AFTERWORD

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oat. n. A grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland appears to support the people. Samuel Johnson. 1755. A Dictionary of the English Language.

For this reader, the papers evoke many, and mixed, food-related associations. All food is so intimately tied to human social life that it can carry one's thoughts everywhere. We are animals who domesticated other animals and, unlike them, we cook our food. For many dozens of millennia, we have been choosing what to eat, without the strict, built-in hormonal oversight that generally typifies other species.

Being the only animals who also made ourselves different by our symbolic interaction—thereby becoming "social groups"—it was to be expected that we would think that our own group's specific foods were the best choices for human beings, whatever the particular group we were in. Our sensitivity to such differ-ences no doubt made it harder to understand that, behind such differences, there remained the equal humanness of kinsfolk and mates, and far beyond, the oneness of the human species. It is sad that, surely, most people still don't believe it.

Were we now to start imagining what might be thought of as back near the origins of hominid social life, based on symbolic communication and all that implies, we would conjure up communities of interacting persons living in an environmentally diverse region. More of them would be bilingual than monolingual, because a good deal would be happening—by no means all of it hostile—between adjacent human groups. Communities strung out over substantial distances, using parts of overlapping technologies, including those for food-getting, would grow as the aggregate outcomes of different local histories. This partial intermingling —together, of course, with much else—would at once make each group more or less the same as, and more or less different from, its neighbors.

We're thinking here about hominids, keenly aware of the behavioral differences among neighboring groups, including the ways each group acquired, prepared, and ate their food. We're only imagining, after all. But it's possible that one of the commonest observations any of them ever made about their neighbors was "Yeah, sure, they're okay. Some of them, even to marry. But have you ever tried eating what they eat?

Food is surely one of the most striking markers of cultural difference among people of different ethnic origins and faiths or coming from different places. One of the most charming anecdotes about this that I have read in recent years (if any reader knows where I read it, I hope he or she will point me to it again) is told by a young

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woman of Chinese origin, invited with her parents to dinner at the house of new American acquaintances. One of the first things served at table is raw celery. As was her and her family's custom, the narrator picks up a stalk and begins to remove the strings with her knife. But in the middle of this task she notices suddenly that the lively, animated table conversation has come to an abrupt halt, followed by dead silence. She raises her head to discover her parents similarly occupied with their celery stalks, while their hosts gaze at them in mute, open-mouthed amazement.

As if by a bright light on a dark corner, difference is revealed. Whether it is the people of Munich skillfully peeling their Weisswürste with their table knives while holding them down with their forks, the Parisians casually smearing sweet butter on their raw radishes, or the Dutch in the town squares downing filets of the tasty raw herring of spring, heaped high with minced onion, food—like dress, nails, hair, and of course language—is noticed by everybody, right away.

But even in societies not divided by ethnic group, belief, tongue, or region, food-related differences will be noticed if the societies are cleft by economic levels that carry with them implications of personal worth.

Food in all its aspects—by which I mean how it's acquired, what it is cooked in, how it is served, how it smells, how it looks, ad infinitum—is a vehicle by which to send messages about anything. It can be saturated with information about taste, breeding, money, and power. And while breeding and taste may be matters of individual opinion, having the stuff with which to buy, or to exact, different behavior is not. Both sides may notice the differences in what they eat. And both sides may understand what those differences are meant to signal. If so, then what they think of the differences—that is, whether they agree with them or not—is not the only thing that matters. That said, these are essays about foods that please some, but not everyone. That's one of the things that makes them interesting as foods. What could be wrong with them? What makes these different foods alike? And what makes them different?

By choosing to refer to the subject as "trash foods," the editor makes an inspired terminological choice. He does not call them "junk food," which has a well-established meaning, at least in the United States. None belongs under that label. He does not call them "fast food," the meanings of which are known and widely diffused, or "slow food." Then what about "trash food?" The editor means the food of the poor, and makes plain his admiration for the inventiveness and resourcefulness of poor people, among whom cooks have sometimes created dishes of gastronomic brilliance, using humble ingredients.

