

TV cook shows Gendered cooking

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The creators of, and the participants in, cook shows occupy a site where the interwoven issues of gender, class, and ethnicity, topics at the forefront of intellectual discourse, struggle for redefinition. And, in fact, the site yields abundant contradictions around these issues for those who care to look. For instance, the predominance of men over women cooks on TV is disappointing since the tradition of women working in the kitchen still generally holds. Also, the TV shows seem to assume a bourgeois audience who want to watch Euro-American cooks present bourgeois cuisine; there is a near invisibility of black cooks, men or women, on these shows. Furthermore, craft itself is often downplayed. How well one cooks hardly matters. The eager and perhaps only aim of the producers is to keep audience loyalty to their show. To that end, cook shows have become entertainment; the cooks, stars with recognizable personalities and names. For example, Emeril tries to convey a vicarious thrill to viewers via the live studio audience to whom he feeds tidbits so they will ooh and aah. Yet, who can taste the food this side of the screen?

Gender politics on cook shows tend to support the power structure rather than reflect the daily reality of those who cook. Although in most homes women cook, in an informal survey where I asked knowledgeable viewers to name some cook shows, they came up with these names: Emeril Lagasse, *The Frugal Gourmet*—Jeff Smith, *The Galloping Gourmet*—Graham Kerr, *Yan Can Cook*—Martin Yan, Jacques Pepin, Pierre Franey, and Julia Child and Martha Stewart. Male cooks dominated. Among those on this list, French—which suggests *haute*—cuisine and the word *gourmet* seem to have an influence. Although there are more female TV cooks than before and despite the fact that Julia Child led the way, patriarchy still dominates on television.

Social class is also made abundantly clear. TV cook shows offer visions of food and lifestyle of and for the middle class, especially that sector aspiring to rise higher. The cooks themselves exude bourgeois confidence and their image continues to raise the status of cooks. None of the TV cooks act or cook like hash-slingers. Whatever their origins, they have arrived at realization of their American dream. But they in fact demonstrate little if any *haute cuisine*, which would in its execution at home be too complicated and difficult, too expensive, too unsuited to the daily life of ordinary Americans. Remember, we grew up with Ben Franklin homilies on thrift and timesaving efficiency.

In a more pointed way, the shows ignore the lower or blue-collar class. No show details how to make your food stamps go further. A class-conscious viewer might ask the following: How can a budget-stretching cook afford the ingredients? Afford paying \$3.00 per recipe by writing the station? If the same recipe is free on a web site, who has access to a computer to find recipes on the web? And who can pay for the cable/satellite shows in the first place?

If anything, these programs emphasize economic and class differences. They separate the audience into those who can afford the life style and those who can't. For example, the overweight in a lower class household cannot keep up with such self-contradictory fashion trends in what to eat, such as the mandate that made complex carbohydrates intensely *in* in the Eighties, intensely *out* in the Nineties. Their families cannot afford the high cost of fresh meat, fish, vegetables; and, after all, potatoes stick to the ribs in ways that goat cheese salads do not. Ironically,

there is an economic basis to the often grotesque cultural image of the economically disadvantaged filling themselves up on white bread, biscuits and gravy, macaroni and cheese, doughnuts.

In television cook shows, because bourgeois culture wants to consume immigrant cuisine, ethnic cooking often moves up in status. Reproducing the food of our grandmothers answers our nostalgic hunger for the food of our immigrant past, whether we actually experienced such a past or are conceptually looking for our roots. Other viewers' restless search for variety leads them to explore national cuisines, as does the travel lust of the middle class, who have developed a taste for the ("better"?) tastes of other cuisines.

In the 60s Marshall MacLuhan noted how television has shrunk the world. Thus we've all grown used to the idea of acquiring other cultures at home in front of the TV set. TV viewing leads to a kind of personal colonialism as the acquisitions derived from viewing satisfy our seemingly bottomless desire for appropriating property to call our own. However, the cultural diversity of the new focus on food may also have an utopian dimension. As Julia Lesage pointed out to me, there are some positive implications in these culinary borrowings and take-overs:

"[M]any people's introduction to an ethnic group they do not know well may be through cuisine, a kind of first step...I have noticed...cross-cultural sympathy among people of color in urban areas for each other's cultural and pop cultural offerings, both in cuisine and in mass culture phenomena like martial arts movies"

(Lesage, letter).^[1][\[open notes in new window\]](#)

SOME COOKING HISTORY: "ORGANISING VIRTUE"

Cooking is an endeavor that has traditionally split along gender lines, and class is closely linked with gender. Even when men took over in the public domain of food preparation, gender lines remained clear: women became second-class cooks. From earliest times, in the division of labor, cooking was done at home by women. With the rise of feudal systems that sharply divided aristocratic landowners from the unpropertied, the task of cooking in a grand household passed from wife to servant. And the hired chef was male, as Stephen Mennell explains:

"It is highly likely that any process of social differentiation will involve distancing from the food of the lower orders and from the women who cook it...[E]ver since Egyptian times it has been men who took over women's recipes for daily cooking and transformed them into a court cuisine...The most likely explanation lies in the origin of the social institution of the court not as a 'private' or 'domestic' household, but as a military establishment" (Mennell, 201).

