Cultural Analysis and Bourdieu's Legacy
Settling accounts and developing alternatives

Edited by Elizabeth Silva and Alan Warde
3 ‘Cooking the books’ of the French gastronomic field

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Insofar as he was less a High Priest of social theory than a Master Craftsman of social research, Pierre Bourdieu’s analytical legacy should properly be understood in terms of its ability to uncover the logic and practice of particular social worlds. In this chapter, the universe of French gastronomy is considered as a distinctive field of practices. Drawing upon Bourdieu’s analytical methods I seek to demonstrate in a schematic (rather than systematic) way, the changing logic of the field of gastronomic practices in France. To do so I trace key aspects of its changing organizational structure and forms of representation through the two crucial periods of its development. In the first I outline the process by which the gastronomic field developed as an autonomous domain in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, achieving a sufficient coherence of practices, institutions, and representations to sustain itself as a distinctive social field. The second traces the process of erosion of that autonomy a century later, pointing to the new institutional arrangements and relations that have emerged to keep it afloat.

By ‘field’ we refer to a distinctive social microcosm that carries its own characteristic practices, rules, forms of authority and standards of evaluation (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 101–2). As Bourdieu asserted and demonstrated, a field is a structured space of positions that is, at once, a field of force operating upon those within it, and equally a field of struggles through which social agents act to preserve or transform the distribution of resources within it. Fields are, as one key practitioner has put it: ‘historical constellations that arise, grow, change shape, and sometimes wane or perish, over time’ that emerge with a certain degree of autonomy, which is essentially the capacity to insulate itself from external influences and to uphold its own criteria of evaluation over and against those of neighboring or intruding fields (Wacquant, 1998).

Roots of a French gastronomic field

In her analysis of the genesis of gastronomy as a cultural field in the nineteenth century, Priscilla Ferguson (1998) places gastronomic literature at its very foundation. She argues that through gastronomic writers (Grimod de la Reyniere, Carême, Brillat-Savarin) as well as through dominant literary figures from other cultural domains who wrote about gastronomy (Balzac in literature and Fourier in philosophy), the emergent ‘gastronomic field’ received symbolic fortification from more firmly established cultural fields. Thus with gastronomic writing accepted as good literature, the emergent gastronomic field acquired a measure of cultural legitimacy. Brillat-Savarin played a particularly important role in this process, according to Ferguson, because unlike most of the food writing produced by journalists and chefs, his was a non-instrumental viewpoint and his writing transcended the domain of gastronomy, placing it ‘within a larger intellectual and social universe’.

For Brillat-Savarin, the text was its own end, a status hardly altered by the few recipes included in the work. The often noted stylistic qualities of the Physiology of Taste – the anecdotal mode, the witty tone, the language play – give this work an almost palpable literary aura.  

(Ferguson, 1998: 616–17)

Ferguson’s focus on literature in the emergence of the gastronomic field is insightful, but we might add two notes of caution. The first has to do with limiting a social analysis of the gastronomic field to literary practices alone. While literature was undoubtedly crucial in creating a symbolic foundation for the gastronomic field, in the ways that have been indicated and as Ferguson has shown, a fuller grasp of the social logic of the field would seem to require that the means of its symbolic construction be conjoined to a broader range of social practices.

The second hesitation has to do with the relations between fields, and in particular with Ferguson’s idea that the relative strength of a field (its ‘cultural resonance’ and ‘cultural resistance’ in her terms) is a function of its dependence on its connections to other cultural fields (or in relation to the ‘larger society’ in her words) (ibid.: 602). Despite the fact that this would need to be demonstrated empirically and not simply asserted, one would expect the strength of a field to rest not so much on its dependence on other fields as on the degree of relative autonomy it enjoys from other fields. In other words, its strength would seem to reside in its ability to operate in terms of its own proper rules and principles of regulation and on its own internal evaluative criteria. Its autonomy ensures a certain fortification in relation to principles of evaluation and regulation introduced from other fields, such as in various cultural fields (U.S. cinema, for example) where the governing rules and principles have been increasingly superseded, if not overwhelmed, by the standards imposed by the economic field.

While in the early stages of its formation gastronomy may indeed have acquired a level of social prestige through the links it was able to forge with more established fields, such as literature and philosophy, as it has gained a certain autonomy (the phase of what Ferguson terms ‘consolidation’), it has come to assert itself as something more than a branch of either, and therein lies its strength as a field. Its capacity to maintain and assert its own rules and its own standards of evaluation over and above those of competing or neighboring or dominant fields is the effective source of its power in the society. Of course the independence of a field is always relative and a function of its historical trajectory (whereby fields come to be located hierarchically, in relation to one another) but achieving independence does
not consign a field to ‘the cultural equivalent of solitary confinement’ as Ferguson fears. On the contrary, it can be viewed as a measure of its maturation.