The authors themselves write engagingly about the foods and each society that consumes them. Describing them in detail, as the contributors have done here, helps readers know in good measure of what they consist. The societies in which the substances described here are eaten (except, perhaps, those mainly mentioned by Rotenberg) differ from those which interested early ethnographers. Nearly all of those societies, though divided internally by differences of birth and kinship and by

clubs and associations, lacked group distinctions that conferred invidious privileges. There were distinctions in what people ate, besides those based on gender, age, or totemic animals; but not many of them. The Kwakiutl, for example, plainly took eating very seriously, especially in feasts, and how people were seated was enormously important. But I do not think that they divided up the food accordingly. In societies composed of economic classes such as our own, however, there is not much surprise in discovering that groups within them often eat very differently, and that such differences are often embedded in other, wealth-related, differences. Drewnowski's (2004, 2005) research on American cities, for instance, lays bare statistically irrefutable connections between obesity and economic class—to which most of us react with a shrug. It merely seems obvious.

But the connection between social rank and different food patterns is not invariable. "Why are traditional African cultures largely lacking a differentiated cuisine, even in great states with differentiated political structures?" That is the question put to the data when Sir Jack Goody (1982) wrote *Cooking, Cuisine, and Class*. Goody, whose book should be read by any serious student of food, was struck by the lack of any links between status and how people ate in the West African societies he had studied. Indeed, he says he wrote the book because he was puzzling over that question. It's a good question for us as well, throwing light as it does upon our own attitudes. "Imagine, here are these jerks with all sorts of clout, but happy to eat the very same food as their unimportant neighbors!"

Goody provides a thoughtful, persuasive answer to the question in his book, where he ends up distinguishing between what he calls "hierarchical" and "hieratic" societies. In the latter, people of all ranks eat the same food. But in the society from which Goody comes (as in your society and mine), income difference usually equals different patterns of eating. Of course, it figures in the trash food cases, too.

Among the Yupik of Chukotka, Siberia, Yamin-Pasternak tells us, it was the influence of Russian newcomers that changed mushrooms into an important food. Before Russification, they were forbidden even to touch mushrooms. Now they can be holiday food or, in crises, famine food, depending on the circumstances. In Austria, Jordan writes, dumplings, a food as common and prosaic as the American hamburger, is now being elevated by the tourist industry into a national emblem. In a third paper, Hernandez recounts how migas, a dish once viewed as nearly inedible by the wealthy, has now become quite prized. In this case, it is not that a food once disparaged is now widely accepted, but the food that carries the same label is now much better than it used to be. So in one case, a food once forbidden is now eaten with great pleasure; in another, the particular food (or opinions of it) are greatly improved; and in the third, a common but plebeian food is being "hyped" to lend it prestige. It seems to me these three papers share much.

Rotenberg's paper, that least like the others, is about animal sexual organs as food. This raises different questions, I think. The author believes many people in many places react in the same way, because of analogies in mammalian anatomy and

behavior. Otherwise said, we see ourselves when we look at animals. These associations presumably make people uneasy, or anyway affect them, but their unease is interpreted here as not due to any culturally specific feelings of revulsion. The author expects people to react, far more often than randomly, to universal (or at least widely shared) reactions to the fact that these are organs of sex.

I think he is probably right. Nowhere else in gastronomy except, perhaps, in regard to cannibalism, is the talk about foods being "good to think" as relevant as when we think of animal sexual organs. The author then shows how these foods are made acceptable and even desirable in various societies. With food as with so much else, making things familiar, expected, and circumstantially agreeable can end up smoothing the sharp edges off all sorts of outlandish behavior. Old civilizations know that well.