This would apply to China as well, another civilization with an ancient history, whose known cooks, that is, those whose reputation has continued down the ages, were men. Whether at court or in an important and/or rich household, the servant/cook acted publicly in the sense that he no longer cooked in the private sphere of his own abode. It was public also in that the great man hiring this cook and the dishes which that cook created did it for show, to exhibit conspicuous wealth and power in palazzos, not casas, in great houses, not humble homes.

As the middle class grew, the traditional bringers home of the bacon, the bread winners, to use language that connects food to wages, worked outside the home to keep their wives inside the domestic space. For the middle class on the rise, a key indicator of status was then also to hire servants, chief among them the cook, whose status was significantly higher than that of the scullery maids. Those women whose husbands had the means stayed at home. They employed economically needy women who always earned less than their male counterparts and began first as assistants to male cooks.

"By the middle of the eighteenth century, Duclos could look back to the end of the reign of Louis XIV and remark...that male cooks had...been found only in houses of the first rank and that 'more than half the magistrates employed only women cooks'" (Mennell, 203).

In time, economically disadvantaged women pushed into the public sphere. With

the opening of restaurants in Europe — certainly by the time "respectable" women could go out and be seen eating in restaurants, late 18th century in France, mid 19th in England (Tannahill, 327) — women were already working as cooks in these public restaurants.

By the late nineteenth century, schools of home economics and cook books were to change the roles of women of all classes:

"One of the kinds of knowledge that...[promoted] greater uniformity through processes of modernisation and democratisation of cookery styles is nutritional science...The new type of nutritional knowledge was..., mediated by bourgeois ladies teaching in cookery classes and writing cookery books. Their pupils were daughters of well-to-do families and lower-class girls who received their lessons in strict separation...At the end of the nineteenth century, schools of home economics and domestic science were established in Europe and America...the importance of economy, health, hygiene and other bourgeois virtues were heavily stressed. The type of learning can be reckoned among the manifold efforts at *organising virtue* by bourgeois reformers, physicians and educators, directed at lower-class groups" (Mennell et al, 89. My italics).

It is noteworthy that whatever social class a woman happened to belong to, she could count on the fact that the preparation of food was not so different among the classes. The idea of "entertaining" — cooking by the wife, at home, for other people, without pay — among common folk, as special, beyond the daily ordinary routine, was a late development, as the idea of leisure time for the masses was a controlling myth that took hold in the 20th century. Various historical factors, including the gradual loss of domestic help to industry and white collar work, eventually led, ironically, full circle back to "the lady of the house" as once again her own cook.

Also aimed at women in pre-WW2 United States were the widely distributed cookbooks, that other great disseminator of "nutritional knowledge." Since these directed themselves primarily at a reading audience, they also saw themselves as repositories for certain traditional values. As how-to books, they often emphasized hostessing skills, manners and etiquette, discussing, for example, setting the table and seating guests, as well as teaching the reader how to be a competent cook. The first *Boston Cook Book* in the popular *Fanny Farmer* editions was published in 1896, about one hundred years after the first European cookbooks directed at bourgeois households (Tannahill, 324; Mennell, 1985: 205).[2] Although updated at intervals, they generally upheld the values of the Victorians, aimed at keeping women in the private, domestic sphere.

Cookbooks seemed to have been written for bourgeois households that wanted to eat a wider variety of tastier dishes:

"As the middle class increasingly required their tables to reflect their status, they also discovered that traditional family recipes were not adequate for the purpose" (Tannahill, 322).

But whether cookbooks were for the housewife to plan with her cook, by now in bourgeois households, female, or whether they were do-it-yourself is open to question. However, one could see the cookbook as a democratizing, equalizing move, standardizing measurements and menus, forming tastes for the same foods, closing the gap between mistress and servant] housekeeper. At the same time, sophisticated dining enabled the hostess to rise in society by means of a more refined consumption.

Some accomplished women writers delighted in cooking as a "womanly" art. In France, Colette (1873-1954) in her novels about *l'amour* and *la jeunesse*, usually both *perdus*, delighted in the country French cooking of her youth. To her, food and sex were intimately connected. Her U.S. counterpart was the lively and glamorous M.F.K. Fisher (1908-1992). Fisher's gracefully written books about food and travel to Europe, French cuisine and sophisticated love affairs offer a memorable and heady mix, not so much about nutrition or health and not your usual cut-and-dried recipe, but narratives that focus on the romance of food. Once I read her evocative account of picking the first peas in late spring, setting up the boiling pot of water in

the field, and ecstatically describing their taste, I longed to match the experience in my own life.

Nevertheless, *chef*, in France, is synonymous with professional restaurateur, and such a definition would leave M.F.K. Fisher an amateur or a "scribbler," if one were to use Hawthorne's disdainful word for women who write. Yet, among the first food mavens to inspire fans in the cult of personality, she turned her fans on to food as an intellectually respectable and erotically viable discourse. Without the sensual enjoyment of food, she seemed to say, we might be as deprived as Grant Wood's American Gothic couple, their backs turned away from fields of amber grain and the delights that could have come from them.

