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What is the Food Network feeding us? : questioning the Food Network's representation of the food industry

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**WHAT IS THE FOOD NETWORK FEEDING US?
QUESTIONING THE FOOD NETWORK'S REPRESENTATION OF
THE FOOD INDUSTRY**

by

**Sarah Kornik
BA, McGill University,
Montreal, Quebec, Canada, 2002**

A thesis presented to Ryerson and York Universities

**in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in the program of
Communication and Culture**

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ABSTRACT

What is the Food Network feeding us? Questioning the Food Network's Representation of the Food Industry

Sarah Kornik

Fall 2007

Master's Thesis for Degree in Communication and Culture
at Ryerson and York Universities

Today, the television Food Network is one of the most popular sources of food knowledge. Although it may be perceived simplistically as a recipe resource for aspiring home chefs it represents much more. Through analyses of the Food Network programming this work examines the network's representations of our food ways. More specifically, portrayals of the food industry are explored. It is argued that the network is steeped in nostalgic longing for a traditional value system which emphasizes family and home. This focus on family, community and small scale food preparation eliminates problematic aspects of our food production, distribution and consumption systems.

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DEDICATION

For Papa Eddie, whose sunny-side up eggs and
infinite generosity are inspirational

and

to my parents, for their constant encouragement.

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Introduction

i. Background

Scampering downstairs to watch Saturday morning television was a childhood ritual. My sister and I would install ourselves in front of the TV but it was not cartoons that we eagerly gobbled up, it was the PBS Saturday cooking show line-up. Julia Child, Jacques Pepin, Graham Kerr and a host of others taught and entertained us. Needless to say, the establishment of the Food Network in November of 1993 was reason for my sister and I to pull out Martha Stewart's *Hors D'Ouvres* cookbook and throw a cocktail party. Since its inception, the Food Network has become one of cable television's most watched stations (Meister 165). Originally the programming consisted of a traditional cooking show genre, in the same vein as PBS's classic cooking show programming. The essence of traditional cooking shows implies a do-it-yourself or home-style approach to food. This has been theorized as an "instructional" genre whose purpose is to teach the viewer not only how to produce a fine meal but also how

to consume the right products (Meister 2001; Ketchum 2005). These traditional food programs often seem to literally take place in the home as staged kitchen sets give viewers the impression they are watching hosts entertain in a private space. The assumption underlying these programs is that food is prepared from scratch in an often nostalgic homey setting (Adema 113). Although the Food Network has become a phenomenal success, it did encounter some rating difficulties during its early years as the programming line-up was too narrow in focus (Adema 113). In order to respond to this lack of diversity, the Food Network began to look for new programming options. It has since propelled the cooking show genre in a multitude of new directions. Shows now move beyond the traditional “host/chef” walking their audience through a step-by-step process of recipe preparation. This new crop of food related lifestyle, educational and travel programming has been created filling in the programming gaps which originally plagued the Food Network (Adema 114). Conventional “instructional” shows pioneered by Julia Child and her show *The French Chef* as well as Graham Kerr’s *The Galloping Gourmet* have been succeeded by shows such as Ina Garten’s *Barefoot Contessa* or the ubiquitous *Emeril Live*. However, these “instructional” shows now stand side by side programs such as *Unwrapped*, *Top 5* and *Rachael Ray’s Tasty Travels*. These new programs give viewers a glimpse into the inner machinations of the food and restaurant industry. Food has moved outside of the home and into an industrialized, market driven and consumptive setting. Other

programs such as *Rachael Ray's 30 Minute Meals* or Giada De Laurentiis's *Everyday Italian* stress the importance of quick and easy cooking and attempt to speak to shifts in lifestyle towards convenience. Eric Ober, former president and manager of the Food Network was interviewed by *Broadcasting and Cable* about the network's diversification (McAvoy 42). He explains that the Food Network is "trying to move beyond just food preparation,' [...] 'We've added to the mix storytelling, news about food and more travel around the country. We want to do all things food'" (McAvoy 42). The network is undoubtedly expanding its range of programming in order to capture a larger audience (Adema 114). This burgeoning emphasis on food and culinary topics in the media reflects and influences changing relationships with food. The way food is perceived and consumed both inside and outside of the home, the traditional residence of food and cooking, must be considered. It is necessary to question the popularity and potential influence of this genre of programming and discuss its message surrounding food as a commodity.

ii. Literature Review

As a rapidly expanding, yet fairly new television station, there has not been a sizeable amount of critical research completed on the Food Network. However, within the small amount of literature that does exist, there is consistency in the conversation surrounding the network. Scholars are in

agreement in their assessment that the Food Network promotes consumptive behavior (Adema 2000; Meister 2001; Ketchum 2005). The specific work concerning the station relates to the way in which it promotes excessive and wasteful consumption (Meister 173). Innately the Food Network cannot be removed from its relationship with consumption, yet scholars claim that it might be detrimental in its unrestrained promotion of the intake of goods (Ketchum 2005; Meister 2001). The programming has been described as a catalyst for the proliferation of an idyllic leisurely and decadent lifestyle which promotes satiation through the tools used to manipulate the ingredients (Meister 178).

In "Cultural Feeding, Good Life Science, and the TV Food Network," Mark Meister bases his definition of the "good life" science on the Burkean conception that the "good life and science emphasizes leisure [...and] is intently attune to economics and technology" (171). The "good life" is built around an ideal which promotes the "'maximum purchase of manufactured commodities'" (172). Meister focuses his analysis on the program *Taste*, which no longer airs. Through his examination of the show, he purports that the Food Network does not address the natural state or the "biological and nutritional characteristics of food" (178). Food is not visualized in its natural state but must be manipulated in order to be enjoyed. This fictionalization and erasure of food's true nature is evidenced through the snippets of behind the scenes Food Network machinations: "At Lisa Ekus's media training school in Connecticut, chefs learn

how to make good television. 'What might take 40 minutes to prep in kitchen with six sous-chefs, you'll do in six minutes on air,' [Lisa states]" (Cohen 2001). The Food Network creates a narrative of fantasy which promises its viewers happiness through uninterrupted consumption (Ketchum 217).

In a slightly different direction, Isabelle de Solier discusses the social function of cooking related programming. She suggests that cooking shows act as an educational tool providing viewers with social information. They do not simply educate in relation to food preparation but present "ideologies of gender, class, ethnicity and national identity" (15). In addition, within these programs taste and aesthetics are highlighted and a distinction is made between "lowbrow" and "highbrow" tastes. However, de Solier focuses her study on Australian television, which includes mainly homegrown programs and productions from the United Kingdom and does not incorporate a discussion of industry.

Cheri Ketchum has conducted the most recent and comprehensive study of the network. She viewed hours worth of the Food Network analyzing the tapes for consistent and repetitive themes. The most prominent themes which she extracted include "intimacy, class, gender, ethnicity, and commodities" (223). She closely examines the roles the Food Network hosts play, their relationship with their audience, both in studio or at home as well as the messages insinuated by the programs' content and visual techniques. Ketchum categorizes the

programs and discusses the way in which the differing genres, which include: “domestic instructional,” “personality-driven domestic,” “food travel” and “avant-garde,” have become successful and have built “new fantasies around food” (223). In her final assessment she states that the Food Network imparts a sense of achievable contentment and intimacy through the fantasies it builds around the pleasures of consumption (223). Ketchum’s research techniques are the most closely related to those which will be applied in this study. Through analysis of the programming she builds an expansive framework of theory regarding food television but she does not undertake a discussion of packaged foods and the Food Network’s food specific dialogue.

In “Vicarious Consumption: Food, Television and the Ambiguity of Modernity” Pauline Adema begins to touch upon the Food Network’s portrayal of prepared foods. She situates “the current interest in food television, and a parallel interest in ready-made meals, in the ambiguity of modernity, a symptom and consequence of real and perceived time pressures, [...] and an ongoing hunger for comfort and security, traditionally sated in the home kitchen and encoded in home-cooked food” (113). Adema essentially suggests that the Food Network does not promote home cooking through its programming but rather satiates the nostalgic need for family gathering and an idealized sociality symbolized by cooking and the kitchen (118). As her research was conducted several years ago Adema does not consider the growing emphasis on packaged

foods on the Food Network. Television shows such as *Semi Homemade with Sandra Lee* focus on meal preparation using 70% packaged foods including canned and “instant” products. Through her commentary on food’s disappearance from the home Adema’s research foreshadows the Food Network’s programming direction.

It is also important to note that there is a large amount of mainstream media coverage of the Food Network. This might be attributed to the celebrity status chefs have achieved. In “Look Who’s Cooking Now,” Andy Cohen quotes restaurant industry publicist Lisa Ekus who states: “With so many outlets now that they can reach the public, these chefs have truly become celebrities. [...] But they are not just on the gossip pages. These are smart businesspeople who know how to build brands and successfully market their names” (Cohen 33). This non-academic coverage is, in general, not critical in nature and might function to further the consumptive pattern by presenting chefs as celebrities and spokespeople.

Clearly current analytical work surrounding the Food Network highlights its promotion of excessive consumption but it does not discuss the way in which food television presents food in its industrialized form. Industrialization for the purposes of this study is used in a fairly broad manner. It is meant to encompass all natures of food in its public and processed forms. For the most part, this would include food prepared in restaurants or mass produced goods. In order to

fully understand the way in which the Food Network engages directly with its most critical prop, food, it is necessary to examine the general discourse surrounding food. As this research project relates specifically to processed foods and the food industry, it is essential to consider research concerning the consumer's relationship to processed foods.

Predictably, there is an abundance of research in the area of food processing, but much of this research is scientific in nature and does not directly relate to the social construction of food by media outlets. For example in relation to convenience foods articles proclaiming the benefits of technological advancement in food production are abundant. In "Fresh Cut Apples: A New Convenience Food" Kathryn Barry Stelljes writes about a new method of packaging apples. She excitedly states that "the refrigerated, packaged slices last 2 to 3 weeks without browning or losing crispness. School children and some consumers are already enjoying the new apple treat, which should be available nationwide within a few months" (22). This type of rhetoric regarding progress in food technology and science, most often in technical journals, is plentiful. There is also much discussion surrounding the way consumers have embraced these new food inventions and conveniences (Barkema 1993; Soliah, Janelle and Barnes 2003; Scholderer and Grunert 2005). There has also been foundational work in the area of food convenience theory. For example, Candel outlines a theory known as "convenience orientation." This is defined as a positive attitude

towards time saving food preparation techniques. This work relates to the public's attitude towards food preparation and adoption of ready-made food items (Candel 2001). It seems this theory is echoed in the Food Network programming as convenience becomes the basis of many of the programs' premises.

Again, media focused research appears to be limited. There is a vein of study which considers the effects of prime time advertising on food choice (Avery et al. 1997;). What does exist is a significant dialogue surrounding the choices consumers make in grocery stores and food outlets. Perhaps due to the growing concern over obesity, much of this questioning relates to the consumption of healthier prepared options (Soliah, Walter and Barnes 68). Yet, within this area of study the elements that appear to be considered most often are labeling (Keller, et al. 1997; Burke, Milberg, Moe 1997) and pricing (Leibtag 2005; French 2003). There appears to be a lack of research specifically in relation to the media's impact on food choice.

Also related to the industrialization of food, there is a fast growing stream of critical research which addresses the political and economic aspects of food production and consumption (Watson and Caldwell 2005). For instance, Warren Belasco, a prolific food theorist, parallels political movements of the 1960's and 1970's with food movements of the same period (Belasco 2005). He takes bread as his primary example and states that "bread was part of an oppositional grammar

- a set of dichotomies between the devitalized, soft, suburbanized world of Wonder Bread and the vital, sturdy, nutrient-dense peasant world of whole grain breads" (221). Natural, homemade breads were free form and unstandardized standing in opposition to mass produced cookie-cutter breads which had no character. Even more politically oriented, Belasco takes the metaphor of whole bread versus white bread a step further suggesting that whiteness was embodied by suburban food products such as Cool Whip, Minute Rice and Wonder Bread (222). On the other hand, counterculture movements, which embraced whole foods, "found a preference for brown in everything" (222). Belasco has clearly aligned politics with food choice.

Choice is also a theme which appears often in food studies. As stated, there has been research in the area of purchase choice in grocery stores with an emphasis on nutritional values. The political implications of these choices are perhaps a less popular topic but despite this food studies often touches on choice. In much of the literature food choice, or taste, is aligned with class structures and hierarchies as certain tastes are perceived as more "correct" than others. Mark Meister's analysis of the program *Taste* similarly highlights the way in which the Food Network erases food's essential qualities and replaces them with "tasteful" and modified versions (Meister 165). The title of the program is a simple indication of the show's intention. Nutritional value is removed from the equation. The quality of food is not related to its nutritional content but is tied up

with moral and aesthetic value. A healthy diet, for example, is associated with a middle-class diet (Ashley et al. 248). Taste becomes a matter of class and “food practices do not simply ‘express’ a class identity but also produce and reproduce class identities” (Ashley et al. 66). These concepts are similar to those which have been raised by the Food Network related research mentioned above (Meister 2001; de Solier 2005; Ketchum 2005) and which will be fleshed out further within this work.

Another instance of this focus on taste is seen in “The Rise of Yuppie Coffees” (Roseberry 2005). Coffee has become a specialized industry with connoisseurs whose noses are as finely tuned as those of sommeliers. In this sense coffee, what was once a morning staple, becomes a matter of refinement and judgment. Do you acquire your coffee from Tim Horton’s, Starbucks, or perhaps you prefer an organic free trade variety? Coffee is also theorized in relation to its return to tradition. The promotion and marketing of traditional roasting techniques and small family run businesses impart a feeling of naturalness and wholesomeness to coffees (Roseberry 125). This research suggests the consumer desires a product which is more real, less mass produced, yet tasteful (Roseberry 125). Further food related research might not deal with issues of taste as explicitly but they often consider the implications of changing food trends as they relate to hegemonic structures and ideologies in general (Belasco 2005; Roseberry 2005; Probyn 1998). In this general area of research,

food literally leaves the earth and enters the realm of representation. This symbolic construction surrounding food parallels Terry Eagleton's definition of culture.

Culture's etymology lies in the "tending of natural growth" (Eagleton 1), the cultivation of the earth. Our understanding of culture has evolved into a distant version of the original organic sense. Terry Eagleton states that the word "charts within its semantic unfolding humanity's own historic shift from rural to urban existence, pig-farming to Picasso" (Eagleton 1). Ironically, this movement of culture away from the land has also been embodied, most strikingly, in the food industry. Eagleton draws upon the importance of the land as he mentions the movement from "pig-farming to Picasso." Our society has moved far away from the land and it often seems as though representations of the land and its bounty are a more potent entity than the real thing. This begins to touch upon the subject taken up within the first chapter of this work, "The Kitchen: Home and Away."

iii. Research Questions, Objectives and Methodology

The goal of this study is to consider the Food Network and the types of messages it disseminates surrounding the consumption of food and food products. The study is guided by three central questions: *How does the Food Network portray food as a commodity? Are certain ideological structures surrounding*

food choices, taste and production reinforced by the Food Network? If so, what are these ideologies?

The methodology proposed for this study will reside within the tradition of moving image analysis. An examination of ideological structures through an interpretive textual analysis of a selection of Food Network programs that will form the body of this study. Close readings of several Food Network programs will be conducted.

Genre will act as a classification system during this analysis. As noted above, genre in food television has been previously defined in the work of Cheri Ketchum (2005). Ketchum outlines four types of cooking shows:

1. Traditional domestic instructional cooking
 - These programs are almost always hosted by women and portray the host standing in a kitchen explaining the preparation of recipes.
2. Personality-driven domestic cooking shows
 - Personality-driven cooking shows are a form of the domestic instructional genre, however they generally involve a live studio audience and can be paralleled with talk-show programs.
3. Food travel programs
 - Hosts of food travel programs visit cities throughout the world supplying information about their destination's culinary options. This include descriptions of local agriculture, industry and restaurant reviews.
4. Avant-garde programs
 - This newest genre of program involves adventurous cooking. These shows do not conform to the domestic style. They often involve competition, extreme cooking conditions or travel to exotic destinations. Examples of this type of program include *A Cook's Tour* and *Iron Chef*.