Some of the animal parts Rotenberg discusses, in some societies, share with tripe, snout, cheek, jowls, spleen, lights, brain, tendon, trotters, heart, tongue, sweetbreads, and a few other parts, the capacity to make some persons lose their appetites. Yet it is also widely recognized that this list includes a great many foods that are highly prized. While animal sexual organs may have a special status because of the uniquely human powers of association, Rotenberg's paper also makes clear that their suitability as food varies culturally, all the same.

We come to some obvious first conclusions. Some humans somewhere will eat just about anything that will not kill them, and more than a few things that will. Food is a familiar marker of status. In societies of the sort Goody (1982:213) calls "hierarchical," food is a common, if not universal, such marker. Tastes in food vary by culture, as do food taboos. Preferences are culturally conditioned. Within cultures, variations in personal preference may (or may not) be tolerated. In class-divided societies, food is frequently a sensitive index of status. Yet it is impossible to predict which foods will be preferred, which rejected, or viewed with loathing. In class-divided societies, there may be much variation in food habits by class. Probably some foods will be eaten by people of all statuses, and among them there may be food more typical of the cuisine of the poor.

Foods of the sort that our authors tell us about have existed at least as long as societies have been divided by wealth and power. They came into being whenever human groups began using foods as a way of marking off others or themselves. One supposes that they will be with us for a long time to come.

Students of food will undoubtedly know the pathbreaking volume by Redcliffe Salaman, *The History and Social Influence of the Potato* (1949). Salaman discusses therein many episodes in the history of this remarkable New World food, but his personal observations are few, and all the more valuable therefor. In a jewel-like epilogue less than three full pages in length, he writes:

> If for any reason, good or bad, conscious or otherwise, it is in the interests of one economically stronger group to coerce another, then in the absence of political, legal, or moral restraint, that task is

> enormously facilitated when the weaker group can either be persuaded or forced to adapt some simple, cheaply produced food as the mainstay of its existence. (Salaman 1949:600)

Salaman's book was published just 60 years ago, and the world has changed, in many ways for the better. Salaman of course could not have known what would happen to the world food system as it changed and grew. But I think his assertions are prescient, albeit in a different world.

A couple of years ago, a family member of the writer who works at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta, recounted an experience to me, a few days before I was to visit the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He had been touring a chicken processing plant in the American South where, if I remember right, they killed 250,000 chickens each week. Since he works on food-borne diseases, he asked during his tour whether the chicken feet were being used to make animal feed. No, his hosts said; each week, 250,000 pairs of chicken feet were shipped to Hong Kong where they were used as food by local people.

A week later in the wet markets of Shatin, a market town near the Chinese University campus, I saw hundreds of packages of chicken feet, awaiting their conversion into a delicious, indeed famed, dim sum specialty. Not far away were hundreds of other packages, these filled with refrigerated fish heads coming, I think, from Norway, which would soon be turned into fish head soup. In Europe and America, chicken feet and salmon heads are not fit for human—er, I mean, European—consumption, at least not outside Chinese restaurants. A long, many-sided, and important Chinese culinary tradition transforms these humble animal body parts into delicious foods. These are not newly invented foods; but the glob-alization of food in recent decades has changed the distribution of ingredients leading to their preparation.

I bring this up because the forces that tie food, status, power, and wealth together can operate internationally, as well as within single societies. Foods can become part of the relations between stronger and weaker states. There may be a colonial link. Or foods may play a part in relations between two sovereign states, even those that differ greatly in their relative size, wealth, and power.

In recent decades, the complexity of colonial-metropolitan relationships has drawn social scientists and historians to their study as never before. Relatively little, though, seems to have been said so far about the role of food in those relations. Having mentioned chicken feet and salmon heads, I wish to note two other foods whose availability has been changed by the wonders of globalization. Both have become enormously important in the Pacific region, one originating particularly in the U.S, and the other in New Zealand. Of these cases there is a great deal to be said. But I limit myself here to a few basic facts, and refer interested readers to several articles (Shell 2001; Errington and Gewertz 2008; Cassels 2006), where the significance of these two foods is developed at greater length. The relevant literature is substantial.