Almost the opposite of the kittenish and flirtatious Fisher, Julia Child has had a more wide-reaching influence on U.S. cooking. Matter of fact, down to earth, straightforward, she has brought to women here what hitherto was considered out of reach, namely "the art of French cooking." When she wrote her cookbook in the 50s, an explication of *la cuisine bourgeoise*, the hallmark *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* (published in 1961), one must remember Julia Child was a housewife — true, in Paris. But unlike aloof Parisians, she would invite her neighbors in the downstairs flat up for the "fancy" dinners she was experimenting with, as one might in Michigan or Iowa, or Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she has lived for many years. Easy, comfortable neighborliness remains part of her persona. She and her two co-authors, Frenchwomen Simone Beck and Louise Bertholle, opened a cooking school in Child's apartment, somewhat more chic than Home Ec, although by the 70s even the Cordon Bleu had become a certificate almost any aspiring wife could earn. The three cooks were not working class, and they cooked with good bourgeois ingredients including "unhealthy" butter and cream, not yet an health issue in those days. Indeed, to the present, Child blithely insists on butter.

Child produced the first cook-show series for U.S. television (starting February 11, 1963), and she's still hosting a TV show and also making appearances at food seminars. Her career has an impressive longevity. Her enduring popularity may well be based on her self-confidence to know that the show was not the be-all and end-all of her existence. She sent a wonderful message to suburban homemakers, this big, over 6' tall, paradigm of a woman who took things in stride and managed to be wife and cook and public person all at once.

The vital signs were indicated physically: "the grinding of herbs with a mortar and pestle is accompanied by grunts and puffs" (*CBY 1967*, 68). She could cope. Dropping a potato ("someone will have to eat one less") or a large turkey did not cause a mini or maxi breakdown or (Showalterian) hysteria. She famously maintained her aplomb no matter what happened. Dan Ackroyd, in fact, did a gory parody of that aplomb on "Saturday Night Live," where he (she) is bleeding from a cut, then gushing blood, all the while dispensing advice to viewers as she sinks into unconsciousness. That she has been made fun of, on the one hand, and now is solemnly marketed as an elder stateswoman, on the other, only solidifies fans' admirations. By example, she has long reminded us of the free unbuttoned spirit of the carnivalesque.[3]

COOK SHOWS TODAY: "KICK IT UP A NOTCH"

Television cook show are still a miniscule part of the overall programming on the major networks, but they have mushroomed up, like non-metaphorical real fungi shouldering their way through cement, to become the all-day Saturday entertainment on Public Television and to provide the entire fare of the Food Channel, one of the more successful of the hundred plus cable/satellite channels. The existence of cook shows depends, at least partially, on an observable, empirical fact: namely, the importance, in ways far beyond necessity, of food in people's lives. Assuaging hunger; tasting, feeling full, gorging; looking, feasting one's eyes in the garden or at the market, preparing, cooking; enjoying the aroma of a bakery; growing one's vegetables, vines, meats; promoting health — these are only some of the ways that food figures in one's life. Food and eating satisfy a deep-seated metaphorical hunger, longing, and appetite.

Early capitalism described a system based on supply and demand that assumed a balance between the two. Late-stage capitalism depends primarily on the creation of demand, where none or little has existed, then overloading the new market in

the hopes of widening demand. How-to books, whether spiritual (how to meditate, how to achieve inner peace) or practical (how to shed the pounds that overeating adds), have dominated non-fiction best seller lists for years. Similarly, TV features more and more how-to shows — fixing up your house (carpentry and bathroom fixtures, on the one hand, and decorating, on the other), raising vegetables, gardening, cooking, entertaining. Cleverly, these how-to shows flatter viewers by implying that they are capable of doing-it-themselves. The shows give the appearance of necessity (you need to be able to do-it-yourself) and seem to supply a demand (you always wanted to learn but never had the opportunity before).

In fact, in my informal survey, I found that only a small percentage of viewers attempt to undertake the how-to project, whatever it may be. Nor is the pleasure of the voyeuristic gaze in these shows quite what Mulvey had in mind. In some cases, women doing their other clean-up chores may watch the show in the kitchen, a homey familiar retreat, not unlike the cook show itself. Both are far removed from Bosnia and Somalia and perhaps even from nasty occurrences in the neighborhood. In other cases, TV watching, like radio listening, provides *background* image and/or sound.

One viewer who works weekdays and is more than usually conversant with cook shows told me she turns on the TV when she enters her kitchen Saturday morning since the cooks on PBS have already begun cooking by 6:30 a.m. Is this the equivalent of the smell of coffee brewing in the morning? She leaves the TV on all day, only sporadically attentive. Does it comfort her to look over at her set and see someone earnestly applying him/herself to what she should? could? would be doing? She does not think about that, she says. In the years that she has been watching cook shows, she volunteers, she has not bothered to take down or send off for recipes. But she likes picking up techniques, like brushing eggplant slices with oil and baking in the oven, instead of dipping, then sauteeing them. For her, watching someone actually going through the process was essential. In the new global community, television has become the presence that the cooking (grand)mom used to be, giving the illusion that she and her culinary sense of tradition and expertise are there for you when you need her.