For the most part these categories encompass the Food Network programming line-up. However, I would suggest that under the definitions provided by Ketchum, programs such as *Unwrapped*, *Top 5*, *The Secret Life Of* and *Recipe for Success* remain unclassified. In essence they all relate to the production of food outside of the home and aim to “edify” their audience about the inner machinations of different areas of the food industry. For example each episode of the *The Secret Life Of* traces the historical and production “life” of a certain food, be it pudding or peanuts. In order to encompass this new vein of programming I will venture to attach a category to Ketchum’s list entitled, “educational food industry programs.” These programs have yet to be examined as a distinctive genre despite their intensifying presence. Television shows such as *Unwrapped* juxtapose the industrial setting of food production plants with nostalgic 1950’s diner sets. It is critical to carefully examine the significance of these types of programs, question their expanding popularity and compare them to more traditional productions. With the addition of this category the main genres of cooking shows will be represented.

The programs chosen for analysis best demonstrate the commercialization of food on the network. They include: *Unwrapped*, *Road Tasted*, *Behind the Bash*, *Semi-Homemade Cooking with Sandra Lee*, *Paula’s Home Cooking*, *The Barefoot Contessa*, and *Rachael Ray’s Tasty Travels*. These programs represent a cross-

section of the new and traditional genres of cooking programs on the network. The selected programs are broadcast at least weekly (generally there is heavy repetition of programming) and programs appear during differing viewing slots throughout the day. During the viewings particular focus will be placed on script, setting and types of foods encountered throughout the program. Each show will be analyzed in relation to the main research goals of this project, to evaluate their portrayal of commodified food and to contemplate, more broadly, the ideological underpinnings which might stem from the particular choice of portrayal.

iv. Chapter Summary

Ironically, the television and subsequently programming which represents food preparation has taken over the traditional cooking and gathering space in the home. "The hearth was the central focus of every home: the fire warming hands and faces, and warmly alive, too, with the imaginations of all those who gazed into its depths" (Fletcher 55-61). It acted as the center of private life, a shelter from the public. Today, the hearth has been succeeded and has lost its dominance. Implementing the work of both Marshall McLuhan and Jurgen Habermas the repossession of the original cooking space by television will be examined. This point of entry will also be used to consider representations of home on the Food Network. In particular, the manner in which images and

dialogue about home are implemented by the network to seamlessly include programs revolving around industry.

Drawing connections between television and myth, Chapter Two, "Nostalgia: Eating the American Dream," considers nostalgia's role in the de-emphasis of representations of food as a commodity on the network. Joe Moran writes that the "[n]ostalgia mode is idealistic and regressive in its emphasis on a self-contained, immutable and secure past, one that sidesteps contemporary problems and smooths over the realities of historical conflict" (156). This definition of nostalgia will be very useful in understanding the way nostalgia permeates through much of the Food Network's programming.

The last part of this work will look at home in a very different way. Entitled "Tastemakers, Eating with Our Eyes," the chapter aims to discuss the Food Network's position as a promoter of "good taste." An overview of the history of gastronomy will provide an entry point into the work of Pierre Bourdieu. His seminal text *Distinction* will act as a basis for a discussion of class privilege and its relationship to the Food Network's representations of class and food consumption.

Finally, running through the entire work is an interest in the ideological implications of the Food Network. Louis Althusser theorized ideology as the illusion which exists in the individual's mind as their true state of existence. "[Ideologies] do not correspond to reality, i.e. [...] they constitute an illusion, we

admit that they do make allusion to reality, and that they need only be 'interpreted' to discover the reality of the world behind their imaginary representation of that world" (Althusser 162). Here, we see that although ideology is an "imaginary" entity reality is its referent. It is this constructed vision of the world that is perpetuated by television. In fact, references to "doped telly-viewers" (Eagleton 2000) are often made in discussions of ideology. Television has been accused of being an amalgamating and stilling force (Bourdieu 1996). One would assume that the television Food Network is no exception and that it, like all programming, projects an illusory vision of reality. As mentioned in the literature review, Isabelle de Solier suggests that ideologies are perpetuated by the Food Network but she covers a range of subjects which do not consider the industrialization of food. Unlike news programs and other more traditional programs which have been explored at length (Bourdieu 1996; Chomsky 1988) the ideological implications relating to food processing on the Food Network have not been thoroughly examined.

Food television is a hugely successful and massively expanding media outlet yet there is minimal work which explores the message it communicates in relation to the industrialization of food. It is necessary to question the underlying message created by the network. Whether this message impacts its audience is beyond the scope of this project but nonetheless it is critical to be aware of the themes relating to food choice disseminated by the network's programming.

These themes are beginning to be uncovered and discussed through the work outlined above. However, current studies lack a focus on the statement the Food Network delivers surrounding the consumption of food prepared outside of the home. As there is a large body of scientific work regarding food packaging and healthful eating habits it is important to consider how a media outlet such as the Food Network intersects with this research. Programming also appears to be moving in a direction which savors the industrialized version of food and emphasizes aesthetics and convenience rather than whole foods and nutrition. This study will seek to evaluate the message disseminated by the Food Network surrounding the food industry. This specific area has yet to be considered in other scholarship

As the Food Network continues to gain popularity a serious consideration of the message it disseminates regarding food consumption is required. This important work is slowly being taken up by researchers such as Pauline Adema, Isabelle de Solier and Mark Meister and most recently and thoroughly Cheri Ketchum yet there is still much work to be done. Consumption and the commodity centered point of view of the station has been touched upon but the academic conversation has not yet delved deeply into the commodification of food itself. This research attempts to seal gaps in the conversation surrounding food television by questioning the processed food related rhetoric and the surrounding ideological implications upheld by the network.

CHAPTER ONE: The Kitchen, Home and Away

i. Rematerializing the Hearth

Historically, the hearth has been the center of the home. From humanity's beginnings until the second half of the twentieth century, it has played an enormous role in family and community life. It acted as a focal point. As the provider of sustenance, it afforded protection, heat and a source of nourishment. Cooking, eating and drinking often took place around the hearth giving rise to the traditional family meal. It is important to recognize this culinary aspect of the hearth given this discussion of the Food Network. The hearth was not only a source of heat, but also a method of food preparation. To a certain extent, it was food that brought the group together by the fireside. Through its centrality and warmth it also sustained the communicative needs of private family life and placed all "surrounding dangers [...] at a safer distance" (Fletcher 55). The hearth refused dispersal and physically forced the family to centralize (55). It drew

people in and acted as a safe haven, perhaps not literally keeping anything out, but in its emanating warmth providing a sense of security and protection from what existed outside of the home. Perhaps romanticized, this is a common vision of the hearth.

Since the Second World War, however, the hearth has all but been eliminated from the home. The warm glow that is so often associated with it has now been reformulated. Both mainstream media and academic research agree that the “glow of the television” has succeeded the hearth (Tichi 43). The first advertisements for televisions physically positioned the new technology in place of or next to a fireplace. An early corporate ad exclaimed “scientific research [is] bringing television to brighten your fireside” (Tichi 43). This slogan suggested that the television would be a positive addition to and perhaps even better the existing family space by the fire. “The television,” wrote a newspaper journalist, “has become an electronic hearth. It has brought the American family back together” (Tichi 43). In this way the television has been described as the hearth “rematerialized” (Tichi 43). These early media representations clearly correlate the television with the hearth and, in so doing, all of the ideological underpinnings associated with the hearth necessarily remain. Alongside these mainstream media representations, there is also much critical theory examining the meaning and value of the comparison between television and the hearth and

the value systems associated with them. If the media aligns the television with the hearth, critical work questions its significance.

From the above description of the traditional hearth it is clear that there are certain ideologies linked with it. Domesticity, patriotism, abundance and family cohesiveness are some of these. Romanticized sensations such as warmth, comfort, safety and wellbeing also emerge in connection with thoughts of the hearth. In making the connection between the television and the hearth, the television acts as a seamless bridge securing the viewer's faith in the stability and continuity of traditional values. Television becomes the center, it "is now the hearth around which we meet, the cool fireside of domestic evenings and the tribal gathering place for moments of ritual celebration or mourning" (Tichi 46). It usurps the demeaned fireplace as the family gathering place, yet it retains all of the original ideological connotations. In this description television also takes on a spatial or environmental meaning. It is depicted as a place, be it for "tribal gathering," "ritual celebration" or solitary entertainment (Fletcher 56-61). This notion of place further exaggerates the sense of sociality which surrounds the television.

Television, although not actually a place, can have similar attributes, in the manner through which it creates a "'centre of felt value'" (Adams 117). Although it is not "enter-able" it evokes the same sense of attachment that might be associated with place. It has also been compared to monuments. Like a

monument the television reinforces positions of power and replaces traditional places of gathering such as the church. This comparison to the monument is in essence the same as the parallel between television and hearth. The television stands as a centralizing force and although "television lacks a definable location, it serves various social and symbolic functions previously served by places: sensory communication, social congregation, the attribution of value to persons and objects, and the definition of 'us' and 'them'" (Adams 117). This conception of television comes into being in the following statement made by Food Network programming executive, Eileen Opatut: "Our goal is to be smart, to have fun and to make people feel like it's a good place to come and visit" ("Rethinking Food Tv"). Although it relates to the changing programming goals of the network the comment reveals much more. It suggests a community, a social gathering space, a place where people would feel at home, much like the hearth. It also brings to mind Marshall McLuhan's highly contentious yet seminal concept of "retribalization."

Terms such as tribal, sensory and congregate that have been used to describe the "electronic hearth" are also reminiscent of Marshall McLuhan's discussion of retribalization in relation to electronic media. The concept of retribalization relates to McLuhan's notion of the global village and the recovery and reintegration of a multiple sensory experience. Through the term retribalization McLuhan suggests that electronic media, including television,

fosters values such as involvement, simultaneity, globalism and the collective. These characteristics of retribalization also describe the hearth and relate to the goals of the Food Network, to recreate a space that is imbued with comfort and family values. This reinvigoration of community is expressed through the stated goals of the Food Network. It is also expressed within the programming. The Paula Deen clan, exemplifies this familial reunification. Throughout Deen's programs, which include *Paula's Home Cooking* and *Paula's Party* as well as a myriad of holiday specials, she surrounds herself with her family and themes of home. Family members and favorite family meals are incorporated into many of the programs. In fact, every episode of *Paula's Home Cooking* begins with images of Deen playfully cooking with her sons and affectionately serving her husband a meal. The introductory segment sets up a reunification of the family around food. This rhetoric can be seen within the shows as well. While snuggled into a comfortable looking chair in the episode "Comfort Foods," Deen signs off by saying preparing "all this food is like getting a poke from home" ("Comfort Foods"). This is one instance of the staged, televised representation of family togetherness found on the Food Network. However, there are several important issues to raise with regards to this notion of retribalization.

McLuhan's theory focuses on the way that our senses have become reintegrated into our lives as we have adopted electronic technologies. He states that we are to be "put back in touch with [our] essential nature [...] and submit

to the sensory powers of the electronic media," (McLuhan qtd. in Gladney 97). This embrace of the sensory relates to the movement away from print's solitary and "senseless" communication and the new media's propagation of oral forms. McLuhan insinuates that the electronic age has brought about a return on the reliance of oral communication, rather than written and it is this that he appears to applaud. In the case of the Food Network, however, there is a loss rather than gain of sensory experience. Food is meant to be tasted and smelled. Without aroma and flavor the enjoyment and sensuousness of eating is eliminated. Emeril Lagasse, a Food Network celebrity well-known for his bombastic manner and use of pork fat, can often be heard shouting "Hey folks, call your cable company and ask for smellavision!" (*Emeril Live*). Of course, until McLuhan's electronic utopia encompasses "smellavision" (*Emeril Live*) the integral senses, taste and smell, are lost in the consumption of televised cooking. In our submission to electronic media, we have taken a step away from the "reunification of man, the end of his alienation, the restoration of 'whole man'" (McLuhan qtd. in Gladney 97). Alienation from ourselves and others is heightened as our senses are stricken from our interaction with food. There is also a further disconnect between the mass retribalization that McLuhan outlines through terms such as the global village and the sense of regrouping around the hearth that is being suggested here. McLuhan might not have been referring to the retribalization of the domestic space but based on the characteristics associated with the term it seems

to be appropriate for that purpose. In a sense the retribalization that McLuhan prophesized is occurring. The family's gathering around the electronic hearth may be equated with a return to shared knowledge and grouping. Nevertheless it is a false reengagement and a poor replacement for original family gatherings.

There is also another relationship between McLuhan's theorizing and the appropriation of the hearth by the television. The hearth, as it evolved throughout history, became a private space. It shifted from a public, community gathering place, to a symbol of the unified family. As the hearth has been replaced by its electronic successor there has subsequently been an invasion of the public in to what has become the private home space. One might view this as a reconnection between many groups, as McLuhan explained it. However, it is not so much that the individual is reintegrated into a global community but rather that the entire family unit has become exposed to the public domain within their home. Consistent global programming allows individuals to consume the same television yet the programming is a poor substitute for what was once personal communication. As opposed to retribalization, this can be described as a repossession of the home space by the public. This global retribalization, occurring in every household with a television, invariably involves an incursion of private space by, for the most part, capitalist interests. It is in this light that McLuhan has been criticized for the lack of a moral component in this theoretical work. He attributes a grandiose reunification of

mankind to the insurgence of new forms of media. The implications of this global restructuring are glorified rather than critiqued. Particularly, problematic is what has been described as the “triumph of the secular over the sacred, the divorce of the written from the oral tradition, and the hegemony of science over religion, of technical authority over moral authority” (Carey in Gladney 97). Although a fairly conservative standpoint is being taken here, the roots of this “technical authority” are being questioned. This retribalization is in effect a disturbance within the home by an exterior force. Discovering the roots of this force is also critical to contending with its impacts.

It is impossible to mention the terms “private” and “public” without invoking Habermas’s seminal reflections regarding the public sphere. Habermas described how the rise of mass media led to the collapse of a genuine public sphere. He suggested that a “pseudo public or sham-private world of culture consumption” (Habermas qtd. in Grosswiler 2001) emerged from the proliferation of mass media. This has in turn led to domination by corporate rather than public discussion. Habermas attributed picture and sound based media with the dissolution of “critical debate.” The commercialization of press has instituted what Habermas calls a “manufactured public sphere” (Habermas qtd. in Grosswiler 2001) and it is that which has entered into the home. The following passage illustrates the effects of TVs initial presence in the home:

Several texts suggest that with the installation of television, the conflation of private and public space threatened to turn this lady-hostess into the cook and waitress preparing and serving food to others indifferent to her, absorbed as they were in programs she could only glimpse en route to and from the kitchen. The others who she served were not only invited friends or her family to whom she could feel obligated as wife and mother to prepare meals or snacks. "Others," instead, were a quasi-public aggregation identified as "neighbors." (Tichi 24)

This excerpt depicts the creation of a different sort of public. The home itself, possessed by the television, becomes a public space, or perhaps, as described, a "quasi-public." The passage highlights the distancing between individuals that occurred within the domestic space as television took a central position. Mother transforms into waitress and visiting neighbors become patrons in a restaurant style environment. The television has introduced a public, in the transformed sense that Habermas describes, into the home. The hearth has become a commercialized space. This is particularly interesting and complex as television content on the Food Network depicts what was once a traditional domestic activity. This is seen quite obviously in the case of *Semi-Homemade Cooking with Sandra Lee*. Lee's mantra, "70% premade + 30% fresh," dictates the content of her television series as well as her empire of cookbooks and magazines. As will become more evident through further examination, Lee is a mother figure but also a corporate entity. She is not simply a waitress but a chain restaurant and she embodies the infiltration of Habermas's corporate public. Multiple levels of disconnection occur as we move leaps away from the original domestic hearth

space into the realm of the representation of food preparation on the “electronic hearth.” This distance is further exaggerated by the increasing shift in programming towards portrayals of the food industry. These portrayals parallel a change in the eating habits of North Americans and this shift must also be examined.

ii. Eating Out

In order to fruitfully discuss the way in which the food industry is portrayed by the Food Network it will be useful to consider industry trends and changes in food consumption. The food industry, be it packaged goods, restaurants or fast food chains, is an inevitable part of our lives. Dining out is often an act of celebration, marking a special occasion. It also allows people to expand their tastes and consider cultures and cuisines they might not readily consume at home. Of course, the food industry stretches far beyond the restaurant or fast food industry. It encompasses a huge and elaborate system of production, manufacturing and distribution. The packaged food industry, as much as it is denigrated for its wastefulness and detrimental impacts on our diet and environment also serves an important purpose. Processing and packaging play an enormous part in eliminating food spoilage. For instance, in less developed countries between 30-50% of food is wasted due to a lack of organized preservation, storage and transfer systems (Witkowski 149). In more developed

countries food waste before it reaches the consumer is approximately 2-3% (Coles, McDowell and Kirwan 6). Of course, this does not account for the waste that is produced once the food reaches the consumer. The packaging of food undeniably allows for the preservation of worldwide food resources.

