, la France semble ne vouloir qu’une chose, oublier. Par réflexe, par optimisme nécessaire — tout est à reconstruire — on souhaite renouer au plus vite avec le “bon vieux temps” et, après une épuration qui se veut cathartique, l’option de tirer un trait que l’on espère définitif sur cette parenthèse trouble, est officiellement choisie.
(Aventures 17)

For Beaugé, politically traumatic or violent experiences reproduce themselves and can be mapped onto shifts or new expressions in the culture. In other words, France’s immediate reaction to painful elements of the war—the occupation, Vichy, the Holocaust, and so forth—was to forget, or purge the memories. Paradoxically, the drive to return to a safer past, or the “bon *vieux* temps,” requires the erasure of the recent, unsafe past, which in turn, inspires a need to create new expressions of culture across the board, from major adjustments in social mores, political ethics, and lifestyle to the seemingly insignificant variations in cuisine, fashion, music and so forth. These new expressions signal the distinct and permanent rupture between the desired future (ironically, the “bon vieux temps”) and the undesired past.

A similar migration of expression is noted by Jean-Paul Aron in his book on nineteenth-century food practices. Aron acknowledges that despite the many regime changes in the nineteenth century, French cuisine remains fairly stable. However, he points out that even if major shifts in the organization and conception of French cuisine are not apparent, there are nonetheless discernible changes in culinary discourse that one can trace to political and social realities: “Son langage est un miroir; on y perçoit des

accents de cruauté, une extraordinaire jouissance de la possession” (171). Such cruelty can be seen in overly specific instructions like “Levez-en les chairs, ôtez-en les peaux et les nerfs, pilez ces chairs [...]” (171). Describing a recipe by famed cookbook writer Urbain Dubois, Aron claims that to finish his *potage à la Cussy*, Dubois engages in “un couteux carnage” (172):

Douze à quinze minutes avant de servir [...] faites partir à la broche deux estomacs de perdreaux, poussez-les vivement; aussitôt cuits, escalopez-les dans la soupière, avec une petite julienne de truffes noires et cuites; versez le potage dessus. (Dubois qtd in Aron 172)

His delight in spitroasting, skewering, slicing, and then scalding these partridge stomachs does indeed seem a bit bloodthirsty. But according to Karl Marx, the brutally repressive and autocratic government of Louis Bonaparte during the Second Empire had left France demoralized and stifled. He describes an environment where the “machinery of government” had “thoroughly fortified itself against society. [...] Hence the timid despair, the sense of crushing humiliation and degradation that oppresses the breast of France and makes her choke. She feels dishonored” (143-144). In Marx’s description, with its repeated imagery of suffocation (“crushing,” “choke,” “breast”) insists that the denial of expression imposed on the French public is both vivid and violent, with devastating effects on the nation’s spirit (“humiliation,” “degradation,” “dishonored”). Such context helps explain what Aron calls the “raideurs victoriennes du Second Empire” and gives additional weight to his theory that the increasingly violent language in culinary discourse signals a displacement of hostility, a way to “se déchaîner” (Aron 172).

For both Aron and Beaugé, socio-political traumas permeate the language and often practice of cuisine. Their observations form a useful framework for thinking about

the political violence of France after decolonization, and particularly the independence of Algeria. France's national identity had to be redefined. An enormous part of France and an entire segment of the population had been severed. In a country where food and nation are so intrinsically linked, it makes sense that if the nation undergoes a dramatic transformation then so will the cuisine, or at least the language of that cuisine. France had changed. Physically, it was lighter. It had lost Algeria and its colonial empire. The process of decolonization became, as we will see, another painful and shameful episode that needed to be forgotten. Following Beaugé's argument, we might speculate that replacing the creamy sauces with lighter transparent ones responds to this cultural need to purge an opaque and heavy past. The rhetorical insistence on lightness achieved through the virtues of elimination betrays a need to erase and rewrite the nation's culinary narrative. In this way, the purge rhetoric used in culinary discourse (particularly with its secondary narrative of weight loss) resembles both a bulimic's determination to control his or her entire environment and the delusional fantasy that such a thing is possible.

Similarly, the bulimic purges to put things back to the way they should be, to undo a perceived excess. The purge, once accomplished, erases the error and replaces it with an illusion of control (DSM-IV 351). This particular iteration of purging is pervasive not just in culinary discourse but also in the political language surrounding France's relationship to Algeria during decolonization. Before de Gaulle came back into power in 1958, the French public had been bitterly split on the question of whether or not Algeria should remain French. It is important to understand that politically Algeria was not a French colony, but was in fact part of France itself. The country and the citizens

were legally just as French as any part of hexagonal France. So the decision to “grant Algeria its independence” was much more complicated than may appear. Throughout the fifties and early sixties, political and intellectual discourse focused with greater urgency on the subject of Algeria. In 1954, Prime Minister Pierre Mendes France tried to bring an end to the divisive debate with this firm, unequivocal promise:

We don't compromise when it comes to defending the internal peace of the nation and the republic's integrity. The departments of Algeria are part of the Republic. Between the Algerian population and the mainland, no secession is conceivable. Never will France, never will any parliament nor any government yield on this fundamental principle. (qtd in Talbott 39)

The prime minister links the nation's very integrity to Algeria. He goes to extraordinary rhetorical lengths to back up his claims about Algeria's future with a series of succinct, declarative, present-tense sentences, the repetition of “no” and “never,” and the impossibly broad future claim (no secession is even “conceivable”) made on behalf of a surprisingly comprehensive interpretation of power in France (“France,” “any parliament,” “any government”). A couple of years later when the press asked François Mitterrand, then Minister of the Interior, about a possible independence, he, too, was adamant: “Algeria is France” (qtd in Talbott 39). But actually this is a unilateral equation that only seems unequivocal because it was quite apparent even then that the inverse does not apply. France is not Algeria.

De Gaulle's return to power in 1958 confirmed the ambivalence hidden in Mitterrand's formulation, and the tide of public opinion now swelled in favor of an independent Algeria. Algeria had become an “excess” that no longer served a purpose. The history of the Algerian war reads like the progression of this realization. Consider

even the terminology associated with Algeria. From the 1930s on, the term “Algérie utile” grew in usage. A 1960 article from El-Moudjahid (a serial published by the Front de Libération Nationale) defines the term succinctly and without euphemism: “L’Algérie utile, c’est l’Algérie qui est utile aux colons” (248). In La Guerre d’Algérie dans l’histoire des intellectuels français, historian Michel Jamet’s account supports this perception:

Ce que la France défend en Algérie, c’est-à-dire au Sahara, ce sont des conditions économiques de sa survie : découvert depuis peu, le pétrole saharien représente en industrialisation possible et en renouveau démographique prévisible, l’analogie de l’extraordinaire atout charbonnier dont ont bénéficié, au dix-neuvième siècle, l’Angleterre et l’Allemagne. L’Algérie assurera en 1960, affirme Raymond Bougrine, l’indépendance financière et pétrolière de la France. [...] De là aussi le projet, ou le rêve, inspiré par l’exemple israélien, de conserver “l’Algérie utile” et de faire garder par des troupes l’oléoduc amenant, à la côté méditerranéenne, le pétrole saharien. (144)

Jamet’s assessment that France’s interest in Algeria was purely self-serving is made more interesting by the remark that in these profits, France saw its survival. Contrary to the notion of a strong, dominant France, the idea that France was struggling for economic survival reminds us in a new way of the Janus-faced nature of national identity. When cast in relation to Algeria, France appears to be the imperial nation, the dominant, the colonizer. But in relation to world powers of the sixties, like the U.S.S.R and the U.S.A, France is itself in danger of being dominated. The frequency of discussions, articles, editorials, and speeches that weighed and recalibrated the evils of American financial and cultural imperialism (“Coca-colonisation”) against the Soviet practices of literal enslavement (“Kolyma” and its deadly gulags) represents France’s determination not to be subsumed by these larger powers; or as historian Richard Kuisel puts it when referring to France’s resistance to Coca-cola, it is “a tiny effort at national self-assertion, a gesture

that France might find a ‘third way’ in the Cold War, at a time when the nation had little room to maneuver” (69).⁴ So as the cost of the war with Algeria continued to escalate, and as the debate within the country began to damage France in areas beyond the economy, de Gaulle leaned on the rhetoric of usefulness, interests, and excesses to reconcile the nation to letting Algeria go, a task made more difficult by years of political rhetoric that staked France’s political integrity on the inclusion of Algeria in the nation: “L’Algérie nous coûte, c’est le moins qu’on puisse dire, plus cher qu’elle nous apporte” (qtd in Stora, Mots de la guerre 41). According to Stora, for de Gaulle and the nation’s economic leaders, the decision to give up on Algeria was framed as a decision to “rompre avec le gaspillage dans l’empire de capitaux considérables, sans aucun bénéfice” (Mots de la guerre 41).

It would be ridiculous, of course, to suggest that we can explain the Nouvelle Cuisine trend of cutting out fats and heavy sauces by pointing to its need to mirror a political model. However, this concept of excess and purging is undeniably central to Nouvelle Cuisine, and because the rhetoric worked on many different levels, its ability to resonate with a diverse public is increased. In the following example, the political discourse circulates through the culinary discourse in a fairly straightforward, even mimetic way, in that we see a shared rhetoric of a need to purge and a rejection of excess.

⁴ Kuisel’s use of the word “tiny” to describe the effort of the French opposition of Coca-cola is utterly perplexing(though fascinating), particularly because he dedicates an entire chapter of his book to detailing the history of the rather protracted and *considerable* effort made in the resistance to the beverage. I can only assume that it wasn’t the effort but the *results* of these efforts that appeared “tiny” when compared with the juggernaut-like appearance of the American culture machine after WWII.

Note how Jean Troisgros, who initially tried to explain his lighter cooking in an international context, here expresses a distaste for excess in a way that sounds more political than culinary, picking up and recycling de Gaulle's sentiment on waste:

The snobbish gourmets of Paris [...] turned back to the super-fancy-pants, show-off cuisine of the kings of France at the Palace of Versailles, as interpreted by Escoffier. [...] What I hate most is the cuisine where there is too much of everything—too many embellishments in the dish—too many garnishes on the plate—and totally too much of everything everywhere for the diner to eat without after-dinner discomfort. Excess serves no purpose. In our new-new recipes⁵ there is no excess of anything. (qtd in de Groot 14)

Troisgros's language ("snobbish," "fancy-pants," "show-off," "embellishments") points to a reaction against excess that certainly appears to be, if not rooted outside of culinary concerns, then at least fuelled by cultural or political attitudes. Even his reference to Versailles recalls a French government that overextended itself with foreign campaigns. And although his language sounds class-based in a way that might encourage more comparisons to May 68's rejection of bourgeois values, the content is more complicated with regards to class than at first appears.

First, despite Troisgros's apparent disdain of upper-class customs, we cannot make a simple parallel between May 68's assault on bourgeois values and Troisgros's comments, because he goes on to state that his cuisine is a highly concentrated and modernized form of "French bourgeois" cooking, which "has always been ultimately the

⁵ Revolutionizing French Cuisine was published in the United States before the label Nouvelle Cuisine had been cemented. Throughout his book, de Groot translates what eventually came to be called Nouvelle Cuisine as either "new-new" or "Low-High."

best” (14).⁶ Additionally, in a move that further distances his comments from the class-based attacks that fuelled May 68, Troisgros reaches all the way back to a pre-revolutionary France to criticize Versailles and the habits of an aristocratic class that no longer really exists and is thus unlikely to be the target of his remarks. What’s more, such criticism, were we to try to infer a classist bent from it, would implicitly realign him with the bourgeois class that opposed Versailles in the first place, not with the *soixante-huitards*. One last way that class gets murky in his remarks is that he objects to aristocratic embellishments while championing austerity. The problem here is that “austerity” and “excess,” much like other terms or values examined in this project, travel prodigiously throughout French history and culture, taking on different meanings in different, or even contradictory, contexts. This broad linguistic circulation complicates our ability to affix a singular or historically stable interpretation to the terms, or even the concepts. So, for example, while of course Versailles and its aristocracy can be seen as showy, excessive, and frivolous when placed in opposition to the sober, simple austerity that characterizes the post-revolutionary Republic, it is also the case that by disdaining affectation and flourishes, Troisgros is actually performing values that are completely consistent with the seventeenth-century monarchy and its courtiers who, themselves, placed a high value on austerity in order to distinguish themselves from and reject the

⁶ It’s interesting to see that here in this early quotation, before the “revolution” of Nouvelle Cuisine had been named or packaged, that it is Escoffier and not Madame Saint-Ange or *cuisine bourgeoise* whose style is being maligned. As the movement develops its rhetoric, this promotion of cuisine bourgeoise and demotion of Escoffier will nearly reverse itself.

showiness and vulgarity of the up-and-coming bourgeois class. In fact, the removal of embellishments and adornments is the hallmark of Racine, a favorite playwright to the Court of Versailles.

If, as it would seem, Troisgros's culinary revolution is not class-based, then the critical weight of his remarks falls to his scorn of waste and excess—"totally too much of everything everywhere"—and takes on instead a more nationalistic flavor. This interpretation is supported by Troisgros's claim that French bourgeois cooking has always been "ultimately the best." And by the time we get to the sentence, "Excess serves no purpose" (a sentence that is itself an embellishment, since, by definition, "excess" is the state of surpassing what is useful or necessary), his message sounds more and more like de Gaulle's admonishments against "gaspillage...sans aucun bénéfice." The official French narrative of decolonization depicted a strong France that shunned vulgar excesses in favor of cutting out the flab. In this example of culinary rhetoric, Nouvelle Cuisine's practice of eschewing waste and excess echoes a popular conservative political position. It reassures and resonates with a nation of people who were already prone to believe that France could no longer afford to be weighed down, either by fats or by unprofitable colonies.

A rejection of excess, however, is only one way that notions of purging circulate through the culture. At times, images of purging go well beyond the removal of excess, and extend into the elimination of fundamental or even constitutive elements. This second type of purge rhetoric resembles the kind of sacrificial elimination often seen in religious or political purges. If the bulimic-style purge attempts to reassert control of the

corpus by erasing past excesses, the religious or political style maintains or protects control by preemptively, and often excessively, sacrificing anything that might threaten not the corpus but the larger or transcendent ideal to which the corpus aspires. Violence towards the self or towards constitutive members of a *corporation* (in the Hegelian sense) can be legitimated by reframing it as a cleansing process required to protect the higher good. Sociologist Peter R. Baehr writes that there is an established practice among French intellectuals to link revolutionary fervor to religion. And he adds that Tocqueville characterized the French Revolution as a “political religion” (qtd in Baehr 98). So it comes as little surprise to see the commingling of religious and revolutionary rhetoric in discussions of the new cuisine.

3.4 La France et La Disparition

According to chefs and food writers, the expulsion of heavy sauces so essential to classic French cuisine served three purposes: it revealed the true taste of the meat; it promoted the ingredient over familiar dishes (such as *coq au vin*), which in turn prioritized the notion of freshness; and it responded to emerging concerns about diet and health by valorizing lightness. Despite these perfectly rational explanations, the totality of the exclusion raised doubts, even among its proponents. A paper entitled “La Cuisine française a-t-elle perdu son âme en perdant ses sauces?” by Benedict Beaugé illustrates that rational explanations may be secondary in a relationship (between the French and their cuisine) that is itself not entirely rational. As the title of Beaugé’s paper humorously suggests, the French have an emotional, even spiritual, relationship to their food. And the attribution of an “âme” to French cuisine reminds us that cuisine often reproduces

something akin to the Catholic *corpus mysticum* in the French imaginary. So when you consider that the 1961 Larousse Gastronomique contains more than 250 entries in its sauce category, it's easy to see why the abolition of sauces from French cuisine created a void significant enough to prompt Beaugé's question. Even Nouvelle Cuisine chef Georges Blanc acknowledged in the preface to his signature cookbook (Ma Cuisine des saisons) that sauces were "l'essence même de la cuisine française" (18). Given the use of words like "âme" and "essence" to describe the role of sauces to French cuisine, it seems reasonable to propose that much as Algeria was essential to France's integrity, so too were the sauces to the integrity of French cuisine. This wholistic language puts the focus not on excess or waste but on emptiness, disappearance or, as Couderc put it, "manque." Even the plate was increasingly "vide;" the weight of food itself was being sacrificed.