Other informants say that in the course of viewing TV cook shows, they have become better acquainted with the food served at expensive restaurants, where corporate and business entertaining often take place. Like much of what is *au courant*, the traffic goes both ways. Restaurants with inventive menus teach more people about eating, help create a demand to learn about food; consumers knowing more about food then become more demanding customers. The message is that acquiring sophistication means as much as money in the move up the social ladder.

As the food becomes more intricate and "foreign," paradoxically there is less attention than ever paid to recipes, ingredients, precise amounts. For example, in an April 1997 episode of the "Frugal Gourmet," he displayed, he did not *prepare*, kasha, not difficult but "foreign" to a large part of the United States, chatting the whole time about things that had little to do with kasha. Supposing you had never tasted kasha, would you know the proportion of water or stock to grain to get the texture you want, and in what form the egg is supposed to be (whole? lightly beaten? hardboiled?) The chef did not expect his television audience to learn from watching.

For some viewers, watching the process, the procedures of cooking, seems entertainment aplenty. For them, the skill involved in chopping fast and fine, the whisking of egg whites in a copper bowl, the choreography of the flourishes taken at the stove, might be analagous to a beautiful serve, or a fine backhand return from the baseline, for the tennis fan. Viewing a tennis match, or any other sports event, has proven wildly successful as entertainment — why not cook shows? Usually, a sketchy knowledge of the rules of the game is helpful, although sometimes not even that is necessary for the couch potato who simply has scopophilia. Learning how to cook specific dishes, honing one's own culinary abilities, or becoming an accomplished cook no longer seem of primary importance to many ESSENCE OF EMERIL cook-show viewers. That disinterest is consonant with the fact that ever more numerous take-out and fast food places negate the necessity to cook at all.

Thus, cook shows have become a kind of entertainment. The show hopes to charm you into wanting to watch it, whether through the cook's personality, the mesmerizing culinary process, or some kind of social acculturation—all of which have little to do with the viewer's own skills. So, analogous to educational institutions whose avowed purpose is to educate,[4] program producers anticipate an audience that yawns and says, "OK. Teach me if you must. But entertain me while you're at it." And a whole slew of entertainers oblige.

Trying to specify what it is they do on the Food Channel, one VP claims,

"We're reinventing the genre...We're saying to people: This ain't your mother's cooking channel."

Her statement reminds us of Tannahill's about the middle-class wish to have their tables reflect their status:

"...traditional family recipes were not adequate for the purpose."

Another VP describing the programs (featuring personalities like Emeril Lagasse or Jennifer Paterson and Clarissa Dickson Wright in "Two Fat Ladies") tells us,

"It's not just about food. It's about food and entertainment." (Neff, s10).

Personality cults and the idea of cook-shows-as-entertainment effectively work together to help producers develop a loyal audience and keep it.

Watching cook shows on PBS, the Discovery Channel, Lifetime ("Television for Women"), TLC (not tender loving care but "The Learning Channel"), and the Food Channel, the viewer sees that there are some differences among the various channels' offerings. Discovery Channel, for example, has a show, "Great Cooks," which is one of the few sites that showcase women cooks for their professionalism. But the program is broken up into short segments of a few minutes apiece. No segment lasts long enough for the viewers to grasp a personality, nor to remember her name. Consequently, "Great Cooks" has not developed a following.

With food as its professed topic, the Food Channel stays the most singularly focused and tries hardest for variety. On the Food Channel, "Three Dog Bakery" stands out as unique among TV cook shows in that it specializes in recipes for dogs. The two hosts are the only male-male team I've seen, joint owners of the show and joint owners of the dogs — in other words, domestic as well as business partners. "Ready, Set, Cook" is a game show between two teams, each consisting of a member of the audience who buys the ingredients with a limited budget and brings it to his teammate, the cook, who has to deal as best he can (a sexist pronoun but true to the episodes I've caught), within a set time limit, with what he's got. This show is perhaps the only one making the cost of cooking the basis for ingredient selection.

Of all the venues for cook shows, the Food Channel is most aggressively organized to sell — and not just sell the show to the public, but time to advertisers, and products to viewers. Emeril Lagasse, in particular, is programmed to appear on the Food Channel several times a day, with some repetition, as if for viewers who couldn't bear to miss him. On these shows, he pitches his combinations and preparations just short of shouting, pushes for his methods, and extols the looks, the taste, the aroma of whatever it is he is cooking. He is constantly self-promoting, all the while talking, like a circus barker or the pre-Cuisinart hawker of a cheap vegetable slicer.

The macho Emeril of "Emeril Live" (does the show's title echo "Martha Stewart Living"?) and "Essence of Emeril" is a unique phenomenon. In "Emeril Live" he overly aggressively plays to the women in the audience who are watching him cook. His favorite *mot*, as when he adds slices of truffle to an already rich scallop dish, is, "Kick it up," or "Crank it up another notch." Like other cook show hosts in the business, he uses his television shows as the centerpiece of a larger business package—

"sponsorable programs including cooking demonstrations, [book] tours and Internet activities" (Neff, s10).