Over the first half of the nineteenth century, Brillat-Savarin’s meditations on taste, the body and the aesthetics of food; Grimod de la Reynière’s symbolic construction of a French ‘public’ for restaurants; and the chef Antonin Carême’s celebration of the culinary arts, taken together, can be seen as having symbolically constructed the foundation for a distinctive design for living, the ‘art of eating well,’ whereby the act of properly nourishing the body simultaneously accomplishes the proper nourishment of the soul. It was a form of perception that, among other things, abandoned the traditional dietetic/medicinal principles of cooking that had governed culinary practice for several hundred years, in favor of a kind of pure gastronomic aesthetic, a stance equivalent to that of ‘art for art’s sake’ that emerged contemporaneously in the fields of artistic practice (Bourdieu, 1996a [1992]: esp. Part I, Chapter 1 and Bourdieu, 1993c: Chapter 5). In the seventeenth century the fine arts borrowed the metaphor of taste from the culinary domain, where it had long been central to the dietetic principle, because taste is what determined the age and toxicity of foodstuffs, and served to match specific foods to the temperament and the body of the individual (Flandrin, 1999: 429). It can be seen as having been part of a process of symbolic labor through which the gastronome became distinguished from (and elevated above) the gourmand. As Ferguson recounts, we see constructed the discriminating connoisseur, raised ‘to the lofty position of high priest for this new cult,’ the gastronome was thereby discursively differentiated from the sinful and indulgent gourmand, the glutton who ‘only knows how to ingest’ (Ferguson, 1998: 608–9). The development of a pure gastronomic disposition was an expression of a distinctive ‘art of living,’ the basic aspiration of all acts of cultural distinction and a (barely) misrecognized assertion of bourgeois dominance in the society. As Bourdieu has put it:

At stake in every struggle over art there is also the imposition of an art of living, that is, the transmutation of an arbitrary way of living into the legitimate way of life which casts every other way of living into arbitrariness.

(Bourdieu, 1984 [1979])

Thus was haute cuisine elevated by an ethos of ‘cuisine for cuisine’s sake,’ a kind of ‘pure gastronomic aesthetic’ in which the sublime (in the act of consumption) was posed against the practical task of ‘cooking to eat’ (as a biological necessity). A complement to this process unfolded within the realm of production, as the artistry of culinary creation achieved dominance over cooking as a commercial practice.

The conquest of autonomy

If the symbolic construction of the field of French gastronomy took place over the course of the first half of the nineteenth century, its material infrastructure was largely put into place in the decades of the second half. Although French scientists had made crucial advances in food preservation techniques (including Pasteur’s discoveries of the scientific bases of food sterilization that served as the foundation) the fact that France was a heavily agricultural society, with southern growing seasons that lasted virtually year-round, meant that the institutional foundations for industrial food processing were developed more slowly in France than elsewhere (Pedrocco, 1999: 487–8). Throughout Europe, advances in food production, processing, preservation, distribution, and storage were underway, but rapid urbanization and population growth generated requirements for food production that could not be met by European agricultural capacity alone, thereby creating an opening for American firms. Aided by technical innovations in refrigeration techniques, American firms successfully entered the European market during an agricultural depression of 1873 with exports of substantial quantities of fresh and processed foods. The mass production of preserved foods began in the 1860s in the U.S., where canning factories developed rapidly with the outbreak of the Civil War and companies like Campbell and Heinz and Borden had success with advertising techniques that would come to be employed in Europe (ibid.: 459). Once Europe’s agricultural crisis lifted, European agricultural interests were able to compete against U.S. industry, but its facility with industrial and commercial techniques in the food preservation industry implanted the ‘American model’ in the domain of food ways, a fixture synonymous with the industrial logic of efficiency, high volume, and standardization, the very embodiment of industrial modernity.

It was a model that introduced a thin fissure into the gastronomic domain that would later be expanded. On one side stood entrepreneurs, managers, and industrialists, seeking to maximize profit and expand their enterprises. On the other stood professional chefs, who responded to the industrial imperative (toward large-scale enterprise, product standardization, and routinization and de-skilling of the labor process) in a way that resembled that of skilled artisans everywhere, namely by a collective defense of their trade. Thus, the latter decades of the nineteenth century were punctuated by small shopkeepers and artisans in the traditional métiers d’alimentation (including chefs de cuisine, cuisiniers, pâtissiers, boulangers, traiteurs) increasingly organizing themselves into trade union associations (chambres syndicales) in response to the installation of large food-processing plants in the outskirts of Paris, several of which employed close to two thousand workers (Trubeck, 2000: 81).

The professional chef and the industrial manager represented social actors pursuing divergent career paths and embodying sharply different values and aesthetic dispositions with regard to food and to cuisine. Within the emerging gastronomic field were distinctive, even opposing, institutional milieux, each with its own logic of practice, each drawing into its orbit those predisposed to it, and each represented by key social agents who can be seen as having embodied these emerging divisions.1 Thus, representative of the one side was Auguste Cortay, an industrialist who had formerly been a chef to the Italian royal family, and who had come to extol the modern virtues of preserved foods (‘Daily, the great factories will deliver tasty, freshly prepared and cooked food at very low prices. It will be the start of a new century’); whose book, La conserve alimentaire, was published in four editions between 1891 and 1902 and whose magazine of the same title was
published continuously from 1903 to 1914 (Corthay, 1902; Capatti, 1999: 495). Corthay might be regarded as the industrial counterpart to the gastronomes of the previous century.

Whereas Brillat-Savarin had presented a series of philosophic and aesthetic 'meditations' on taste, the senses, the preparation of meals, the social character of dining, the table, and the body, Corthay offered up a disquisition on the practical methods of food processing and conservation, with recipes geared not to the senses so much as to industrial preparation and preservation. Only secondarily concerned with the taste of the food, Corthay's recipes emphasized the proper amount of water, salt, sugar, oil, or carbonate of soda added to the various steamed vegetables, or fruit confits, or canned fish or meats that were laid out in his 473-page compendium of industrial food ways. A connoisseur of haute cuisine would have seen the work as a gastronomic abomination, a meditation on tastelessness that deliberately and explicitly eschewed the skill of the chef/artisan in favor of the industrial machine and its practical possibilities. Corthay's book (1902), subtitled Traité Pratique de Fabrication, eulogized the machinery of industrial production and emphasized practical matters of quantity (weights, amount of produce - high volume being the objective of industrial production). Simultaneously a practical industrial manual and a celebratory reflection on the practical virtues of industrial technique, Corthay's book placed both visual and narrative emphasis on the organization of the industrial kitchen and on the production machinery of production deployed within it (including presentation of adoring images of the factory-kitchen and of food-processing machinery).

