

reviews of the wider context they are in, tend to be thinly supplied (notable exceptions are cited above). The papers are well done, informative and well edited; publication has been carefully managed for maximal value. This book will thus be valuable to specialists in the areas covered.

CULINARY CAPITAL

BY PETER NACCARATO AND KATHLEEN LEBESCO (NEW YORK: BERG, 2012).

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In *Culinary Capital*, Peter Naccarato and Kathleen LeBesco extend Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital as described in *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1984). Following Bourdieu's focus on the imposition of arbitrary upper class tastes (not simply tastes in food but also art and music) as the standard by which distinction is conferred, Naccarato and LeBesco assert that food and foodways are important markers of social status and that the assignment of a high or low value is a dynamic rather than static process. The study of the creation and flow of "culinary capital"—which we may think of as a form of status that accrues to individuals who conform to their culture's food and food-related norms and expectations—allows us to "understand how and why certain foods and food-related practices connote, and by extension, confer status and power on those who know about and enjoy them" (p. 3). The book contributes to food studies by demonstrating the use of this theory by exploring a variety of food "sites" (both virtual and physical, all of relatively recent origin) and the ways in which they can confer users and customers with culinary capital.

In exploring the "Contradictions of New Trends in Food Procurement" (Chapter 2), Naccarato and LeBesco lay down a pattern that they use in each subsequent chapter: a brief introduction to the site, historical contextualization, relevant criticism and then an analysis with an eye to evaluating the extent to which this site encourages the acquisition of culinary capital either through adhering to privileged foodways encouraged by middle class ideology, or through resistance to the same. This strategy is useful both because of the relative lack of attention given heretofore to these sites—in the first chapter—meal assembly centers and e-grocers.

While these services are seemingly a boon to the harried professional (usually female, as the authors point out) who wants to provide a healthy, home-cooked meal, there is a Faustian bargain: the culinary capital acquired by providing this meal (despite working full-time) comes at the price of the acceptance of dominant ideologies. Despite decades of women's liberation, the patronization of meal prep kitchens like Dinner by Design and e-grocers like FreshDirect by middle class women reinforces the unspoken expectation that they continue to do "second-shift" duty as (unpaid) cooks. The authors also point out that while having domestic servants may be uncouth in middle class America, both e-grocers and meal assembly kitchens allow the middle class to call on the services of the invisible Other. While the chapter does discuss the same mechanisms at work in lesbian,

gay, bisexual and transgender homes, it focuses on how the businesses discussed give “culinary capital to the family that protects traditional narratives around cooking and eating and the ideologies of gender and class that they promote” (p. 33).

The analysis of the Food Network and its programming (Chapter 3) paints a slightly more complicated picture. Acknowledging that television is our culture’s dominant storyteller, the authors identify three categories of food-related programs: “traditional,” “modern” and “competitive.” While all shows promise culinary capital as well as the personal transformation that is its implied accompaniment, the “traditional” programs offer this through acceptance of women’s traditional role as nurturers. The authors show that despite Giada De Laurentiis’s extensive professional culinary education and experience, her on-camera persona is not that of a successful entrepreneur but rather a nurturer. Indeed, De Laurentiis’s new show, which followed her courtship, marriage and pregnancy, is called *Giada At Home*—leaving viewers to wonder if the intended subtitle is *Where She Should Be*.

Because of the need to appeal to the largest demographic possible, the other two categories of programs go beyond this “traditional” narrative. The food shows Naccarato and LeBesco label “modern” acknowledge the difficulty of a mother (again, female hosts appealing to female viewers) trying to work while simultaneously keeping up middle class appearances by not resorting to fast food. These typology of show—among them Rachel Ray’s *30-Minute Meals* and Robin Miller’s *Quick Fix Meals*—while helping women cook satisfying meals “falls short of a feminist, worker-centered manifesto in that it fails to urge its audience to question the very system that demands women’s harried acquiescence and instead ... encourages them to embrace the mantra of the Superwoman” (p. 58). The chapter also explores how food shows are not, as in decades past, solely the domain of female viewers. Naccarato and LeBesco’s critique reveals how the Food Network (like the Travel Network) has attempted in recent years to offer culinary capital to male viewers. The key seems to represent cooking that does not threaten male viewers’ masculinity by encouraging their interest in a traditionally female activity. The authors explain how competitive shows like *Dinner: Impossible*, *Boy Meets Grill* and *Iron Chef* draw on the imagery of traditional hyper-masculinity—action movies and sports—to entice male viewers with the promise of adulation, power and personal transformation.

While some observers have praised the democratization of cultural criticism with the advent of user-*qua*-reviewer sites like TripAdvisor and Yelp, Naccarato and LeBesco argue that they do not reject the concept of culinary capital, but rather redirect its flows. While supposedly egalitarian, the debates that rage between users on ChowHound.com reflect the hierarchies that have arisen despite the rhetoric of democracy. The authors provide a number of examples of how users promote the idea that the true mark of distinction, and therefore the most deserving of culinary capital, is openness to food regardless of price. Authenticity—the subject of many recent talks at the ASFS conference—is the touchstone for “chowhounds,” who continuously counterpose themselves to “foodies,” who are following food trends rather than starting them. These are contested values, with some chowhounds



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insisting that omnivorousness, if it leads to the elevation of a greasy spoon, is snobby foodie-ism. Naccarato and LeBesco hasten to point out that the reference to fatty foods and obese people is a not-so-subtle message about class; denigrating certain restaurants and the food they serve as “fatty” reinforces the ideology of middle class culinary restraint and the consequent body shape. While demographics of users are not public, users of these sites, as the authors point out, enjoy a certain amount of leisure time and disposable income to be able to both eat out and later write extensively about the experience.

Of the sites reviewed by the authors for the creation and distribution of “culinary capital,” those examined in the final chapter provide the most space for culinary resistance. This analysis is particularly compelling (and interesting reading) because of the authors’ forays into the world of competitive eating, as well as their descriptions of the Indiana State Fair. In both areas (as well as on the “junk foodies” blogs which are the subject of the final section) Naccarato and LeBesco find complex interactions of the dominant food ideology of restraint and the carnivalesque excess of over-eating—a particularly effective example was the dieticians and nutritionists at the INShape Indiana stand: sponsored by the governor’s office, it stood just a few yards from fried-food vendors. The authors suggest that while these exceptional periods of revelry can provide a pressure release from oppressive food ideologies, they can also be seen as the permitted departure from the expected norm: “It is not merely the escape from privileged foodways that is rewarded with status: it is the eternal *return* to them” (p. 93, author’s emphasis).

Culinary Capital has much to recommend it, but perhaps the most attractive advantage is its theoretical application to foodways in myriad contexts, contemporary and otherwise. It makes the reader think about Sidney Mintz’s term “extensification” in terms of a loss of culinary capital of any one food, but it is equally applicable to an analysis of the various grades of *garum*, as well as an investigation of the sudden popularity of local food. While the book is built on a solid body of literature, the authors’ prose is clear and happily not jargon-laden. It is easy to imagine educators giving the first chapter to undergraduates and instructing them to use the theory of culinary capital to investigate novel food sites: farmers’ markets, communal dinners prepared by dumpster-divers, or Occupy kitchens. At a recent conference, the keynote speaker, talking about Italian food in the United States in the 1950s, paused in the middle of his sentence: “Pasta lacked ... cultural capital.” Had he read this book, he would have said “culinary capital.” Given the utility of both the phrase and the theoretical work behind it, we can be sure we will be seeing it often in the future.

Reference

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Trans. Richard Nice. London: Routledge.