He also owns at least two restaurants in New Orleans and one in Las Vegas. His

show seems strikingly pre-feminist, returning to a differentiation between male master chefs and female nonpros.

Most viewers who see enough cook shows would realize that Lagasse is an anomaly. Most male cooks on TV are sexually non-threatening men. The producers go out of their way to star performers like the *Frugal Gourmet* Jeff Smith, Graham Kerr, Pierre Franey, Mario Batali. Like James Beard and Craig Claiborne in the old days, the men haven't changed much — some gay, some well-padded from eating well. It raises the question: to what extent do cook shows draw male audiences and those men who enjoy cooking? Some U.S. males would identify with Emeril; others would prefer what they decode as camp.

Because most male cooks are not stereotyped in the all-American mode, a whiff of suspicion clings to one or two of them. Still, no one could have expected what hit Jeff Smith:

"three civil lawsuits filed against him since January...eight men are suing the...food evangelist" (*People* 7-7-97, 79).

The accusers had been high school boys in a work-study program assigned to the Chaplain's Pantry (the name of Smith's restaurant!). They asserted that his bland TV image masked a real-life threatening sexual predator. Five years before the charges of harassment and sexual abuse surfaced, Smith's particular performance style was the subject of a long essay in *Harper's*, June 1992. Barbara Grizzuti Harrison's study is based on careful research, and her details give us proof of the hours she had spent watching him. No wonder she is so effectively savage! She begins her essay by stating that Smith's

"program is the highest-rated cooking show ever. He...enters...15 million households" (43).

She then goes on to detail Smith's sexual innuendo:

"He is coy. He suggests using 'beef caps' for sausages. Ask your sausage maker about beef caps, he says. So I do some research. I get, by means too tedious to detail, as far as 'bung.' Then I call the Jefferson Market in Manhattan and ask what beef caps are. They hang up on me. They think I am talking dirty. I call The Sausage Maker in Buffalo, New York. 'It's a casing,' a prim voice tells me. Yes, but made of what? 'The p word,' the voice says-'p-e-n-i-s.'"

At one point, Harrison asks,

"Why do people lap up his arts-and-craftsy pretentious approach to food, which owes nothing to art, science, or sensuality?...Why is he beloved?"

Her punch line:

"The short answer is that people are stupid" (*Harper's* 6-92, 46).

Her analysis is sharp and compelling, and mean.

Harrison's attack on Smith, however, seems to have had no effect. For one thing, audiences conditioned by patriarchy were used to taking instruction from male instructors, whether or not the men were role models. Most of our professors are men. Male cooking instructors simply reinforce old attitudes. If we analyze how woman's traditional place is in the kitchen, the domestic sphere, in such a configuration, what is a man doing there? He may be teaching us our place in the home of the postmodern era.

OTHERS' FARE: PRESENTING ETHNICITY

Cooking in books and newspaper columns reflects current Health considerations, the cult of nutrition. In contrast, even as health has become a trendy concern, TV cooking shows seem to minimize anxiety about health issues. Undoubtedly, the production of entertainment entails that in the cozy feel- and taste-good world of food, any alarmist note would be discordant. From time to time, the viewer notes a TV cook's nodding consciousness about cholesterol, as butter and sour cream go

into the pan. At one time, *nouvelle cuisine* seemed to gain a precarious hold, but like *haute cuisine*, it was too hard for the amateur cook, not to mention the fact that a normal restaurant patron could not get full on *nouvelle cuisine*, no matter how much money s/he spent. Whipping up pears to substitute for cream in sauces presumes the home cook's willingness to ripen that rock-hard and costly market ingredient, lots of it, and then dirty the Cuisinart with this extra, cholesterol- and calorie-saving step in food preparation.

More shows now find it viable to borrow from Asian cuisine. This cuisine is vegetable and grain heavy, like the "new" Department of Agriculture pyramid. Furthermore, on their Asian coasts, the native populations have always eaten more fish and seafood than meat, which agrees with the new thinking of U.S. nutritionists and healthcare scientists. So Asian ingredients and methods, not Asian *haute cuisine* but rather the everyday, has entered North American cooking. However, the specialized ingredients can pose something of a problem. Although supermarkets routinely carry ginger and tofu, different kinds of cabbage (bok choy, napa, Chinese or celery cabbage), some varieties of chili peppers, and hoisin sauce — none of this true twenty years ago — they don't carry the ubiquitous fish sauce of southeast Asian cooking. Seattle and California on the Pacific Rim were the first to adapt Asian ways, and the California style of good nutrition has been more influential on the way North Americans eat than most people recognize.