On the other side of the emerging divide between industrial food processing and the culinary arts stood the renowned chef, Georges Auguste Escoffier. His classic Guide Culinaire first appeared in 1902, and he came to personify French haute cuisine through mid-century, a period when its symbolic imprint was perhaps most pronounced. His book remains a central text in the training of professional chefs, while Escoffier continues to occupy a prominent place in the pantheon of haute cuisine, a legacy marked as much by his contribution to the organization of the modern restaurant kitchen as by the considerable culinary artistry he displayed within it (Mennell, 1996: 157). For generations, Escoffier's finely honed artisan skills and refined aesthetic sensibilities represented the model for all grand chefs of haute cuisine. He stood on the one side of the emergent division in the gastronomic field where culinary practice represented an art, with the industrial values of mechanization, standardization, time-thrift, and labor-saving techniques resting on the other (Capatti, 1999: 496).

The emergence of an industrial cuisine in the latter decades of the nineteenth century no doubt helped to delimit and to define the artisanship of the culinary arts. The professional chef was placed at the very center of the emerging gastronomic universe, as artist and artisan in contrast to the industrial practitioners of industrial cuisine, to be sure, but also as specifically male artisans distinct from the female purveyors of domestic cuisine. That is, the elevation of the professional chef was also accomplished through a necessarily hierarchical social differentiation of the culinary practices of the chef from 'mere' everyday domestic cookery performed by housewives (Swinbank, 2002). This required boring into powerful cultural bedrock that held women to be the gardiennes du feu and considered culinary talent a matter of female nature rather than of human cultural practice, with haute cuisine confronting such gender mythology by representing itself as a thing apart (and above).²

Supporting these transformations over the course of the same period, the increasing mechanization of publishing made possible the publication of numerous culinary journals that both aided the process of social differentiation and reflected it. There were at least twelve culinary journals founded in France between 1870 and 1900, intended either for men involved in professional cooking practice or for women engaged in food preparation or household management (Trubek, 2000: 83). One such journal, L'Art Culinaire, played a particularly significant historical role in placing the chef at the center of the gastronomic field. Founded by chefs in 1883 as the journal of the Société des Cuisiniers Français, it was considered the leading professional journal of the day, devoted to the everyday concerns of the chef profession (with articles on qualities of various foodstuffs, on the techniques of food preparation, and on a variety of questions related to the art and science of cooking; as well as on occupational matters, such as the training of cooks and the system of apprenticeships). In contrast to other leading culinary journals, it cultivated a distinctive readership, the professional male chef (ibid.: 85). While various prominent chefs contributed as well, the recipes and menus of Auguste Escoffier were found in almost every issue of L'Art Culinaire and by 1890 the journal had put him well on the way to becoming the most influential chef of the Third Republic (Mennell, 1996: 174). Escoffier's rise to prominence can be seen as having marked the triumph of the professional chef in the struggle to achieve a certain 'jurisdiction' over the kitchen, but also in the triumph of the chef of the restaurant (and hotel) kitchen over the managers of both industrial and domestic kitchens.

While Escoffier played a key role in elevating the professional chef in symbolic terms, he was also responsible for institutionalizing the modern organization of the professional kitchen. With the opening of the Savoy Hotel in London in 1889 under the direction of César Ritz, Escoffier was provided with a stage upon which to work his culinary and organizational magic, thereby permanently shifting the main venue of haute cuisine from the upper-class household to the gastronomic restaurant; in this case to the kitchens of the luxury hotels that were opening throughout Europe. No longer were chefs mere glorified household servants, but they could now aspire to commanding spaces of their own making, spaces with an international visibility that Escoffier had helped secure for French haute cuisine (Dornenburg and Page, 2003: 8; Mennell, 1996: 179; Trubek, 2000: 48).

All the important marks of professional accomplishment, major awards of recognition, and the rites of institution that would truly matter within the field of gastronomic practices revolved around the practices of professional chefs, their associates, and the institutions closest to them. That is, according to the evaluative criteria composed from within this universe, it would be chefs, their restaurants and their creations that would represent the principal objects of veneration, rather than
the purveyors of industrial cuisine ('food service professionals' as they might be called today) for their products or processes, or indeed the family recipes and home-cooked meals prepared by the (mostly female) cooks of the domestic household.

The latter decades of the nineteenth century thus saw the consolidation of French gastronomy as a distinctive domain that was increasingly acquiring its own rules, regulations, institutional forms, and developing its own proper standards and methods of evaluation. The measure of autonomy achieved by the gastronomic field had its social expression in the dominance of the professional chef in the restaurant and hotel kitchen. It was increasingly a social world unto itself, having defined itself through a process of social conquest in which the professional chef had come to hold sway, a sphere dominated by men and not women (therefore a cuisine distinguished apart from the cuisine of the private household) and a cuisine that had been symbolically elevated above industrial process, and therefore a victory for professional chefs over their industrial counterparts. Thus the scale of valuation that became established in this world was one that was constructed not between craft and industry, as in the rest of the industrializing world where the skilled artisan was everywhere forced to defend his position and his traditional craft prerogatives against the encroachment of mechanized standardization and its insidious deskilling effect. Rather, the practice of the chef had come to occupy the space between art and craft, a scale of valuation that redounded to the enhancement of the position of professional chef.