Disappearance, whether of everyday items or of core fundamentals, seems a primary concern throughout the fifties, sixties, and seventies. Terms like "manque" and "disparition" show up in diverse arenas of French life, with a wide variety of significance and meaning, consistent perhaps only in the constancy of their widespread use. In a study that was at once historical, semantic, linguistic, sociological, and philosophical, French scholar Jean-Pierre Faye analyzed the role of language and discourse in the evolution of German politics from the 1890s to the 1933. His goal was to understand how a society arrives at a place where it can find Nazism and totalitarianism acceptable political solutions. In Langages totalitaires, he traces the circulation of words and the *oscillations* of their meaning over time and across domains. He argues that words repeated in various cultural settings form a complex series of relationships, until History (as it is recounted or

narrated) is eventually able to impact history (as it unfolds in the form of events or actions). Though these relationships may appear nebulous, tenuous, inadvertent, or even forced, he maintains that linguistic repetition, with its crossovers and slippages, is nonetheless evidence of cultural movement and worthy of study:

C'est que l'aspect "insignifiant" et second paraît signifier quelque chose de précis, quelque chose de partout récurrent, sur l'échiquier des langages et des événements. Non qu'il s'agisse d'un montage délibérément construit, par une régie consciente de ses propres intentions. Mais bien plutôt l'on aperçoit comment, au hasard des formules et des mises en page, reviennent des interprétations opposées qui se disposent selon certaines relations, assez précises pour qu'il semble nécessaire d'admettre, par surcroît, *quelque chose* qui soit là pour les unifier. (1972 37)

At this point, I think it would be useful to put Faye into dialogue with Beaugé, who believes that political violence, for example, can be mapped onto culture when the need to forget past experiences drives the creation of new expressions elsewhere in the culture. What emerges from this combination is the notion that when a linguistic element is repeated so pervasively in a society at a given time, relationships may exist between the most horrifying aspects within a culture— war, genocide, terror, institutional oppression— and what might still seem to be the cliché of cuisine as an insignificant, even frivolous, expression of culture. Obviously it is important to tread cautiously into any conversation that connects, say, menu choices with war, so I want to be very clear that I do not intend to suggest direct or causal links (there is no "montage délibérément construit" as Faye puts it). But the widespread use of purging or elimination as a trope, in particular this element of disappearance, combined with Faye's belief in an ineffable "quelque chose" that links them, compels me to point out certain linguistic connections

that may at first appear somewhat loose, but may ultimately come together on this “*echiquier des langages et des événements*” that is postcolonial France.

Georges Perec’s lipogrammatic novel La Disparition was published in 1969, the same year Gault and Millau launched their magazine on a yet untitled new style of cooking. Perec expresses elimination and literal “disappearance” by writing the book without the letter E. It is worth noting that E is the most commonly used letter in the French language. The book makes use of its title to refer superficially to the plot, which concerns the disappearance of the main character, and also to act as a thin disguise for the additional disappearance of the letter E from the text. But critics have determined that Perec’s book cannot be fully understood as simply an experimental novel without the letter E about a man who disappears. Literary scholar David Bellos, for example, points to the need to place Perec’s book into a larger socio-historical context, one that suggests linguistic links to a major historical event that is never mentioned specifically in his novel. He argues that even in a book of absences “one cover covered another” (400). Perec’s book with its missing E becomes a sort of de-naturalized version of French. Covered by this superficial exclusion at the textual level is the fact that the finished E-less product actually recalls and mimics a much larger act of denaturalization and disappearance:

In the case of La Disparition, the double cover hid something that none of the author’s closest friends could have guessed at, unless they, too, were orphans of the *shoah*. The novel’s title is a slightly arch euphemism for death, but it is also something much more special: it is the term used in administrative French for persons missing and presumed dead. (400)

Perec's mother, like many other Jewish people in France, disappeared from society, never to return. The initial certificate granted by the government was an *Acte de Disparition*, which could be exchanged for a death certificate after five years. However, because she was not a French citizen, the government would not officially recognize her death, further emphasizing both the dehumanizing effect of the *shoah* as well as France's unwillingness to openly acknowledge or deal with the massive suppression of human life. In his analysis of Perec's novel, Bellos, like Beaugé, underlines France's "voluntary amnesia" (279) with regard to its role in and the outcome of the *shoah* and posits this self-inflicted memory purge as a reason for the multiple layers of suppression in the book, and in the culture itself. He turns to film critic Jean Cayrol's reaction to Alain Resnais's film Night and Fog (1955) to characterize the deep ambivalence of a society that was, on the one hand, intensely anxious about the possibility for more shadowy executions in an unknown future, but on the other, equally compelled to deny or repress any thoughts of such potential.

There are those of us who sincerely look upon the ruins today as if the old concentration-camp monster were dead and buried beneath them. [...] Those of us who pretend to believe that all this happened only once, at a certain time and in a certain place, and those who refuse to see, who do not heed the cry to the end of time. (Cayrol qtd in Bellos 279)

Just three years after the film's warning, the 1958 publication by Editions de Minuit of Henri Alleg's La Question signaled the realization of precisely this repressed threat, albeit in a different time, location, and context. Alleg's essay was a personal account of the atrocities committed by the French police and *parachutistes* during Algeria's revolutionary war. Here, too, we see an intentional, but this time overtly

politicized use of the word *disparition*. Right from the beginning of his account, he zeroes in on the word, setting it off in quotations to underscore its hidden significations, “J’ai appris la ‘disparition’ de mon ami Maurice Audin arrêté vingt-quatre heures avant moi, torturé par la même équipe qui ensuite me ‘prit en mains.’ Disparu comme le cheikh Tebessi, président de l’association des oulamas, le docteur Cherif Zahar et tant d’autres” (12-13). He even closes the first chapter by announcing that his book is dedicated to each one of the “disparus” (14). Before the government was able to ban the book, La Question united many of France’s intellectuals, regardless of political leanings, against the war and raised an outcry from the international community. But details of torture, deaths, and fighting only trickled out in incomplete and inconclusive fragments, heightening both angst and doubt in the minds of the French citizens back in the hexagon. So although the Evian Accords were signed in 1962, bringing an official end to France’s reign as a colonial empire, France’s conflicted relationship to its history of torture in Algeria persisted. In his book La Gangrène et l’oubli, historian Benjamin Stora argues that France’s failure to openly address and admit its role kept its shameful history hidden but also kept it alive: “Le feu couve toujours sous les vieilles cendres” (318).

As Bellos demonstrates, Perec’s use of the word *disparition* is rooted in a highly significant and personal experience of WWII. I would add to Bellos’s remarks that Perec’s use of the word *disparition* cannot be fully disentangled from its late-sixties, contemporaneous counterpart. Perec’s book appeared roughly a decade after Alleg’s, a

decade that had prompted the recirculation of the word *disparition* and the considerable, hidden violence associated with it.⁷ Consequently, the book provides one more level of cover, as readers simply cannot ignore the echoes between the “disappearance” of Jews (and others) during WWII and the more recent, repressed “disappearance” of the Algerians both in Algeria and in France during the War of Algeria.

What starts as a novel written without the alphabet’s most popular letter becomes a discussion about human purges during wartime, even though Perec never explicitly addresses his mother’s disappearance, the Holocaust, or Algeria. Nor does he have to, because the Algerian war and the WWII deportations are common to France in a way that resembles how common E is to the French language. By the late 1960s, a familiarity with the disappearance of things that once seemed fundamentally French has necessarily emerged in the French imaginary. Whether writing a novel or creating a meal, there is an undeniable impulse to create a product without its fundamental ingredient. But just as there are many disappearances covering one another in Perec’s novel, so there are in the culinary discourse, as well. Nouvelle Cuisine was meant to herald the return of French cuisine to its place as the finest cuisine in the world. The disappearance of sauces was big news, but like the elimination of the letter E, it was just an initial, if challenging, constraint. Other disappearances, that at first seem unconnected, are nonetheless present

⁷ There was, for example, the designation of *les disparus d’Oran*, in which “3080 personnes avaient été signalées comme enlevées ou disparues” (Stora, 2005 45), the round-up and temporary internment of 6000-7000 Algerian protestors in the Palais des Sports on October 17, 1961 (of which it is estimated some 200 were murdered by French police), and, of course, the disappearance of Algeria itself from the French Republic.

in the culinary discourse if we dig, as Stora might say, in the ashes. In July 1973, three months before Le Nouveau Guide published “les dix commandements,” the magazine ran an article proclaiming, “France, ta cuisine fout le camp!” Citing lazy restaurateurs who cooked cliché specialties instead of “authentic” regional dishes and used imported or frozen ingredients, the article warns that France’s “plats de terroir” are on the verge of disappearing:

Dédaigneux du moindre effort, endormis dans leur routine, la plupart des restaurateurs s’en tiennent désormais aux mêmes “spécialités” sans surprise (confits en Périgord, fruits de mer en Bretagne, salade provençale sur la Côte d’Azur, etc) et négligent sans complexe les authentiques recettes du cru. D’autres les affadissent, les dénaturent en remplaçant un produit local par des marchandises d’importation, le plus souvent congelées. (23)

This description describes a perilous slide toward complacency and a slavish attachment to the mundane among French restaurants and their cooks right at the dawn of Nouvelle Cuisine. Alarming though that may be, it is the second part of the complaint above that interests me at the moment. The authors use the verbs “affadir” and “dénaturer” to describe the practice of using imported ingredients instead of local French ingredients. Both these terms connote a disappearance or loss: on the one hand, the loss of taste (a fundamental part of eating), and on the other, the loss of its very nature (implying that the inclusion of the foreign introduces a polluting aspect, an artificiality, or even a sort of death in French food).

It is evident in the article that the real problem with the chefs’ laziness is that non-French items are being introduced to the French diet. So while they admit that a small number of chefs take the trouble to make their own foie gras, “les autres estiment plus d’ouvrir une boîte et, dans cette boîte, se trouve une foie bulgare, hongrois, ou, dans le

meilleur des cas, israélien” (24). Taken on its own, this article, appearing as it does just before the magazine launches *Nouvelle Cuisine*, lavishing great praise on the originality and excellence of French cuisine, is noteworthy. But the publication of a second, even more critical article on this disappearance of French ingredients prompts a closer look. In 1976, the magazine included an article entitled “Les Français ne mangent plus français.” This time, the story uses much stronger language to announce the alarming mystery, resorting to the familiar rhetoric of disappearance: “Tous les produits qui composaient le patrimoine culinaire de nos terroirs *disparaissent* peu à peu” (32).⁸ Suddenly, it is not just some lazy chefs occasionally resorting to imported shortcuts to make regional dishes, it is “*tous les produits*” and they compose nothing less than “le patrimoine culinaire.” Worse still, according to the authors, “Mais c’est peut-être l’amour des choses bien faites, élevées, bichonnées et surveillées avec passion qui est en train de *disparaître*, et c’est sûrement cela le plus grave” (33). The reason this second list of disappearing items is “plus grave” is because here they’re describing actual values and character traits, constitutive elements that wouldn’t be limited to *le patrimoine culinaire*, but would compose *le patrimoine* itself. Outlining what they call “une leçon d’humilité” (34), they elaborate on the many disappearances:

De tous les produits “bien français,” c’est sans doute le plus symbolique. Or les grenouilles *disparaissent* de nos marais. [...] Désormais, les cuisses de grenouilles arrivent de Yougoslavie, d’Albanie et de Grèce. (34)

⁸ The italics throughout this section are my own.

Les écrevisses *ont disparu* de nos rivières. [...] Cette *disparition* quasi totale, due aux barrages et surtout à la pollution, a enrichi la Pologne, la Yougoslavie et la Turquie. (34)

Les escargots *ont presque disparu*. [...] Il faut les faire venir vivants d'Europe centrale, principalement de Hongrie, de Pologne et de Roumanie. (34)

Les deux tiers de nos foies arrivent dans des containers glacés d'Europe Centrale et d'Israël. C'est le plus légalement du monde qu'ils garniront une boîte de foie gras "du Périgord" ou une terrine "de Strasbourg." [...] Les régions traditionnelles de production *se dépeuplent*, les grand-mères gaveuses *ont disparu*. (35)

The article continues in this vein for several pages, naming a traditionally French foodstuff, cataloging its disappearance, and pointing out not only the newly foreign provenance of the erstwhile French product, but also the deceptive labeling that hides France's loss of control over its national products. Even items protected by geographic appellations, such as *boeuf Charolais*, are not safe from deceptive labeling practices, and the authors' final word on the famed *boeuf Charolais* —“Au niveau de consommateur, toutes ces viandes perdent leur identité” (37)—makes clear that what's really at stake is traditional French identity, as these foodstuffs so fundamental to French cuisine are quietly, and almost secretly, disappearing. The repeated discourse of disappearance and the quiet purging of items so essential to French culinary identity sounds a familiar bell. And what we find is that Nouvelle Cuisine's positively framed discourse of the voluntary elimination of traditional French preparations performs like a cover, obfuscating the involuntary, and negatively framed, disappearance of some of France's most traditional and recognizable foods.

Though the food discourse follows a widespread cultural model of expressing one purge while hiding another, its ultimate goal seems to be the protection of its Frenchness

from the threat of foreign invasion. In this way, it expresses a very different anxiety from what emerges from Perec's book and its rhetoric of disappearance: there, the anxiety is focused on the purge of people treated as the invading other, not on the threat those people represent to Frenchness. It is a useful illustration of the oscillation of language studied by Faye in Langages totalitaires. He points out that the same linguistic terms are used to opposite purposes by contradictory movements, with each one claiming to be the winner of the constructed revolution:

On le voit, ce qui est positif et ce qui est négatif, ce qui est but et ce qui est détour ont rigoureusement permuté entre le langage de Moeller et celui de Weth. Au milieu de ces permutations, cependant, un élément reste identique: "gagner la révolution." Quelle révolution? La révolution est définie justement, au sens où tous deux l'entendent, par ce renversement symétrique des "détours." (34)

Interestingly, both the language of *détours* and the concept of claiming victory in the revolution come up in historical readings of France's reaction to the Algerian war. So I'd like to turn back briefly to how de Gaulle and his government framed Algeria's revolutionary bid for independence. Even though many intellectuals were convinced that France was engaged in torture and illegal violence in its conflict with Algeria, the official government narrative was much more circumspect about the way they framed the transition of French Algeria to Algerian Algeria. Not only did they refuse to admit to claims of torture, they failed even to acknowledge openly that France was at war with Algeria, referring instead to "les événements," "les opérations de police," "le drame algérien" and so on (Stora, Gangrène et l'oubli 13). Indeed, it was not until 1999 (37 years after Algerian independence) that the Assemblée Nationale recognized the official or legal status of the term "guerre d'Algérie." (Stora, Mots de la guerre 17). Stora writes

that France has a sort of amnesia where the horrors of Algeria are concerned and has failed to come to terms with its colonial past. Of course it is worth noting that Algeria was not the only colonial tie to be severed with violence in post-war France. The battle of Dien Bien Phu, for example, which took place from March to May of 1954, represented a thoroughly humiliating French defeat. When the French forces surrendered to the Viet Minh revolutionaries, it was, according to historian Alexander Woodside, “the worst defeat any Western colonial power ever suffered on the battlefield” at the hands of a people they once ruled (qtd in Borthwick 227). Given France’s former imperial dominance, it is perhaps understandable why for the French, “l’oubli obsède” (318), as Stora baldly states it.

3.5 Claiming Victory from the Jaws of Defeat

Stora’s argument that France enters into a voluntary amnesia about these defeats recalls and supports both Bellos’s and Beaugé’s observations about French culture after WWII. And Stora goes on to say that France’s persistent denial or repression of what he calls the amputation of Algeria provokes a gangrene that cannot help but express itself in a crisis of French nationalism (318). According to historian Todd Shepard, it is in an effort to avert this very crisis that France had to create a “fictional” narrative whereby “the Algerian experience had been an unfortunate colonial detour from which the French Republic had escaped” (11). Because of this rhetorical framing, eerily consistent with Faye’s reading of Germany, he says that many people accepted decolonization as a French victory even though Algeria waged a revolution against France and walked away with its independence. Calling on language that stressed France’s successful liberation

from an obsolete system, the government thus coopted Algeria's revolution and recast the liberation, and consequently the victory, as France's own.

The manner of hiding defeats and of purging perceived threats to the stability of a movement by framing them as part of a revolutionary victory is certainly present in Nouvelle Cuisine's discourse as well. Consider that culinary discourse sets up Madame Saint-Ange and Curnonsky, and consequently, *cuisine de femme*, as the targets of the Nouvelle Cuisine revolution. To assert or emphasize their revolutionary status, Nouvelle Cuisine chefs had to reject the authority of those who threatened their claims to originality, purging the memory or significance of their *cuisine de femme* predecessors along with traditional or classic French cuisine, a fact most easily represented by the disappearance of the sauces. However, in light of how France hid a defeat through the rhetoric of successful revolution, this anti-classicism rhetoric takes on a new significance, because if "one cover covered another" then there's bound to be an unacknowledged threat behind the purge of the old establishment. As it turns out, the early and mid-sixties saw a surprising number of articles predicting the impending demise of haute cuisine and, by extension, the end of French dominance in gastronomy, as well. The following article from the New York Times announces the death of the French restaurant:

Alas, the time is past when sauce bordelaise flowed like Perrier. In the last year, the Café Chauveron and the Colony have closed, and others are threatened. [...] André Surmain, the proprietor of Lutèce, says with finality, "It's a dying business."

[...] In the confrontation between principle and survival, only terrible alternatives seem to be left. Contemplating the ultimate disaster, Masson says, "The time may come when La Grenouille and other restaurants like it will have to sell hamburgers." (Bujarski SM10)

It's one thing for the popularity of French cuisine to falter on foreign shores but according to a 1964 article, also in the New York Times, the French themselves were aware that French cuisine was "au plus bas de la vague" (Gault and Millau, Best of Paris 15):

"One eats worse and worse in France," a reader recently wrote to a Paris daily.
"We live on a reputation which we no longer deserve." (Schneider SM20)

As evidenced by the comment about hamburgers above, and by the articles on the disappearance of French ingredients, the decline in France's culinary supremacy was often transformed into a narrative of invasion of French cuisine by foreign foods. But this invasion was by no means limited to the hamburger or even Americanization. In an in-depth profile of Le Monde food critic Robert Courtine, Courtine "insists" that he's no national food chauvinist, offering as proof that he likes "haggis, sauerbraten, and baked beans," but then goes on to say the following when passing a Chinese restaurant in Paris: "There is the yellow peril, a veritable Fifth Column. There were 27 in Paris before the war, now there are 400. It's food for sadists. They cut everything up into tiny pieces" (de Gramont SM9).