One of the most fascinating shows for me is "Yan Can Cook." Like many cooks, the star of this show, Martin Yan, comes from working-class origins. Yan's father owned a small restaurant in the old country, and his son followed the father's trade to become a self-made empire builder, starting out at thirteen as an apprentice cook. His show's publicity emphasizes his M.A. in Food Science earned from the University of California at Davis and his honorary Ph.D. from Johnson and Wales, which is a sort of trade-school community college that calls itself a university, with headquarters in Providence, RI, and at least one branch in Florida. In other words, Yan's background and education illustrate the American dream, and his professionalism is beyond question.

On the other hand, his marketing ploy also stresses his ethnicity, and sometimes on the show he takes the risk of playing a colonized role, a step'n fetchit, or in this case, a toothy grinning Oriental, with exaggerated acting on the verge of clownish.

In one of the best-known half-hours (used on a PBS marathon fundraiser), Yan returns to Hong Kong with his mother, to the natal city. When they go together to the fish market, he goofs around, picking up a lobster and pretending to use it like a telephone. Then he "kicks it up a notch," to borrow a phrase from Emeril. Yan jokingly tells the audience to look at the fresh shrimp — one shrimp by its Cantonese name is *har*, two, *harhar*, and three, *harharhar*. He's counting on the audience to think Chinese consists of nonsense syllables.

His eyes shift to his live audience (to the live crew or bystander) to see if his humor has hit the mark. Does it give him any pause to wonder if he has created too outrageously stereotyped an effect? Even the name of his show, "Yan Can Cook" followed by "So Can You" (Yu is an authentic Chinese surname) has its echoes of the linguistic monosyllables of the old title-and-author jokes like "Brown Spot on the Wall" by Who Flung Dung.

A mildly self-Orientalizing attitude prevails in many ethnic minorities' behavior, by which I mean an insider calls attention to his ethnicity for the purpose of appealing to an existing image which s/he knows outsiders to the culture might have constructed. When we do this, we face the very difficult questions of how much "authenticity" is just right and when does it become self-exoticizing. When Yan chops with his cleaver or speaks with an accent, it is clearly appropriate to him and to the show's diegesis. But when he calls attention to the monosyllables of his native tongue because he knows Americans have a tradition of laughing at the sing-song nonsense of *chin-chin-chinaman*, then his behavior is self-Orientalizing. Had he put his forefingers in the air and made little up and down gestures, then his deprecation of himself and of Chinese American culture would no longer be so mild.

Yan has a great following as an entertainer — my neighbors in New Hampshire certainly watch him. "Oh," I said to one New Hampshire man, "You like to cook

Chinese food." What consummate naiveté on my part! "Oh, no. We just watch him because he's so humorous." Since Yan's show also includes a lot of his travels in China and Hong Kong, it draws on touristic interest in local color. In this aspect of travel combined with cooking, he seems to have started a trend, followed by "Tamales World Tour." As a Chinese cook, he's limited to a Cantonese style, notched only slightly higher than Column A/Column B cooking, not new or different.

But, it's important to remember, he also presents the figure of a good son, a gentleman with Confucian values. This persona fits right into neo-con, pre-feminist, U.S. Family country. In another episode, Yan cooks with his mother for the relatives. Even though she is the elder, the mother who, as he says elsewhere, taught him how to cook, Yan emphatically takes the role of the master in the kitchen. He tells her her tasks and condescends to her. In a patriarchal society, where women have far less intrinsic worth, he remains within his rights. His mother seems willing and pleased to play along with her son, who can chatter in English and has become so prominently featured on PBS.

Martin Yan is only one of many specialists in ethnic cuisines. Among ethnic cooks, the hosts' roles tend to be frozen into stereotypes. Chinese men, at least those featured as guests on other cook shows, are energetic, quick, bright, small, and smile a lot, like Yan. Italian women tend to be comfortable, serious and dignified rather than flashy. In "Ciao Italia," Marianne Esposito is pleasingly plump and motherly. She refers continually to her grandmother's kitchen, and she dries, preserves, cans the bounty of her garden. An Italian cook on The Learning Channel, Biba, typifies a more urban version, not plump, but still maternal, practical and down-to-earth. Producers and participants don't seem to have doubts about the televisual presentation of ethnicity.

Of minorities, black chefs are the least visible. Certainly, black cook shows are few and, if WGBH in Boston is an indicator, becoming fewer. The public station aired, but no longer carries, Dorinda Hafner, whose "The Taste of Africa" visited Morocco, Zimbabwe, Egypt, and Tanzania among other places, and Vertamae Grosvenor, whose thirteen-part series, entitled "America's Family Kitchen," explained and demonstrated Creole cooking, meaning a blend of European, African and Native American influences. The networks seem indifferent to featuring African, Caribbean, and African American cuisine in their variety of cook shows, though African American characters are well-represented in situation comedies and on commercials.