Neither the centrality of the grand chef nor the transcendental quality of haute cuisine as a cultural object would have been possible without a system for the production and reproduction of belief in the virtuosity of the chef and the cultural meaning of haute cuisine. A proper analysis of the production of belief in French gastronomy would require systematic attention to those social agents (individual and institutional) collectively engaged in the production of this belief, including the various gastronomic guides; the trade journals and magazines; the journalists and the food critics; the foundations; the museums and monuments, including both the established figures and the rebels; the connoisseurs and the critics, from the more influential to the more marginal, as well as attention to the sources of social power that make them so. While these social actors may appear entirely peripheral to the cooking process in the kitchen and ancillary to the production of haute cuisine as a cultural object, they are central to the production of belief in both the power of the chef and the power of the cultural object.

Since the end of the Second World War, the Guide Michelin and its rating system can be regarded as having furnished the nomos of the field, to the extent that the Michelin guide asserted the dominant principles of vision and division that establish and maintain the terms and the boundaries of the gastronomic field. Its symbolic power has resided in its power to consecrate chefs and restaurants through its role as gatekeeper over one of the primary stakes in the gastronomic field, namely the monopoly of culinary legitimacy, or the power to assert (with authority) just who may legitimately be considered a "grand chef" in France. Within the domain of haute cuisine, as well as across the broad realm of the French gastronomy, the Guide Michelin is recognized as granting the supreme measure of culinary worth, with its highest three-star rating never having been bestowed on more than 27 chefs or restaurants in any given year.

A powerful mystique envelops the Michelin rating system, one that is spun from a combination of elements. The most prominent has been the cult of secrecy surrounding the inspectors, who conduct the restaurant inspections, anonymously, with even the precise number of inspectors remaining a closely guarded secret. Next to its legendary secrecy and anonymity, another pillar of the Michelin mystique has been its cultivated disinterestedness, or its seeming disregard for commercial concerns. It is a trait largely derived from the fact that for 92 of its 107 years of existence, the Michelin guide (unlike other guides) has refused to accept advertising on its pages (Mesplède, 1998). The appearance of disinterestedness creates a kind of cultural 'firewall' that appears to protect the evaluative process from any conflict of interest, at least in pecuniary terms, and the effect of this has been to lend the guide a strong measure of legitimacy, strengthening belief in the integrity of the system. Another ingredient of the Michelin mystique is the air of timelessness that it appears to embody, the product of the combined effect of its age as an institution (over a century), its serialized publication schedule (there is a ritualized quality to its annual publication) and the conservatism of its almost unvarying presentation, dressed in the same red cover and organized according to the same format. The elements operate in relation to one another to magnify the timelessness that it seems to exemplify, while also facilitating a ready transposition in the public imagination of the history of the Guide with the history of the gastronomic world that it has chronicled. Its ability to evoke a sense of solidity is further augmented by its association with a venerable family-owned and -dominated industrial corporation that has been firmly implanted in the French economy for over a century (Eckholm, 1995: 76–7).

The elements of secrecy, disinterestedness, and timelessness that create the Michelin mystique serve to magnify its gatekeeping powers. Its power to consecrate those seeking to enter the temple makes it an object of fear and respect among the players within the field, but it is also widely known to those outside via a popular media that sustains the popular fascination with it. There are other cultural guides in France, and some have enjoyed a fair degree of influence, but in the French gastronomic field three stars in the Guide Michelin is the 'holy grail' for the chef and the restaurateur and neither considers themself (or is considered) at the summit until they are in receipt of their third star. In France the publication of every new edition of the annual Guide is a greatly anticipated and noteworthy media event, and this air of cultural authority is both a cause and a consequence of its mystique, and is made possible by a belief in its integrity as a gastronomic arbiter. The annual 'scorecard' of winners and losers is a kind of serialized game that is an object of great interest, in a country where most three-star chefs remain virtually household names. But if the Michelin mystique helps maintain a belief in the cultural power of haute cuisine, it is a game in which both the losers and the winners prevail, to the extent that it reinforces the central place of haute cuisine in the gastronomic field, and of gastronomy in French culture and society.

If the Guide Michelin reigns supreme among culinary guides, the process of
The concours has been an important form of culinary consecration, a competitive contest in which one's talent and skill in the craft is judged and authorized by one's peers, a central method of recognition within the artisan culture of the chef profession. Such concours are ubiquitous rituals in the domain of wine and of haute cuisine, and the chefs who win them hold them aloft throughout their careers as marks of pride and accomplishment.

The most coveted culinary concours that serves as a virtual model for all of the others has been the award of the Maître Ouvrier de France (MOF), created in 1924 and administered by a non-profit association that sponsors competitions for some 220 different crafts in France. Operating across a broad spectrum of occupations, including those of the building construction industry, the arts, cosmetology, among many others, the 'métiers de bouche' ('crafts of the mouth') account for 11 different award competitions within the field of gastronomy. For example, held every four years, the concours for 'cuisine-restauration' would typically commence with several hundred candidates who are then winnowed down to 30 or 40 finalists, from which emerge four or five award winners.

The MOF is the most prestigious award that can be accorded a worker in any of the manual or service trades in France, though it accords no explicit material rights. It is not a license to practice a craft, it affords no entry to a job site; but only accords the right of the medal winner to wear the French tricolor on their collar, a symbol bestowing considerable prestige among the members of a craft, including those culinary trades for which there is a competition. It is a highly coveted prize within the chef profession and is an even more exclusive 'club' than that of those who have achieved three stars in the Michelin guide (of the 38 grand chefs who have possessed three Michelin stars since 1990, 23 never won the MOF).