The perception of cuisine as a site of French identity is particularly striking in Courtine's quotation: the racist language ("yellow peril" "food for sadists") combined with the directly expressed perception of cultural invasion ("Fifth Column") reveals a nationalistic agenda where the protection of the French nation relies on the protection of French cuisine. Though Courtine did not believe that Nouvelle Cuisine was the right direction for the floundering French cuisine to take, he nonetheless shared Gault and

Millau's alarm over the foreign threats facing French cuisine in the sixties. If, as Shepard argued, the French erased the defeat of the Algerian war by creating a fictional narrative of "victory," then the narrative of a revolutionary Nouvelle Cuisine worked in a similar way.

The creation of a "revolutionary" cuisine that purged the most fundamental elements of classic French cuisine allowed the French to take credit for the defeat of their own cuisine. Rather than admit that the French haute cuisine model was dying or acknowledge that foreign food cultures threatened to invade the "soul" of French culture, Nouvelle Cuisine provided a revolution that purged its own past in order to claim the victory for itself. In their manifesto of Nouvelle Cuisine, Gault and Millau directly articulate this need to forget the fatty past:

Et c'est précisément cette image de bons vivants, grasses personnes, la serviette nouée autour de cou, dégoulinant de fonds de veau, de béchamel, et de vol-au-vent, décorés, chevaliers de confréries vineuses, bachiques et oenophiles, chanteurs à boire et palpeurs de soubrettes *que nous voudrions effacer de mémoires*.⁹ ("Vive la nouvelle cuisine" 67)

Cuisine is complicit with the larger national desire to erase a dark past ("nous voudrions effacer de mémoires"). Regardless of whether culinary practices were truly "revolutionary," the movement relies on discursive strategies and produces results consistent with historical processes that have been termed "revolutions." In this case, by providing an arena where participants of food culture can enact different versions of sacrifice and forgetting, Nouvelle Cuisine illustrates a way that food can project identity

⁹ Italics are mine.

as well as represent it. But, with its Manichaeic divisions of good and evil, and its incarnation of a conservative nationalistic agenda, Nouvelle Cuisine also demonstrates the potential dark side of revolution: once the revolution establishes the “new,” it must purge the “old.” But with the “old” gone, a constant and aggressive vigil is necessary to keep the new movement pure of perceived counter-revolutionary forces.

4. Purity

*Le pouvoir oblige, le pouvoir transforme, et
l'appétit, s'il faisait défaut, vient en mangeant.*

—Michel Winock

4.1 Culinary Purity as a Performance of Nation

In the introduction to French Colonial Cookery (2000), food writer David Burton recalls that the summer he chose to spend in France researching his book coincided somewhat remarkably with an *à propos* culinary debate between two pronounced factions of chefs in France. The debate, which at first resembled any standard quarrel between *les Anciens et les Modernes*, devolved into a rather ugly media storm that splashed around the French culinary world (and subsequently the international press) during the second half of 1996—a year incidentally that is often called *annus horribilis* by food writers and chefs alike (Lazareff). Burton writes, “It all began innocently enough in May 1996, with a press release from a public relations firm which, on the face of it, was nothing more than a promotion of regional foodstuffs, signed by Joël Robuchon and a dozen or so leading chefs...” (xv) The debate centered on the use of alien or foreign flavors and spices that the traditional chefs said were masking French ingredients and “suffocating” France’s national cuisine. He goes on to say, however, that once the story broke and the arguments were repeated and reworded, the language took on ever more hostile and even racist overtones. “Using expressions which seem alarmingly nationalistic, Robuchon

advocated ‘purity’, while Ducasse spoke of ‘polluting elements’. The French culinary identity, others claimed, was threatened by ‘bastardization’, ‘cross-breeding’, even by *cosmopolitisme*—a word much used by the Vichy regime in the 1940s with respect to a supposedly corrupting Jewish influence on French cultural life” (xvi).

The 1996 “War of the chefs,” as it was called, is hardly the first time that foreign foodstuffs have been treated as dangerous or noisome invaders. Recent examples would be “freedom fries” or the 2009 law passed in Tuscany that prohibited the sale of ethnic foods in Lucca’s historic city center. Both are instructive in slightly different ways. The term “freedom fries” was born in 2003, when France refused to support a United States-backed plan to invade Iraq. By ordering that the word “French” be banned from menus in every cafeteria in the House of Representatives, U.S. Representative Bob Ney ensured the term’s circulation at the highest levels of government discourse. His move also demonstrated the degree to which food and language combine to represent national identity. Consider the following from an article in the New York Times describing additional backlash against the French prompted by the “freedom fries” protests.

In Pennsylvania, a Republican state representative has proposed that state liquor stores divest themselves of Beaujolais. In New York, Washington, Chicago and San Francisco, the French-owned Hotel Sofitel is no longer flying the French flag -- "a precautionary measure," said a spokesman, Paul Charoy.

The managers of the House cafeterias, perhaps fearing Mr. Ney's wrath, have extended the French ban by placing red, white and blue "freedom" stickers over the word French on the yogurt machine and on dozens of individual packets of french dressing. (Stolberg 2)

What’s telling about this description is that nestled in this list between French wine, French yogurt, and french dressing is the actual French flag itself, as if French food or,

more accurately, foodstuffs called “French” are just as capable of representing France as the official and state-sanctioned symbol of the country. The idea that one could express overt displeasure with a nation by renaming or rejecting associative food products underlines the political role food can play in expressions of nation. It also points to an increasingly performative role played by food, because the word “French” in foodstuffs (or the expectation of it, as in “French wine”) becomes a repository for all the negative feelings that certain Americans associate with French political policy, and expunging the newly invested word from menus or intentionally destroying or rejecting “French” foods in a public spectacle allows the American actors to stage their displeasure with France.

The example of Lucca also demonstrates the conflation of nation with foodstuff in a social imaginary, but provides a somewhat different example of food as a performance. Described as an effort to preserve cultural heritage, the law banning ethnic foodstuffs from Lucca’s city center would, in addition to promoting regional Italian food, also necessarily close down numerous kebab stands, Chinese restaurants, and American-style fast-food restaurants, just to name a few casualties of the law. Italy’s Minister of Agriculture, Luca Zaia, a member of the Northern League (which supports a right-wing agenda that has been strongly anti-immigration) defended the law by saying, “This is not a battle against anything or anyone, but a defense of our culture and our agriculture” (qtd in Squires 1). However, according to The Observer (England), application of the law was not in keeping with this sentiment, where it was reported that one kebab shop was firebombed and, in another instance, “police in Tuscany uprooted and seized unauthorised Chinese vegetables planted by Chinese immigrants” (Kington 40). The

article reported that Zaia had supported this and other such raids on immigrants, and a noticeably stepped-up rhetoric calls his earlier denial of “battle” into question: “We must continue to block the arrival in this country of all foods which have nothing to do with our extremely rich agricultural heritage, and protect the hard work of our farmers and the health of Italians” (qtd in Kington 40). Zaia’s xenophobic statements about “blocking” the entry of foreign foods and protecting the “health” of the Italians rely on an unspoken presumption that what is “foreign” is also unhealthy. Journalists like Kington saw the law as an overly nationalistic attempt to shut down minority businesses, which would in turn eliminate the infiltration of immigrants (along with their foods and customs), particularly in areas frequented by tourists. In this example, Italy is arguing that the preservation of its culinary and cultural purity is threatened by the invasion of ethnic foods. The corollary to purity in this example is pollution or contamination, as evidenced by his concern that outside food was threatening the very health of the Italians. Purity, then, comes to represent all that is positive and worth preserving about Italianness, but promoting or safeguarding this purity is entirely reliant on expelling the contaminating “ethnic” food threats. The problem with this exclusionary effort to preserve culinary purity is of course the assumption that truly “pure” national cuisines exist. Where do you draw the historical or geographic lines that delineate Italian versus non-Italian food? As many people in the international community remarked, tomatoes were once a foreign import, and it has been noted that, ironically, the most stereotypically Italian of dishes, pasta, may have been introduced to Italy during the Arab conquests of Sicily.

This example of Italian culinary nationalism is even more reactive and far-reaching than the 1996 example of the French chef's call to ban foreign spices in French cooking because it goes so far as to enact legislation that mandates the expulsion of the foreign. But both situations endow the idea of culinary purity with perceived positive qualities of national identity and clarify their designation through the counter identification of non-national substances that stand in for dangerous pollutants that must be sanitized or expelled. As the examples demonstrate, trying to enforce or, worse, legislate the preservation of cultural or culinary purity presents a complex set of social and political challenges. The dual processes of, first, identifying and, then, seeking to purge the so-called threats to this purity are equally fraught with the potential for the expression of fascist sentiments. However, the language and action on display here also bring us back to Furet's remarks on the revolution's need for exclusion and the Manichaeic division of the nation into pure and polluting. If *purging* seeks to legitimize the revolution's status, then *purity* enforces and protects that legitimacy. It maintains (or sanitizes) what the purges begin. For that reason, I have chosen *purity* as the third component to investigate in Nouvelle Cuisine's revolutionary discourse. The process of enforcing culinary purity—the mutable and at times seemingly arbitrary notion of a singular French cuisine—mimics, to a lesser degree, the process of enforcing political purity, or what Robespierre referred to as *une volonté une*. For Furet, the Terror, with its hypervigilant protection against all perceived threats to the Republic, must be viewed as an integral part of the Revolution, not as a distinct or separate series of events. Along those lines, historian David Andress writes of the Jacobin government, “the government

was ‘revolutionary,’ not merely in the sense that it was the consequence of revolution, but that it would act as it saw fit, outside the bounds of any written laws, to defend the Republic against all the many threats to its existence” (224). For Andress, then, the act of being “revolutionary” includes within it the possibility of an unchecked defense of that revolution. The problem, of course, becomes who distinguishes between the “*volonté une*” of the Republic and the threats to the Republic? As is clear from the example of the exclusion (and even execution) of the Girondins by the Jacobins, even the most devoted revolutionaries can be cast as the counterrevolution if they appear to pose a threat to the nebulous *volonté une*. It is this combination of aggressive defense without the burden of law that created “a formula for an ever-narrowing definition of political purity and legitimacy” (Andress 225).

In this chapter I will look at two major ways that the revolution of Nouvelle Cuisine fought to maintain the legitimacy and purity of French cuisine. In the first instance, I’ll look at how the idea of purity functions discursively in the articulation of Nouvelle Cuisine over time, especially after the term Nouvelle Cuisine has fallen out of favor. In the second part of the chapter, I will examine how, trapped in its own “ever-narrowing definition” of legitimacy, French cuisine enacts its own protectionist purification. This section will demonstrate how a culinary revolution that initially appeared to include women chefs like Olympe extended its perception of threat from *cuisine de femme* to *les femmes* themselves and systematically eliminated women from haute cuisine.

A study by anthropologist Rebecca Stein provides a useful framework for understanding the conditional relationship between culinary purity (as defined by the practitioners and, later, inheritors of the Nouvelle Cuisine movement) and the specific moment it inhabits in postcolonial France. Stein examines culinary tourism in a Palestinian village that has historically had a cooperative relationship with Israel. Despite being Palestinian, village bakeries, cafés, and restaurants draw a large Israeli and tourist crowd by specializing in traditional Israeli foods and dishes. She argues that these food practices can be read as performative displays that “rehearse the grammar and gestures of dominant nationalism” (98) so as to dramatize the longing for an impossible state of nationalism, on the one hand, while also suggesting an alternative conception of nationalism at the same time. The restaurant sector thus functions as a “political theatre” where seemingly incommensurable desires and anxieties can be staged. She uses the term *edibility* to express the ways that culinary practices are able to take on positive social value in specific situations:

The term attempts to demarcate the contingent nature of food and eating in any given context, how what is deemed good to eat within the terms of a prevailing social imaginary is implicated in situated histories, politics, and notions of geography. Edibility is thus the culinary analogue of intelligibility. The condition of edibility denotes not merely that a given food is or can be eaten in any literal sense, but that it is popularly considered worthy of consumption. (99)

I would argue that it is “inedibilities” that arise from the previous examples of xenophobic culinary purity, where the act of banning a food that is representative of the foreign invader allows the diner to dramatize the longed-for homogenous and unified nationalism, while rehearsing a solution that would allay the fears surrounding escalating immigration rates. I would like to use Stein’s concept of edibilities to frame the

inconsistent, and often contradictory, way that *purity* is employed in Nouvelle Cuisine discourse.

4.2 The Semantic Impurities of “Purity”

Purity is a powerful tool in the revolution’s discursive toolbox, in part because of its ability to impart overwhelmingly positive connotations, but also because of its rather shadowy dexterity. Despite the seemingly fixed and transparent meaning of the term, the concept of *purity* is itself a highly unstable and contaminated construction, whose shifting values and attributes allow the term to quietly slide in and out of contradictory meanings. Examinations of the term’s equivocality emphasize not how distinct, but rather how slippery is the divide between the revolution’s false binary of what is pure and what is polluted or polluting.

We’ve already seen how one word can come to represent many contradictory or conflicting positions, but in the case of *purity*, this is exacerbated by the fact that the term’s own definition insists on invariability and precision. Yet, as we will discover, that definition is itself far from “pure.” In the Petit Robert, the definition of *pureté* is divided into two subsections: an abstract meaning and a concrete meaning. In the abstract, the first definition for *pureté* is “Etat de ce qui est pur, sans souillure morale” (2120). The second definition is “Etat de ce qui est sans mélange.” The third definition, however, shows where we start to lose a firm grasp on the term: “Etat de ce qui se conforme avec élégance à des règles, à un type de perfection (pureté de la langue)” (2120). This definition switches rather abruptly from a set of rigorously objective criteria to a set of almost completely subjective criteria. Problems also arise when the term’s concrete

usage is defined. In the first, to be *pur*, a substance has “aucune trace d’une autre substance (en pratique, aucune impureté décelable)” ; which after a semicolon becomes the same thing as “homogénéité parfaite.” In the second, *pureté* is “Etat de ce qui est sans défaut, sans altération” (2120). This definition suddenly creates an equal sign between the idea of a flaw and the fact of being altered or modified. According to the Petit Robert, the opposite of *pureté* is of course “impureté,” but “corruption,” “immoralité,” and interestingly “mélange” and “imperfection” are also listed among the antonyms (2120).

For a definition more specifically tailored to food and culinary interests, I turned to the encyclopedia Larousse Gastronomique. According to the 1996 edition, the word *pur* refers to “un aliment dont la composition correspond à une réglementation légale” (870). But the examples provided in the Larousse also betray the lack of any precision or consistency in the meaning or application of this word. According to French law, for example, the use of the term *pur* when discussing fruit signifies that only the fruit mentioned and nothing else was used in the product labeled pure. That type of definition would seem to correspond with the definition in the Petit Robert that refers to a state of perfect homogeneity (unmixed) and also to the definition that refers to an unaltered substance, at least chemically.

Unfortunately, the meaning becomes significantly less clear after that. When talking about beef, pork or animal products, the word *pur* indicates that, legally, the meat and fat in the package come only from the animal mentioned but may also contain unspecified additives and artificial coloring. With regard to oils, *pur* only governs that the oil contains no coloring. Restrictions regarding the addition of additives aside from

coloring, the provenance of the fruit, seed, or nut that makes up the oil, as well as the percentage of that item in the composition of the oil are not specified. The only thing that is clear from these definitions is that the word *pur* implies either some form of exclusivity or exclusion. But there's no certainty as to what that is, especially since the very same ingredient—coloring, for example—is considered a pollutant in oils, but is deemed pure in beef or pork.

Coming back to postcolonial France and in particular the Nouvelle Cuisine phenomenon, it is fairly clear that the prolific use of the word *pur*—or words that evoke purity—in Nouvelle Cuisine discourse by chefs and food writers alike has very little or nothing to do with the type of definition found in the Larousse. Though amorphous and undefined, the claim to purity was raised right from the beginning of the Nouvelle Cuisine revolution. Gault and Millau described the new culinary style as “the really great, the simple, the pure, the intelligent, and generous new gastronomy of our time” (qtd in de Groot 18). Inserted here, as it is, among adjectives associated more with character or value judgments than with food preparation (“great,” “intelligent,” “generous”), it seems safe to infer that, in this context, the meaning of “pure” extends to an abstract, philosophical, possibly ethical, but clearly positive designation. Nouvelle Cuisine chef Paul Bocuse also emphasizes the centrality of purity, and also provides a slightly more specific use of the word when describing the importance of his mentor Fernand Point in the development of his revolutionary cooking style: “He purified the cuisine. He worked to bring out and enhance the natural taste of a *volaille de Bresse*, not to disguise it” (Kulla and Kulla 81). Purification in this example is capable of creating an image of

authenticity (“natural taste”), but it is also explicitly, and irrevocably, linked to the removal of disguises, showing the degree to which purity is not only the enforcement of purging, but also its rationale.