Also, the dearth of African American cook shows may result from a complicated political stance taken by the networks. In U.S. restaurant life, Italian owner/chefs and Chinese owner/chefs are common enough across the country in establishments frequented by the general population. For the affluent, middle-class group of largely white Caucasian diners, they see few bourgeois black restaurants, few black owners. So, for them, there are few black cooks that fit the dominant cultural image of a presentable or bourgeois "chef," especially if that person wishes to present traditional African American "soul food." In fact, the classic Southern cuisine, seen in its haute aspect in New Orleans, has subsumed or co-opted the repertoire of those who historically did the actual cooking. And when it comes to presenting cooks who adopt a comic formula of ethnic self-presentation, as does Yan, this means that the TV cook might act to corroborate traditional servile roles. In terms of asking a black cook to do such an act, the truth of the matter is that television networks are considerably more worried about offending African American viewers than they are, say, about offending Chinese American ones. The legacy of slavery is just too painful and shameful to make fun of.

In their favor, however, the cook shows are going farther afield. In one month, for example, "The Frugal Gourmet" featured both Russian cuisine and Jamaican cooking. Some might think this is going too far in search of novelty. Yet, even in established cuisines, like the Italian, the cook shows no longer limit themselves to Tuscany or Bologna or Rome. They have moved to the Savoyard and the Friulian. Mario Batali on "Molto Mario" featured a dish he called *brovade*, which is julienned turnips pickled in marc. (A pound of grapes pulverized in the Cuisinart, skin seeds and all, was his substitute; even he realized that we can't buy marc at our local liquor store.) The turnips were pickled and stored for at least four days, then sautéed in olive oil and red onion.

Yet I wonder who would cook it? I do not just balk at the ingredients but at the trouble involved, like turning over the mixture every day for four days, all for a dish I've not tasted, as other viewers had not tasted kasha. I myself have traveled and eaten widely, from *tsampas* in Tibet to *menudos* in Mexico, from the aristocratic *bento* lunches in Kyoto to the peasant *fejoada* in Rio, from Turkish *borek* to Uzbeki *nan* to Indian *idali*. Yet until I saw it on "Molto Mario," I had not heard of brovade, though I've spent time in Friuli. Since then, as if in mimesis of one-upmanship, several articles, including one in an inflight airline magazine, have mentioned brovade.

WOMEN COOKING: "GOOD THING"

A survey of contemporary TV cook shows reveals that, generally speaking, the old feminist agenda is beside the point. Today, in the domestic sphere, Martha Stewart seems to be the only contender for Role Model. But here the question is whether she's merely a "crank[ed] up" version of Woman as patriarchy would have her, a perfect role model in the Home. Her world is centered on the Home. As Home body, Martha Stewart has gone beyond all competition, not just in terms of cooking, but in the larger area of "homemaking," which would include gardening and decorating, among other "*good things*." That's her signature phrase, as in "It's a *good thing*," or "I love *good things*," or her "magazine of *good things*."

Diegetically, in terms of class, she appears to be haute bourgeoisie, quasi-aristocratic, WASP from New England ("county" in British vernacular); biographically, she is of East European heritage from New Jersey and the Midwest. When the title sequence of her show first appears, superimposed on a background of what seems a large stately country seat, one reads "Martha Stewart [and next line] Living." The emphasis is on Martha Stewart and not on life style, living. The absence of a colon between her name and Living suggests that Martha Stewart is not dead; the rest of us are dead.

The visuals behind the credits at the end of her show, as if leaving the house from a back door, gives us a toned-down suburban backyard that only recaptures the general upscale air by stopping at a formally laid out little garden of herbs. Simultaneously, the local carrier hawks the next program, a jarring voice over urging the viewer to watch what's coming up next. The messy closing, the jumbled reality, returns us to our "living." Subliminally, we conflate her considerable capabilities with our own reality. We think that in the midst of our busy schedules, we too can find the time to swag our living rooms and patios in ropes of fir and garlands of roses according to season. For Stewart, the minimalism of modernism, the notion that less is more, has become the eclectic excess of post-modernism. And the consumerism inherent in the idea that only more is more, hence the need to add to and fuss over every bare surface, dress up every meal, even a snack, makes her a real leader, or at the very least, an acute arbiter, in matters of taste in late capitalism.

Even as Woman, the lower class of gender, is in the process of being hiked up, hyped up, Martha Stewart's kitchen, she makes clear, is in her home, not at the studio. For one thing, it is better equipped. It is her own kitchen. In one of the segments when an expansive, male, guest cook is making dough, dusting the counter with flour in rather large gestures, she admonishes him about getting her kitchen messy. Here, the stereotype is still man as intruder, messy intruder even if he is a professional chef.

Stewart's multimillion-dollar business makes her an independent woman, but the image she projects is that of woman in the home. It is complicated to sort out our own reasons and responses, even our own readiness to prepare *millefeuille pate choux* from scratch. Postmodern patriarchy is not feminism. It is still essentialist in the same way that Freud wanted to know "what does a woman want?" Does the modern American woman secretly wish to be Martha Stewart?

One answer is that women desire differently. In contrast to the noisy, prancing Emeril and the intensely cool Martha, the female team "Too Hot Tamales," though the name of their show has unfortunate sexist connotations, features camaraderie and general cooperation. They are postmodern eclectic and self-conscious, and they are feminist sisterly. There is give-and-take, sometimes edgy, between the two women. The word is that they should be outed, but otherwise, they are as conventional as the heroines of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Helena

(tall, blond Mary Sue Milliken) and Hermia (short, dark Susan Feniger).