The entire system of culinary recognition, including the awards and competitions and the organizations that sponsor them, have operated in a more or less reciprocally confirming relationship with the gastronomic guides and magazines, their food critics and journalists, and their rating systems. They have all been bound to and have fed off the field of gastronomic practices. In doing so, they have been collectively involved in the production of value of the gastronomic field, including its dominant players and institutions, engaging one another in the struggle to impose a way of seeing through a lens in which the chef and the practices and institutions of haute cuisine have held sway. It is an arrangement that essentially mirrors the field of cultural production (Bourdieu, 1993: 261).

The erosion of autonomy

It must be said that José Bové and his tractor could not have chosen a more appropriate target for decapitation than that McDonald's outlet in South-Central France back in 1999. Everything, from the company's global reach, its relentlessly formulaic organization, and its hyperbolic promotional style, to its hyper-rationalized labor process (overseen by the evil genius of a computerized accounting system capable of monitoring worker productivity at each of its cash registers, in each of its restaurants, anywhere on the planet), to its position within a carnivorous system of industrial agriculture that has devoured small farmers to the point of extinction, recommends McDonald's as the perfect embodiment of American-style neo-liberalism. But while the populist drama of the 'David' of the Confédération Paysanne fending off the prototypical American 'Goliath' (and in a battle waged deep in the heart of 'la France profonde') was a brilliant piece of guerrilla theatre and a useful weapon in the struggle to overthrow the existing symbolic order, its simplified narrative obscured important parts of the story.

In a more complicated version, McDonald's might be considered in the context of a wider arena of French institutions and social forces that have developed and changed, together, and in relation to it. Here we sketch a brief and provisional outline of such a story, one that locates McDonald's on the institutional and spatial landscape of the French gastronomic field. As we step back to take in this broader view, the vision that emerges is not so much that of the unwanted interloper menacing the peaceable host, but a more counter-intuitive picture that directs our attention to the indigenous forces of 'Americanization' within the French gastronomic field. From this vantage point, neo-liberalism is not so much a boorish intruder, loudly announcing itself at the front door, but is seen slipping in more discreetly, through a gradual and nearly intangible process of erosion in which 'limited reforms' slowly trickle into the crevices and interstices of even the most traditional (and therefore least likely) institutions, practices, and locations.

Although it seems somewhat counter-intuitive, the fast-food industry in France was actually established by French companies that were attempting to beat the Americans at their own game. The McDonald's Corporation entered France in the early 1970s along with other American-based chain companies (hotels, commercial cleaning companies, weight-control services, tax preparation and employment agencies) that were expanding into Europe in response to rising labor costs, market saturation, and increased competition within the United States. McDonald's was not the first fast-food company to operate in France (brands with names like 'Crip Crop', 'Dino-Croc', 'Chicken Shop' and the British-owned 'Wimpy' preceded it) and, until 1982, it was forced to cede most of the French fast-food market to indigenous chains while it settled a prolonged legal dispute with its local franchisee. Only afterward was it able to reacquire its license to develop its brand in France.

It was these companies that largely fueled the fast-food industry in France in the 1970s and 1980s, opening numerous hamburger restaurant chains closely modeled on the McDonald's formula. With American-sounding names ('Magic Burger', 'France-Quick', 'FreeTime', 'B'Burger', 'Manhattan Burger', 'Kat's Burger', 'Love Burger', 'Kiss Burger') these restaurants sold hamburgers and other American foods (prepared by part-time workers along a computerized assembly-line) and essentially packaged, displayed, and marketed as 'American' goods in restaurants whose design, organization, and internal spatial symbolism borrowed heavily from the American fast-food model (Fantasia, 1995).

So, while the McDonald's name was legendary in business circles, giving it considerable symbolic power, its actual business role was fairly negligible in the early stages of fast-food growth in France, thereby providing an opportunity for
French-owned corporations and independent entrepreneurs to enter the market for fast food. That is, the domination by McDonald’s over the French fast-food market has been relatively recent. As late as 1989, 80 per cent of the 777 fast-food hamburger restaurants that were located in France were owned by French or European firms or investor groups.10 Once McDonald’s settled its legal dispute and was able to expand in the French market, it did so steadily, installing 150 restaurants within the first seven years (1982–1989). However, since 1989 McDonald’s has expanded in the French market with great force, using its enormous marketing capability to sweep most of the French firms out of market entirely, while opening roughly one new restaurant outlet every week over the course of two decades, so that by the beginning of 2009 there were 1,134 McDonald’s restaurants in France.11

Even before McDonald’s came to dominate in France, its looming presence in the international market made it difficult for small or independent companies to operate and it isn’t surprising that the small independent firms very soon lost out to larger, more heavily capitalized French chains. The most active in the fast-food business were large industrial groups (grands groupes industriels) like SOPAD. SOEXHO, EVITAIR — conglomerates with roots in post-war service-sector industries such as tourism and hotels, catering and chain restaurants, supermarkets, and industrial food processing (called ‘l’agro-alimentaire’ in French). With corporate genealogies that can sometimes be traced back to the Marshall Plan ‘productivity missions’ of the 1950s (that took European businessmen to the U.S. to learn American business techniques), they represent a sector that, from birth, has been stuck at the top of the ‘American model’. They tend to be firms bred in expressed opposition to the organizational, financial, and stylistic temperament of the historic family-owned enterprises of the traditional manufacturing industries in France, representing a sort of ‘comprador bourgeoisie’ with respect to the introduction of American forms of commercial culture generally (Boltanski, 1981).