Highlighting these facts is important in presenting a truthful, fair and balanced image of the food industry and this is precisely what the Food Network does not do. It is clear that the food industry is not an entirely detrimental entity. It has a necessary place in society. However, conglomerates, globalization, cultural erosion, use of pesticides, genetic modification, hormone therapies, over production, and the inhumane treatment of animals are all critical problems which cannot be brushed under the table and these are problems which do not generally make it to FoodTV.

In conjunction with the food industry's growing size is an increase in the amount of meals being consumed outside of the home. Americans currently spend almost half of their food dollars on eating outside of the home amounting to a total of \$415 billion dollars spent in 2002. This is growth of away from home food expenditures of 23 percent between 1992 and 2002 (Stewart, et al 2004). Furthermore, a USDA economic report conducted in 2004 predicts that per capita spending could rise 18% at full service restaurants and 6% at fast food restaurants between 2000 and 2020 (Stewart, et al. 2004).. The report also considered the changing structure of the American household and the

dissolution of the nuclear family. It concluded that household structure, which has not previously been considered in household food expenditures, is an important variable in the way that food is purchased (Stewart, et al. 2004). The same report states that “younger generations know less about cooking than earlier generations did at the same point in their life” (Stewart, et al. 4). This can most plainly be seen in the changing tactics of advertising.

Through its advertising, McDonald’s has quietly reacted to these changes in food preparation habits. In the 1980s it shifted its advertising away from a product focus to a focus on tradition and family (Helmer 85). The message it constructed with its rebranded campaigns was not about food but about “caring,” the “home and family.” McDonald’s recognized the shift in family life and rather than selling ‘home cooking’ or pies ‘like Mother used to make,’ which is not representative of modern life, it sold the image of trust and the family (Helmer 85). This change in advertising focus is a fine industry example of the correlation between food consumption trends and the home. Looking at these trends is interesting in relation to the Food Network’s portrayal of the industry. There appears to be a correlation here which will soon be further exposed. It is important to consider these trends and changes as actual trends relate to the way that the Food Network portrays the industry. This is especially true as the Food Network seems to uphold a traditional American family value system. Innate to

the Food Network is the notion of “home made.” The network clings to the idea that food is made from scratch even when this is not the case.

Even more pertinent than advertising changes is a consideration of other media perspectives regarding the industry. This can act as a comparison point by providing a greater sense of the dialogue surrounding industry practices and norms. In contrast to the Food Network, the mainstream news media’s coverage of the food industry is often steeped in the rhetoric of fear. In a televised report on CBS News the food industry was repeatedly described as under “threat” of contamination and “vulnerable” to terrorist attacks (“An ‘Agro-Terrorism’ Threat”). It warned of the “frightening reality” of agro-terrorism and the difficulty of detecting and preventing such attacks. The report closed by citing the need for constant vigilance due to the decentralized and unpredictable threat to our highly interconnected and susceptible food chain. The repeated use of language such as “threat,” “contamination” and “outbreak” suggest a highly unstable and at-risk food supply. This creates a sense of fear and instability around the food that we consume. Of course, this is only one instance of such a report. Reports of foodborne illnesses occur in great numbers. Whether it is mad cow disease, the avian flu, salmonella or e.coli outbreaks the news media is replete with reports of food insecurity. Research has indicated the need for education in the area of food safety as a preventative measure (McArthur, Holbert and Forsythe 60). However, the dialogue surrounding the food industry

and food safety is often apprehensive rather than educational and reports of E. coli outbreaks in large production sites will necessarily cause concern. These reports also occur with noticeable frequency. An International Food Information Council report entitled “Food for Thought” followed media coverage of food related topics between 1995 and 2001. At two year intervals, the study considered the consistencies and changes in media coverage of issues such as foodborne illness, fat intake, functional foods, disease prevention diet, nutrition, and food safety. The report included a comparison and ranking of the “Leading Topics of Discussion” during 1995, 1997, 1999 and 2001. Throughout the four periods of study, the topic of foodborne illness has continued to remain in the top three items of discussion. Disease prevention and biotechnology have also consistently been leading issues in media coverage of food. Furthermore, food producers and processors were held responsible for 90% of the instances of foodborne illness. In essence this study highlights the media attention given to harmful and unappealing aspects of the food industry. This media discussion of the food industry, although perhaps not outright, in effect creates a sense of instability surrounding our food supply. It is important to contrast/juxtapose this with the way in which the industry is presented on the Food Network.

iii. Home away from Home

As mentioned, innate in the Food Network is the notion of meal preparation taking place in the home or being “home made.” Show titles such as *Paula’s Home Cooking* and *Semi-Home Made* suggest that food is cooked within the home. For the most part these shows are shot in a kitchen set that emulates a very well appointed home kitchen. Some shows take place in the chef’s own homes. For instance, *The Barefoot Contessa*, *Paul’s Home Cooking*, and *Nigella Feasts* are all shot within the modified home kitchens of these respective chefs. These shows give the appearance of being centered around the home and in a sense suggest that food preparation is, for the most part, taking place in the home.

It is this hominess that pervades the entire network, including the programs which take-up the food industry. There are several shows which revolve around informational accounts and visits to food businesses. In particular the shows *Road Tasted*, *Rachael Ray’s Tasty Travels* and *Unwrapped* track the production and retail sectors of the food industry. Consistent with the rest of the network, these shows are also couched in a sense of home and portray the food industry as deliberately safe and family-oriented.

Road Tasted is a program hosted by Bobby and Jamie Deen, the sons of the well-known Food Network star, Paula Deen. Paula Deen has garnered much attention for her down-home Southern cooking and hospitality. Her sons often guest host her program (*Paula’s Party*) and holiday specials such as *Paula’s*

Southern Christmas, depict the family cooking and celebrating together. By creating spin-off programs hosted by the family of star Food Network chefs and keeping it “all in the family” the network creates a sense of togetherness and lineage around its programs.

Road Tasted is based on the travels of Bobby and Jamie Deen. In each episode they visit a different city, restaurant or food processing facility. The show’s introduction explains that the Deen family has owned their own food business for over 18 years (*Road Tasted*). Furthermore, they claim to believe in home grown local businesses like their own. However, in every program introduction the brothers mention that all items presented during their show can easily be shipped, “bringing our home to you.” Although, at heart the show takes up the business rather than domestic side of food, the program itself is filled with references to family. In general the show’s tone is upbeat and is permeated with a sense of camaraderie. Throughout the program the boys repeatedly call each other “brother.” They interact warmly and convivially with their guests, stepping into their kitchens and preparing recipes together. They are helpful and vivacious, and build a sense of friendship and familiarity with their guests. This produces a show infused with a sense of intimacy and informality. The notion of family, friends and community is upheld through these interactions.

The depiction of the businesses visited is also critical to this investigation. A recent episode entitled, "Meet Me in Saint Louis," described one of the locations visited in the following manner: "A family business since 1969, Swiss Meats controls its products from beginning to end." This description suggests that the production of meat products occurs on a small scale and is safely contained. Although, cursory research about Swiss Meats ("Swiss Meat & Sausage Company") suggests that it maintains a fairly small family-run operation this portrayal of the meat processing industry is not at all accurate. Another episode called, "Chi' Town," tracking the hosts' movement through Chicago, described one of the businesses visited in this way: "Then it's off to Solomon's cookies, where brothers Adam (a former lawyer) and Jason (a recently crowned PhD) gave up their aspiring careers to bake cookies from their grandmother's recipe! The Deen boys sample the Turtle and the Sandies cookies that made the Solomon brothers' grandmother famous!" Again the show focuses on small family run operations. The show's content repeatedly returns to themes of home and family. In this particular case, the "Solomon Sons" have given up more conventional and status driven careers to retain a family tradition. These show descriptions encapsulate the general portrayals of the food industry. The focus on family values suggests a nostalgic return to the way home used to be and exploits the audiences's innate desire for comfort and love created by memories, whether real or fictional, of the home. More importantly, family

cohesiveness, traditional food preparation techniques and small scale food production are presented as industry norms. Authenticity and wholesomeness is the pervading rhetoric. Another aspect of this presentation of the industry is the intimation of success. Each story is a success story. There is no representation of the failures and mishaps which pervade in the mainstream media.

Rachael Ray's Tasty Travels takes up another side of the business of food, the tourism and restaurant industry. Mainstream media coverage of Rachael Ray has positioned her as the girl next door (Blakely 1). Her extra friendly demeanor and prior experience as an attendant at a grocery store food sample kiosk make her seem less like a celebrity and more like an acquaintance. On this program Ray travels to different cities sampling dishes at multiple restaurants. Lucky, for Rachael she is never stricken with food poisoning on her travels throughout the U.S. and surrounding areas (Vancouver and Trinidad, specifically). The illnesses and outbreaks so often mentioned on news media outlets are clearly of no concern here. Understandably, this is a food and travel program so it highlights some of the "best", most "affordable" and popular "hot spots" at her destination city. The show packs visits to several restaurants into one episode. Usually a restaurant's signature dish is prepared and patrons are subsequently seen digging in and enjoying it. When the show is viewed carefully however it becomes reminiscent of an infomercial. Restaurant after restaurant is visited and the rhetoric that emerges consistently has to do with price. This is seen most

prominently in Ray's "Hot List." Usually taking place at the end of the show, Ray provides viewers with a select group of "special value" restaurants.

Describing the restaurant Toi on Sunset Boulevard in L.A she says, "Its Thai food is awesome and so are its meal deals! Check out their lunch special for \$5.95 and get a salad and your entrée!" ("Los Angeles"). The repetitious style of this narration and subject matter is suggestive of an advertisement for these restaurants rather than an unbiased review. Ray exuberantly pitches the restaurants as though she was selling a used car. In spite of this, she is portrayed as a friend sharing travel tips with you yet her tone and message are suspicious. Unlike a friend whose honest advice provides the pros and cons, Ray's televised restaurant experiences are always "delish!"

It is unfair to claim that the Food Network never represents large scale food industry operations because that is the subject matter taken up by the program *Unwrapped*. Each week the show "unwraps" the process behind the production of a theme group of packaged foods. These foods range from ice cream to potato chips and candy to turkey. The show exposes the production process of a myriad of different canned, frozen and pre-wrapped goods. It airs at prime time and is hosted by Marc Summers. It is important to note that a large portion of Summers's past hosting experience is in children's television. He spent eight years hosting Nickelodeon's program "Double Dare," a kid's game show, and also hosted and produced several other children's programs ("Marc

Summers"). This is particularly relevant due to the tone and content of *Unwrapped*.

There is a decidedly didactic quality to the show. As Summers narrates the production process of the theme food, he sounds as though he is addressing a group of children. Language such as "discover how," "take a peak," and "check out" often used in the introductory segment are all simple, decidedly friendly and youthful (*Unwrapped*). They seem to invite the viewer to "join" Summers in the unveiling of a mysterious process. Summers's upbeat and jovial tone contributes to this. Given his past experience it would not be surprising that his tone would suggest a young audience. Further support of this is seen in the show's recent incorporation into the "Cable in the Classroom" program.

Unwrapped is one of several "commercial-free, educational" programs made "available to teachers and students in more than 81,000 public and private schools" ("Cable in the Classroom"). This is a clear indication that the tone of the show is acceptable for children. This focus on a kid-like atmosphere is noteworthy for several reasons. Similar to *Road Tasted's* insistence on home-style cooking, creating a show imbued with a sense of youthfulness normalizes the industrialization process and makes it seem innocent and harmless. It dumb-down the massive and complex process of industrialization. Enormous conveyor belts are pictured carrying hopping rainbow colored candy towards claw-like machines which evenly distribute them into ever-ready packages ("Kiddie

Cravings"). Cleverly, narrated the process seems fun, entertaining and almost like a ride at Disneyland.

Furthermore, the foods chosen to be *Unwrapped* continue to retain the theme of childhood. Foods often return to childhood favorites and "classic" American snacks. In fact, the show frequently tracks down popular candies and kid's treats from the 1950s in order to show viewers that they are still available. An obvious instance of the thematic return to childhood is seen in this particular show description:

Sack Lunch: The clock has struck noon, so it's time to reach into the brown bag for a look at sack lunch foods. Discover how Wonder Bread gets its special texture, see how bologna is really made, and learn how Deli Express is making sandwiches for those on the move. Discover the trick to turning applesauce red and furry and see how baby carrots are grown. ("Sack Lunch")

The brown bag premise necessarily invokes memories, potentially idealistic, of school lunches. Although people do continue to bring bagged lunches to work with them when one thinks of a "sack lunch" it is generally reminiscent of childhood. This youthful phenomenon is encountered with even more transparency in the show "Kid Cuisine," where "Marc Summers checks out foods that make us feel like a kid again." Whether its Blizzards, "revival retro gum," "mini veggies," Chef Boyardee, or taking "a trip down memory lane with an inside look at Abba Zabba candy bars and Sugar Daddies," ("Chewy Gooley

Treats”) *Unwrapped* is imbued with the theme of childhood and nostalgia through its food choices.

The sense of comfort and reminiscence is heightened further by the show’s set. Summers introduces each of the products from the booth or counter of a traditional 50s style diner. The stools and banquettes are a glossy red vinyl and a jukebox looks chipper in the corner. High school team jackets, vinyl records and black and white photos are mounted on the set walls. The set remains in line with the show’s tone and content which all suggest a return to the constructed innocence, tradition and youth of the 1950s. Childhood comfort foods and snacks take viewers back to a sweeter and more contented time.

With all this talk of gooey sundaes and cheesy macaroni it is almost easy to forget the true content of the show, its portrayal of the food industry. At the time of writing the *Unwrapped* homepage, found on the Food Network website, contained a subtitle which read “Sponsored by the Joy of Eating - Sara Lee.” When clicked, the subtitle linked to a web page featuring children and adults smiling, laughing and seemingly enjoying Sara Lee products. Corporate sponsorship for this show means that it cannot provide an unbiased representation of the food industry. This is particularly disturbing as the show touts itself as an educational program and airs in schools throughout the United States. The show’s general audience however, is its primetime viewers who, in the majority, are not children. The food industry is depicted to these viewers in a

manner that evokes warm fuzzy childhood memories. The delightful treats and holiday comfort foods harken back to those “happy days.” Whether they were truly happy or not is irrelevant. The immense mass production and distribution systems, not to mention issues such as the over-consumption of sugar and fats, are erased in this representation of the process. It is also important to mention that the narration of the show consistently returns to the achievements of the industry. Sales and distribution figures are proudly announced by corporate marketing representatives who are generally seated in front of their company’s cartoon mascot (“Kiddie Cravings”). From there the show might cut to a giant vat of melted sugar slowly turning pink as red dye is poured in. Summers’s perky voiceover explains what is in the vat, how much is produced, where the product is shipped and how much it is enjoyed by the consumer. Follow this scene with our host happily perched at the diner’s counter, a bowl of the featured product in front of him, and the program has *Unwrapped* its food of the day. In reality, the product has been rewrapped in the shows sugar coating. The food industry has nearly been equated with the local diner and the audience is meant to have fondly recollected their favorite childhood treats. Again, the industry appears almost quaint. *Unwrapped’s* portrayal suggests that its sole purpose is to bring joy into people’s lives.

These are only a few examples of the type of representation of the food industry that exists on the Network. Other shows follow in this vein and couch

the food industry as a friendly, home-like and safely packaged entity. In each of these presentations the industry becomes as harmless or even welcoming as the domestic space. The network features positive aspects of the industry, substituting vital food issues for a vision of accomplishment, success and comfort. Although the trend in food consumption is moving outside of the home and towards the consumption of prepared foods, the Food Network has created a space which denies this reality and in turn misrepresents the food industry.

Ironically, the Food Network seems to epitomize the concept of the “electronic hearth.” Consumption of mass produced products is increasing and the Food Network works to uphold the notion that things are as they always were. Even in the portrayal of the food industry it suggests to people that they are consuming a type of traditional domesticity. The permeation of nostalgia throughout the network and specifically in relation to food industry related programs is the subject of the following chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: Nostalgia, Eating the American Dream

Look at my childhood, an idyll of cookery.

- Lela Nargi, *In My Mother's Kitchen*

Her potato bread was sheer mouth-watering nostalgia.