The highly entangled relationship between purity and purging is demonstrated more immediately in the French language, where *épuration* and *pureté* are close linguistic cousins, and I concede that separating the two cleanly is not always possible. However, while we are looking at linguistic links between *pureté* and *épuration*, I’d like to propose a language-based metaphor to clarify the distinction that I envision between the two. Purging, happening as it does immediately with the revolution, might be compared to the *passé composé*—an action of limited and/or specific duration that begins and ends. On a linear diagram of time, the *passé composé* could be represented as a point on a line. Purity, on the other hand, evolves and changes over time and in this way could be compared to the *imparfait*. On our linear diagram of time, the *imparfait* might be represented by a continuous line. Just as both tenses express the past, both *pureté* and *épuration* express exclusion, but, as with the tenses, they perform these expressions in ways that are sometimes quite distinct and sometimes stubbornly indiscernible.

Purging and purity are also firmly inscribed in the French Roman Catholic tradition, which brings us to another intertwined relationship that makes it difficult to separate any notion of purity from the society that is producing the term. Specifically, *culinary purity* is nearly always linked to *moral purity*. Historically, of course, there has been a great deal of conflation between alimentary and moral purity in religious discourse, particularly in publications seeking to clarify the official Roman Catholic

position on issues like fasting or purging, or on foods that were deemed healthy versus those determined to be vices. There is a historical precedent for this type of elision in the earliest examples of food writing that is worth looking at because of its parallels to the “guerre des chefs” example. To historicize the chefs’ 1996 protest against foreign spices, Burton cites canonical culinary texts by La Varenne and Nicolas de Bonnefons to show that the vogue in the seventeenth century was to take a stand against alien spices (such as saffron, cardamom, and ginger) that had made their way into French preparations, prioritizing instead the use of native French herbs. It becomes clear from these texts that degrading foreign food stuffs whose provenances are more manifest becomes an integral part of praising French foods, thus creating not just distinction but a hierarchical distinction that solidifies the excellence or superiority of French ingredients—and by extension of Frenchness itself. In one such example, Burton cites Charles, seigneur de Saint-Evremond, writing on the purity of French cuisine: “Fine herbs are wholesome, and have something in them more exquisite than spices” (xvii). The word *wholesome* in Burton’s translation is particularly striking because, in English, the word *wholesome* moves the defense against foreign spices or ingredients to another level. No longer simply a question of taste or nutrition, the word “wholesome” seems to convey the distinction of moral superiority as well. This nuance becomes significant when taken in light of the enormous jockeying for power that took place in the seventeenth century within religious contexts, between the Jesuits and the Jansenists, the Huguenots and the Catholics, monarchs and the Pope, or the Christian West and the Muslim East, for example. There were also significant religious implications to France’s seventeenth-

century expansion projects, which rationalized the “civilizing,” converting and, occasionally, torturing of “l’homme sauvage” on the grounds of France’s assumed moral authority.

To verify that the moral connotations inherent in the use of the English word *wholesome* were also present in the French text, I tracked down the source and discovered that *wholesome* was the author’s translation for the French word *sain*: “Les fines herbes sont plus saines, et ont quelque chose de plus exquis que les épices” (Evremond 414). Petit Robert defines *sain* as “Qui contribue à la bonne santé, n’a aucun effet funeste sur l’état physique;” and “hygiénique, bien tenue, propre” (2347). But as an antonym, it lists “dépravé,” suggesting a moral overtone. In addition, immediately following the definition is a boxed note that says “ce mot est issu du latin *sanus*, ‘sain, bien portant (au physique et au moral)’” (2347). The real confirmation, however, that his use of “sain” invests the totemically French “fines herbes” with a moral purity superior to that of the foreign *épices* is Evremond’s use of the same word in a separate context to convey precisely that sense: “Je laisse à nos savants à confondre les erreurs des calvinistes, et il me suffit d’être persuadé que nous avons les sentiments les plus sains” (259). Evremond makes dual claims to purity with his “plus sains” constructions. And each one creates power for his position by enacting the pure/impure binary. In an international context, he sets France and its herbs up to be better than foreign spices, implying that the herbs can impart to the eater a moral and physical superiority natural to France. Within France, he creates a hierarchy among religions and then uses the positive designation of “plus sains” to distinguish himself. It is worth noting that this seventeenth-

century analog to the “guerre des chefs,” occurs during Louis XIV’s determined quest to establish France’s strong cultural identity in opposition to threats such as Calvinism or the Muslim presence in the Proche Orient:

In a Eurocentric gesture that parallels Louis XIV’s decision to begin manufacturing in France exotic luxury goods, such as porcelain, [chefs] replaced foreign spices with indigenous herbs, in particular parsley—called by one author ‘our French spice’—thyme, chives, and scallions. (DeJean 113)

Joan DeJean is just one scholar who explicitly connects the expulsion of foreign spices with France’s political and economic expansions.

Modern-day claims to purity, however, reveal more ambivalence in certain rehearsals of Frenchness. In La Grande Cuisine minceur, Guérard says “Mon pauvre corps, lesté de trop de relents de sauces riches et voluptueuses, avait tant et si bien enflé qu’il me clouait pour l’éternité à ce sol” (11). His condemnation of “sauces riches et voluptueuses” and his imagery of “clous” and “l’éternité” certainly link culinary practice with a moral or spiritual one. But, later, his description of his early efforts to purify his body by abandoning the old, classic French cuisine reveal the inherent contradictions of purity as espoused by Nouvelle Cuisine proponents:

Ainsi commençait pour moi la longue marche à travers les champs de carottes râpées et autres sympathiques délices apparentés qui vous font vite regretter d’avoir vu, un jour, le jour et vous entraînent joyeusement au désespoir. *Le rituel* “grillade-haricots verts à l’eau” me laissa vite sans voix. [...]

Je me sentis brusquement *solitaire, isolé, contagieux, comme mis en quarantaine* et tout envahi d’un sentiment de frustration claustrophobique. (11-12)¹

¹ Italics are mine.

Suddenly, this monk-like “ritual” intended to purify him from the polluting effects of the rich indulgences creates instead a new form of contamination and pollution, one that leaves him feeling infected and isolated. The religious imagery in Guérard’s language is thus mitigated by the seemingly contradictory need to stage both sacrifice and pleasure in French food consumption.

For Guérard, the edibility of pure, light food unexpectedly reverses and becomes an *inedibility*. The rich, heavy, creamy preparations were depicted as evidence of a decadent, corrupt institution but Classic French cuisine could not be deposed by simply paring down to the naked ingredients that remained. Instead, an official expert, such as an artist-chef, had to lead the way to this culinary simplicity, that is in fact not simple, because according to Guérard, “Mais tout comme qui ne sait pas nager coule à pic, qui ne connaît pas la cuisine se noie dans une tasse” (12). Indeed even in the most respected hands, finding the right balance between culinary and moral purity is no simple matter. In 1983, the Gault and Millau guide awarded Alain Senderens a score of 19/20, the highest score in the guide and only matched by one other restaurant. But the guide faulted him for occasionally slipping to what is apparently the wrong side of “purity,” like the overly sacrificial or austere style that left Guérard feeling “isolated” and “quarantined.” Setting up the divide once again between religious purity (deprivation) and culinary purity (a vague and shifting notion of “natural”), the guide describes Senderens as a “moine ligueur en guerre contre les sauces” (Guide de Paris 1983: 45) and complains that, “il arrive, évidemment, à Senderens de ‘mettre à côté de la plaque’ et sacrifier la saveur à la ‘pureté’ [...] mais quand c’est réussi, c’est la perfection” (Guide de Paris 1983: 45).

Despite the implication in the Gault-Millau guide's reproach of Senderens that "saveur" and "pureté" are oppositional pairs, these terms somehow come back together in the guide's description of Joël Robuchon and his phenomenal success in 1985: "Rien dans ce tourbillon subit n'a réussi à entamer le flegme, la modestie et la sagesse de Joël Robuchon. [...] On resterait bouche bée devant un talent aussi lumineux, un sens des saveurs pures aussi aiguisé" (Guide de Paris 1985: 107). Even though the guide's description of Robuchon also emphasizes his monk-like qualities ("modestie," "sagesse"), his "saveurs pures" are more heavenly than sacrificial—the guide compares the delicate purity of his dishes to clouds adding, "on se demande si ce n'est pas un ange qui les ai faits" (Guide de Paris 1985: 107). The confusion here between a purity that elevates and a purity that contaminates (Guérard says he felt contagious) recalls the question raised earlier of who differentiates between the revolutionary and the counterrevolutionary. The power to distinguish among these forms of purity, to dole out praise or censure, remains beyond the reach or understanding of the average consumer, remaining instead in the smallest collection of seemingly self-ordained experts.

It is curious that a revolutionary movement, one that stresses liberation, experimentation, and increased access to food knowledge, would find such a passive audience in the Nouvelle Cuisine devotees. Guérard's don't-try-this-at-home approach, Gault and Millau's "dix commandements," and then their subsequent shifting definitions of the movement's priorities are suggestive instead of a totalitarian or absolute authority. This steady production of articles and cookbooks that regulate acceptable cooking possibilities or reveal the latest prohibitions all seem to meet with eager and

unquestioning cooperation from the majority of would-be culinary experts. Sociologist Roy C. Wood, one of several scholars to note this ovine response, registers his surprise saying,

The *nouvelle* style is of interest because of the nature of the market relationship that exists between producer and consumer. Nouvelle Cuisine is very much a producer's product, yet it has been embraced by an audience willing to be dictated to by suppliers—not perhaps altogether unusual in a world where the power of the latter is routinely used to mould consumer tastes but curious in that the market for Nouvelle Cuisine is normally regarded as one characterized by considerable discrimination and exacting demands. (79)

Wood's market formulation pairs the chef/producer and the French public/consumer and could account, at least in part, for the captive response we see in the initial years of Nouvelle Cuisine. However, I would like to put forward that even though the public appears passive, they are still actors, not merely spectators in this performance, and as such, are more than consumers. The identification of this active/passive submission to an ideology of purity inscribes the Nouvelle Cuisine model of revolution into its 1789 antecedent in a new way.

4.3 A Taste for Collective Submission and Sacrificial Violence

In his book The Headless Republic, Jesse Goldhammer remarks on the apparent ease with which revolutionary martyrs were able to induce the public to follow them in performing sacrificial violence in the name of achieving a purified nation. Furthermore, he notes that, as with culinary purity, the quest for national purity is not completely distinct from a longing for moral or religious purity:

As the quintessential form of communal violence, sacrifice offers those who wish to reconfigure the political future a spectacular link to a distant mythologized past. In a world increasingly bereft of sacred places and sublime acts, political sacrifice enthralls oppressed and frightened people, providing them with a violent

outlet for expressing agency and generating collective meaning. The logic of sacrifice [...] appeals to those bent on translating religious devotion into political obedience. [...] Without gods to establish the right to rule and the legitimacy of laws, modern political actors must find alternative sources of the sacred. (197-198)

The zeal with which Nouvelle Cuisine appealed to the public to sacrifice various targets within the culinary aristocracy seems almost violent at times. The public's acquiescence to these sacrifices, however, makes more sense if we apply Goldhammer's theory to the condition in which French cuisine found itself at this time. Goldhammer argues that the loss of the sacred creates an environment where sacrifice and punishment provide an outlet for asserting "agency" and creating "collective meaning."

According to a Gault-Millau guide written for English-speaking visitors to France, cuisine was in precisely that dilemma:

The finest restaurants used to be temples where a great religion was celebrated with wildly complicated rites. Nowadays, they must strive for wide appeal in order to survive, and tend to lose their spectacular originality. They do their best to live up to their image; it's not their fault if this is becoming more and more difficult. (Best of Paris 11)

Without these culinary temples, where lavish displays of luxury and "wildly complicated rites" performed the nation's claim to originality and excellence and established a hierarchical model of the ruling elite, Gault and Millau, with their commandments and their reproductive discourse, provided the culinary version of what Goldhammer calls "alternative sources of the sacred." Recall, for example, Le Nouveau Guide Permanent's "On Conteste dans les rangs" section that urged readers, as a patriotic duty, to seek out and report perceived failures or offenses of the nation's top tables. The authors claimed they would protect these "monuments nationaux [...] par tous les moyens" and used

words like “délation,” “dénoncer,” “châtier,” “vilain,” and “plaie” in their call to arms. Soliciting and then publishing these anonymous restaurant infractions, which essentially convict the “guilty” party simply on the word of the informant, amounts to a sort of secret policing of the industry, and of course recalls a more infamous and decidedly violent set of “patriotic” denunciations in France.

After the French Revolution, the Jacobins passed laws that made it every citizen’s duty to denounce anyone who might be an “ennemi du peuple.” Article 9 of the *Loi de Prairial* reads “Tout citoyen a le droit de saisir et de traduire devant les magistrats les conspirateurs et les contre-révolutionnaires. Il est tenu de les dénoncer dès qu’il les connaît” (qtd in Lefort 101). By granting to “tout citoyen” not just the right but the duty to denounce any other citizen as a counter-revolutionary, without the burden of producing evidence, the *Loi de Prairial* obliterated the traditional chain of power and security. Even the least entitled person had the access to the citizenry through the power to denounce. The call to save France’s restaurants (expressed as a duty to preserve the nation’s “monuments”) shares both the *Loi de Prairial*’s summons to “dénoncer” as well as the impression that “cette nouvelle forme de contestation dans les rangs” (81) will bring about new ways to increase one’s own power and status. But just as the line between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary was blurred as the Terror continued, so too is there slippage in the revolutionary rhetoric of Gault and Millau.

While the notion of challenging authority from the ranks certainly sounds like a revolutionary value, the magazine’s page layout and the assortment of complaints enumerated by Gault and Millau seem more aligned with the counter-revolution than the

revolution. The ad on the page facing the article is for the latest edition of Juilliard Guide de Paris, co-authored by Henri Gault and Christian Millau. It proclaims “une formule inimitable” and “un succès considérable” with more than 300, 000 copies sold. Descriptions such as these, which enumerate Gault and Millau’s obvious power and influence in the culinary industry, make their self-characterization as just visitors to the most “imposants” hotels and restaurants seem somewhat disingenuous. Their successful guidebook marks them as consummate insiders, not revolutionaries. So does another ad in the magazine that invites readers to join their exclusive “Club Gault-Millau.” The ad promises that, “avec la carte en or, vous êtes un prince” (10). Far from contesting from the ranks, the Carte Gault-Millau promises that, “il suffit alors de montrer la carte en or, nouvelle patte blanche, pour que ‘le tapis rouge’ soit déroulé” (10). Instead of promoting equality and democracy, the ad uses the language of the monarchy (“prince,” “tapis rouge”) to sell the Carte Gault-Millau, promoting the opposite instead: “Vous devenez un privilégié” (10).

Furthermore, not one of the denunciations in the aforementioned “On Conteste dans les rangs” article refers to the quality or taste of the actual food. Instead, every remark focuses on service: lazy, unaccommodating, or disinterested service: “Le portier du Ritz qui, à 9h du soir, nous refuse le stationnement devant son hôtel, alors que nous y venons dîner, et ne se donne pas la peine d’ouvrir, quand nous ressortions deux heures plus tard, ni la porte de ce célèbre hôtel, ni celle de nos voitures” (81). Despite their appeal to report snobby, pretentious behavior and despite saying that they won’t bother readers with insignificant shoulder shrugs and sighs, the complaint that a Ritz doorman

didn't open the door to their carg (plural!), makes it difficult to picture them "dans le rang." The traditional nature of their complaints also indicates that they are more interested in *restoring* the restaurants to their former glory (complete with a doorman who knows his place) than in sacrificing these microcosms of aristocratic dominance in the name of a higher revolutionary cause.

The article also inadvertently references a much more recent tragedy perpetuated in the name of "purification" with the use of the word "délation," a term that would still have been very much invested with its WWII meaning (more than three million informants denounced others during the occupation of France). The authors casually distance themselves from the action, "La délation est un villain défaut," only to counter in the next sentence, with no apparent remorse, that such an activity may at times be necessary, "Mais les monuments nationaux [...] méritent d'être sauvés par tous les moyens" (81). Indeed, they seem to relish the opportunity to report restaurant infractions, as evidenced by their inclusion of Bofinger, which is a brasserie, to a list that was intended to target "les grands restaurants." The combined articulation of "dénonciation" and "délation" in this article points not to just an initial over zealous presentation of a revolutionary new cuisine by Gault and Millau but to an enduring and systematic approach to the management and maintenance of their power as culinary authorities. Their magazine consistently ran articles that claimed to uncover all manner of restaurant and industry infractions. Such articles couched their public denunciations in a posture of the dutiful defense of French cuisine. Here is just a brief sampling of articles that appeared in *Le Nouveau Guide* between 1973 and 1981. Such alarmist presentation both

frightened readers (leading them to feel they *needed* this protection) and emphasized the magazine's total authority to censure whomever they pleased:

- “Les Plus Mauvais Plats de la cuisine française” (Le Nouveau Guide No. 55)
- “Les Additions les plus folles des restaurants les plus chers” (Le Nouveau Guide No. 56)
- “La Surgélation: Un danger pour notre santé?” (Le Nouveau Guide No. 60)
- “Les Combines des mauvais restaurants” (Le Nouveau Guide No. 62)
- “Les Couleurs qui vous trompent” (Le Nouveau Guide No. 65)
- “Ils sont fous ces restaurateurs! Cuisiniers imitateurs. Biologique = Bidon” (Le Nouveau Guide No. 67)
- “Le Vrai Scandale des vins du Midi” (Le Nouveau Guide No. 86)
- “Les Français ne mangent plus français” (Le Nouveau Guide No. 89)
- “Un repas très louche avec les Frères Jacques” (Le Nouveau Guide No. 92)

The authors proudly report that they obtain the information for such articles by spying, intentionally misleading their subjects, and of course by attempting to disguise themselves.