The island of Kosrae is part of the Federated States of Micronesia, and is administered by the United States under the Compact of Free Association since 1986. Under the Compact, the Federated States receive about one hundred million dollars annually in aid from the U.S.; local governments are the biggest employers. Aside from the now well-known sweatshops—legally able to operate outside U.S. labor and minimum wage laws, using viciously exploited Asian women workers, famous ever since Mr. Abramoff hit the newspapers—there is not much work in this part of the world.

According to Shell (2001), one important food-related result of American benevolence is sometimes referred to as "New World syndrome" (Shell 2001), though it seems rather odd to me to hang it on the whole New World, when one New World country is disproportionately responsible for it. It takes the form of political dependency, and a diet solidly resting upon turkey tails. The term refers here to a turkey's behind, which consists mostly of fat, as well as the uropygial (preening) gland. Few Americans eat the turkey tail, or "Pope's (or parson's) nose," as it is irreverently known. Hence there is a U.S. surplus of turkey tails, and it was soon discovered that Pacific peoples like the fat.

The rates for obesity, low life expectancy, and diabetes in Kosrae have gone through the roof in recent years. In Samoa and in Fiji, laws have been passed prohibiting the importation of turkey tails. But they remain important in all of Oceania, and of course to those who export them. Of Micronesia, Cassels (2006) writes:

> Turkey tails are a telling example of inferior imported foods replacing healthy local foods. According to the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), consumption of poultry meat in the Pacific has increased from an average of 19 kg per capita per year in 1980 to 34.4 kg per capita in 2002. In the U.S., the tails of turkeys are deemed inedible, but exporters found a market for them in Micronesia. Frozen imported turkey tails— simply gristle and fat—cost under $1 a pound, are commonly eaten in Micronesia, and are extremely unhealthy.

In Papua New Guinea, Errington and Gewertz (2008) write of a somewhat different food, but it sure smells to me like turkey tails. In PNG, the food of choice is lamb flaps. Like turkey tails, nobody who produces them really wants them, but fortunately or not, lambs come with them. These lumps of fat and gristle are sold to the Papuans by the New Zealanders and Australians, who find no market for them in the places, such as the United States, to which they send their lamb chops and crown roasts:

> [I]n addition to their capacity both to nourish and to over-nourish, flaps have other importantly ambiguous attributes. Never produced for their own sakes, they are in a sense by-products; as such, they lie between the cheap fatty meats that constitute the world-traversing, highly caloric, branded and patented fast foods (such as McDonald's hamburgers and Kentucky Fried Chicken pieces) and the cheap, fatty meats that constitute regionally distinct, highly caloric, ethnic foods (such as Italian lardo and Afro-American "chitlins"). Unlike the first, flaps do not evoke an imagined international community of flap-eaters. After all, many Pacific Islanders know that they are by-products that white

people refuse to eat. Nor, unlike the second, do flaps (yet) generally evoke a valued way of life. After all, many Pacific Islanders know that they are a recent introduction from elsewhere. Turkey tails are a telling example of inferior imported foods replacing healthy local foods. (Errington and Gewertz 2008:593)

A good many things might be said about turkey tails and lamb flaps, one of the most striking being that the people of the Pacific are unable to do anything with the packages of fat that they buy but to grill them and put salt on them. As I read about the turkey tails and lamb flaps, my mind turned back to Hong Kong's imports of salmon heads and chicken feet. One huge difference is how healthful, and I'd say delicious, are the heads and feet, and how profoundly depressing the tails and flaps. I think that the people I know who are offended by salmon heads and chicken feet would be equally offended by turkey tails and lamb flaps. But are we then talking about taste or something else? What about food could possibly be trashier than the picture I am drawing?

My aim here was to discuss an alternative meaning for trash food, and my hope is that these cases may lead us in the direction of a more nuanced meaning. Of the larger picture of which these cases are merely part, I would say that "trash food," as I would define it, has a nice political parallel. I think the name for it probably is trashy international politics.

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