- Oxford English Dictionary, under the entry "Nostalgia"

Apple pie, grilled cheese sandwiches, turkey and stuffing, macaroni and cheese these are all foods which evoke a feeling. Comfort, home, warmth and safety are all bound up in the memory of these foods. As a child I was victim to the final remnants of my mother's macrobiotic diet. Brown rice, carrot pie with whole wheat crust, steamed broccoli with a drizzle of soy, goat milk yogurt; these were staples of my childhood diet. Yet it is the potatoes saturated with the flavor of garlic, olive oil and roasted leg of lamb, my grandparent's buttery meat dumplings and secretive trips to McDonald's with my grand father that I remember most fondly. I am not alone in this remembering, specifically of food and the kitchen. Much mainstream food writing is steeped with these tender

feelings. Superstar journalists such as Ruth Reichl have taken up their memories of food. Reichl has written a series of immensely popular food memoirs. With titles such as *Tender at the Bone* and *Comfort Me with Apples* these books are sweetly sorrowful in their intertwining descriptions of food and life. For instance her first book, *Tender at the Bone: Growing Up at the Table*, begins with the following description:

This is a true story.

Imagine a New York City apartment at six in the morning. It is a modest apartment in Greenwich Village. Coffee is bubbling in an electric percolator. On the table is a basket of rye bread, an entire coffee cake, a few cheeses, a platter of cold cuts. My mother has been making breakfast—a major meal in our house, one where we sit down to fresh orange juice every morning, clink our glasses as if they held wine, and toast each other with “Cheerio. Have a nice day.” (1)

Reichl begins with the statement “This is a true story.” It is in fact a story, a story one must “imagine” not only for the obvious reasons, but because a sit-down family breakfast is a rare occurrence for most families today. Modern life is quick and has no patience for orange juice in wine glasses and cheerful morning greetings. This type of family tradition is for the most part unrealistic, a fantasy of the past.

Another instance of this nostalgic food writing is seen in the compilation of recipes, poetry and short stories entitled *In My Mother's Kitchen*. Every story in this book imbues home and the kitchen with a sense of love and safety. Whether melancholy or amusing, all the mishaps and accomplishments taking place in the

kitchen are told fondly with a quaint and wistful remembrance. Difficulties were overcome cheerfully and there is no sense of despondency, except perhaps for what once was. Snippets such as “Food has consistently remained a focus of my family; it not only provides comfort, but togetherness and laughter within our home” (Clegg 129) and “My father liked cheese soufflé, so my mother graciously obliged” (Pepin 11) belies an innate stability in a traditional value system that is currently destabilized. All of these stories, including my own and many others look nostalgically back into the kitchen. Similar to my childhood memories, some of these fond reminiscences make sense. They evoke happy times spent with family in a safe and loving environment. However, memories are ephemeral and apple pie was never part of my mom or my Russian grandparent’s repertoire, so why then the warm fuzzy memory of it? It is these memories, this nostalgic remembering whether real or imagined that frames this chapter. As noted, the security of childhood and home would understandably bring about feelings of longing for the past but nostalgia for past times appears in many places, including the Food Network. So, what is nostalgia? How does it manifest itself in the media? What purpose does it serve? More specifically, what is its relationship with food and why is it evoked so regularly on the Food Network? It is a complex feeling and apparatus which necessitates further discussion and definition.

i. Defining Nostalgia

There is a wealth of theorizing on nostalgia (Pickering and Keightley 2006; Moran 2002; Spiegel 2001; Duruz 1999), however, a decisive and accepted definition does not appear to exist within theoretical work. The Oxford English Dictionary defines nostalgia as an “Acute longing for familiar surroundings, esp. regarded as a medical condition; homesickness,” or a “Sentimental longing *for* or regretful memory of a period of the past, esp. one in an individual's own lifetime; (also) sentimental imagining or evocation of a period of the past” (“Nostalgia”). Much can be gleaned from this simple definition. A phrase such as “longing *for* or regretful memory of the past” clearly suggests that past times were better times. Through this definition, the past is staged as trouble-free and joyful. However, this positive backwards looking stance also speaks of the present and future. It fixes nostalgia in opposition to progress (Pickering and Keightley 920). Nostalgia becomes an enemy of the future. It implies sadness for the loss of what has been culturally and socially destroyed by advancement. Consumed with the past and a perpetual looking backwards, nostalgia represents a loss of faith in the future and in progress (Pickering and Keightley 920).

Compounding this problem is the fact that the past which is being rejoiced is often a fabricated and non-inclusive one. The nostalgia mode has been criticized due to the way it effaces challenging social and political issues through

the type of warm and comforting narratives cited above (Moran 155). It glosses over contemporary problems through its idealistic portrayal of a secure and unperturbed past. In "Childhood and Nostalgia in Contemporary Culture" Joe Moran writes that "For Jameson, nostalgic pathos individualizes and sentimentalizes the complexities of social, political and cultural struggle, and the best cure for it is 'a history lesson'" (Moran 155). This individualization and sentimentality is clearly evidenced in the passages from *In My Mother's Kitchen* where we see narratives of refuge and security. Moran continues to explain that nostalgia acts as a mediator between the opposing beliefs that "'lived experience' is more real than mediated experience" and that "lived experience mediated through narrative can provide a comforting sense of transcendence and closure" (Moran 159). Defined in this way, these nostalgic narratives are, in effect, soothing fairy tales where real life plays a secondary role to pacifying falsities. Certeau puts it aptly when he says "A memory is only a Prince Charming who stays just long enough to awaken the Sleeping Beauties of our wordless stories" (Certeau qtd. in Moran 160). This use of nostalgia therefore becomes increasingly problematic as current problems are smoothed over and delivered through mass-mediated channels such as television.

As television takes over the traditional hearth space in the centre of the home, it also represents the past it is eclipsing. In many senses the media, especially image based, narrative driven and widely accessible media such as

television, has the innate ability to act as a mediator of the past. Through programming choices, television supplies the images that stand in the immediate consciousness of its viewers. This is not only true for current events but also the past. As Lynn Spigel explains it our social memory can be fixed by media (Spigel 365). Spigel writes in relation to 1950's television reruns which depict the past; however this notion can be applied to television in general. Portrayals and allusions to the past on television play a role in the creation of our historical imagination. To a certain extent, television serves to create a part of our histories. Spigel outlines this concept as "popular memory" (363). She states that "popular memory is history for the present" (363). It is a way of conceiving or integrating our historical consciousness within our current, modern lives. It puts history in a context which makes sense today. Spigel suggests that popular memory is a type of story-telling that allows people to be comfortable and make sense of their present lives (362). "Television engages in a kind of historical consciousness that remembers the past in order to believe in the progress of the present" (362). There is no insistence on accuracy or objectivity in these stories which aim "to discover a past that makes the present more tolerable" (362). It is in this way that television makes the past more digestible and current for a present day audience.

This conception of "popular memory" is similar to the way that nostalgia has been described. It is clear that nostalgia's irreversible gaze into the past is representative of a loss of faith in the future; however, it also works as a catalyst

for the acceptance of change. Like the notion of popular memory nostalgia hinders an objective view of the past and eases the acceptance of modernity's rapid pace of change. This might at first seem contradictory, as nostalgia was described as being an enemy of the future, but as Spigel explains when a network recontextualizes the past by framing it in a contemporary setting it "implicitly suggests the 'progress' of contemporary culture" (361). Our understanding and acceptance of the present and future becomes a little bit less difficult through our popular memory of the past. As noted, Spigel cites television reruns as an example of this. She states that a nostalgia network such as Nickelodeon, which airs 1950s reruns in the evening, creates a new "reception context" for programs by "repackaging them through a camp sensibility" (360). Coincidentally, as I recently tuned into a talk radio program the hosts discussed the upcoming TV Land Awards. TV Land is a spinoff of Nick at Nite or Nickelodeon, Spigel's focus of research. As though they were describing the winners of the Nobel Peace Prize, the hosts stated that the Brady Bunch will be reunited on stage to accept the Pop Culture Award. Further crystallizing Spigel's concept of the "recontextualization" of the past is the Future Classic Award. This award is presented to "one new show from the previous calendar year that best exemplifies the qualities of an emerging television classic" ("TV Land Award"). In past years programs such as the *The Sopranos* and *Desperate Housewives* have been presented with this award. This celebration of old television programming

embodies Spigel's conceptualization of television reruns. This becomes especially true as the past and present are conflated in the Future Classic Award. However, this phenomenon is not restricted to television reruns. It can also be seen on the Food Network where the industrialization of food is framed by nostalgic portrayals. This will shortly be examined further.

I have already begun to discuss the use of nostalgia and the way it impacts our relationship with the present but there are more ominous and deeper seeded problems which arise from the usage of nostalgia by the mass media. In "Food as Nostalgia: Eating the Fifties and Sixties," Duruz discusses the manner in which childhood foods are consistently portrayed with wistful longing. She explains that these nostalgic references "risk[...] mythologizing the power relations that frame these narratives" about food (Duruz 240). This insistence on a nostalgic portrayal of food idealizes and reinforces the ideologies innate within these past times.

Nostalgia on the Food Network also functions to erase the politics that surround food. This devaluing or erasure of politics echoes ideas from Rolands Barthes text, *Mythologies*. The connection to myth is established by Duruz in her comparison of nostalgia and myth-making (232). Duruz aligns myth with nostalgia and their similar characteristics become even clearer given Barthes' reading of the myth. In *Mythologies* Barthes writes:

In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves. [...] Myth prefers to work with poor, incomplete images, where the meaning is already relieved of its fat, and ready for a signification, such as caricatures, pastiches, symbols, etc. (143)

In this explication of the myth, Barthes suggests that myth creation is the process of simplification, even over-simplification. Myths reduce complexity to manageable, bite-sized pieces which can be easily understood and moreover cause no tension or conflict. They make sense of things which would otherwise create instability. Furthermore, Barthes discusses the way myths are based on “incomplete images.” Emptied of all meaning, these images heighten the potency of the myth by providing a sense of realism where there is none. Similar to the myth, nostalgic imagery allows our present to be understood and accepted. “It has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal” (142), states Barthes, “Myth is depoliticized speech” (143). In this statement Barthes intimates that myth both eliminates debate while providing a false sense of hope in what lies ahead. By presenting a narrative devoid of politics we are left with the impression of security. I propose that nostalgia works in much the same manner. Nostalgia does away with dialectics. A certain truth and logic is eliminated in the simplistic, emotionally charged and

positively tuned vision of the past. As Barthes puts it, there is acceptance based on “what is immediately visible.” The creation of myth through the use of nostalgia becomes excruciatingly apparent in the Food Network’s portrayals of the food industry.

Another integral element to the concept of nostalgia and myth is childhood. Evidence of this was provided in the introductory paragraphs, where memories of childhoods spent in the kitchen were tenderly recalled. In many ways it is logical to connect childhood with nostalgia. Obviously, the act of looking backwards may lead to thoughts of youth but youth is also connected with innocence. Simplicity and purity are central to the nostalgic form and they are also innate to our infancy. “In order to be aware of the importance of childhood nostalgia as a form of ‘false consciousness’ to dominant ideologies, we also need to recognize it as a sentiment that resonates with our own deepest longings for identity, security and belonging” (Moran 171). It is these “deepest longings” that the Food Network exploits by repeatedly invoking nostalgia for childhood.

These “deepest longings” also resurface in Roderick Peter’s definition of nostalgia. Taking a psychological approach Peters discusses nostalgia as homesickness, the literal loss of home and all that it symbolizes. He equates the characteristics of nostalgia to the “lost paradise” of mythology where the “other” is there as creator, provider, container. There is perfect harmony, no discrepancy

between need, or expectation, and provision or response" (Peters 137). Peters states that nostalgia is the desire for the 'other' to continue fulfilling this role. Who originally fills this archetypal othering role? As Peters explains it, the first "creator/created," "container/contained" and "provider/provided," experience is between the mother and infant (137). Peters goes on to implement this theorizing in relation to psychological disorders nonetheless his definition is useful. It suggests nostalgia is innately tied to the home and bound up with symbols and memories of mother and child. Peters writes that "Indeed, the word 'home', so instantly and universally understood and meaningful, is at the same time incomprehensible, full of mystery and paradox" (136). The Food Network programming supplies a simplistic definition for the "mystery and paradox" of home.

ii. Butchering: Program Analysis

Having watched and examined the Food Network religiously since its inception, I am struck by my own impression that the entire network is permeated by nostalgia. This backward looking stance may be attributed to the focus on family and the home. We return however to the question, what is it about food that conjures feelings of longing? Why does potato bread embody nostalgia in the *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of nostalgia? As in, "Her potato bread was sheer mouth-watering nostalgia."

Although characteristics of nostalgia could be drawn from many, if not all, of the programs on the Food Network the most relevant and exemplary shows are chosen for examination. These shows include *Semi-Homemade*, *Paula's Home Cooking*, *Unwrapped* and *Guy's Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives*. These shows are all characterized by the nostalgic mode. Categorizing these programs will allow for a systematic examination of them. This can easily be accomplished by returning to the themes defined by Cheri Ketchum in the introductory chapter. To briefly reiterate, Ketchum defined four cooking show genres. They include the Traditional domestic instructional genre, Personality-driven domestic, Food travel and Avant-garde programs. In addition to these genres, a fifth genre was defined to take into account the crop of new programs whose purported goal is to educate. This additional category was labeled the "educational food industry" genre. The five shows to be investigated fall within these existing categories. *Sandra Lee's Semi-Home Made* and *Paula's Home Cooking* are both traditional domestic instructional shows. It is important to clarify that most traditional domestic instructional programs have evolved since the first cooking shows in the 1960s. The 30 minute format has always forced televised cooking into the use of shortcuts and off-air food prep. Watching a chef chopping carrots, onions and celery does not make for gripping television so host chefs work with a mise-en-place, pre-chopped foods placed in bowls and ready to be used in cooking. This is much like it would be in a restaurant. However, most home cooks do not have

a team of sous-chefs prepping the contents of their chicken soup. A home cook can only acquire a row of precut vegetables by buying them cut or taking the time to chop vegetables themselves. The integral word here is time and in the course of shifting programming the Food Network has taken into account the time constraints of their viewers in making programming choices. Where an old Food Network program such as Ming Tsai's *East Meets West* incorporated a wealth of "exotic" ingredients and numerous stages of preparation, *Rachael Ray's 30 Minute Meals*, as the title suggests, does not. Often using ready made and precut items, Rachael Ray preps and cooks everything in the allotted 30 minute time span. Shows like Ray's, *Giada DeLaurentis's Everyday Italian* and *Semi-Homemade with Sandra Lee* and many other current traditional domestic cooking shows take cooking time into account. Recipes are chosen based on the accessibility of products and the length of time required for food preparation. The use of mise-en-place in traditional domestic cooking shows still exists, but in order to cater to perceived time constraints of viewers it has been greatly reduced and replaced with more "efficient" recipes and cooking techniques. It is in this way that domestic instructional cooking shows still retain the same general characteristics but their content is changing.

Placing the remaining shows into categories becomes a little more difficult as some overlap between the characteristics of these shows occurs. Part of this overlap lies in the fact that Food travel programs are often focused on the food

industry. For instance, *Road Tasted* takes place in a different city every week. As discussed, the hosts, Bobby and Jaime Deen, travel to different areas of the United States seeking out local specialties. Finding these local “favorites” necessarily involves visiting restaurants, bakeries and food production facilities of various sizes. In essence the focus of this show is the products made and sold at these food businesses. So, although the show is based on travel, it is also rooted in a portrayal of the food industry. This crossover in genre between travel and industry occurs throughout various programs. For instance, the bulk of *Rachael Ray’s Tasty Travels* is made up of restaurant and bar suggestions throughout different North American and European cities. It must be said that the connection between travel and industry is obvious to a certain extent. For most people, cooking while on the road is impossible. Restaurants therefore become a necessary and enjoyable part of travel. What is undeniable though is the importance placed on consumption of foods outside of the home. Despite these grey areas in genre and for the sake of clarity, it will be useful to place the shows into the existing categories. *Guy’s Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives* will be considered Travel style programs while *Unwrapped* falls into the Educational food industry genre.

a) Traditional Domestic Instructional Genre

Given its title and rootedness in domesticity it is not surprising that the Traditional domestic instructional genre evokes the home. The genre is

dominated by women hosts who for the most part are not trained chefs. This is important to note because it perpetuates the notion that women are not “real” chefs, but home cooks. It has often been thought, similar to many professions, that true chefs are men. These traditional domestic hosts carry on that lineage and imbue the genre with an idealized version of motherhood and the kitchen. Similar to the childhood cooking reminiscences discussed at the beginning of the chapter this genre places mom squarely in the kitchen. However, in these programs, mom has lost the authenticity she had in the stories above. Rather than providing wholesome, nutritious and fulfilling meals these shows deal with time, convenience and falsely attempt to satisfy that craving for something that perhaps once was. In this regard, the worst offender is the program *Semi-Homemade with Sandra Lee*.