Similarly, in the intro to one of their guidebooks, they admit that they typically include a couple of entries that are entirely fabricated. They go on to describe the “plaisirs sadiques” (Guide de Paris 1983: 9) they feel when such traps successfully flush out pretenders:

Et croyez-le, notre vicieuse attente n'a jamais été déçue.

C'est ainsi qu'ayant inventé de toutes pièces un restaurant chinois dans le Marais, nous eûmes la joie, l'année suivante, de voir son existence confirmée par un journaliste américain, fort célèbre à l'époque. Une autre fois, ce fut un

“réparateur d’ombres chinoises” (un beau métier, quoique assez fragile) qui inspira à l’un de nos confrères le récit vécu d’une visite à son atelier, dans l’île Saint-Louis. (Guide de Paris 1983: 9)

That they intentionally plant fabrications in their work in order to reveal the lazy and careless dishonesty in the work of others creates the highly ironic situation where they increase their power by *appearing* more trustworthy than their plagiarizing competitors.

The obvious joy they take in these acts of *délation* is hardly unique to Gault and Millau. The enormous success of their magazine and guidebooks (essentially their “brand”) attests to the public’s appreciation for and participation in these “plaisirs sadiques.” In fact, according to journalist Jacqueline Remy, there is an unfortunate but decided complicity in these purifying sacrifices among a surprisingly large segment of the French population. In a L’Express cover article entitled simply “La Délation,” Remy suggests that, despite the lack of hard data to substantiate such a claim, the collective willingness to denounce one’s neighbors, rivals, colleagues, and so forth, is particularly prevalent in France:

Cela porte un nom: la délation. Pas de chiffres, pas de statistiques, pas même de définition précise. Mais un phénomène quotidien. Qui peut frapper n’importe qui. Vous, peut-être. Vous écornez la loi, les règlements administratifs, les bonnes moeurs ou simplement les usages? [...] Alors, dans l’ombre, “on” gamberge. Quelqu’un, connu ou inconnu, proche ou non, vous épie. (44)

She lists case after case of “citoyens” who, with or without rewards, find reasons to expose or turn in people whose rights or citizenship, they believe, should be curtailed: a wealthy acquaintance who doesn’t pay enough taxes, a homosexual who built a wall without the proper permit (“c’est sans doute qu’il a des activités répréhensibles à cacher,” said the informant), an immigrant neighbor who carries suspicious packages to his

apartment at night. Recalling the term's association with the Occupation, she points out that the term is taboo, but the practice continues, and nearly always with the same defense: "Les délateurs ont toujours un alibi auquel ils feignent de croire: ils font le ménage de la France" (44). Despite acknowledging that, certainly, an individual's personal psychology plays a large role in "délation," she nonetheless also points out that the practice is fundamental to totalitarian regimes, but thrives in democratic societies like France, "lorsqu'elles se sentent en danger" (48). By describing how informants use *délation* both to gain power within the society through exclusion as well as to participate in the larger collective defense of the nation, Remy's article supports Goldhammer's assertion that sacrificial violence provides an outlet for expressing agency and collective meaning. Seen in a culinary context, the article allows us to posit that the methods and rhetoric employed in culinary discourse—with their strong emphasis on purity and its requisite sacrificial violence—reveal a position marked more by insecurity and vulnerability than strength and provide new challenges to the notion of Nouvelle Cuisine as a successful revolution that liberated and democratized French cuisine.

Before moving on from this idea of French diners as willing, if passive, participants in the sacrifices made to maintain the establishment created by Gault and Millau and the Nouvelle Cuisine chefs, I'd like to consider one last rhetorical move in the "On conteste dans les rangs" article. Supporting Goldhammer's assertion that sites of revolutionary sacrifice are often invested with images of religious morality, the authors use the verb *châtier* to describe their plans for offenders. That they themselves place the verb in quotation marks only draws further attention to its overblown religious and moral

connotations. According to the definition of the word *châtier* in the Petit Robert, “L’idée de pureté est présente dans *chaste* comme dans *caste* (du portugais, évoquant des races sans mélanges)” (410). Interestingly, this definition reminds us how narrow the linguistic gap is between the moral purity of *châtier* and the racial or national purity of *caste*, creating a new and obvious link between purification and projects of eugenics.

4.4 “La France aux Français...”

As claims to “purity” escalate, so does the language of exclusion. Articulating these exclusions very often highlights the parallels between defining cuisine and defining a nation. Food historian Ken Albala notes the appearance of this exclusionary nature of food and its potential as a political force as early as the end of the modern period: “Then it is clear that food had become a tool of state and an instrument of both exclusion and national pride” (137). Annales historian Fernand Braudel has also argued that food has always been about exclusion. When the masses can afford and access items that were once considered luxury products, the elite move on to something else.² We see proof of these exclusions even in food movements that seek to deny any form of exclusivity. Carlo

² I am particularly fond of Braudel’s articulation of luxury. He succinctly lays out the tense interplay between the classes created by luxury goods. He also demonstrates why a study of objects typically associated with luxury, and thus the very wealthy, is able to engage in broad social commentary, despite its seemingly narrow focus: “Ainsi le luxe a bien des visages, selon les époques, les pays ou les civilisations en cause. Ce qui ne change guère, par contre, c’est la comédie sociale, sans commencement ni fin, dont il est à la fois l’enjeu et le thème, spectacle de choix pour sociologues, psychanalystes, économistes, historiens. Il faut, bien sur, que les privilégiés et les spectateurs, c’est à dire la masse qui les contemple, s’accordent dans une certaine connivence, Le luxe n’est pas seulement rareté, vanité, il est réussite, fascination sociales, le rêve qu’un jour les pauvres atteignent, lui faisant perdre aussitôt tout son ancien éclat” (Structures du quotidien 154).

Petrini claims that Slow Food (a movement identified with Italy but founded in Paris and modeled on the French concept of *terroir* that protects a region's food purity) "creates an elite without excluding anyone" (19). The Slow Food manifesto demonstrates an awareness of the exclusionary practices that are, for Albala and Braudel, inherent to food, and tries to counteract that tradition by creating an entirely new set of practices that govern our relationship to food in ways that do not exclude anyone. Unfortunately, even a politics of food that sets out to be all-inclusive fails to escape the inclusive/exclusive divide: the Slow Food manifesto calls for the expulsion of fast food *and* its proponents, calling them a "virus" that must be extinguished (xxiii).

The language of contamination, contagion, and viruses, such as that used in the Slow Food manifesto and in the French culinary rhetoric that I will look at in a moment, is often wielded to maintain a desired form of social and political control. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that in the wake of postcolonial globalization, "The boundaries of nation-states [...] are increasingly permeable by all kinds of flows. Nothing can bring back the hygienic shields of colonial boundaries. The age of globalization is the age of contagion" (136). What I'd like to suggest is that the linguistic conflations and contortions enacted in expressions of purity and pollution in evolving French culinary rhetoric perform a sort of semi-covert cultural triage—assigning positive or negative values according to the complex workings or shifting priorities and anxieties within French society.

The unavoidable but imprecise relationship that exists between political and culinary discourse during this time is displayed in the following description of a chef that

made “purity” his signature value. Here his hypersanitized form of cooking seeks to exclude all but the essence of a singular ingredient, a cuisine uncontaminated by mixtures or “mishmash”:

It was flattering to the young, inexperienced chef of 1976 that GaultMillau had praised the ragout of scallops, sweetbreads, veal kidneys and crayfish that he presented to them, but the mature Chef Bernard turned his back on such a profligate mix of tastes, colors and textures. The ragout was surely delicious, but it smacked suspiciously of mishmash. It was not *pure*. As the years passed and he honed le style Loiseau into a disciplined syllabus with defining rules and taboos, Bernard grew far more sectarian about what was right and what wrong, and *his rules hardened into something like a party line*. There was to be no more than three saveurs on the client’s plates, with the main ingredient *pure* in its true, unadorned taste; a simple but vigorous sauce that revealed and reinforced that taste; and two accompanying sub-dishes, each one designed for the that ingredient alone and not for any other. Unsurprisingly, this cuisine reflected his character. Like the theorizing Parisian intellectuals who continued to cling to their uncompromising Marxist-Leninist Weltanschauung even as the world of Communism was falling into shambles everywhere, Bernard’s insistence on *purity of taste* has an *absolutist ring* to it that was strangely reminiscent of Maoism. (Chelminski 203)³

From Loiseau’s attitude toward food, we see that the food that had been considered pure and praiseworthy in 1976 no longer held the same culinary value in the 1980s and early 1990s. The quotation above makes repeated allusions and comparisons to political attitudes but is unable or unwilling to untangle the confusing parallels between food and politics. The political references in the paragraph seem to suggest that at the end of the sixties, French intellectuals had staked the nation’s identity on a rejection of American-style capitalism in favor of a Marxist-Leninist worldview. Once communism’s failures were revealed, and with France maintaining a public posture of tenacious resistance to the

³ Italics are mine.

American model, the nation found itself without a clear and defining political identity. Chelminski somewhat confusedly compares Loiseau's cuisine both to the intellectuals who held on to their Marxist-Leninist dreams despite communism's disappointments and to a form of Maoist absolutism.

Though Loiseau's culinary austerity may sufficiently support comparisons to Maoism, I believe his culinary practices are also reminiscent of Escoffier's elaborate and inflexible codification of French cuisine. Loiseau sets out to establish a "disciplined syllabus with defining rules and taboos." In a time of political indecision that may recall the political compromises that characterized the Third Republic of Escoffier's time, Loiseau wants to scour away all adornment. He dedicates his entire meal to one main taste, with all its sub-dishes and accompaniments "designed for that ingredient alone and not for any other." In a highly exclusionary and ideological cuisine, Loiseau's rules, like Escoffier's, defined "what was right and what was wrong." Food steps in, with the help of zealously committed purists like Loiseau and other inheritors of the post-Nouvelle Cuisine era, to stage powerful expressions of national singularity and exception through aggressive culinary codification and regimentation.

Le style Loiseau or *cuisine des essences*, as he called it, was in many ways a more extreme version of the Nouvelle Cuisine that it was replacing. The term *Nouvelle Cuisine* had fallen out of favor by the mid-1980s in part because of continued economic downturns and a turn away from "silly" luxuries, in part because the large number of imitators who hoped to capitalize on the movement's success had turned the movement's label into a parody of itself; in part because, despite the initial claims to *égalité* and

amitié, chefs devolved into quarreling factions and sought to distinguish themselves from each other, the imitators, and the failing reputation of Nouvelle Cuisine; and in part because the label simply no longer resonated with the public. In a book of memoirs co-written with her husband, food critic Patricia Wells summarizes the end of Nouvelle Cuisine's popularity as follows:

[...] everyone had HAD IT with *nouvelle cuisine*. In an interview with chef Michel Guérard, who was one of the first to popularize the idea of a simpler, less rich style of French cooking, the Michelin three-star chef noted that "today, too many dishes lack dignity, nobility, pride, and nuance."

The cuisine that was intended to become a breath of fresh air had become claustrophobic. The cuisine that was designed to rescue chefs and diners from sameness and boredom had, indeed, become repetitive and tedious. There was more emphasis on looks than flavor.

After my interview appeared in the New York Times, the paper ran an editorial noting: "The new cooking was...a worthy revolt... there were brilliant moments: extraordinary vegetables, veritable haikus of fish, miraculous sauces of vinegar instead of fat. But it went too far, and it grew solemn. (Wells and Wells 116)

Chelminski's description of Loiseau's almost punitive and hyperpurified cuisine is an excellent example of the "solemnity" expressed in the New York Times editorial above. And indeed as culinary discourse and even cuisine itself focused more intently on the concept of purity than on the experience of the meal itself, it became increasingly difficult to separate culinary rhetoric from its contemporaneous political realities.

In the early 1990s, for example, France was a nation beset with fears about porous borders and contagion. Diseases transferred through human or food contact such as mad cow disease, AIDS, and the Ebola virus appeared as routine threats in the French press and were a spectre of worry in daily life. There was also an increase in violent clashes between the French authorities and France's swelling immigrant population (both legal

and illegal), exemplified by violent riots and bombings in 1995 in Paris and Lyon, and by the widely publicized manhunt and shooting of 24-year-old terrorist suspect Khaled Kelkal by French police. The shooting, captured on film by a news crew and shown repeatedly on television for weeks, provided surrogate memories and constant audiovisual proof that terrorism was a real threat and that France would protect itself with brutal and excessive force (Begag, Quinio). Just one year after the spectacle of Paul Touvier's trial (Touvier was Lyon's *milice* leader under the Vichy government, responsible for rounding up Jews for the Gestapo and for combating any resistance efforts with extreme force) and just six months after Chirac's official condemnation of the Vichy government, the sight of brutal police violence in the streets of Lyon as a response to an ethnic danger made some uneasy: "Onze balles dans le corps! Et cette image, terrible, du cadavre retourné d'un coup de rangers! Et cette phrase encore plus terrible— 'finis-le!' —prononcée par le gendarme. Légitime défense? On aimerait le croire. On attend qu'on nous le démontre" (Lévy). Anxieties about globalization and its perceived threats to France prompted political rhetoric that turned to language of purity and pollution, contagion and sanitation. In 1996, journalist Jean-François Held called *anti-mondialisation* the latest French revolution and noted not only its dangerous rhetoric but also its ability to create strange political bedfellows out of extremes from the right and the left:

Nos révolutionnaires sans modèle, désespérés, en sont réduits à jeter toute modernité avec l'eau du bain de *la pourriture globale*.

[...]

Forcément, la haine du mondialisme pousse les militants alternatifs sur un terrain dangereux où se dessinent, sinon encore des alliances, du moins des convergences contre nature. A gauche, certes, avec les communistes, les jacobins chevènementistes ou les “durs” socialistes; mais à droite aussi, et avec quelles droites!

[...] certaines interventions ultra-protectionnistes et communautaires auraient pu être signées Villiers, Le Pen ou, pourquoi pas, Karadzic *le purificateur ethnique*.⁴(47)

A similar rhetoric of purity was employed in cuisine, which in turn performed a similar process of fortifying boundaries and defining/defending Frenchness. The need to purge its colonial past had somehow become a need to purge the foreignness. At times this pure French rhetoric in culinary discourse mirrors almost too closely the anti-immigrant sentiments like those apparent in anti-mondialisation positions referred to above. The Sunday (London) Times reported “War has broken out between the top chefs of France over what makes the best cuisine, with one side attacking ‘traitors’ for using alien spices, and the other bemoaning culinary nationalists who are opposed to experimentation” (Lang). In the article, chef Bernard Loiseau is described as a “purist” who claims, “Our national cuisine is being suffocated by a battery of flavours,” and the article quotes an anonymous chef who feels targeted by the “culinary jingoism” and overtly makes the political comparison: “Saying that you cannot use soya sauce in your cooking because it is not French is no different from (National Front Leader Jean-Marie) Le Pen saying our football team isn’t really French because there are too many black

⁴ Italics are mine.

players” (Lang). Much like in the nineteenth century, where food helped define Frenchness with its inclusions and exclusions, here we see that as power shifts both in the political arena and the culinary arena, the claims to purity begun by the purges remain but the definitional elements of this purity shift to suit the prevailing message.

New power chefs, like Joël Robuchon and Alain Ducasse who led the culinary manifesto, claim to have left Nouvelle Cuisine behind in favor of a return to more traditional, pure French food, which signals a critical change in the way culinary discourse frames its claim to purity. For example, with regard to “foreignness,” the inclusion of non-French ideas and ingredients was far from taboo in the early days of Nouvelle Cuisine as evidenced by geographer Jean-Robert Pitte:

[...] les autres aspects de la “nouvelle cuisine” témoignent aussi d’influences étrangères que l’on pourrait qualifier de néo-puritaines, venues en partie de l’Europe et de l’Amérique: hygiène (conservation de vitamines, refus des marinades, des faisandages), souci de minceur (forte diminution des matières grasses), authenticité et visibilité (refus des croûtes, feuilletages et déguisements). (“Face à la mondialisation” 134)

Not only does Pitte’s assessment demonstrate that foreign influences were not initially viewed as impure, he suggests that it was precisely these foreign concepts that defined the “néo-puritan” values of early Nouvelle Cuisine. The insistence on pure French ingredients and the prioritization of *terroir* (which emphasized a product’s French provenance) thus signals a marked shift in edibilities and inedibilities in French cuisine.

Joël Robuchon, a 3-star chef who dominated the French culinary scene in the eighties and nineties, repeatedly disavowed any connections to Nouvelle Cuisine. From Patricia Wells’s book Simply French, we learn that Robuchon’s cuisine is “marked by flavors that are intense, pure and distinctive” (14). Robuchon maintains that “you have an

obligation to respect the flavor, the essence, the authenticity of ingredients. You don't have the right to alter them" (18). His claim to purity then relies on an authentic (an equally problematic term) or unaltered state, but it is clear that, as in the legal definitions, the purity of his flavors are determined by what Robuchon decides the flavors should be, not by strict adherence to guidelines about altering or adding substances. For example, Wells says that Robuchon's "green beans tasted more like green beans than ever before, I saw that the simple addition of lemon juice enhanced the true flavor of freshly sautéed mushrooms and made them taste even more 'mushroomy' " (15). Here, altering the ingredient is somehow sold as an enhancement not a corruption of that ingredient's purity. Because the decision of what is pure and what is corrupt appears to be his alone (you don't have a right to alter [the ingredients]"), he claims a sort of absolute authority over the kitchen, the ingredients, and even the discourse. Yes, he added lemon to that vegetable, but the flavor is unaltered simply because his superior food knowledge permits him to say it is.