On a show featuring meringue desserts (#6345 — I have learned to refer to the program by number, as the ad telling us where to send our \$3 has taught me), Mary Sue combined shredded coconut doused with orange juice with beaten egg whites. Instead of the gentle folding most cooks are careful to do, she vigorously beat the two together. Predictably, the air went out of the egg whites, which may not have been whipped until they held their peaks in the first place, and when the meringue mixture was spooned onto a baking tray, they were limp and threatening to spread rather than hold a perky shape. Susan had to comment on the lack of peaks. Earlier in the show, Mary Sue said of Susan's enthusiasm, "Now that she's done it three times, she's feeling very confident." The comment can be read as competitively sparring, or as naturally high-spirited, repartee. But even if they cook at Border Grill in Santa Monica (are "professionals," in other words), they project an image of amateur fun in the kitchen. Easy! You too can do it! If this is a strategy towards bonding with their viewers, I'd say it's probably successful. Having added "Tamales World Tour," an effort to broaden into ethnic cuisines, they continue to convey an image of no sweat, you can acquire another cuisine as handily as you've mastered your own. However, although basics are covered, there's not much depth here for the serious cook.

We are beginning to see changes in cook shows. The most lively cook show on TV at the moment is "Two Fat Ladies" produced by the BBC. It was introduced on the Food Channel to the American public in September 1997. Typically, one of the two fat ladies, Jennifer Paterson, commented:

"I used to get put off by the *Ladies* because it sounds like the public lavatory" (*People* 10-20-97, 138)

Their animation credit sequence, and live action as they are traveling to another venue, shows them zipping around on one motorcycle with an attached sidecar. Paterson, the driver, wears a WWI airman's leather helmet, while Clarissa Dickson Wright, the passenger in the sidecar, looks suitably unflappable. I have already mentioned them as carnivalesque. These women fit several transgressive categories: their obesity, their lesbian-suggestiveness, and, in an age of media-formed esthetics, their age (they are not young and nubile). Unruly women that they are, and Rabelaisian, their bawdy one-liners, lascivious leers, abrupt guffaws are precisely the signs of carnival. On one show, they are cooking for a large group of Scouts, and one lady asked the other, "How do you start a fire?" to which the other answered without missing a beat, "By rubbing two Boy Scouts together."

"Appetite" is a term we associate with both food and sex, as we could see with M.F.K. Fisher. Paterson and Dickson Wright take appetite into the postmodern age, with their verbal innuendoes about sex, while they are actively in the process of making tempting, irresistible food. In this particular moment when Health is the prime concern in eating, neither fat lady gives a damn. Their bubble-and-squeak uses so much lard that any health-minded viewer might cringe; they revel in telling us we must put in yet more fat when we turn the potatoes over. If we're not willing to do so — then we shouldn't bother to cook the dish. The two fat ladies lust and eat for us. They are the transgressors, going against an establishment that hates desire and preaches puritanism in every aspect of life. They take the heat as we watch with pleasure.

To sum up briefly: Although, as I have argued, the audience watches cook shows for entertainment, including visual pleasure and escape, the explicit text of these shows broadcast the possibility of mastery. Despite the modus operandi of business first, principles when convenient, a kind of egalitarianism exists at an unseen level. Anyone — female/ male, straight/queer, bourgeois/ working class, Norwegian/ Uruguayan — can master the intricacies of the kitchen, if s/he wants to. In fact, the larger genre of How To shows, of which cook shows are a subgenre, upholds the myth of mastery. From computers, carpentry, cooking, dancing, the stock market, money making, to human relationships — any TV viewer can master it.

The cook show is a particularly good site for studying issues of gender, interwoven as it is with class and ethnicity. There is a long separate history of men cooking and women cooking, with the result that, although more women have entered the field of cook shows, men still have an edge at least in part because of the old

standard of professionalism. M.F.K. Fisher and Julia Child have been influential role models as counter-influences to male professionalism. TV cook shows today are about bourgeois cuisine for bourgeois viewers, who have developed a taste for ethnic cooking. As time goes on, it seems ironically clear that cook shows belong with the category of spectator sports; they are no longer really about viewers becoming better cooks. A sampling of cook shows with attention to individual cooks shows us the retrograde macho of Emeril, the non-threatening character of other male cooks, the scandal of Jeff Smith, the self-Orientalizing of Yan, the excesses of Martha Stewart, the sororal image of Too Hot Tamales, the fresh liberating aspects of Two Fat Ladies, Among all these cooks, some tell us there's life and the capacity for change in the genre.

NOTES

1. In her letter, Julia Lesage was interested in "courting the Other," a major idea that deserves serious exploration beyond the scope of this paper.
2. Tannahill explained that because of the spread of literacy, "far more women were now able to read..." (322).
3. Food, eating and excreting, was a source of Rabelaisian laughter; Rabelais the source of Bakhtin's carnivalesque.
4. In an essay in *Harper's* (Sept 97) Mark Edmundson discusses student demand for education as entertainment.

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