Semi-Homemade's introduction begins with Sandra Lee explaining the concept of the show. Moving between images of Sandra Lee sitting at a desk in a kitchen and perusing the aisles of the grocery store, her voiceover states, “I call it semi-homemade. Seventy percent store bought, ready made plus thirty percent fresh ingredients and creative touches. The result: one hundred percent flavorful, fabulous and fast” (*Semi-Homemade*). This in a nutshell is what *Semi-Homemade* is all about. The show teaches people how to cook using a majority of store bought items while incorporating a few fresh ingredients in order to give the appearance of dishes being homemade. To a certain extent it seems this program does not

require analysis. It is so obviously a promoter of packaged foods. The show not only normalizes the use of packaged products, but also glorifies these items and suggests “faking it” is the way to feed your family and entertain your friends. Although the program does not blatantly advertise specific products, the corresponding recipes found on www.foodnetwork.com do. For instance, for “Casino Night” Sandra Lee prepared three types of pizzas including this “Meaty Stuffed Pizza” (see Fig. 1). As any viewer is apt to do, I went online to view the recipe and the following ingredients were listed:

Figure 1. Meaty Stuffed Pizza



Source:

<http://www.foodnetwork.com/food/recipes/recipe/0,1977,FOOD_9936_35735,00.html>

For the Dough:

2 (6.5-ounce) packages pizza crust mix (recommended: Betty Crocker)

2 teaspoons Italian seasoning
(recommended: McCormick's)

1 cup hot water

For the Filling:

1 tablespoon oil

1/2 pound lean ground beef

1/2 pound hot Italian sausage, casings removed

1 (2.5-ounce) jar sliced mushrooms, drained (recommended: Green Giant)

1 (2.25-ounce) can sliced black olives, drained (recommended: Early California)

2 1/2 cups marinara sauce, divided (recommended: Prego)

2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese (recommended: Kraft)

The blatant promotion of select brands discredits this show as a true promoter of home cooking. Although the act of cooking might take place in the home the end result is far from home cooked. One might call the show a half hour advertisement for the packaged products incorporated into the recipes.

Furthermore, this glorification of food packaging and its convenience evokes the delight and exuberance seen in packaged food advertising during the second half of the twentieth century.

In *Welcome to the Dreamhouse*, Spigel describes the way modern high-tech corporations are implementing the 1950s vision of the “home of tomorrow” (383) in an attempt to promote their products. She states that “much of the current corporate wisdom on technological progress is steeped in a sense of nostalgia, not for yesterday per se but, more specifically, for yesterday’s future” (Spigel 382). Spigel goes on to cite examples of the 1930s and post-war World War II “homes of tomorrow.” Interestingly, many of the examples she provides revolve around a “progressive” kitchen. Fully equipped with the newest and most

efficient “mechanical servants,” these kitchens were marketed mainly to women with the intent of reducing chores in the home. Displays and demonstrations of these “magical kitchens” connected their convenience and efficiency with the time saving and emancipating qualities of packaged foods (Belasco 192). For instance during the 1939 World Fair samples of General Foods’ “quick frozen foods” and Kate Smith’s Bake a Cake kits were on sale for the thousands of fair visitors (Belasco 192). This reliance on technologies and the embrace of “progress” only heightened after the war with the migration of the middle class to the growing suburbs. Nineteen fifties foods relied heavily on packaged products. Being a good homemaker meant devising creative and palatable menus based on “modern” and convenient products . Although diversity was scarce in the suburbs diversity on the table was a safe way of introducing excitement and creativity into the home (Gitelson 73). Joshua Gitelson writes that “In the absence of gourmet sensibilities or professional training, suburban women used the materials that were most familiar to them: inexpensive ingredients, basic fruits and vegetables, canned and frozen foods. To the suburban housewife, an adequately supplied cupboard became a treasure chest of possibility” (Gitelson 73). It was this interest in creative outlets and the general 1950s focus on modernization that food companies began to take advantage of. They tapped into this market by promoting the versatility of their products. Companies such as Kraft and Campbell’s began printing recipes and suggestions

on boxes and labels. The suburbanite could now participate in exotic dishes such as the “Punjabi Appetizer Dip” or “Baked Chive Cheese Omelet” which incorporated Kraft’s Philadelphia cream cheese and Miracle Whip respectively (Gitelson 74). The marked similarity between these types of recipes and those prepared by Sandra Lee on *Semi-Homemade* are eerie. Furthermore, the show’s usage of these 1950’s sales techniques is unmistakable and effectively implies a format built on the nostalgic use of these marketing devices.

Another element of the program that harkens back to the 1950s food aesthetic is the incorporation of “exotic” flavors. Gitelson explains that concocting unusual and exotic meals was in some ways a reaction to the homogeneity and conservatism of suburbia (75). Although trips to foreign countries were often not financially feasible escapism could come in the form of ethnic recipes. Gitelson aptly writes that “the best way to go to India – and the only feasible one – was to prepare with domestic ingredients a home-cooked meal which *Good Housekeeping* called Indian” (75). Foreign foods safely injected everyday life with an element of excitement and novelty. In many ways, *Semi-Homemade* has also integrated this characteristic of 1950’s cuisine. For instance, in a recent episode Sandra Lee prepared a Caribbean style menu. One of the highlights of the meal was a recipe called “Island Bread Pudding” (see Fig. 2). The ingredients were listed as follows:

Figure 2. Island Bread Pudding



Source:

<http://www.foodnetwork.com/food/recipes/recipe/0,1977,FOOD_9936_36580,00.html>

Island Bread Pudding

Episode: Caribbean

1 pound Hawaiian Bread, cut into 1-inch cubes (recommended: King's)
1 cup pineapple chunks (recommended: Dole)
1 (7-ounce) bag dried tropical fruit trio (recommended: Sun Maid)
1 (12-ounce) can coconut milk (recommended: Thai Kitchen)
1/4 cup dark rum (recommended: Myers's)
1 cup pineapple-coconut nectar (recommended: Kern's)
1 cup brown sugar (recommended: C and H)
3 large eggs
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons butter, cut into small pieces

This recipe might give one the impression that food choice has not evolved in any significant way since 1954 when, in an ad for their canned pineapple, Dole proclaimed "Be sure its Hawaiian - Be sure it's DOLE!" As evidenced in the recipe above, Dole pineapple chunks should still be the chosen canned fruit for

the discerning homemaker. Other exotic themes portrayed on *Semi-Homemade* have included "Hawaiian Luau," "Chinese" and "Indian." This televised appropriation of the 1950s packaged food recipes is not a "reaction against the cultural homogeneity of Suburbia" as it may have been at the time but rather seems to be a vehicle for the advertising and sales of packaged food products. Also problematic are the ideological messages and implications bound up in this program.

The show undoubtedly harkens back to the 1950s and in promoting a fifties sensibility it promotes the dominant belief systems that guided the times. As it has been defined, nostalgic longing is a memory. It is faith and trust in a faded and uncertain recollection. Susan Stewart describes nostalgia as "the erasure of the gap between nature and culture, and hence a return to the utopia of biology and symbol united within the walled city of the maternal" (23) and it is this sunny, motherly walled city that is orchestrated in the *Semi-Homemade* kitchen. Sandra Lee embodies this maternalism. Her very name evokes the home. One cannot help but think of the name Sara Lee, one of the originators of frozen baked goods in the 1950s, when one hears the name Sandra Lee. Home style baking, warmth and tradition are all wrapped up in the Sara Lee brand and Sandra Lee attempts to convey these qualities as well. Like the show itself the name suggests the nostalgia for home and comfort through baked goods while retaining a processed presence. Furthermore, *Semi-Homemade* is always thematic

and more often than not involves cooking for friends and family. Exotic themes are juxtaposed with themes that take up traditional holidays and family gatherings. "Christmas," "Thanksgiving," "Picnic" and "Family Dinner" are just a sampling of the show titles which highlight this insistence on family values. The show celebrates long standing American customs. Home is portrayed as the centre. The set's lighting continues to heighten this sense of the welcoming home. Golden rays of sunlight appear to cascade through the window and warm the kitchen (see Fig. 3). It is soft, homey and reassuring.

Figure 3. Sandra Lee Preparing a Cocktail



Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vxr4_0_NdbA>

Lee herself is a highly sexualized, mother figure. Perfectly manicured, with blond hair and blue eyes, she is the epitome of the homemaker. Despite Lee's plunging necklines and fondness for cocktail hours, children are also often figured into segments of her shows. A young boy, who appears to be her son, can be seen in the introductory segment of every episode. Foods are often tailored to cater to

children's tastes and themes, such as "Fruity Family Foods," focus on children. Deliberate or unintentional this plays upon the connection between nostalgia and childhood. The connection is twofold, injecting youthfulness into the program with the frequent visits from children but more so through the focus on kid friendly foods. Lee is positioned as a caregiver, a successful hostess and an attractive woman. She is the modern June Cleaver ready to entertain at a moments notice. She embraces the role of homemaker with a smile and sparkle of pearl. Through Lee's persona and the food that she prepares *Semi-Homemade* reifies the American value system.

Figure 4. Introductory Segment of *Semi-Homemade Cooking with Sandra Lee*



Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eARI_yc1Y98>

Another program which falls under the category of the domestic instructional genre is *Paula's Home Cooking*. As previously mentioned her show is highly family-oriented. She often brings her sons and husband on as guests and this has led to the creation of multiple spin-off programs. She has turned her

home cooking concept into a family empire. This empire originated in Paula's kitchen. Although the first several seasons of *Paula's Home Cooking* were shot in upstate New York newer episodes are being filmed in her modified home kitchen in Savannah, Georgia. Filled with her grandmother's antique cooking tools Deen's kitchen is decidedly homey. Shots of her dogs roaming freely around the set and looking wistfully at Deen for scraps appear frequently on the program ("Riverside Party"). However, the central focus of the kitchen and what Deen is often filmed standing in front of is a large open brick oven. It is impossible not to draw a connection between this open fire space and the hearth. Although a large plant often resides in this hearth space it is a symbolic representation of the traditional values Deen's kitchen is meant to reproduce. The set is also filled with antique items. Bronze pots hang from large iron hooks above her range. They appear comfortably worn with use and age. The wood cabinetry is painted off-white but distressed creating an aged and weathered impression. The kitchen evokes the country and presiding over this farmhouse kitchen is Deen, the archetype of motherhood.

Figure 5. Paula Deen on the set of *Paula's Home Cooking*



Source:

<<http://everythingandnothing.typepad.com/photos/uncategorized/deen.jpg>>

With the soft camera focus, her plump, motherly figure, engaging smile and well coiffed graying hair, Deen is the picture of motherhood, or at least grandparenthood. The effect of her appearance and environment is only heightened by her warm, down-to-earth southern twang and her colloquial language. Deen also addresses the audience as though they were present in her home, welcomed in like visiting grandchildren. As she is spooning out coconut cookies she drawls with a chuckle, "I wish you kids were here so you could lick a beater!" ("Great Bake-Off") and then steals a lick herself. Deen is inviting the viewer to return to childhood. She affectionately addresses her audience as

“kids” and almost conjures a happy memory of licking the bowl after mom is done baking. She intends to soothe her audience with her familiarity and warmth. For instance, taking a bite out of a gooey serving of pecan smothered bread pudding she smiles broadly and exclaims “great grannies it’s so good y’all!” (“Great Bake-Off”). Unlike Sandra Lee who aims for perfection in presentation and styling, Paula Deen has a certain inviting looseness about her. She sticks her fingers into fluffy piles of whipped cream and tempts viewers to do the same. Standing in front of her massive brick oven, she characterizes the fun-loving grandma figure.

The food Deen prepares continues to highlight her Southern roots and features traditional American classics. Her audience sees their fair share of butter, mayonnaise and deep fat frying. Deen cannot be accused of glorifying the use of packaged foods in the way that Sandra Lee does. She may not be a proponent of the 70%/30% mentality nonetheless she does not shy away from using a packaged brownie mix to “fix up” a batch of “Fudge Brownie Bites with Cherry Mousse” nor does she mind incorporating a store bought deep dish pie crust for use in “Ron’s Tybee Island Sausage Pie” recipe. This use of pre-made items continues to reflect the time saving ethos of the Food Network. Program themes such as “Engagement Brunch,” “Barbeque Bonanza” and “Brunch with Jimmy Carter” can all take place with the help of some store bought items.

Paula’s Home Cooking could not own its title if Deen’s use of packaged foods was

excessive. However, Deen's program takes a different approach to nostalgia. She is a major Food Network personality who has transformed her program into a family affair. She leaves the vision of the 1950s American dream for a more soulful and simple representation of family values. With its massive, central wood burning oven, the show is steeped in nostalgia for a very traditional representation of home and family. Similar to Lee, Deen's version of "nostalgia wears a distinctly utopian face, a face that turns toward a future-past, a past which has only ideological reality" (Stewart 23). Her ideological reality is securely fastened in old fashioned Southern American values.

b) Educational Food Industry Genre

The traditional domestic themed programs seem a likely residence for nostalgia. Taking place in home kitchens and harkening back to youth, these programs exert the "a backwards, or downwards, or inwards pull" (Peters 2) that is characteristic of nostalgia. However, genres such as Food travel and Educational food industry programs may seem less expected sites for nostalgic remembering. Dealing with the food industry, it would be reasonable to assume that these shows may have a more factual and less reflective feel but for the most part this is not the case. These genres indulge in similar types of reminiscences. They do so by relying on similar techniques used by the marketing and advertising industries. We see a plethora of terms such as "home style," "home made" and "old fashioned" popping up in print and television ads, on packaging

and in product slogans. These terms, with their invocation of home, quietly attempt to inject products with a sense of authenticity and youth. Innately suggesting home is better. Unfortunately, no matter what, the terminology “home style” is not the equivalent of made in mom’s kitchen. These statements are only the first and slightest indication of nostalgia’s usefulness in selling products. Research in the area of marketing and advertising has examined nostalgia’s value as a marketing technique. For instance in “Influencing Consumer Judgments Using Autobiographical Memories” the researchers examined the way that conjuring personal memories skewed the purchaser’s perception of a product. They found “that when ads encourage the retrieval of autobiographical memories there is a higher level of felt affect and reduced processing of product attributes. [...] That is, consumers' judgments may be based more on the feelings and emotions aroused by the retrieved autobiographical episode and less on "cold" analysis of product information” (Sujan, Bettman and Baumgartner 422). Emotions take precedence over the factual characteristics of the product. Furthermore, the agreeable feelings inspired by the ad seem to transfer to perceptions of the ad itself leading to more positive evaluations. The study demonstrated that the more an advertisement led a viewer to tap into personal memories the more they tended to react positively to it (433). The researchers concluded that attention can be diverted away from weak arguments through the introduction of autobiographical prompts which

enhance the viewer's perception of the brand (434). The inclusion of personal memories relocates the focus from potentially unsubstantiated claims giving the ad false credibility. Facts are eliminated and replaced by romanticized and popular memories. It seems as though certain Food Network programs have taken their cue from this technique. One of the worst culprits of this is the show which most obviously portrays the food industry, *Unwrapped*.