For Robuchon, the threat to the purity of French cuisine comes from a widespread loss of tradition in France and a general ignorance about quality French products. Purity at Robuchon's restaurant comes through the rejection of globalization and the expulsion of foreign ingredients. The importance of rejecting foreign contaminants is also emphasized in descriptions of his relationship to cleanliness: "Today he is a maniac for neatness and cleanliness, and his restaurant kitchen is thoroughly cleaned (including exhaust filters and oven hoods) twice daily" (Wells 21). But it is not just his space that is clean; even his process seems to have been meticulously organized

to create fortified barriers and to minimize the possibility of unwanted exchange: “Chef Robuchon’s method for roasting poultry is ingenious. The bird is seared first on the stove, then in the oven, then roasted in a hermetically sealed container” (Wells 151).

Despite Robuchon’s shimmering-clean kitchen practices and their implication of futuristic perfection, the menus of his restaurant Jamin in the 1980s and early 1990s sound more like a country bistro than a 3-star, internationally acclaimed temple of gastronomy. He favors vegetables like turnips, cabbage, and celery; features plenty of organ meats like kidneys, sweet breads, and of course foie gras. And the menu proposes such main courses as “tête de porc mijotée à la sauge, pommes purée” and “Laitances de hareng au Verjus, pommes aux appétits” (*Laitances* are testicles, and *Verjus* is a very old-fashioned French vinegar-like accompaniment usually associated with the Middle Ages, though making a recent comeback). His alliance with pre-Nouvelle Cuisine cooking is further strengthened by the use of word *mijotée*, a term often used to differentiate women’s cooking style from men’s and also applied when distinguishing traditional styles from the early Nouvelle Cuisine style that shunned the idea of anything “mijoté.”

Robuchon’s culinary philosophy and menu choices are in stark contrast to another three-star chef, Alain Senderens, who earned his stars and his reputation by doing precisely what Robuchon rejects: His menu reflects such distinctly un-French dishes as “lobster à la vanille,” “Pigeon grillé au colombo et au vermicelle chinois,” or “Poularde aux épices thaïlandaises et au maïs soufflé.” Because his emphasis is on highlighting foreign flavors, foods, and cooking styles, Senderens’s cuisine appeared a likely target during the “war of the chefs,” representing “polluting” French cuisine rather than purified

cuisine. According to journalist Kirsty Lang, Senderens's response was, "I have been a chef 27 years and I've never known such treachery [...] It is not right for chefs to turn against one another. We are artists and should respect rather than attack each other's differences. Picasso was influenced by African art, does that make him any less good?" (Lang). Senderens, having once been a major part of the Nouvelle Cuisine revolution and now seeing the new powerful chefs try to oust him from legitimacy, invokes the word "treachery," recalling both the group that defined themselves through their *amitié* and the ambiguous determinants that separate the traitors from the betrayed. In L'Atelier d'Alain Senderens, novelist and Académie Française member Erik Orsenna seconds Senderens call to unite rather than divide through difference. Orsenna makes a case for using Senderens's concept of purity to rehearse an alternate possibility of nationalism that is reminiscent of the edibilities explored by Rebecca Stein in the Palestinian village that serves Israeli food.

Orsenna endows Senderens with purity and austerity by comparing him to a man of religion, calling him an “abbé de l’Ancien Régime” (10).⁵ But he upends the strict conservatism associated with religion, because, paradoxically, it is a purity that is not based on either singularity or the absence of *mélange*. Furthermore, he reminds us that the etymology of “religion” (arguably the home of moral purity in traditional French Catholicism) is itself an amalgamation. The word brings together two Latin words: *relegere* (to collect or assemble) and *religare* (to bind together). Orsenna refuses the idea that Senderens’s inclusive/international approach is an anti-French menace and compares it instead to another of the most French of all preoccupations: according to Orsenna, Senderens is trying to construct no less than a gastronomic grammatology. If grammar, says Orsenna, determines how we organize the communal life of words, Senderens’s cuisine is the search for “the secret rules, which between them unite the most diverse products of Creation” (10). Orsenna’s comparison of language to cuisine is far more appropriate than it may at first appear. Language and cuisine are both sites of continual

⁵ It is worth noting that at least some of the inspiration for this label comes from Senderens physical appearance, which might also be described as Elizabethan, owing to the style of his facial hair and the pointed features. Having said that, this description (“abbé de l’Ancien Régime”) also recalls Gault and Millau’s comparison of Senderens to a “moine ligueur”; however, it creates a slightly different effect. According to the *Petit Robert*, *ligueur* refers to a “membre d’une ligue politique, en particulier d’extrême droite et hostile au pouvoir” (1491). This decided conservative or extreme-right alliance posits a binary, inscribing Senderens into one side of a system characterized by political power struggles. Orsenna’s characterization, on the other hand, prefigures this left-right schism. Rather than suggesting a royalist or counterrevolutionary stance with the reference to the Ancien Régime, I would argue that Orsenna is instead trying to find a way to release Senderens from the language of the contemporary and contentious culinary debates (often breaking down along opposing political views). These terms remind us how problematic it can be to assume that terms and ideas expressed in culinary discourse can be translated directly into political discourse. Just as referencing the Ancien Régime is likely not intended to bestow upon Senderens any pro-monarchical political values, it would also be inaccurately literal to attempt to map the right-wing term *ligueur* onto Senderens’s culinary OR personal political viewpoints.

change and debate over that change. France's longtime passion for the codification and preservation of its language closely resembles the same impulse with cuisine. Both are also major sites of identity—be it regional or national. And while pure food and language may purport to be unaltered or free of foreign contamination, it becomes clear that some alterations or some impurities are possible while others are not. In Nerval's Angélique, the narrator says,

La langue des paysans eux-mêmes est du plus pur français à peine modifié par une prononciation où les désinences des mots montent au ciel à la manière du chant de l'alouette Chez les enfants, cela forme comme un ramage. Il y a aussi dans les tournures de phrases quelque chose d'italien, ce qui tient sans doute du long séjour qu'ont fait les Médicis et leur suite florentine dans ces contrées divisées autrefois en apanages royaux et princiers (78-79)

Ironically, the language described here as the “plus pur français” has been noticeably altered by foreign influences. Despite the author's assertion that the language has been only “à peine modifié,” he goes on to catalog changes in pronunciation, tone and melody, as well as in vocabulary and turns of phrase, all of which suggests a surprisingly wholistic adulteration. That the changes/impurities in this case come from an exposure to the Medicis, a family with claims to royalty in both France and Italy, appears to make this pollution not only acceptable but, possibly, more pure.

Claims to culinary purity, authenticity, and tradition tend to support a dominant national ideology that maintains that the hegemony of French cuisine is a direct reflection of the hegemony of French culture. But, as Bhabha argued, in times of intense national debate or crisis, the instability of a rhetoric based on “purity” reveals instead the hidden side of the Janus-faced discourse of national identity, showing these claims to be not the victory cry of a nation secure in its strength, but, rather, the rallying cry of a nation under

threat of invasion. Ironically, the same linguistic instability that transforms these terms into tools of exclusion for those in power is also what allows these terms to be reclaimed by those who seek to subvert that power. So although the Jacobins could legitimate their power by casting Danton as a heroic “revolutionary” one moment and a treasonous “counter-revolutionary” the next, the same tactic opens the door to challenges to authority in culinary or other cultural revolutions.

One particularly entertaining example of this is the expression *100% pur beurre*. In Brittany, a region known for its *galettes pur beurre*, a person who is a born-and-bred Breton is, like the cookie, called “100% pur beurre” or “Breton(ne) pur beurre.” In recent years, the expression has been extended beyond the regional to signify “pure Frenchness,” in the sense of “français de souche”—a claim to Frenchness that excludes French citizens with foreign origins, particularly those of Arab descent.⁶ Not only does this expression emphasize the indissociability of food and identity in the French imaginary, but it also demonstrates how terms of purity can be turned around to mean both one thing and its opposite. The expression *100% pur beurre* intended to distinguish

⁶ Because this example refers to relatively new verbal slang, it is difficult to provide dictionary confirmation of usage. However, a 2009 [Libération](#) blog post, which explored a racially based controversy in the Miss France contest, demonstrates the usage of “100% pur beurre” in relation to the oppositional “Miss Buerrette.” The blog post recounts that an official of the Miss France contest had expressed an interest in proving French diversity by crowning what she called a “Miss Beurrette” at the pageant. Upon learning of this, the winning contestant, Malika Ménard, responded that she was in fact “100% Français” and that her parents had simply liked the name. Commenters to the blog post weighed in on whether Ménard was French, looked French, or accurately represented France. In what appears to be a play on words to the post’s repeated reference to the terms *beur* and *beurette*, one commenter replied simply, “Malika est française, 100% pur beurre.” (“Le roi,” [Observatoire](#))

français de souche from immigrant or Arab French is, ironically, a perfect homonym for and thus indistinguishable from *100% pur beur*.⁷

In both political and culinary discourse, terms expressing *pureté* and *pollution* exhibit vague and fungible meanings, such that they become convenient national repositories, semantically empty but culturally full. The ability of these terms to masquerade as innocent or naïve descriptors ebbs and flows. In the example of “la guerre des chefs,” in which culinary purity is directly compared to xenophobic political positions, the language of purity is over laden, too overtly nationalistic to successfully hide French cuisine’s role as an important site of displacement for both socio-political anxieties and aspirations.

* * * * *

4.5 Une Société pure n’est pas une société mixte

Historically, the ultimate threat to purity, the ultimate expression of foreignness or Otherness is, of course, woman herself. “Car impure est la femme,” (63) as Michelet

⁷ A mixed-race French reggae band called Rasta Bigoud (pronounced “be good”) shows, with their 2003 album *100% Pur Beurre*, how this expression of purity can be made to challenge the nationalist rhetoric. They have also released a song entitled “Jean-Marie,” which confronts the racist discourse of Jean-Marie Le Pen and political groups like the Front National:

*Si vous suivez ses pas
Vous vous retrouverez tout en bas
Et si vous suivez ses traces
Vous vous retrouverez dans l'impasse
De ceux qui refusent l'égalité des races
Et voudraient s'appropriés le pouvoir en place
[...]
Jean marie tu répands la haine ti gui da ti gui da
Jean marie tu me fais d'le pen ti gui da ti gui da
(Rasta Bigoud qtd at zouker.com)*

says in L'Amour. As subject and predicate in Michelet's formulation, "femme" and "impure" are one and the same—identical values balanced on either side of a grammatical equal sign ("est"). Her filthy, menstruating body testifies to her polluting status because, as Michelet points out, "le sang de femme est immonde" (63). These quotations are not intended to represent Michelet's personally held beliefs, though according to Roland Barthes he is said to have had a horror of blood.⁸ Rather, in L'Amour, Michelet attempts to expose the illogical, medieval mythologies that have trapped women in a web of male dominance with regards to both her position in *l'imaginaire* and her fairly grim juridical status: "La loi civile n'est guère moins rude. Elle déclare la femme mineure pour toujours, et prononce sur elle une éternelle interdiction" (63). Though he is writing specifically about a logic drawn from the Middle Ages, his double use of "pour toujours" and "éternelle" leaves little doubt as to the continued presence of these myths in contemporary society.

It is precisely the continuation of this myth of impurity, this hobbled civil status that prompted women's rights advocate Gisèle Halimi, in La Cause des femmes, to argue that France is in need of a completely new idea of democracy, "Car la société qui est la nôtre aujourd'hui, n'est pas une société mixte. Elle se construit sur une maquette unique, celle de l'homme. Son projet demeure, pour l'essentiel, masculin" (xxiv). For Halimi, the purity implied by a "maquette unique" is clearly a negative one. The nation's project,

⁸ See Roland Barthes, Michelet par lui-même (Paris: Seuil, 1954).

despite the French Revolution, despite May 68, despite the reforms of the seventies and eighties, “demeure” masculine. Her choice of the verb *demeurer* is appropriate because although it certainly means “to remain” in this context, its rich etymology conveys a more subtle reading. It comes from the Latin *demorari* (“to hesitate,” “to delay”) implying both long duration and a blocked or stalled situation, inscribing it within this sentence of an “éternelle interdiction” described by Michelet.

A similar logic could be said to pervade the realm of cuisine, and Halimi’s desire to see an overdue integration in the society recalls Fischler’s optimistic interpretation that the Nouvelle Cuisine revolution was, by 1979, performing this “tardive” integration. Of course Fischler’s prediction was off the mark, and by the twenty-first century, food historian Pascal Ory was ready with a new assessment, sounding very much like Halimi’s:

Alors, qu’aujourd’hui, où le culte de l’‘innovation’ règne en cuisine comme ailleurs, la véritable, innovation culinaire serait que des femmes se voient reconnues le droit de commander à ces brigades de mâles dressés à la dure, comme des mecs, des vrais, qui en ont, et qu’on appelle des cuisiniers. Une Olympe ne fait pas le printemps: elle l’a appris, à ses dépens et ceux qui, comme moi, la voyant émerger dans les années 1980, ont cru que “cette fois, c’était parti” se sont trompés” (Ory, “La Gastronomie, sans les femmes?” 109).

The parallel between the French Revolution’s failure to extend its liberating effects to women and the twentieth-century culinary revolution’s exclusion of women is punctuated by the fact that both revolutions feature a central female protagonist named Olympe who incarnates how thoroughly, and at times violently, women were excluded from their respective “revolutions.” As we saw in Chapter 1, Olympe de Gouges was beheaded for, among other reasons, her outspoken beliefs about women’s rights. For Dominique

Nahmias (later, Olympe Versini), head chef at Restaurant Olympe, the sexism was less fatal but, as Ory points out, nonetheless apparent. Despite her early popularity among patrons and critics alike, Olympe never attained more than a single Michelin star and was unable to keep that star very long. When she eventually split from her husband, he temporarily continued to profit from her name and celebrity status by maintaining the restaurant name—Olympe—even though she was no longer in the kitchen. These words by her 1789 counterpart could just as easily have been spoken by her:

L'homme esclave a multiplié ses forces, a eu besoin de recourir aux tiennes pour briser ses fers. Devenu libre, il est devenu injuste envers sa compagne. O femmes! Femmes, quand cesserez-vous d'être aveugles? Quels sont les avantages que vous recueillis dans la révolution? (de Gouges 6)

Evidently, if the marriage, between cuisinière and chef, predicted by Fischler ever took place, it ended in a speedy divorce where the male chef walked away with all the culinary property.

What is easy to forget when reading Ory's characterization of women in cuisine is that the inequalities he describes represent not just a blockage but an actual reversal. From 1933 (the year that Michelin first awarded three stars to chefs nationwide in France) to 1968, there had always been at least one woman chef in France, sometimes more, in possession of three stars, giving the impression that women had at least some access to the highest accolade possible in the culinary industry. So it is perhaps somewhat surprising that beginning in 1968, the year that MLF (Mouvement de Libération des Femmes) was developed (by Halimi among others), women all but disappeared from the

highest levels of cuisine. Not a single woman chef held the distinction of three Michelin stars in France again until Anne-Sophie Pic achieved the honor in 2007.⁹ For the entire period of time coincident with the liberatory revolution of Nouvelle Cuisine and its myriad of equally promising successors (*cuisines de terroir*, *moléculaire*, and so forth), a culinary sanitation completely cleansed women from the highest level of the profession. What began as an appropriation of a culinary style known as *cuisine de femme* became a systematic elimination of women themselves from haute cuisine.