At the level of both production and consumption, American-style fast food either introduced or provided a firm institutional structure for a range of innovations that stood in contrast to the practices of traditional restaurants in France. In the realm of production practices, McDonald’s (and the French-owned firms modeled on it) brought computerized accounting systems; extreme rationalization of the food preparation labor process; an extensive use of contingent labor (mostly part-time); and a virulent opposition to unions. At the level of consumption, American-style fast food brought to the gastronomic field, and to the French service sector, various innovations in the methods of restaurant marketing and service delivery (including the extensive use of visual hyperbole in promotions and in the design of restaurants and their internal space; smooth uncovered surface textures; bright lighting levels; colorful menus that dominate the visual field; self-service practices; ordering and queuing patterns; packaging of food to be eaten by hand; tables cleared off by customers, etc.). At the level of production and consumption, fast food in France was driven by youth, with both a workforce and a customer base made up of young people and with a style that attracted them on the basis of an appearance of stylistic rebelliousness, especially in relation to traditional French cultural forms (Fantasia, 1995).

While the fast-food restaurant and experience represented a cultural break from traditional French culinary practices, the fast-food industry was only the most extreme expression of an industrialized culinary sector that emerged in France in the 1970s. This sector has included a massive, vertically organized food-processing industry (l’industrie agro-alimentaire); various commercial restaurant sectors, including those devoted to institutional provisions (canteens, cafeterias, and restaurants in schools, prisons, hospitals, etc.) and standardized chain restaurants (‘Hippo’ and ‘Buffalo Grill’ are two well-known brands); supermarket chains that have expanded to become massive ‘selling factories’ (hypermarchés) for the distribution of goods of all sorts.

What has distinguished industrial cuisine (and its various institutional affiliates) from haute cuisine (and its cult of artisanship) is that the industrial is governed by the principles and rules of the economic field. Its standards uphold the values of profit maximization, standardization, high-volume production, technological innovation, speed and efficiency; whereas haute cuisine has been governed by the logic and values of art and artisanship, with a fidelity to traditional practices, to the fabrication of unique creations, to complex and sophisticated technique, aesthetic refinement, low-volume production, formal training, the consumption of time, etc. The one extols the quantity of production; the other the quality of creation; the one is led by the managerial skills of the chef d’entreprise; the other by the virtuosity of the chef de cuisine.

It is not simply a matter of being able to recognize the domestic sources of neoliberalism in France, for it is not surprising to find the logic of the mass market governing the activities of industrial food processing, cafeterias, supermarkets, chain restaurants, and fast-food outlets, regardless of their national origin (although the ‘American model’ has been viewed as a particularly harsh strain of neo-liberal practice). It is necessary to make an analytical break from the sort of realist approach that would treat fast food and haute cuisine as distinctive worlds, toward a view that seeks to understand the social logic operating around (and through) fast food toward the wider field of culinary practices in which it has been embedded. That is, it is necessary to look to the field of relationships that link mass cultural goods to luxury markets, mass culture to high culture; and that link regionalism and the local (le terroir) to ‘globalization’ and ‘Americanization’.

**Crossing the firewall**

When we begin to pull at the threads of industrial cuisine, we can begin to see the degree to which its logic, its institutions, and its practices have expanded well beyond their customary orbit, increasingly penetrating (and occupying) what had traditionally been considered an antipodal universe of haute cuisine. Of course, haute cuisine is able to maintain all appearances. It sustains its air of venerability and tradition through an elaborate edifice of private and public institutions that chronicle it and that consist of foundations, associations, and museums of the culinary arts. Various rites of sanctification signify who is worthy to enter its portals (through awards, prizes, ceremonies, and the all-important star system), and serve as a cosmic to
cover its increasingly commercial and promotional aims. The highly elaborated event of the Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin, for example, is an exclusive annual dinner held in Renaissance costume at the Château du Clos de Vougeot in Beaune in Burgundy, cloaked in pomp and circumstance. The ritual is far more symbolic, however, for it always immediately precedes the annual Burgundy wine market, where wine exporters, distributors, wine critics, and restaurant sommeliers gather to place their annual orders for Burgundy wines. A Renaissance ritual thus serves as a sacred ‘cover’ for a thoroughly modern commercial operation.

Helping to sustain the conviction is an army of retainers (magazines, journals and journalists, food critics) who operate as though entranced by the very magical powers that they are employed to render believable. It is a domain that has both a ‘majestic’ and a ‘magical’ quality. It is majestic in the way that haute cuisine represents France to the outside world and to itself: as sacrosanct, as venerable, through the cult of the lineage (Chef Vergé begets Chef Ducasse, who begets Chef Solivères, who begets …); and in the romance of le terroir (a term with an English equivalent, that refers to that which is drawn from a particular soil or place, and made sublime by the traditional artisan practices of that place). The constructed majesty of haute cuisine stands in almost direct proportion to the constructed frivolousness of fast food, with each serving as key elements of the symbolic vocabulary by which France and the U.S. represent themselves to the rest of the world.

As is the case with all luxury industries, the principles of haute cuisine could not be any further from the logic of the mass market (standardization, high volume, low cost, convenience, informality) and the production requirements that make mass markets possible (rationalization, polyvalence, cheap and flexible labor, weak collective structures). In recent decades, however, the symbolic and institutional barrier that once afforded haute cuisine a significant degree of independence from pure commercial standards has become increasingly permeable, allowing for an ease of movement across the divide from both directions.

From one direction, the large industrial groups have reached across the divide into the domain of artisanship, to purchase some of the most venerable culinary establishments in Paris. These industries now routinely engage in the practice of ‘leasing’ portions of the accumulated prestige of the grand chefs by procuring their signatures to enhance the symbolic value of their products (including lines of frozen and prepared foods, chain restaurants, as well as pots and pans, aprons, television programs, cookbooks, wines, and various ‘satellite’ restaurants around the world).