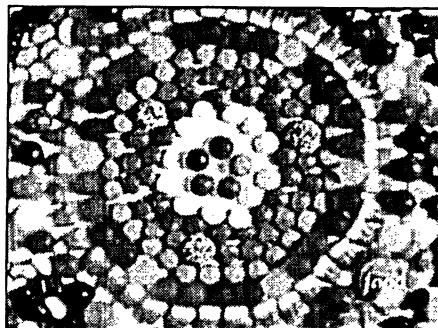
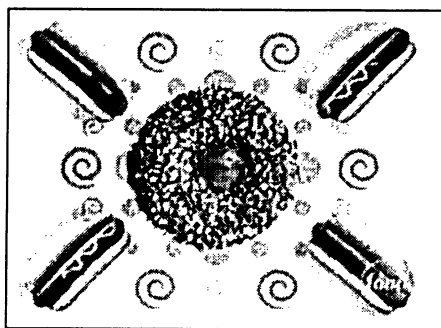
To briefly reiterate, *Unwrapped* is a half hour program made up of several segments which follow a weekly theme. For instance the theme might be "Extreme." This particular episode follows the production process of extremely tart Sour Patch Kids, Hardee's Monster Burger, a visit to a professional pickle eating contest and the Guinness Book of World Records collector of gum wrappers. Over the seasons, the scope of the program has grown to include diverse aspects of food, including collecting and packaging and production ingenuities. Despite a shift in content, the style has remained consistent. Each clip attempts to tell a small story. Facts and numbers might fly around, but there is always an anecdote or personal element to the segment. An example of this is seen in the Sour Patch Kid segment where we learn that the mascot on the package is a cartoon image of the inventor's son ("Extreme Foods"). This puts a human face on the product and downsizes the enormous production process. Prior to this we heard that ten million pounds of sugar goes into creating the "pucker power" of Sour Patch Kids. Images of enormous silos of sugar are

portrayed on the screen but there is no indication of their impact or drawbacks. Fun factoids and terms such as “pucker power” and “bitter bite,” accompanied by personal anecdotes about the products have much the same effect as the nostalgic advertising outlined above. They distract from the reality of the situation by portraying a positive, personalized snippet. The detrimental health impacts of excessive sugar consumption and the enormous societal problems which can be attributed to the overuse of sugar have certainly not been unwrapped. In fact, much the same as nostalgia in general, the show establishes the “blissful clarity” that Barthes elucidates.

Unlike the traditional domestic instructional genre, *Unwrapped's* emphasis is evidently not on the home. Because its topic is generally industry related it cannot make use of ideological loci such as family and the kitchen in the way that *Paula's Home Cooking* and *Semi Homemade* can. In place of these, *Unwrapped* relies on another key element of nostalgia, childhood. As highlighted in the preceding chapter, youthful exuberance permeates the entire program. From the introductory segment where brightly colored candies, hamburgers and doughnuts loop around the screen in concentric circles, to the smiling, munching faces of kids eating treats, to Marc Summers's alliterated quips, the show is quick paced, spirited and kid friendly. The program's use of a child oriented tone coincides with its participation in the “Cable in the Classroom” series. As pure entertainment, a debatable concept in itself, perhaps *Unwrapped* cannot be

decried too stringently. However, used as a learning tool to teach children about the food industry *Unwrapped* becomes more of a dangerous entity. A child's food knowledge should not be derived from a program which seemingly advocates and promotes the consumption of processed high fat and high sugar foods.

Figures 6 & 7. Images from the Introductory Segment of *Unwrapped*



Source: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CNWIPIMQ9xM>>

The children's treats portrayed on the show are not only intended for kids. Most of the foods on *Unwrapped* hearken back to childhood. They are classic sweets and meals that would fall under the broad category of American comfort foods. These foods are imbued with nostalgia and necessarily ask the viewer to look backwards in time and remember their youth. Furthermore, the show's set, a fifties style diner, blatantly frames each segment with a nod towards the happy days of the past. There is nothing wrong with fondly remembering these foods. I cannot deny that Lick-M-Aid or Nerds bring a naughty grin to my face, but it is the way *Unwrapped* wraps food production in these memories that is problematic. This portrayal sways the viewer's impression of the food industry

and glosses over very real issues with our food production and distribution system.

The show also has a focus on collecting and keeping. Many episodes contain segments which relate to the collection of often bizarre food relics. In the “Extreme Foods” episode there were two instances of this. The aforementioned clip traced the world’s longest chewing gum wrapper chain as it was measured by the Guinness Book of World Records. Filmed in the collector’s home, the segment focused on the novelty of the item as well as its history mostly expressed by its creator. Also, featured during the segment were several young children admiring the chain, almost in awe of it. The second segment told the story of a man who spent a year documenting every food that he consumed and then published a book made up of these documents and the stories which accompanied them. This segment introduced the viewer to the author and followed him as he continued to take photos of the foods that he ate. Not as obviously nostalgic in nature, these types of segments trace practices and products that are no longer particularly current or relevant. Despite the difference they are also attached to the act of remembering. The past and memory come into play in both instances.

c) Food Travel Genre

Another program which is driven by nostalgic remembering is *Guy’s Diners, Drive-ins and Dives*. Guy is not your average chef or television personality.

He is the winner of the Food Network competition *The Next Food Network Star*. This is his second production on the Food Network, his original being *Guy's Big Bite*. His stint as the host of this travel program is not necessarily surprising as he previously worked in various positions throughout the food industry ("Guy Fieri"). Each episode of this program has a distinctive theme which takes Guy to different eateries throughout the United States. Although the topics and foods can often veer away from the traditional towards unusual or bizarre styles the underlying rhetoric of the show, which is given away by its title, is focused on family driven, old style restaurants and establishments. In one particular episode Guy travels to Texas to discover some American "Classics" prepared by folks who make "great food their own way." Similar to *Unwrapped* this show focuses on the personal and anecdotal. The first location showcased during the "Classics" episode is Mac and Ernie's Road Side Eatery. The eatery is an open-air kitchen with a parking lot for a dining area. Local specialties range from the "cabrito" burger, a goat meat hamburger, to local quail in ancho chili sauce. What is important to note is the sense of camaraderie and quaintness created around the establishment. Goats are raised on the family's farm and locals and tourists eat communally at picnic tables. There is a sense of community built around the restaurant. This is even more prominently established at the second location Guy visits, Brint's Diner, "a Kansas classic, to whip it, flip it and talk some trash" ("Classics"). This site is a classic diner. Patrons and employees know

each other by first name and there is a distinct sense of community created around the restaurant. In fact, the diner almost stands in for the home, acting as a surrogate space of acceptance and exchange. "Charlie's a fixture around here," says a happy patron about Charlie the proprietor. The food that Charlie produces is also in keeping with the rhetoric of home. "Go to your grandma's kitchen and this is what it is," Guy tells the audience ("Classics"). Everything is hand battered and fried, rather than bought pre-made and ready to be defrosted in the deep fat fryer. There is an unmistakable kinship and group identity created around this site. The evocation and celebration of intimacy at this diner and in other locations visited again suggests nostalgia for a culture which prizes home, community and personal relationships.

iii. **Just a Spoonful of Sugar**

Exposing these small family run establishments in the same way that Bobby and Jamie Deen do in *Road Tasted* is in a sense very commendable because it suggests that food can and should be made fresh. That these quirky and unique locations, with a personal and intimate feel, are still in existence is important to acknowledge. Nonetheless, a great proportion of fast food and restaurant food is not cooked in this fashion. Goat meat is for the most part not family farm raised and served up to happy customers on picnic tables in rural Texas. The post office and general store presented during the segment are

atypical, relics rather than the norm (“Classics”). These exceptional establishments may also retain the feeling of community but they are few and far between. These programs instill the impression of old times, when people used to come together around food and family. By highlighting the sense of community which surrounds these businesses the true image of the food and restaurant industry is further eclipsed.

These programs perform nostalgia in a manner which delivers a false impression of the food industry. With particular emphasis on *Unwrapped*, they personalize and familiarize mass production and, in the instance of Sandra Lee, relocate it in the domestic space. Our soft spots for home, community and childhood are exploited, whether deliberately or not, to naturalize eating outside of the home. The use of packaged products and processed goods are also normalized and even promoted. Saturated in a utopian vision, nostalgia on the Food Network skews our perception of the food industry.

CHAPTER THREE: Tastemakers, Eating With Our Eyes

A dessert without cheese is like a beautiful woman who has lost her eye.

- Brillat-Savarin

i. Introducing Taste

Standing in her Hamptons kitchen, Ina Garten, star of the Food Network's *Barefoot Contessa*, skims the fat off of a simmering duck. Watching carefully, one notices the fleshy, zaftig quality of the duck. It glistens, a succulent fatty gleam. Behind the steam emanating from the shiny stock pot, we see Garten's restaurant quality range, marble countertops and expertly arranged wall hangings. The camera pans back up to the Contessa. She gazes at the duck and then at the audience and smiles invitingly. This is the other side of the Food Network. Not all camp and kid-friendly this face of FoodTV might invite the occasional well behaved and well appointed child but only in moderation for fear they may soil the white linens. Decorum, excess and elegance dominate and although easy entertaining is often embodied in country style dishes, such as Ina's "Peach and

Raspberry Crisp,” in the end hot pink raspberry juice drapes the side of the stark white earthenware baking dish looking unaffectedly striking. Obviously this description of a Food Network program deviates from the programs that have been previously illustrated in this study. In Ina Garten’s Hamptons kitchen, we are faced with a different sort of food preparation and, perhaps more importantly, the portrayal of a lifestyle most people cannot even aspire to attain. Wealth, elegance and presentation are all performed with ease, grace and perhaps a few charming gaffes. In programs like the *Barefoot Contessa*, whose very title evokes effortless luxury, the Food Network establishes its role as a tastemaker.

With its chefs leading the way in cookbook sales, new spin off media initiatives emerging on a regular basis and a tight rein on the televised food market, the Food Network is in a position to direct its viewers’ preferences. However, taste is not a simple phenomenon. Taste is multi-faceted ranging from the sensory experience that occurs as a salty chip hits your tongue to a hierarchical process of acculturation. How do we begin to understand this notion of taste that the Food Network appears to be promoting through its programming?

ii. Taste throughout History

No one can contest the relationship between food and taste; however judgments regarding good food and the right tastes have a long lineage of discussion. The act of recording recipes might be considered the initial stages of this discussion. In *Accounting for Taste*, Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson explains that “Just as the written word fixes speech, so culinary discourse secures the transitory experience of taste” (17). By recording our foodways through text and image we see the transformation of food into a fixed cultural entity (19). Food does not only sustain but is dictated by the same mediators as culture. Simple cooking, the transformation of food for human consumption, shifts into the realm of cuisine and is defined by its own set of codified practices and shared social contexts which distinguishes it from food preparation (18). This necessarily implies a system of classification, where “Hierarchies govern taste” (19).

Ferguson states that “Every social setting prizes certain tastes and disdains others, and food is no exception. [...] These many hierarchies remind us that the foodways of any collectivity concern not just behavior and practices but also the values that sustain those practices” (19). This socialization of taste and with it the introduction of a hierarchy of cuisine was first evident, in the West during the eighteenth century in France and hence, the subtitle of Ferguson’s text, *The Triumph of French Cuisine*. Whether French cuisine is triumphant or not is debatable, but nonetheless France has an immense culinary tradition of both

cooking and food writing. Its influence can be seen in many areas of food, and notably within many cooking shows. It is therefore the next logical step in this discussion of culinary taste.

“Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are!” Perhaps most popularly known as the battle cry of *Iron Chef America*, this statement was first seen in Brillat-Savarin’s seminal text *The Physiology of Taste*. From a discussion of the “effects of gourmandise on sociability,” to our “sensual predestinations,” and a treatise on our six senses (the last and least known being attraction or “physical love”), *The Physiology of Taste* takes up all things gastronomical. Celebrating the high art of eating is at the centre of the text. Despite its often tangential and anecdotal quality, its general aim is to edify readers concerning the proper and therefore successful forms of dining and entertaining. Laying out conditions under which a successful and enjoyable meal might be had. Although it is a charming, witty, often playfully written and beloved text, it also lays the groundwork for division between those who consume the proper foods in the proper manner and those who do not. For instance Brillat-Savarin writes:

The persons predestined to gourmandise are in general of medium stature. Their faces are either round or square, and small, their noses short and their chins rounded. The women are rather pretty than beautiful, and they have a slight tendency to obesity. [...] Those, on the contrary, to whom nature has refused a desire for the gratifications of taste, have a long nose and face. Whatever be their statures, the face seems out of order. Their hair is dark and flat, and they have no embonpoint. They invented pantaloons. (78)

No doubt archaic, amusing and perhaps moderately ironic, given the reference to tight trousers, this physical description of the “correct” gourmand must to a certain extent be taken with some seriousness. The passage suggests that only certain people have the ability to truly enjoy “the gratifications of taste.” The ability to taste correctly is innate rather than learned again suggesting a selective physiological difference. This quality is granted to certain individuals who are generally also blessed with class privilege. In fact, Brillat-Savarin goes on to clarify that particular professions are “predestined to gourmandise.” We learn that “Those persons who make money easily must be gourmands.” The preeminent of these moneymakers being, the financier, followed closely by “men of letters, doctors and devotees” (80). Evidently wealth is equated with fine taste and taste is relegated to a distinguished few. For Brillat-Savarin a fine tuned palate is a privileged attribute that is only bred within a small number of people. He quips, “The careless, hasty eater never discerns the second degree of impressions [smell and sound]; they are the exclusive appanage of a chosen few, who by this means can classify, in exact order of excellence, the various substances submitted for their approval” (28). His nascent conception of what it means to be a fine diner and eater has created a division of tastes. Although this division may have existed long before Brillat-Savarin, he succinctly articulated it and perhaps accelerated the adoption of this differentiation of tastes and, consequently, classes of eaters. His treatise on taste has acted as a reference point

and building block for works which came after it. *The Physiology of Taste* continues to be central to the culinary canon confirming that good taste is still very much secured to a tradition of hierarchical difference.

Furthermore, Brillat-Savarin attempts to justify his aphorisms by treating the pleasures of the table as a science. This is elucidated in the book's title but also in its continued reference to the body and the senses. By grounding his anecdotal musings in a quasi-scientific framework Brillat-Savarin picks up on the notion that that which is based in science is an unequivocal truth. Similarly, and more currently, Mark Meister has dissected the way the Food Network programming "identifies with the discourse of science, whereby the good life is accessible by following good life methodological procedures, incorporating good life technology, and pursuing good life status and social distinction" (173). This description of the Food Network sounds as though it might be a comment on *The Physiology of Taste*. In fact, Meister pays particular attention to a program which previously aired on the Food Network, *Taste*.

Taste is one of the original programs presented on the Food Network. Hosted by David Rosengarten, a preeminent food writer, *Taste* took up a different theme ingredient every episode. Themes ranged from spinach to polenta. The show provided some historical context and would then focus on the implementation of the proper tools and ingredients in order to correctly prepare and serve the theme ingredient. At the end of each segment and to truly refine

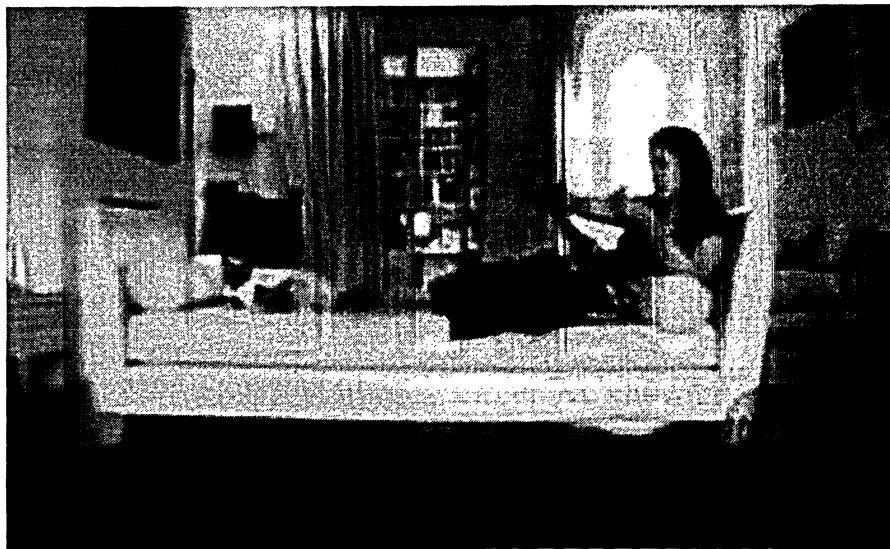
the meal, Rosengarten would pair his completed dish with an ideal wine. Shot in a stark white, almost institutional set, Rosengarten sat court over his army of kitchen tools and culinary techniques, what seemed to be the secret ingredients to the creation of superbly tasteful and fine cuisine (*Taste*). Although *Taste* does not air any longer, it has been the focus of a useful consideration of the Food Network's portrayal of the Burkean "good life" (Meister 170). Mark Meister describes Burke's "good life" as a "maximum of physicality" (Burke qtd. in Meister 170) whereby materialism, often technologically oriented, is the hallmark of living well. He goes on to state that this "good life science" is enacted in *Taste* which "clearly promotes a leisure-filled good life in which excessivism and social distinction is promoted through elitist knowledge and access to technology" (173). It is through technology that the "essence" of food is uncovered and only upon the manipulation of the natural foodstuff is food given "taste" (173). Furthermore, artful plating and pleasing aesthetics continue to reproduce an image of the "good life" (174). Meister also claims that on the Food Network "food often comes to represent the stylistic and the hierarchical, rather than the natural and equitable" (176). Meister's analysis, however, does not utilize any current programs. At the time of Meister's writing the Food Network's focus was still on programs which took up more restaurant style dishes. Ming Tsai's *East Meets West*, Michael Lomonaco's *Michael's Place* and Wolfgang Puck all embodied highly aesthetic, complex and artfully plated cooking. The network has since

moved towards a home style rather than restaurant style cuisine, but nonetheless Meister's analysis touches upon many attributes which continue to exist in the new Food Network programs. Rather than overtly styled and sculptural food the programs convey the good life through cooking tools, surroundings and general lifestyle, as well as through food choice. There was one particular program which revolutionized the production and style of cooking shows, moving it into this new direction, and that was *Nigella Bites*.