Though this purification was effected without the discursive insistence on the same rhetoric of purity that characterized the previously examined xenophobic or nationalistic impulses, the mechanics of exclusion nonetheless reproduce the sanitizing practices, if not the language, consistent with post-revolutionary strategies of keeping power in the hands of a singular or homogenous group. According to Kristin Ross, in the decades following May 68 and the sexual revolution that brought women new legal rights regarding issues such as rape, abortion, fertility treatments, and so forth, there was a

⁹ This is also the same year that Andrée Rosier was elected top MOF and Ségolène Royal ran for president of France. Interestingly, since 2007, when Anne-Sophie Pic and Andrée Rosier broke down (once again) those barriers that prevent women from attaining power and prestige as chefs, there have been indications of a rehabilitation of Les Mères and Eugénie Brazier in particular. Claims of indignation over the omission of women chefs in the official culinary history of France have begun to appear. A 2008 article in *L'Humanité* carrying the headline "Mère Brazier: 'vestale de la table'" goes on to say "Que les semeurs d'étoiles laissent la portion congrue aux créatures portant jupon ne saurait faire oublier l'irremplaçable rôle joué par les vestales, au premier rang desquelles celles que l'on appelait les 'mères'" (Teyssier). The awards of Pic and Rosier, taken perhaps together with the accomplishments of other visible instances of women's achievements in French culture, seem to have awakened a realization in the author (and indeed others) that the history of *grande cuisine* has been written, as he says, "au masculin." He even refers to the fact that Andrée Rosier is the first woman ever to have won Best MOF in cuisine as "cet ahurissant ostracisme."

subtle reversal of power that challenged the idea that women had been “liberated.” Ross suggests that this reversal is linked to a pervasive and powerful rhetoric that essentially pushed women out of the public sphere. She describes this rhetoric as, “a certain, highly sanitized version of the women’s movement, narrated as part and parcel of a return to ‘private life’” (156). Her use of the word “sanitized” here reinforces the idea that this discursive strategy is enacting a post-revolutionary purifying operation, even without relying on the term *pureté* as a call to action. According to Ross, the irony of this strategy is that it is the very reforms that women had fought for that were used to resituate them in the domestic sphere: “Political questions that had previously been held to be ‘private’ (abortion, sexuality) are recuperated back into the service of the dominant bourgeois ideology against which those struggles were engaged in the first place” (156). In other words, many of the political powers that women fought for dealt directly with the woman’s body and her sexuality. Even though women gained new legal rights that would ostensibly make their bodies their own, politicizing these most intimate matters placed the female body, its functions, its differences, and its worth into not only public but legal debate, calling into question once more who had ultimate authority over a woman’s body. Additionally, according to Françoise Héritier, all this wrangling over powers exerted on or by women with regards to her body “repose sur une vision, une représentation quasiment sacrée de la virilité” (299). Consequently, though contraception and abortion pose a perceived threat to male virility, the threat is mitigated, and nearly dispatched, by the fact that the whole debate takes place within a logic that presupposes the essential dominance of that male potency.

It is easy to see how the culinary discourse of Nouvelle Cuisine, emerging as it did right after May 68, could provide a sort of theatre where performances of virility and power both revealed and diminished threats to a male-dominated French cuisine. Though the version of Nouvelle Cuisine that eventually came to dominate French culinary history is that of the “original,” “innovative,” and “creative” male chef, there were those who challenged that image from the very beginning. Robert Courtine’s voice was certainly the loudest of those, and interestingly, it is precisely on this question of appropriating women’s culinary practices without proper attribution where he lands one of his most convincing blows. Referring to Paul Bocuse’s claim to be the inventor of “Cuisine du Marché” (the title of his 1976 cookbook), Courtine writes: “Un autre des grands principes est de ne pas établir un menu à l’avance mais en fonction des achats du marché. Ma grand-mère faisait de la nouvelle cuisine sans le savoir. Et toutes les ménagères ou presque. Elles vont être très contentes de l’apprendre.” (qtd in Drouard, Histoire 119)

Courtine continues his attack on the notion of originality in Nouvelle Cuisine and particularly in Bocuse’s cookbook by claiming that of the first 150 recipes contained in Bocuse’s book, more than 120 of them are taken directly from the classic cookbooks of Alfred Guérot. Guérot’s books, *La Cuisine Moderne* (1956) and *La Cuisine et Pâtisserie Française* (1953) were immensely popular with women cooking in the home. And his ability to translate French cuisine into recipes adapted for the home cook even resulted in the English-language book *French Cuisine for Everyone* (1963). It is worth noting that Bocuse does acknowledge that he uses Guérot’s recipes because they are so well written, but he also says he has adapted and transformed them, encouraging the “maîtresse de

maison” to do the same. Courtine, however, brutally maintains his charge of plagiarism, as well as that of Bocuse’s complete lack of originality, by pointing out that Bocuse copied these recipes, “sans même un changement de virgule!” and by sarcastically concluding that “Paul Bocuse” must not exist and is in fact a pseudonym for Guérot whom he characterizes as “le représentant *authentique* (et talentueux) d’une cuisine *très classique*.”¹⁰ (Courtine qtd in Drouard, Histoire 119) The enormous blow here of course is his assertion that it is Guérot, not Bocuse, who can legitimately lay claim to authenticity, a buzzword of Nouvelle Cuisine, and that this cooking Bocuse is selling as “nouvelle” is not only not his own, but is “très classique.”

These types of critiques or challenges to the chefs’ originality, these challenges to the stark distinction between home cooking (*cuisine de femme*) and professional (male) cooking all presented potential threats to the “invention” of a new French cuisine capable of shouldering the metonymic role consistent with the rhetoric surrounding it. French gastronomy and Frenchness were one in the same, and the supremacy of France’s Nouvelle Cuisine led by its star male chefs supported the image of a strong dominant France. If French chefs were fulfilling a symbolic role of strong male leadership left empty by failed military and government leaders, it would not do for these swaggering young chefs to define Nouvelle Cuisine as an adoption of a feminized cuisine created and practiced by women in bourgeois homes. Consequently, even if the food preparation and

¹⁰ Stress is mine.

presentation did, in fact, take on certain stereotypically “feminine” attributes (lighter fare, smaller portions, baby-size vegetables, simpler recipes, fewer choices) the chefs responsible for these changes had to appear to be the strong, virile leaders capable of leading France and the world through this culinary (and cultural) revolution. Thus the constant barrage of anecdotes and imagery pointing to the sexual prowess of chefs like Bocuse. From the editors of Le Nouveau Guide titling a major profile “Bocuse vide son sac”; to Bocuse’s own practice of finding a way to insert his virility into the most unrelated topics (on posing for photographs: “Je ne sais jamais où mettre mes mains. Sauf avec les femmes” [“Bocuse vide son sac” 30]); to his dismissal of women chefs on the grounds that they belong in bed (as was examined in Chapter 2); the image well received is that in the culinary arts, the artists are macho chefs with absolute rule over their domain. They are masters of professional kitchens, private kitchens, and the women who cook in them. Thus, too, the eventual repression of not just *cuisine de femme* but of women chefs, women mentors, women’s contributions, women’s cooking.

According to Ross, the “sanitized narrative” of the women’s movement resembled the highly manipulated versions of May 68 in that it attempted not only to rewrite the history of the movement, but in some cases to simply erase it completely: “Certain topics are not merely neglected but actively targeted for amnesia, erased from the record” (156). History itself is purified. A corresponding erasure or sanitization of history can be found in particular with the practiced party line regarding the women who have come to be known simply as “Les Mères.” According to the 1996 edition of the Larousse Gastronomique, “Mères Lyonnaises” is “un surnom affectueux donné à plusieurs

cuisinières qui s’installèrent à leur compte à Lyon, à la fin du XIXe siècle” (Larousse Gastronomique 1996: 665). The first sentence of the entry (above) certainly gives no indication of any true import of these women in the twentieth century, but we do get a basic description of what their cooking might entail:

Ces cuisinières, à l’accueil souvent bourru, ne proposaient jamais un choix de plats très étendu, mais exécutant ceux-ci à la perfection, elles portèrent haut le renom de la cuisine lyonnaise, ouvrant la voie aux plus grands cuisiniers de la région : Fernand Point, Paul Bocuse, Alain Chapel se sont en partie formés à leur école. (Larousse Gastronomique 1996: 665).

Though the entry does credit Les Mères with excellent reputations for perfecting the dishes they served and for helping to launch the future renowned chefs who once worked for them, it undercuts their significance enormously by remarking on their rough, unprofessional manner and their limited range, and it relegates their status to that of simple, local or regional cooks, rather than granting that their food could be viewed as a form of French (or national) cuisine.

In the culinary shorthand that developed after May 68, any woman cook who ran her own kitchen and served what might be called *cuisine de femme* was summarily lumped into the category of Les Mères. The anonymity of the nickname ensured that the virus of women chefs remained well-contained and this could not multiply or spread throughout the culinary culture. In addition to denying these women access to an identity (culinary or otherwise) by giving them all the same nameless title, the title is of course the most restrictive one possible—Mère—emphasizing that these women chefs can only be associated with the home, the private, the domestic.

This post-Nouvelle Cuisine interpretation of Les Mères as capable but limited, skilled but uncreative, becomes a well-worn trope. In Nouvelle Cuisine chef Georges Blanc's cookbook, Ma Cuisine des saisons, he places Paulette and Elise Blanc, his own mother and grandmother, into this category even though his mother was a two-star Michelin chef who earned effusive critical praise and traveled all over France and Europe, cooking at expos and acting as an unofficial ambassador of French cuisine. Despite having trained with his mother in her kitchen, he does not acknowledge her as a professional mentor. In fact, he finds a very adroit way of sidestepping the traditional homage to the culinary mentor. Blanc writes that "s'il existe un métier dont l'apprentissage dure toute la vie, c'est bien la nôtre." (18) In this way, his mentor is not his mother, but the profession itself. Even though he cannot deny his famous lineage or his access to their knowledge, he explains why Les Mères (and consequently his mother and grandmother) were not real chefs despite their fame as well as how he and the chefs of today are *not* like them.

Les Mères exécutaient avec amour une cuisine simple d'une grande honnêteté. Leur registre était limité mais mettait en œuvre des produits du pays, choisis avec soin pour leur qualité irréprochable. Leur tour de main, leur sens de l'assaisonnement, de la juste cuisson, et de tout ce qui pouvait régaler le palais le firent connaître des heures de gloire. De nos jours, la cuisine a évolué pour s'adapter au goût. Certains on parle avec raison de "Nouvelle Cuisine," et les cuisiniers ont sans doute suscité de nouveaux désirs, créé d'autres symphonies et d'autres voluptés (17)

The resemblance between his comments and the description found in the Larousse Gastronomique entry for Les Mères is striking. We see this repetitive and rehearsed strategy of explaining women chefs: the same elision of female cooking with traditionally feminine traits (they cook with love), the same story of limited register and regional style.

The new chefs, by contrast, are creators, innovators, artists. According to Blanc, Les Mères have a limited register, only offering a handful of dishes on their menus. Yet, one of the “dix commandements” of Nouvelle Cuisine is “Diminuer le choix de leur carte.” Next, Blanc remarks on the regional style of Les Mères, stressing that they rely on the “produits du pays” and admitting that they are able to choose the very best, freshest ingredients in the market place. But according to Blanc, “la cuisine d’aujourd’hui” is “plus naturelle” and “plus libre” because they choose their ingredients “au rythme des saisons et aux ressources du pays.” (18). Les Mères executed their simple cuisine with love, and achieved their modest success because of their “tour de main, sens de l’assaisonnement, de la juste cuisson” but he also says the Nouvelle Cuisine chefs have revolutionized old, classic cooking by creating dishes “exécutaient simplement, avec une rigoureuse et précieuse attention, afin de mettre en valeur le goût, la juste cuisson, et la finesse de l’assaisonnement.” (18) These repetitions of criticisms and inconsistencies of claims are important. As de Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard have argued, narrativizing is an important part of *replacing* history. The near identical descriptions of Les Mères that appear in culinary histories and encyclopedias after 1968 signals the type of narrativizing or practiced stories that over time are repeated until they appear true.

Before I continue, I want to step back and admit that Georges Blanc and the others who sought to distinguish themselves from Les Mères were not completely wrong. The cooking of the Nouvelle Cuisine chefs *was* more experimental than what had been offered before. The chefs *did* create new and exciting harmonies of flavor and *accompagnements* that were lighter and more innovative than what had come before. In

Blanc's cookbook, main dishes like "grenadins de veau aux salsifis et au gingembre" or desserts like "soupe glacée de pêches blanches au jus de groseille et à la menthe" feel quite removed from menu items like "crêpes à la mode de beurre" and "gâteau fondant au chocolat" (recipes in Elisa Blanc's cahier) but I maintain that the continual effacement of women chefs and the repeated dismissal of their culinary knowledge is an unnecessary and symbolically violent attack.

Of course, calling all women chefs *Les Mères* not only makes it very hard to distinguish among them, but also makes it very easy to forget those who truly did distinguish themselves. Despite granting individual entries to many male chefs, across the ages, the *Larousse Gastronomique* groups all women chefs in the single entry of "Les Mères Lyonnaises," with potentially one exception.¹¹ This 1996 version of French women chefs and their achievements/influences is so "sanitized" by omissions and elisions that the information seems to bear little resemblance to reality. For example, in the one line that mentions these women chefs by name, no distinction is made among them, presenting them as all as equal entities in the comma-separated series. And the list of incomplete names ends with "etc" as if to emphasize both the interchangeability and

¹¹ I say "potentially" because the exception is Annette Boutisut Poulard, who is not included because of her fame as a chef. In fact, she is not even identified as a cuisinière. The guide designates her instead as a "restauratrice" and adds that she was a former "femme de chambre" for an architect who took over the kitchen for the abbaye at Mont St. Michel. She makes the guide because, as it explains, after marrying the son of a local baker, they opened a restaurant where she served omelettes all day long, the omelet, called "l'omelette de la mère Poulard" became famous throughout the country and many have tried to copy its particular and secret mode of preparation. This entry then is more about the omelet that bears her name than her cooking. Despite the omelet's fame and irreproducibility, she is not given any credit for artistic or creative authorship, and when possible, the events of her life (being able to cook, running a restaurant) are explained in the context of her boss or her husband.

the insignificance of their identities. Furthermore, no mention is made *at all* that more than a few of these women held one or two Michelin stars or even that Eugénie Brazier and Marie Bourgeois held three Michelin stars. In fact, Bourgeois is not even mentioned. Their critical acclaim and international reputation is completely swept away by the following characterization: “[...] les mères Brigousse, Blanc, Niogret, Bigot, Brazier, Guy, Brijean, Pompon, Charles, etc [sont] des anciens cordon bleus de maisons bourgeoises, qui ouvrirent de petits restaurants, les ‘bouchons’ fréquentés par une clientèle fidèle” (665). If by “petits-restaurants,” the authors mean two- or three-star restaurants, and by “clientèle fidèle,” they mean American and French movie stars, presidents of France, and visiting international hoteliers and dignitaries, then the entry is simply understated rather than unfactual.

Again, as a post-revolutionary strategy of purification, the rewriting of history to suppress not just the present-day threats but to reach back and erase women from the official archives of French culinary history, is consistent with sexist strategies in post-68 France that have been documented by feminist theorists and historians.

“Ainsi le discours sur les représentations, et non sur des faits oubliés dans les narrations et/ou introuvables dans les archives, n’est-il pas nécessairement erroné, en ce qu’il n’aurait pas de rapport avec la réalité vraie.” (Héritier 301)

It is not only the lack of “rapport avec la réalité vraie,” but the actual reversal in narrative between pre- and post-Nouvelle Cuisine representations of Les Mères, that makes the attempt to prevent women from obtaining any measure of power or authority in cuisine so apparent. Prior to the sixties and seventies, women still faced sexism in the profession, but the critics were often openly laudatory of women chefs and Curnonsky, in particular,

felt *cuisine de femme* to be the best representation of French food, so the criticism did not pigeonhole all women chefs or their talent as regional. Consider the following commentaries written by guide book authors or food writers in the thirties about Marie Bourgeois, a Michelin 3-star chef who was apparently included as “etc” in the Larousse entry on Les Mères Lyonnaises:

Là, vous comprendrez que la gastronomie est un Art où tout est harmonie, mesure, et qualité. Madame Bourgeois est l’une des plus grandes cuisinières de France. (unnamed guide qtd in Mesplède 72)

L’Hôtel Bourgeois est un des centres de la cuisine mondiale et Mme Bourgeois un des premiers cordon-bleus de France. Elle a réalisé la perfection simple. (Curnonsky qtd in Mesplède 72)

What distinguishes this effusive praise from that heaped on the likes of Olympe is that the reviews do not center on the critic’s astonishment that the chef was a woman, nor on the appearance or personality of the woman at the stove. Consequently, these women did not attain special *miraculée* status used to further bolster the dominant system. In his book, French Gastronomy: The History and Geography of a Passion, Jean-Robert Pitte emphasizes that before the 1970s, Eugénie Brazier had mythic status throughout France on par with the “Father of Modern Cuisine”: “Fernand Point’s gratin de queue d’écrivisse or Mère Brazier’s poularde demi-deuil were veritable historical monuments” (Pitte, French Gastronomy 152).

4.6 The Economic Logic of Gender Domination

The extent to which women remain the “impure,” the “Other,” the easily dismissed voice, despite the many so-called liberatory moments in women’s history is all

too clear in the unintentionally ambivalent attitudes expressed by François Simon (the restaurant critic for Le Figaro daily newspaper) in The Guardian:

François Simon [...] said the Michelin Guide was an out-of-touch relic and its award to a top female chef would sadly not change much in the “blocked, macho world of French gastronomy.” He said the guide had too long ignored a range of women and international chefs [...] “The Michelin guide was born in the twentieth century. It’s like an old woman who stands in the street muttering: no one listens anymore.” (Chrisafis)

In the same sound byte, Simon blasts the Michelin guide for ignoring women and then closes the gap between himself and the guide by resorting to a comparison that calls on the sexist and ageist archetype of the blithering old woman that “no one listens to anymore.” Such ambivalence reveals that Simon, like others who appear to be giving women their due, is unable to fully escape from the “blocked, macho world of French gastronomy” that he articulates.

It is precisely this idea that we can discount the “mutterings” of women that enabled the Nouvelle Cuisine and post–Nouvelle Cuisine male chefs and food writers to most effectively shut the door on women as serious contributors to French gastronomy. This is not only true of the domination of men over women in cuisine but plays out in the suppression of women throughout history. In an essay in The Logic of the Gift, Hélène Cixous writes the following.