Not only have the large industrial groups entered what was once considered the sacred ground of haute cuisine in pursuit of direct profits, but they have also been involved in the maintenance and reproduction of the culinary patrimony itself. For example, they have helped to finance and govern the Fondation Brillat-Savarin (an institution created in 1980 and charged with defending against the forces of homogenization) and have sponsored the ‘Chef of the Year Award’, an honor bestowed annually by Le Chef magazine, one of the principal organs of the chef profession. So in the same 1990 issue in which Alain Ducasse was granted an award as Chef of the Year, the magazine also featured awards granted to the industry of l’agro-

'alimentaire' by its own trade association for industrial food products (for example, awards were bestowed upon Daregal for its herbes aromatiques surgelées; Mikogel for its mini-bavarois; Sopad-Nestlé for ‘entremets flans sans cuisson’, and Uncle Ben’s for its salades saveurs.

As we consider movement from the other direction, from the domain of haute cuisine toward the industrial, we can discern the extent to which conditions have been created in the gastronomic field that permit those with a sufficient accumulation of symbolic capital the ability to convert it into economic capital. Since industrial firms have no other way to acquire symbolic capital other than to purchase it on the open market, it becomes a true ‘seller’s market’ for the grand chef who, once installed at the apex of the profession by receipt of a third star in the Guide Michelin, is granted the magical power, Midas-like, to turn whatever he touches into gold. Everything is potential lucre, no matter how prosaic the object (aprons, cookbooks, pots and pans, bistros, commercial restaurants). A Bocuse, a Robuchon, a Ducasse (or once a Loiseau), and dozens of others, are able to either lease their names to other producers, attach their signatures directly to goods, or trade on their names themselves (by opening a much less expensive bistro next to their three-star restaurant, for example).

Once he has been granted a third Michelin star, there seems to be a shift in the discourse of the grand chef, from a language of ‘purity’ and ‘excellence’ and timelessness and pricelessness, to the rhetoric of accessibility and democracy (‘everyone should have the opportunity to savour the wonders of our kitchen’). So, for example, Alain Ducasse, who held three-star ratings in the Michelin guide for two of his restaurants (in 2009 he holds three), was featured in an article in the principal magazine representing industrial cuisine (on the occasion of the opening of his new chain of popular mass-market restaurants, ‘Spoon’) which was entitled: I want to make accessible our culinary know-how. Among other things, Ducasse noted that ‘Freedom, diversity, and accessibility are the three rules of success in hotels and restaurants,’ although his own ascension to the top proceeded through institutions and practices that have little to do with any of the three rules (Thiatt, 1999: 53). Like a religious epiphany, those who have spent their careers sanctifying haute cuisine are suddenly converted to the religion of the market, a conversion made necessary by the high loan repayments for restaurant renovations that are almost obligatory in the quest for a third Michelin star.

This movement is also expressed by opening mass-market restaurants, as chefs with three Michelin stars now commonly open one or more ‘annexes’, bistros and other relatively inexpensive restaurants, sometimes right next door to their signature three-star restaurant (Pudlowski, 2000: 58–9). These establishments permit grand chefs to trade financially on the symbolic capital they have accumulated, by purchasing a restaurant designed for a higher volume of customers and a more popular clientele. When Paul Bocuse was hired by Disney to create an ‘authentic’ French restaurant at Epcot Center, the interchange went in both directions, for Bocuse returned to France with knowledge of the business potential of publicity and of expansion, both of which he claimed to have learned from Disney’s ‘master marketers’ (Knight, 2004: 13).
Bocuse, who has become what Le Chef magazine (the principal journal of the profession) has called a living "monument of French cuisine"; who has marketed a full complement of cookbooks, CDs, postcards, shopping bags, tableware, cookware; and who owns a gift shop devoted to himself and his image, invested heavily in mass-market restaurants upon his return from Disney (Fedele, 2003; Golan, 1995a). In financial terms this venture has proven more lucrative than his original restaurant near Lyon, with its seemingly permanent three-star rating. In 2003, revenue at his three-star restaurant was nearly six million euros (selling 98 tables a day, with the average diner spending 178 euros) while revenue that same year from his various brasseries totaled 22 million euros. It shouldn't be forgotten that his brasseries are sustained by the 'Bocuse' name, an appetizer that would have little value without his three Michelin stars and other awards (like the Meilleur Ouvrier de France). In other words, not only is haute cuisine a site where symbolic capital is exchanged for economic capital, but each sustains the other in a mutually constituting and reciprocally confirming relationship.

While economic value has clearly become more and more central to the gastronomic field, the object of market exchange may not necessarily be the accumulation of economic capital, even in the last instance. A field may represent a market for whatever forms of capital social agents in that field happen to possess or bring to it, or otherwise be in a position to benefit from. Cultural fields exert a force upon those who enter them, and represent sites of contestation between those with a stake in preserving the existing arrangements and those predisposed to transform them. While haute cuisine may appear old, venerable, and a repository of traditional artisan values, 'a world apart' from the requirements of standardization and homogenization at the base of fast food, in recent decades the barriers that maintained it as a world apart and provided it with its definition have become much more porous. The symbolic and institutional firewall that once permitted haute cuisine to maintain an independence from pure commercial standards has become much more permeable in the last three decades. Grand chefs, like Bocuse and Ducasse and many others, are now able to break with tradition in pursuit of commercial rewards and public adulation because others have paved the way by crossing the firewall. For example, Michel Guérard, who had been associated with the culinary style known as nouvelle cuisine, appeared to have been the first to step over the wall separating haute cuisine and industrial cuisine when he signed a consulting contract with the Nestlé Corporation in 1976. Quickly habituated to the industrial logic, Guérard asserted with regard to his association with Nestlé, 'I have the feeling of being a fish in water' (Cordier, 1989: 36). Alain Ducasse, Paul Bocuse, and others would later plunge even more deeply into these waters, so that today a grand chef de cuisine is often, simultaneously, a grand chef d'entreprise.