Television, they say in the industry, is aspirational and Nigella Lawson gives viewers much to aspire to. Born in Britain, her father was a Conservative cabinet minister during the Thatcher era and her mother was a socialite. "Nigella began with considerable advantages," states a BBC report ("Nigella Lawson"). This cursory statement concerning Lawson's upbringing does not tell us much, but it does indicate that she for, all intents and purposes, has had a privileged upbringing and lifestyle. It is this lifestyle that is evoked in her shows. Although Nigella Lawson's numerous series have not encountered great success on the Food Network in the United States, in fact many have not aired at all, the impact of her show can be seen through the changing aesthetic of the Food Network's programming. Her programs have a flare and flourish about them that stand in stark contrast to the original Food Network programs, such as *Taste*, which place the host squarely and statically in front of a stove. The camera shots in all of Lawson's programs are almost indulgent. The languid, intensity of the close-ups

on the food items and the dynamism of the movement of the camera suggest the lushness and vitality of Lawson's life. The camera always appears to be in motion, following a vibrant Lawson around her posh kitchen (*Nigella Bites*). Sequences of her cooking are cut with images of her enjoying the food she has prepared while lounging on a chaise. We see her sweeping towards the pantry, hair flowing behind her, or catch her tucking her children in after a laborious day at the beach. Programs such as *Everyday Italian*, *The Barefoot Contessa* and *Easy Entertaining* take their cue from this style of program. Like these programs, Lawson's shows still fall into the domestic instructional genre. However, they are not strictly about the recipes being provided.

Figure 8. Lawson munching on Elvis's Peanut Butter and Banana Sandwich



Source: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBhdlytELvU>>

For instance, her more recent program, *Forever Summer*, takes place at her summer home where guests flit in and out, enjoy cocktails by the sea, and candlelit soirees. Although Lawson insists in interviews, snippets from her cookbooks and descriptions of her cooking programs that her cooking ethos “is about easy cooking and easy eating, laid-back recipes” and “Food for real life, cooking for real life and eating for real life” (“Forever Summer”) there is a consistent and underlying elitism that runs through her programs. This is portrayed quite succinctly in an episode of *Nigella Bites* entitled “Trashy.” Lawson introduces the program’s theme by saying: “In my heart there is a place, and a very fond one, for a bit of kitsch in the kitchen. I’m not interested in pleasing food snobs or any just one sort of food, I’m after indulgence and sometimes only calorie-infused trash will do” (“Trashy”). Here, in one fell swoop, Lawson claims that she does not cater to “food snobs” but then promptly places herself in this category by referring to the “trashy” foods she “indulges” in. This introductory proclamation is followed by a sequence of Lawson and her children frolicking at a fair ground, riding the carousel and then splashing about at the beach. From this scene, we return to Lawson’s kitchen where she says, “You want trashy, boy can I give you trashy. I mean where would you go to but the King. I mean no one did it better than him and this is his masterpiece, Elvis Presley’s fried peanut butter and banana sandwich, which is a complete joy and offers some explanation as to why he got to the size he did” (“Trashy”). This type

of rhetoric belies an underlying division between “fine” foods and foods that are not respectable and are relegated to the category of guilty, “trashy” pleasures. As Lawson explains that the peanut butter and banana sandwich should be sliced on the diagonal, it is difficult not to notice her ceremonious and polished British accent. There is an audible condescension in the tone of the segment. The positioning of this “trashy” Elvis favorite alongside a family trip to the fair, two American classics, almost insinuates a modicum of British imperialism. This reference to the “trashiness” of Elvis’s favorite meal resonates with Pierre Bourdieu’s seminal discussion of class and taste.

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu presents us with a vast study of the workings of class in French society. Although his focus is on the French people he proposes that his analysis of taste is portable and can be applied to other cultures. It is difficult to summarize Bourdieu’s dense and extensive analysis, but in broad strokes, he suggests that taste necessarily reproduces social hierarchies. Cultural products, which embody taste, exhibit and reaffirm the “distinction” between classes. Taste is also associated with habitus, it is inextricably tied to everyday life and practical existence rather than “discursive knowledge” (Holt 3). This notion of habitus is central to Bourdieu’s argument because the association of taste with quotidian life acts to undermine it as a pillar of the hegemonic system. Taste, through cultural consumption, works to “fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences” (Bourdieu 7). Furthermore, Bourdieu states that:

Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed. (6)

Not only does taste impose a system of hierarchical classification but it expresses and reinforces an individual's social status and positioning. It gives away their inclusion and ranking within the system of classification. Nigella Lawson's narration of the peanut butter and "ba-naw-nah" sandwich very plainly "classifies the classifier." Her rare indulgence in this "trashy" American favorite marks her position above it and those who may not classify it in the same manner she does. Although in ease of preparation Lawson's food appears to be carefree and simple, her attitude ultimately embraces refinement and a hierarchy of taste. Her programs enact Bourdieu's philosophy of taste, reifying taste as a conduit for class reaffirmation. Moreover, as a stylistic reference for many succeeding cooking shows, Lawson's "taste" and style has necessarily infiltrated the Food Network.

iii. "It's a Good Thing": Program Analysis

Taste on the Food Network plays itself out differently based on the various types of programming. Domestic instructional programs such as *The Barefoot Contessa*, Giada DiLaurentis's *Everyday Italian*, *Easy Entertaining with Michael Chiarrello* and Tyler's *Ultimate* follow in Nigella Lawson's footsteps. The

emphasis is on simple and stylish entertaining. Like Lawson, they navigate between easy, time saving cooking and a luxurious, well-appointed lifestyle. Every show employs high end cookware, utensils, dishware and ranges. Hosts also tend to insist on “best quality” ingredients. There are many instances of this and *The Barefoot Contessa* is an excellent example.

It is in fact no surprise that *Nigella Bites* and *The Barefoot Contessa* have a similar aesthetic because both programs are produced by the same production company. Like Lawson’s home based program, Ina Garten’s show takes place in her home in Easthampton, Long Island. The Hampton’s have long been known as a resort town and weekend getaway for wealthy New Yorkers. Polo, picnics of farm stand produce and leisurely days at the beach all describe the luxurious and laid back charm of the Hamptons and this is the ethos delivered in *The Barefoot Contessa*. Every episode is driven by a luncheon or dinner party to take place in Garten’s home at the end of the program. Guests arrive, the candles are glowing warmly and Garten’s finished product is served up to gracious appreciation. In preparation for the evening the audience follows Garten as she spends the day popping into local cheese shops or grocers, gathering ingredients and preparing the meal. Ina Garten seems to welcome us into her Hamptons life and in this life everything appears effortlessly lovely. The flowers are pleasantly coordinated, vibrant in contrasting whites and greens or pretty in a myriad of pinks but always simple yet elegant. As faces glow, shirts are crisp and the silverware

sparkles in the candlelight we are privy to this privileged lifestyle. Throughout the program Garten does not only instruct viewers on the preparation of her Beef Bourignonn but she also suggests how one might achieve this apparent effortless beauty she has. This instruction on good taste can also be seen in the plethora of media publications Garten writes and is interviewed for. She has, afterall, worked with the almost perfect and prolific homemaker Martha Stewart. Although Garten does not have the same disciplinarian persona as Stewart, she has much of the same cache as an authority on fine living. For instance, asked what type of china she uses in an article for *Food and Wine*, Garten answers: "I love faience pottery from France, especially the green- and cream-colored plates by the late Provençal potter Jean Faucon, and anything else in the same style. You can get similar plates at Le Fanion in Manhattan [...]. I like solid colors. Patterns don't make food look as good" (Druckman). Faience pottery, perfect as it may be for plating foods, is not on the agenda for most people, nor is a trip to Greenwich Village's Le Fanion. These authoritative suggestions highlight the inconsistency of the program's message. Food and presentation should be simple and although simple may be rustic, it is also expensive. Cost is of no concern and simple style, as portrayed on the *Barefoot Contessa* appears to be a costly venture.

This quote also brings to light another interesting element of Garten's cooking and entertaining philosophy, her love of France. Perhaps coincidental, it is ironic that Garten is inspired by French food. With its long history of

gastronomic complexity French cuisine is hardly simple. Understandably, the freshness and quality of market produce, so central to French cooking, should be lauded and Garten cites this as her introduction to French food. Nonetheless, with its legacy of richness and ornate presentation it is an oddly incongruous source of inspiration for easy cooking. As the French presence infiltrates through her classic American recipes in the way of Beef Bourguignon and Plum Cake Tatin, it almost serves as a metaphor for the underlying message of Garten's show. Although on the surface the food seems carefree and easy the lifestyle is well manicured and meticulously thought out. As Garten moves around her massive kitchen, drives past a row of Easthampton mansions in her Mercedes Benz and preaches about the benefits of placing a choice selection of luxurious grooming products in the guest bathrooms we begin to understand how the scene looks so easy, breezy and gorgeous. Although unspoken, good taste is equated with wealth.

It would be incorrect to say that all the domestic style programs on the Food Network exhibit the qualities seen in the *Barefoot Contessa*, however, a number of them do. For instance the Food Network website describes Michael Chiarrello's program *Easy Entertaining* in the following way: "Each episode of *Easy Entertaining*, shot on location in Napa, California's gorgeous wine country at the Trefethen Winery, features Michael planning, cooking and throwing a creative get together. His recipes--a mix of his Italian heritage and wine country

lifestyle--are perfect for easy and effortless entertaining" ("Easy Entertaining"). Again, perhaps creating such a get together is "effortless" when one is located in the upscale Napa Valley. Language such as "easy," "effortless," and "simple" is generally attached to "perfect," "best" and "gorgeous." This depiction of lifestyle is encountered again and again throughout the domestic instructional programming and further exhibited in the food travel programs.

Food travel programs are particularly obvious in their display and celebration of the "good life." Throughout the history of the Food Network there have been an increasing number of these types of programs. In the earlier years, travel programs focused on adventure-type eating. For instance, famed chef and food writer Anthony Bourdain traveled to exotic destinations in search of local dishes and food oddities on *A Cook's Tour*. Similarly, Ming Tsai's program, *Ming's Quest*, took the host chef to remote and often rural destinations throughout the United States. Today, the majority of food travel programs aired on the Food Network portray a lifestyle of leisure and luxury. *Giada DiLaurentis's Weekend Getaways*, *Rachael Ray's Tasty Travels*, and *Behind the Bash* all take their hosts to different destinations where they proceed to dine their way through the day at, for the most part, upscale restaurants and events. Even *40\$ a day with Rachael Ray's*, which purports to teach viewers how to eat on a budget while traveling, focuses on attaining as luxurious an eating vacation as possible. One might venture to say that spending forty dollars per person per day is a generous

budget to begin with and breakfast for just under ten dollars is not a particular bargain.

Giada DiLaurentiis, a fairly recent addition to the Food Network, is accompanying if not succeeding Rachael Ray as televised travel guide and it soon becomes apparent that Giada travels first class. Unlike *\$40-a-day*, DiLaurentiis's shows make no attempt at counting pennies. *Weekend Getaways* and *Giada in Paradise* have recently become increasingly extravagant as Giada travels to destinations such as Capri, famed hideaway of multi-millionaires and celebrities, and Santorini in Greece. Her other program, *Behind the Bash*, is slightly different in style. During each episode of *Behind the Bash* DiLaurentiis visits a different party location and traces the party preparation until the witching hour when she must run and put on her party dress in order to attend the "bash." Needless to say these parties are not your average backyard BBQ. DiLaurentiis has attended parties such as the American Cancer Society's annual DreamBall held at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City and Elle Décor's Dining by Design, both exclusive, upscale fundraising events. During a recently aired episode of *Behind the Bash* DiLaurentiis visited a "coming out party New England style" ("Cape Cod"). This was the celebration of the nine million dollar renovation and reopening of Chatham Bars Inn in Cape Cod. To properly commemorate the reopening, the Inn is throwing a clambake. Of course, this includes a luscious lobster dinner by the sea for each of the two hundred guests.

"Everything's being caught right off the shores, it's the freshest experience ever," says the head chef to DiLaurentiis. The camera pans across the "upscale shops" of Cape Cod and lands on the "tempting candy manor." We are informed that this shop has been family owned and operated since the mid-1850s only making small batches of confectionary's using the freshest cream and butter. Here, we watch DiLaurentiis as she runs her finger through "silky" rich looking chocolate for the lobster shaped chocolates which will end up in the "chocolate clambake" gifts for each of the guests. Through the party preparation to the serving of the lobster, basil, enoki mushroom and granny smith apple spring rolls, it again becomes abundantly clear that the "wow factor," present in each episode of this program has a lot to do with luxury and extravagance. Going *Behind the Bash* is not just about learning how caterers manage a large party but rather delights in outlining what it means to have good taste. Throughout this program freshness and quality are equated with wealth and sophistication and it will soon become evident that these types of programs only reinforce class inequalities relating to food consumption.

iv. The Pyramid – Food and Social Standing

As Bourdieu elucidates, taste acts to distinguish and further separate class distinctions. In these instances of "good taste" presented on the Food Network, we see the differentiation of the palate played out. Even though many

of these programs verbally reject the ostentatious elitism of restaurant style cooking, their elitism is innately implied through the lifestyle and surroundings portrayed. In these programs, food becomes the vehicle for the fetishization of lifestyle. The very wealthy have the opportunity to opt out or buy out of participation in the consumption of “low class” or as Lawson calls it “trashy” foods. These foods, for the most part, are not wholesome and homemade but, rely on processed ingredients. Unfortunately, this will become evident through food consumption statistics. There is a definite economics of food knowledge and these programs reinforce the status quo equating wealth and the bourgeois with tasteful, wholesome and authentically homemade.

We are made to believe that taste is individual. I have a taste for pralines and cream ice cream and you may not. However, throughout this discussion taste or preference appears to be highly influenced and dictated to us through a long gastronomical lineage. Taste is also made on a more global scale than the Food Network overtly suggests and it is prefigured by countless external factors. The prefiguring of taste does not only occur through the influence of media, but more literally, our tastes and choices are dictated by the foods made available to us. Industry, due to social and more often economic factors, necessarily influences our tastes.