Every woman has known the torture of beginning to speak aloud, heart beating as if to break, occasionally falling into loss of language, ground and language slipping out from under her, because for woman speaking—even just opening her mouth in public is something rash, a transgression.

A double anguish for even if she transgresses, her word almost always falls on the deaf masculine ear, which can only hear language that speaks in the masculine. (164)

When read together, Simon's comments and Cixous's observation recall Bourdieu's assertion that even those practices that generate the appearance of disinterestedness are still inscribed within the rules and system of an economic logic. The valuelessness of women's words in Simon's and Cixous's quotations can be compared to the symbolic valuelessness of women's identities, work, and practices in the culinary register. The refusal to place a value on women's cooking practices makes it possible for women's practices to be appropriated or taken without the benefit of exchange, and subsequently repackaged as purely "masculine," ergo, of value.

Conclusion

*Je suis étonné que des gens qui se piquant
d'honorer leur état par leurs producteurs, ne soient
pas plus susceptibles sur le choix des mots, et
surtout dans la science gastronomique.*

—Antonin Carême

J'ai appris que la liberté c'était l'argent.

—Pierre Gagnaire, Michelin 3-star chef

Over the course of these four chapters, I have argued that the story of Nouvelle Cuisine, like the rhetoric that supports it, partially erases itself even as it writes itself. There is the overt and official story of culinary revolution. This is the story of an all-inclusive democracy, where more diners with disparate social backgrounds have increased access to chefs and their food knowledge. It is the story of liberation from dated dietetic guidelines and overly regimented cooking practices. And it is the story of a nation's renewed and strengthened culinary hegemony. This story is invested with aspirations. But there is also an oppositional narrative, one that emerges from the cracks and inconsistencies of the official story. In this story, newness might turn into appropriation and misrepresentation; sacrifice may camouflage defeats or fears of invasion; and purity, as Michael Mann has said, “may be maintained by the suppression of deviant minorities, [which] may lead to cleansing” (55). Fears, frustrations, and anxieties find expression here.

Chapter 4 of this dissertation closes with a brief meditation on the cleansing of women from haute cuisine that is effected by the Nouvelle Cuisine revolution. Not because it is the end of the story, but because it is the first step in the next level of the story. However, it is also where the danger of trying to draw cultural conclusions based on the representative value of food becomes exceedingly evident. As culinary representations of literal consumption and national representations of economic or figurative consumption continue to approach one another linguistically, it is difficult to find language than can adequately describe their relation to one another. Consider this alternative metaphor to the way the Nouvelle Cuisine history unfolds. In addition to the figure of a story that writes itself while another erases it, we might also think of Penelope, weaving by day and unfurling by night. What's frustrating about Penelope is not that she is bound in this deception in order to remain free, but, rather, that her "freedom" takes the form of remaining Odysseus's woman. Even with her ruse, she is trapped in a closed system, and indeed, with each night of unraveling, she reinscribes herself in a social and economic logic where she can circulate from suitor to suitor but has no inherent value of her own. In this way, she is an excellent illustration of what Luce Irigaray describes in "Le Marché des femmes":

Les femmes, animaux doués de parole comme les hommes, vont assurer la possibilité de l'usage et de la circulation du symbolique sans y être pour autant partie prenante. C'est le non-accès, pour elles, au symbolique qui établit l'ordre social. Mettant en rapport, en relations, les hommes entre eux, les femmes ne réalisent cette fonction qu'en y abandonnant leur droit à la parole et, d'ailleurs, à l'animalité. Plus dans l'ordre naturel, pas encore dans l'ordre social qu'elles entretiennent cependant, les femmes sont le symptôme de l'exploitation d'individus par une société qui ne les rémunère que partiellement, voire pas du tout, pour leur "travail." (184).

For Irigaray, women are present but not participants in the economic system that orders society. As commodities circulating from man to man, they are excluded from the power of exchange and receive little to no recognition, financial or otherwise, for their “work”—or, since she sets the word off in quotation marks and since we’ve observed the apparent valuelessness of women’s contributions to Nouvelle Cuisine, we might also say they receive no remuneration for their *word*.

Certainly, this theory illuminates linguistic elements in culinary discourse, such as the designation of women chefs as “Les Mères.” After all, as Irigaray points out, “la mère, instrument reproducteur marqué du nom du père et enfermé dans sa maison, sera propriété privée, interdite aux échanges” (180). This description of the woman confined by her house and her husband’s name bears an uncanny resemblance to the language used by Georges Blanc in Ma Cuisine des saisons to describe his grandmother: “Elle s’était retirée dans sa petite maison en face de chez nous et je me précipitais chez elle [...] pour savourer ses inoubliables flans à la vanille et au caramel” (17). Blanc’s need to disavow a professional, training relationship with his critically acclaimed mother and grandmother is partially on display in this claustrophobic description of a grandmother tucked away in her little house. Only in the safety of this domestic and mental “enfermement” (the house is itself contained in a memory of childhood) is it safe to discuss her competence in the kitchen. Blanc’s description enacts the very *inderdiction* and exclusion of women (particularly mothers!) from exchange that Irigaray elaborates in her essay.

Viewed now in the context of an economic logic, it seems that a disproportionate number of the Nouvelle Cuisine’s rehearsed and repeated claims that are framed in the

revolutionary rhetoric work not just to appropriate women's culinary knowledge or to exclude women from the kitchen but to enforce this denial of female access in the process of economic exchange. Another significant target of the "revolution" is based on what I originally interpreted as a sliding and nebulous conception of foreignness. However, an initial consideration of acceptable versus unacceptable culinary alterations or assimilations suggests that maintaining or reversing unequal economic power relationships is at play in these designations, too. In *Mythologies*, Barthes points out that while France was in a position to claim ownership of Algeria's contributions, as in Algeria's supply of grapes for the production of French wine, the provenance of the grape was not an issue. But even before Algeria's independence, Barthes remarked on the hypocrisy of this edibility: "Il est vrai que le vin est une belle et bonne substance, mais il est non moins vrai que sa production participe lourdement du capitalisme français" (72). As a "produit d'une expropriation," wine, according to Barthes, contributed to France's colonial, and especially economic, dominance of Algeria. As such, there was no economic reason to deem its foreignness dangerous nor even acknowledge it on labels. But, for Barthes, this very inequality was enough to prevent the wine from being "une substance tout à fait heureuse" (72).

Returning to Bhabha's idea of a silenced narrative and to Bellos's assessment that, in Perec, "one cover covered another," I'd like to offer a related hypothesis: Attention! Une révolution peut en cacher une autre. Recall that in the metaphor above, Penelope most directly represents the multiply narrated history of Nouvelle Cuisine. Nouvelle Cuisine weaves an official story by day and unweaves it (creating a new

oppositional story) by night. Despite Penelope's double and opposing narratives, she is nonetheless stuck as a commodity in the social logic that is based on male exchange. Similarly, in a post-May 68 France, Nouvelle Cuisine and its valorization of fresh local products and artisanal producers seemed to stand in stark contrast to fast food and industrial agriculture, a symptom of what has often been viewed as a particularly noxious American export: late capitalism. On the surface, France had appeared to reject America's crass brand of capitalism, but in the years prior to Nouvelle Cuisine, restaurants in France were struggling financially. In 1964, prices were rising so swiftly in bistros and cafés that the government intervened to stabilize the prices. It is also possible that the changing demands and lifestyles of the new French clients made it impossible for classical French restaurants with those long exhaustive menus to survive.

No matter what prompted the construction of a Nouvelle Cuisine revolution, its unspoken revolution may be the transformation of French national cuisine into a commodity whose value no longer exists in and of itself. Taking that one step further, according to Jean Baudrillard, the genius of mass media in a consumer-driven society is its ability to generate a discourse around a commodity that is consumed as readily or instead of the object itself: "Elle fait de l'objet un pseudo-événement qui va devenir l'événement réel de la vie quotidienne à travers l'adhésion du consommateur à son discours" (198). For the public in this late-capitalist France, the rarest and most desirable commodities, according to Baudrillard, were knowledge and power (72). In spite of the remarkable popularity and success of the Nouvelle Cuisine phenomenon, neither the Nouvelle Cuisine meal nor the Nouvelle Cuisine discourse could be consumed entirely as

an end in itself, but as a means of acquiring the two primary *biens*. Despite comparisons to May 68 (Rao et al.) or Maoism (Chelminski), despite its disdain for the American hamburger and the McDonaldisation of French culture (Fischler, Homnivore), Nouvelle Cuisine was very much an embrace of capitalism, or perhaps, more accurately, was very much caught in the embrace of capitalism.

If the history of Nouvelle Cuisine is well inscribed in a patriarchal capitalist logic, then, it seems plausible that, by extension, the nation to which it is inextricably tied may itself be enmeshed in this capitalist logic, its value determined by its strength relative to other nations. Among the many links between food and politics that I was unable to explore in this dissertation, one deals directly with this theoretical problem: the activism of José Bové. Although his actions are often interpreted as expressions of anti-americanism or hyper-nationalistic protectionism, the real target of Bové's protests is the international commodification of food. From a peaceful dismantling of a McDonald's in Millau, France, to the development and enforcement of an AOC designation for Roquefort, to the massive demonstrations at the 2000 World Trade Organization meetings that clogged and paralyzed the city of Seattle, Bove's purpose has been to challenge recent trends in agribusiness that determine who has authority over the quality, safety, and production of the world's food. According to Gilles Luneau, Bové's protests grew out of the fact that, in food, Bové saw the most compelling evidence that "capitalism at its most rampant and ruthless was sweeping the world" (xii, introduction to The World Is Not For Sale). He argues that multinational agricultural interests have taken over the fields and food supplies of the people for whom food used to have a specific

function (to provide calories and nourishment to the body). Bové's demands for fair trade, his championing of small farmers, and his promotion of "authentic" French food stuffs are certainly compatible with the values discussed by the haute cuisine chefs and in the culinary discourse of Nouvelle Cuisine. In addition, his overtly political mission and rhetoric confirm the seeming inescapability of the capitalist logic suggested by the hidden narrative of Nouvelle Cuisine. Yet, can we really compare the goals of French haute cuisine with Bové's fight against fast food on the strength of the intersection of certain priorities?

It seems sloppy to confuse or assume a fungibility between the terms and debates of haute cuisine (where food is already a luxury) and the terms and debates of a more general understanding of food (where it is viewed as a necessity). And yet, in his own argument, Bové may tighten the very knots he is trying to unravel: first between food and capitalism but also between luxury food and necessary food. The snare that binds food to capitalism, as elaborated by Bové, is a practical one: by changing the value of food from a substance whose function is to provide nutrition to a substance whose function is to generate profit, agribusinesses have turned food into an international commodity. Unfortunately, in his defense of why this link must be undone, I feel he creates a theoretical impossibility for the undoing of this commodification. In his summary of Bové's positions Luneau writes, "But Bové [...] argue[s], food is not a mere commodity: eating is an intimate, daily activity, a source of pleasure, a means of survival, and a crucial aspect of the way in which we relate to the earth. Food has its rituals in every culture, creed, religion and philosophy. Wheat, maize and rice are more than just crops"

(xii). In this quotation, there can be no clear boundary between luxury and necessity, because although food may be either “a source of pleasure” or “a means of survival,” its investment in such subjective categories as rituals or intimate (thus particular) daily activities make it impossible to determine how and when food may take on which qualities and for whom. Furthermore, part of his elaboration of how corporate interests had commodified food was by changing the value of its function as a substance. In commodification, food, of course, becomes a tool for profit; but food’s function is quite clearly transformed in Bové’s valued-added description, too.

According to Fernand Braudel, it is all these maddening inconsistencies and linguistics slippages that contribute to food’s status as a powerful tool in the study of consumer societies. As we have seen, food is quite literally consumed, but its consumption also runs the gamut from absolutely essential for survival to entirely superfluous and extravagant. He stresses the importance of, but also the acceptability of, these concepts—“superfluity” and “sufficiency”—to the study of culture and the development of market systems. He also privileges food as a major topic of study in his three-volume history of pre-industrial Europe and the growth of market economies. For Braudel, food, along with other “parahistorical” objects such as clothing, lodging, technology, towns, and so forth, create a language that usually emerges only in the margins of traditional history. But Braudel maintains that the aspects of material, everyday culture (“civilisation matérielle”) can be placed alongside society’s economic organizing systems (“civilisation économique”) to create what he calls a double register. Clarifying this double register—the coexistence of the cultural and practical logic of food

with the economic logic that is both driven by it and driving it—creates a historical approach whereby the civilisation matérielle both “disturbs” and “explains” the civilisation économique à *contrario*. (Vol. 1: 128). Although Braudel’s study focuses on pre-industrial Europe, he nonetheless also insists on the inextricable link between capitalism and the production and distribution of food. He calls his use of the word “capitalism” to discuss social and economic forces at work in societies that lacked a strong market economy “anachronistic,” and admits that during the time about which he is writing, the word had not yet entered any form of political, economic or historical discourse. But he defends his usage by claiming that there is no running away from the realities or the controversies that the term might raise.

Despite Braudel’s contention that his goal is to elucidate and thus untangle the “double register” of history, perhaps his more significant achievement is the opposite. His meticulous elaboration of this complex dialectic actually ends up blurring or even erasing the distinctions between his “parahistories” from the margins and what he calls “traditional history.” At the same time, he introduces another equally tricky dialectic—that of superfluity and sufficiency, or average versus luxury. He acknowledges from the beginning of his chapter on food and drink that those privileged enough to live in luxury are the minority and consequently concedes that the luxury experience is not the experience shared by the majority of mankind. Yet the significance of luxury consumption remains central to Braudel’s study, not only because the line between luxury and average is ever changing and unstable, but also, as I discussed earlier, because

luxury represents the success or goal toward which the members of a society train their aspirations.

Perhaps the limitation of this dissertation is that by constructing such a defined frame—food as a revolutionary model—I have been tempted to draw conclusions about a nation based on linguistic similarities and overlaps in the cultural objects that is said to express it. Over the course of this dissertation, I have changed my mind several times and even, at times, used the same data to argue contradictory positions. Laurent Dubois has articulated this dilemma using a surprisingly analogous object of study:

Fans in France have participated in a larger global tradition of seemingly endless commentary about the way the particular style of play of a national team reflects aspects of their nation's character. Such discussions are, of course, full of dangerous intellectual pitfalls and often tend toward absurd stereotyping. After all, the stylistics and tactical choices of a football team can never truly represent a nation. And yet many fans and commentators have felt that they do. Football can never really answer the questions it raises: "What is a nation? Who are we?" But it has taken on a crucial role in raising those questions by creating a space for impassioned and intense discussions. (Dubois 41)

Dubois's assessment that a football team can hardly be expected to hold the line as an accurate representation of a nation seems perfectly obvious and reasonable, but the temptation to use Nouvelle Cuisine and its culinary discourse to represent various guises of French nationhood and to answer, "What is a nation?" is very much in evidence, not only in my work here, but (using different culinary expression or different nations) in a great deal of other work in the burgeoning field of food studies.

My hope is that the strength of the mode of inquiry used in this dissertation is that it does not simply point at these culinary and political "revolutions" and describe a monolithic trend that would participate in the "endless commentary" about how a cultural

object reflects its nation's character. Instead, I have tried to complicate and challenge the obvious narrative whenever possible. Sometimes, but not always, that strategy has its own profound terrain. My frustration with a rhetoric so slippery that it conflates revolution and counterrevolution, or innovator and appropriator, is mitigated by my faith in the delicate balance prescribed by Roland Barthes: "Nous vogueons sans cesse entre l'objet et sa démystification, impuissants à rendre sa totalité: car si nous pénétrons l'objet, nous le libérons mais nous le détruisons; et si nous lui laissons son poids, nous le respectons, mais nous le restituons encore mystifié" (Mythologies 233). Writing a dissertation on culinary discourse is already embracing the fact that one is "impuissant à rendre la totalité" of one's object. Food writers, with their ephemeral referent, must make peace with the imperfection of what stays behind long after the meal is eaten. This dissertation is itself the result of a textual maceration, and must therefore leave its own imperfect description of the meal that was digested.

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Biography

A native of Lexington, VA, Heather Mallory was born in July of 1969, just a few months after Henri Gault and Christian Millau launched Le Nouveau Guide Permanent. She completed her Bachelor's degree in English and Comparative Area Studies (specializing in Russian Studies) at Duke in 1991. She returned to Durham, and Duke, in 2002 to pursue the Master's and Doctor of Philosophy degrees in Romance Studies after more than ten years working in theatre, journalism, and photography. Her articles and photographs have appeared in the International Herald Tribune, Civilization, Ms., Condé Nast Traveler, and Swing. In 2001, her photographs were exhibited at the World Financial Center in New York, NY, in a group show entitled "Mongolian Nomads: A Tradition of Survival." From 1999 to 2001, she was an editor at Ms. magazine in New York and was promoted to copy chief in 2000. She has also assisted food writer Patricia Wells in the publication of numerous books over the past 15 years, most particularly The Food Lover's Guide to Paris, an experience that provided much of the inspiration for this dissertation.

While pursuing her doctorate, she was the beneficiary of a six-year departmental fellowship. In addition, she was awarded the Evan Frankel Fellowship (2008) and a Duke University Summer Research Fellowship (2008). In 2007, she was selected to Duke's Presidential Council for Women. She is a member of the national French honor society Pi Delta Phi, the Modern Languages Association, and the Association for the Study of Food and Society.