An analytically fruitful way of representing such changes is to view them as an erosion of the historic and relative autonomy of the field. While the two poles of the gastronomic field in France have been expressed in the practices of haute cuisine and of industrial cuisine, it has been the former that has dominated both the social life of the field and its representation, both for the French and for the world. Its character emphasizes cuisine as an art, centered around the chef (artisan), whose knowledge is acquired in apprenticeship with a master, where there is value in the length of time devoted to culinary preparation, where raw materials are considered sublime, and where the nearly priceless creation is designed for a highly restricted (luxury) market. Industrial cuisine, on the other hand, prizes labor-saving technologies that facilitate short-time production, high volume (for a mass market), produced by de-skilled and polyvalent labor.

As I have tried to demonstrate in schematic form, these two regions of the field have become increasingly interpenetrated. Despite the apparent mutual contempt, even repulsion, expressed by the producers and consumers of haute cuisine toward industrial cuisine (contempt that often operates in the other direction as well through various kinds of reverse snobbery), at an institutional level they have become thoroughly interpenetrated through the exchange of symbolic and economic capital. The fabric of this arrangement requires that the economic capital of the grand groupes industriels remains somewhat hidden, so as not to reveal its seams, while the symbolic capital of the grand chefs is presented as the symbolic face of the field. The powerful cultural charm of French haute cuisine, which, as we've seen, confers considerable symbolic capital to those at its apex and represents a key element of French national cultural identity, could be dissipated if its practices and its practitioners were perceived as being too close to the crass industrial/commercial logic of the economic field. The stakes are much higher now than they used to be, and so a symbolic façade is crucial in maintaining all appearances.

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Notes

1 In the larger study of the French gastronomic field from which this chapter derives, I am analysing the career trajectories and occupational histories of several hundred social actors from the field of gastronomic practices in France (grand chefs, with various levels of consecration; cooks in industrial food establishments; business executives from the industry l'agro alimentaire, etc.). Considerations of space make it impossible to present that data here in anything approaching a systematic way.

2 Represented by the expression 'La femme nait cuisinière, l'homme le devient' ('The woman is born a cook, the man becomes one') noted in Jean Claude Ribaut, 'Cuisine au féminin' in Le Monde, 15-16 juin 2003: 18. According to Jack Goody, from as far back as the Ancient Egyptian era, male cooks had appropriated women's recipes for everyday cooking and transformed them into court cuisine, but French haute cuisine would have further reinforced this tendency because the rise of the chef profession in France was so closely bound up with nationalism, thereby raising the stakes involved and necessitating sharp social markers of differentiation. See Goody (1982: 101); and also Szwank (2002: 469).

3 It was for this reason that the exposé written by a former Michelin inspector was treated as such a scandal when it was published (see Remy, 2004; Eichhorn, 1995).

4 It therefore makes perfect marketing sense for the principal published history of the
guide, *Trois étoiles au Michelin* to be subtitled *Une histoire de la haute gastronomie française* (Jean-François Mespède, 1998).

5 In addition to more than half a million copies sold annually, the *Guide Michelin* receives some 25,000 letters per year from readers who send in their judgments of restaurants. They are never published in the *Guide* but are, reportedly, read by the inspection teams as part of the process of discovering new establishments and marking others for attention (Mespède, 1998: 16).

6 The best-known of the other culinary guides has been the *Guide Gault-Millau*, founded in 1969 by two food journalists as a more modern and less pretentious alternative to Michelin. *Gault-Millau* carries neither the same cult of mystery nor the aversion to commercial advertising that has buttressed the Michelin mystique, and it has never been as influential either (Terence, 1996: 114–24). While its symbolic power is substantial in sustaining the gastronomic field, in practical terms it is not tremendously significant. A marketing study commissioned by the trade magazine, *Le Chef*, reported that only 16% of restaurant customers had consulted a culinary guide in the previous six months, and of those (162 respondents) 50% had consulted the *Guide Michelin*, 23% had consulted *Gault-Millau*, while the various other guides consulted included the *Bottin Gourmand* (5%), *Guide du Routard* (9%), *Guide Pudlowski* (1%), *Guide des Relais et Châteaux* (5%), *Champerard* (1%), and *Guide Lebey* (1%) (Golan, 1995b: 52).

7 Portions of this section have been adapted from a previously published article. See Fantasia (2000).

8 Jose Bové is a sheep farmer and militant activist for the peasant’s union, *Confédération Paysanne*. He famously demolished, with a tractor, a McDonald’s outlet that was being constructed in Millau, a small city in the Aveyron region of France, as a protest against the use of hormone-treated beef. His arrest and subsequent trial became a *cause célèbre* in France and Bové was soon propelled internationally as a figure of resistance to American domination of global food circuits and, specifically, the use of genetically modified crops and hormone-treated beef. He was recently elected a member of the European Parliament.

9 These did not include fast-food pastry and sandwich shops, and other adaptations of traditional foods to the fast-food formula, for which an even higher percentage were French owned. These data are available in *La Restauration Rapide en France*, *Revue Technique des Hôtels et Restaurants*, No. 473, mars 1989: 98–107.

10 Data published in *NÉO Restauration*, No. 462, mars 2009: 31. Since 2002, the pace of new openings has cooled with roughly two new McDonald’s outlets per month in France.

11 For example, Groupe Flo, a corporation owning several restaurant chains with close to 200 establishments, has purchased some of the most venerable historic bistros of Paris in recent years, including the Brasserie Lipp, Le Balzar, and La Coupole; and Fauchon, the Parisian purveyor of food delicacies was recently bought by a subsidiary of ACCOR.