A very clear and concrete case of taste evolution as dictated by food availability and corporate power is presented in the article “The all-American

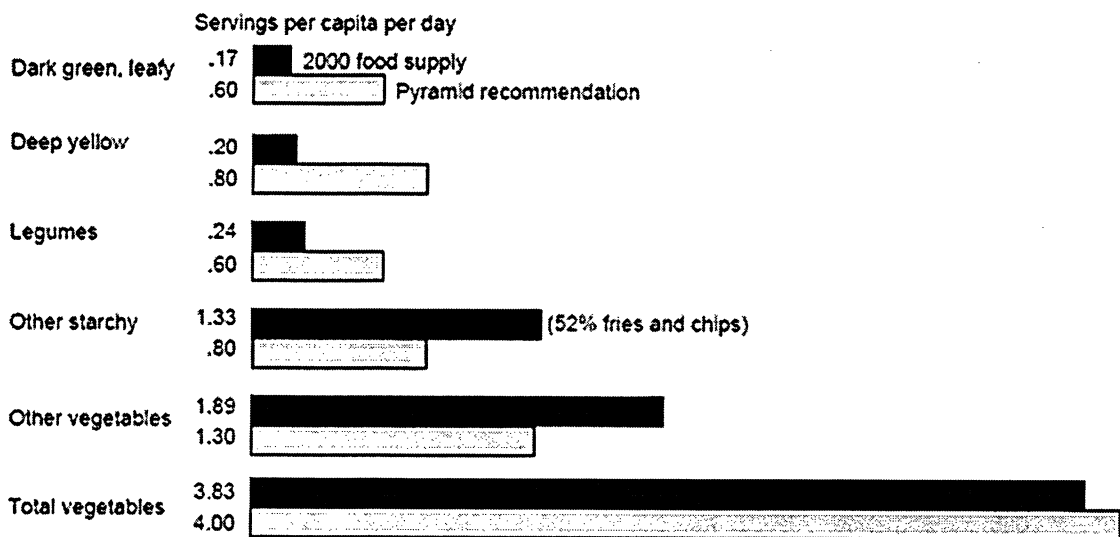
beer: A case of inferior standard (taste) prevailing?" In this study David Choi and Martin Stack outline the shift in the American public's preference in beer from a range of high quality and individualized styles to a standardized light beer. They explain that this change in taste was not necessarily chosen but induced by many factors both political and economic (80). For example, they suggest that one of the first major causes of this change was the onset of prohibition. During this time soft drinks were adopted as the alternative to alcoholic beverages and they became immensely popular. After prohibition lifted, breweries began producing beers which they believed would cater to the consumer's newly acquired taste for sweeter, less bitter beverages brought about by the acceptance of soft drinks (82). Here, we see the first sign of standardization of taste. This process of standardization was further accelerated by technological advances such as refrigeration and new packaging techniques which allowed for the mass distribution of beers (82). In conjunction with this came the emergence of national brands. Branding shifted the focus from product attributes to perceived lifestyle and expression of self and became one of, if not the, critical component of product marketing and customer retention. Loyalty became dependant on brand rather than taste and the concentration on advertising and marketing of the leading brands further eliminated competition from local and specialty breweries (83). These factors moved standardization and uniformity of product to the forefront supplanting product individuality.

Breweries have been accused by food historians of deliberately choosing “formulas sufficiently bland to win a mass following among relatively inexperienced consumers and (through repeat purchase) consumers acculturated to bland beers” (83). The proliferation of these few breweries and their homogenized products has acclimated the public’s taste to characterless and mass produced beer. A case study such as this one highlights the relatively short time in which a whole nation’s taste has moved from the preference of a variety of heady, bitter and denser beers to a standard lighter, sweeter and blander product (81). This instance almost parallels the direction of food consumption in general where we see the over-consumption of plain, starchy carbohydrates and sugars. With our knowledge about the relationship between health and diet it is perturbing to see poor dietary statistics even more so when we consider that those who suffer most from poor diet are from low-income families.

This shifting diet is evidenced through changing consumption patterns. In conjunction with more away from home meals there has been an increase in the consumption of fatty, salty and sugary foods (Putnum, Allhouse and Kantor Scott 2). This is in keeping with the types of foods overflowing convenience store shelves and fast food restaurant kitchens. It is simple to just visit the facts to see the results of these food supply changes. The USDA reports that total dietary fat consumption has risen 6 percent between 1999 and 2000, the highest level it has ever reached (Putnum, Allhouse and Kantor Scott 3). This has also led per capita

calorie consumption to an all time high of 3,900 calories per person per day staggeringly above the average recommended intake of 2,200 calories (3). Furthermore the reports indicate that the calories being consumed are originating from less wholesome sources.

Figure 9. Average Consumption of Dark Leafy and Deep-Yellow Vegetables and Legumes



Source: USDA's Economic Research Service

These poor figures also extend to the consumption of fruits and vegetables. Fresh fruits and vegetables should not be considered a luxury but if one was to look at the statistics that appears to be the reality. Although food guide pyramid suggestions are not being met across the board, higher income families spend decidedly more on fresh fruits and vegetables. The USDA reports that twenty four percent of low-income families, a segment which represents

twenty percent of the American population, buy no fresh fruits and vegetables while only thirteen percent of higher income families spend zero dollars (Blisard, Stewart and Jolliffe 15). As income rises these discrepancies remain. For instance, seventy three percent of lower income homes spend three dollars or less on fresh fruits and vegetables versus the sixty two percent of higher income homes (15). Although higher income families continue to purchase greater amounts of processed fruits and vegetables, it is interesting to note that the gap in expenditure is not as great. This may indicate that lower income families are acquiring their daily requirements of fruit and vegetables from processed goods which, for the purposes of this study, include items such as frozen orange juice, canned and bottled juices and frozen and fresh vegetable juices. Although these products do contain some of the nutrient value of fresh produce, unless they are labeled unsweetened, they are often chockfull of added sugar and salt. The consumption of processed fruits and vegetables by lower income households may not have everything to do with cost. Education plays a critical role in the consumption of healthier foods (Blisard, Stewart and Jolliffe 21). So much so that college educated homes spent approximately twenty seven percent more per capita on fruits and vegetables. Of course, there is a strong relationship between income and higher education but generally as education rises so do fruit and vegetable consumption. As income rises across the board lower income families do not necessarily spend more on fresh or processed produce. Rather, they may

spend the money on household goods or foods that are perceived to be more desirable. These facts led the researchers to state “that perhaps more nutrition education, coupled with food stamps, might induce the low-income households to purchase and consume more fruits and vegetable” (23). Although the outcomes and immediate effects of health initiatives are unclear all indications suggest that education is positively correlated with greater consumption of healthful foods. Education is necessarily part of the Food Network’s modicum of doing “all things food” but does its brand of education positively impact these highly perturbing food related societal problems?

It would be wrong not to suggest that programs such as the *Barefoot Contessa* teach viewers how to cook fairly simple and, for the most part, wholesome meals (with the exception of Garten’s penchant for butter). However, given the statistical data it is clear that these types of programs only reiterate the break between those who are financially capable and subsequently consume a more healthful diet versus lower income homes that cannot easily access healthful foods or nutritional knowledge. These programs, as television is wont to do, only reaffirm the status quo, equating wholesome, home cooked eating with wealth. This is particularly true as programs focus not simply on “higher income” families but privileged, upper class homes. “Best quality” and fresh are words which for many people are not easily accomplished. This continues to be true in the instance of food travel programs. The restaurants portrayed often

focus on plentiful, fresh and expensive ingredients and luxury is generally the standard. As though describing *Behind the Bash*, Meister writes that food's raison d'être on the Food Network "is to satisfy the excessive and sophisticated tastes of the human pallet. Leisure is at the heart of living a good life" (Meister 179). Furthermore, the portrayal of these sophisticated tastes does not invite inclusion. The sharing of food knowledge occurs but it very much appears to be relegated to those who have access to this good life. The content of these programs, whether intentional or not, reinforces disparities.

It must be noted that programs such as *Semi-Homemade with Sandra Lee* also focus on taste and presentation. During the final segment of each program Lee describes how the meal can be made more inviting through a unique "tablescape." Her tablescapes are the equivalent of *The Barefoot Contessa's* table settings. The difference lies in Sandra Lee's focus on frugality and the repurposing of existing household items. This emphasis can be seen in the following "Elegant Tabletop" suggestion found on the Sandra-Lee website:

A Sentimental Air. I like to play up the nostalgia and sentimentality of a special occasion or holiday by using old-fashioned lace. You can use inexpensive fabric remnants or even lace curtain panels. Simply drape the lace gracefully across the center of the table, tucking or knotting the ends out of sight. ("Elegant Tabletop")

Fundamentally, there is nothing wrong with the desire to beautify and make one's home and environment more appealing and comfortable. This applies

across the board, yet it is interesting to note that Sandra Lee's program, which is focused on the use of packaged products, takes into account cost. In this passage she states that readers can use "inexpensive fabric remnants" or repurpose curtain panels. This is very different from *The Barefoot Contessa's* French faience. Perhaps it is only by chance that the one program which puts no stock in fresh ingredients also highlights frugality around the table both in food spending and in decor. More likely, this program portrays the flip side of the coin, where a lower-income diet is equated with a lack of fresh produce and the consumption of processed goods. It also upholds and reiterates divisions in diet based on income.

It would be unjust not to mention that there are programs, aside from *Semi-Homemade*, that do focus on budget. For instance, *Good Deal with Dave Lieberman*, teaches viewers how to entertain and create healthful and fresh meals on a budget. These types of shows are few and far between and for the most part evening time slots are filled with programs which follow Giada as she bicycles through vineyards and snacks on hors d'oeuvres at elegant soirees. It seems relevant to return to Ferguson's comment regarding hierarchies and taste. She states that "Hierarchies govern taste [and that] every social setting prizes certain tastes and disdains others, and food is no exception. [...] These many hierarchies remind is that the foodways of any collectivity concern not just behavior and practices but also the values that sustain those practices" (19). On the Food

Network we see the enactment of these hierarchies played out through the manipulation of food and lifestyle. The foodways depicted on the Food Network unfortunately sustain, or at least perform, our collective behavior, practices and beliefs. The very definition of taste implies choice, but we must remember that choice also implies excellence and superiority. These descriptors are necessarily implicated on the Food Network where taste and class are perfectly placed to quietly demonstrate our imbalanced social hierarchies.

CONCLUSION

Calvin Copeland is throwing his last Gospel brunch. Fernanda Santos recently reported on this farewell bash and the end of the Copeland's era for the *New York Times*. Mr. Copeland has been the proprietor of Copeland's restaurant in Harlem for nearly five decades, over the years becoming a destination for black families seeking traditional soul food. But Harlem is undergoing a new renaissance, one that does not include Copeland's "démodé" stylings. The gentrification of the area has forced rents to spike and with it, long time, local tenants such as Mr. Copeland to evacuate. In the telling of this story, the article takes on a distinct sense of nostalgia. A cozy old time feeling ensconces Copeland's, as though it is a hidden retreat or a worn treasure soon to be replaced by something decidedly upscale and modern. This nostalgia, unlike the Food Network which is more celebratory in nature, mourns a passing.

The story of Copeland's is not an unfamiliar one. Watching the Food Network, however, viewers are led to believe that family run business and home are still the primary sites of food production. As the simple instance above indicates, this is not necessarily the case. This incongruity with reality appears to be one of the greatest problems that has surfaced from the programming examined. The goal of this study was to question the manner in which the Food Network portrayed the food industry and consumption of packaged and processed goods. I believe it has become abundantly clear that through nostalgia and images of home viewers are presented with an unrealistic and positively skewed version of our food industries. Some may argue that the role of a television station such as the Food Network is not to edify but to entertain and as such we cannot expect the Food Network's programming to be of any substantial value. There may be some truth to this argument. However, we cannot overlook the fact that the Food Network is the primary food related television network. Dismissing it as pure entertainment does not take into account its unquestionable role in the public's acquisition of food knowledge. The disappearance of unique family run establishments such as Copeland's, and the global insurgence of large-scale, industrialized food conglomerates, not portrayed on the Food Network, leads to a standardization and homogeneity of food consumption. This concept is reminiscent of the stamp of uniformity central to the work of the Frankfurt school.

The members of the Frankfurt school believed that “the culture industry perpetually cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises [...] The promise which is actually all the spectacle consists of, is illusory: all it actually confirms is that the real point will never be reached, the diner must be satisfied with the menu” (Adorno and Horkheimer 97). They asserted that the “culture industry” acted as a stamp creating identical and easily digestible products. Pauline Adema touches upon this notion. She states that in our culture, which is saturated by voices promoting the denial of pleasure, the Food Network acts as a source of “vicarious consumption.” Images of thinness and advertising for fad diets continue to be wide spread and The Food Network acts as a deferred source of sustenance (Adema 2000). Everyone can consume Emeril Lagasse’s mantra “pork fat rules” or watch him create recipes such as “Grampa Ray’s Bacon Buns” without the threat of weight gain. Although Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer use the menu/diner as a metaphor it almost becomes a reality not only for Adema but in this work as well. Home and family, bound up through representations of food, are consumed as symbolic products. As our culture moves away from the perceived stability of the nuclear home the cultural products made available on the Food Network act as the menu. Furthermore the reality of our food supply is distanced through the consumption of these cultural products which present a falsified version of what truly exists. This cursory discussion of the Frankfurt School brings forward a slightly different point of

view and can be used to further take up the cultural and social implications of the Food Network programming. Although certain conclusions regarding the messages of these programs can be drawn, there is much more to be unearthed using this lens.

The notion of the stamp of cultural uniformity is also useful in looking at the way the Food Network has had greater global impacts. The Food Network has significantly changed the general food programming landscape (Adema 2000). This has ramifications outside of North American borders. As programs are delivered outside of the U.S. and Canada, the same concerns regarding health as well as larger issues of cultural erosion come into play. Similar to the way transnational food and beverage corporations can change the landscape of international communities (Miller 1998; Watson 2000) it is necessary to question the international impact of the Food Network. Its influence on programming is exported in the same way as McDonald's French fries. It is therefore essential that critical research in this area be conducted in order to ascertain the relationship between the Food Network, cooking programs and global food consumption and preparation trends.

Closer to home, there is much more to be discovered regarding the Food Network and its portrayal of eating in relation to health, industry and packaged products. This is a particularly pressing issue as obesity and child-onset diabetes, as well as many other diet related health problems which continue to be growing

concerns. Consumption of sugar and fat is rising (Putnam, et al. 2002) and although there is an increasing amount of variety of fruits and vegetables available, consumers gravitate towards a limited number of starchy choices. "Iceberg lettuce, frozen potatoes (mainly french fries), and potato chips constituted a third of total daily vegetable servings in 2000" (Putnam, et al. 12) Fats are often hidden in processed foods and consumers are not aware of the amount of added fats incorporated into products consumed outside of the home. It is much the same situation with added sugars. Processed and packaged food manufacturers are not required to differentiate between the types of sugars incorporated into the products and therefore consumers are not made aware of amounts of refined sugars they are consuming (Putnam, et al. 8). They certainly are not learning about these issues on the Food Network. Looking back for a moment to the USDA study cited in Chapter three (Putnam, et al. 2002), we learned that education level is a marker of fruit and vegetable consumption, an indicator of healthful eating. However, education on the Food Network often comes with a sugar coating itself. Health is for the most part co-opted by comfort. We find the suggestion of satiation of emotional needs through consumption of images of home.

Longing for home, or perhaps more neutrally stated an emphasis on home is encountered in many of the programs discussed throughout this work. Food has always been central to domesticity and therefore acts as an ideal conduit to

reestablish ideologies of home. Furthermore, the notion of the hearth can be evoked once again here. While watching Paula Deen, with her down home Southern hospitality, fixed in front of her massive wood burning oven, sons by her side, it appears we are witness to the reestablishment of a very far removed or distanced hearth space. These types of programs allow us to consume the domestic space, in the way that it once was, with mom attached to the kitchen. This impression of domesticity running through the programs has been discussed in relation to the way industry is downplayed and effectively made trivial. More so than simply acting as a blanket to obscure the image of industry we see the commodification of lifestyle, specifically a traditional lifestyle which is centered on family and home.

As the Food Network audience continues to expand into a greater number of homes, further research is necessary in order to examine how the network's programming impacts its viewers' relationships to food buying, preparation and consumption.

Apperitif

When I tell people that I am researching the Food Network I usually encounter an interested and bemused expression. Often, I meet another fan and bemusement is replaced with glee. However, once I explain the nature of my research the general response is, "But I love the Food Network!" I can honestly

concur and admit that I love the Food Network too. I have spent countless hours ensconced as charismatic chefs produce exceptional meals. I am inspired to cook, I know what the term macerate means and I can properly chop an onion, thanks to FoodTV. Of course, there were always certain programs I liked, many of those I have critiqued here, and some that I did not. It was only when I noted a clear shift in the programming towards shows that were not really about cooking that I became perturbed. More often than not people go on to inquire how this research will make a difference. Will the programming change? Will we suddenly stop seeing Paula Deen scoop a mound of custard into a baking dish layered with social tea biscuits? Likely not, nor should we necessarily. I then describe to them some of the notions brought forth in this study. They listen, most often with interest and a discussion ensues. To me, that has been the goal of this exercise. Bringing to light the fact that the Food Network is not simple entertainment, as many would have us believe, or educational material, as the Cable in the Classroom program suggests. These cultural constructs regarding food carry with them messages and meanings which speak to our society as a whole.

We often eat without thinking. Not really savoring our food or experiencing textures and flavors as time pressures and thoughts fill our consciousness. This is also the way that we consume television. The Food Network revels in this unconsciousness, comforting us with romanticized

notions of home and our food production system both in and outside of the domestic space. As the Food Network feeds us a nostalgic mash of misinformation regarding our foodways we must continue to consider its essence and impacts.

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