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Rick Fantasia, *French Gastronomy and the Magic of Americanism*. Philadelphia and Rome: Temple University Press, 2019. xviii + 221. Tables, figures, images, notes, and index. \$104.50 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1439912294; \$39.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-1439912300.

Review by Benjamin Poole, Texas Tech University.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, two shocking events signaled an apparent “crisis” in French cuisine. In 1999, a sheep farmer named José Bové led a crowd in ransacking a new McDonald’s in southwestern France to protest American imperialism, specifically a punitive American tariff on Roquefort cheese, the local specialty. Then in 2002, the suicide of one of the most successful and decorated chefs in France, Bernard Loiseau, followed rumors that he might lose his third Michelin star. More broadly, while Spanish, British, and American chefs were seizing the spotlight in international haute cuisine, France was becoming McDonald’s second most profitable market after the United States. Taken together, these looked like symptoms of the overall decline of French cuisine, as if it were a singular organism. Indeed, this crisis seemed to strike at the heart (or at least the stomach) of the French nation itself.

Scholars have typically explained the confrontation between French gastronomy and American industrial food as a story of Americanization or globalization in which the protagonists seem to be global capitalism or national cultures themselves. In *French Gastronomy and the Magic of Americanism*, Rick Fantasia reminds us that these narratives and constructs are constituted by real people and institutions, rather than the other way around. Fantasia restores agency to social actors to define their own categories, interests, and hierarchies by employing Pierre Bourdieu’s “field” concept. A field is “a distinctive and relatively insulated domain of human activity, with its own history, its own rules and institutions...All participants have a stake in either maintaining or exposing its contradictions” (p. 7). Fantasia argues that the “French gastronomic field,” long governed by the artisanal practices of haute cuisine, suffered a “tectonic shift” when it was infiltrated in the late twentieth century by entrepreneurs and corporations imposing “American” industrial and commercial practices (p. 9). While this book remains a story of Americanization, it eschews faceless processes and broad generalizations, instead emphasizing the human links between material practices and cultural constructions. It explores how chefs, critics, and consumers influenced, interpreted, and navigated changing gastronomic practices and principles within an increasingly globalized and industrialized society.

The first two chapters chart the inner workings of the gastronomic field and how it maintained autonomy from the dominant economic and political fields. The notion of the “French gastronomic field” was developed by Priscilla Ferguson, whose work focused on the nineteenth-

century rise of the restaurant, gastronomic literature, and a codified cuisine.[1] Fantasia continues this story through the twentieth-century with the blossoming of a complex system of professional associations, awards, trade journals, and numerous popular magazines and books. Using a massive corpus of biographical profiles of over 1400 notable culinary professionals during the 1990s, combined with analysis of popular and professional magazines, Fantasia is able to map trends, interactions, and hierarchies within the field. From Michelin stars to prestigious apprenticeships, haute-cuisine ideals including craftsmanship, artistry, and taste were continuously reinforced against the baser concerns of commerce and industry. For instance, winning the quadrennial *Meilleur Ouvrier de France* (MOF) cooking competition “accords no explicit material rights, only the right of the medal winner to wear the French tricolor on their collar, a symbol that bestows considerable prestige among the members of the culinary trades, as well as beyond” (p. 66). In the words of Jacques Chirac, “the *meilleurs ouvriers de France*, who defend the high ideal of French quality, true to their roots in the traditions of yesteryear, but resolutely turned toward the future, are an essential element of the spirit of conquest that must be ours” (p. 67). True, this “recognition is able to be successfully exchanged for jobs, salary, financing, and so on, but the process and the cult of the MOF seems carefully sheltered from any reference to the pecuniary” (p. 67). Paradoxically, uncompromising devotion to haute-cuisine artistry could be converted to national prestige or economic gains. French gastronomy was therefore not so much detached from modern mass society as perched atop it, aloof but, ultimately, supported by it.

Chapters three and four detail the “incursion of industrial processes and commercial marketing techniques that entered the French gastronomic field in the 1970s, largely impelled by the corporate investments of American firms and their French cousins” (p. 9). After World War II, French reconstruction and modernization efforts created an opening for the corporate and industrial “American model” to transform the parochial fields of French agriculture and gastronomy. Three thousand French businessmen made a pilgrimage to Dayton, Ohio to learn the “magical” marketing and retail strategies of Colombian-American cash-register salesman Bernardo Trujillo, the “oracle of distribution” (p. 133). Many returned to France to launch global food-industry corporations like Carrefour (hypermarkets) and Accor (hotels and restaurants). The 1950s and 1960s saw the introduction of factory farms, supermarkets, and the “commercial strip,” developing the corporate infrastructure and consumer market necessary to launch the assault on the heart of the gastronomic field, the restaurant.

According to Fantasia, the tip of the spear in the industrialization of the restaurant in France was the arrival of McDonald’s and its “fast-food formula” in 1972 (p. 96). However, Fantasia is more concerned with how a market for fast food could develop within the heavily fortified French gastronomic field in the first place. One of Fantasia’s most important insights is that French fast-food customers *wanted* their fast food to be “American.”[2] For these disproportionately young, urban, and middle-class consumers, fast food could be (and was marketed as) an exotic treat, an act of transgression, or an escape from stodgy cafés and bistros. Although McDonald’s provided the “formula” and inspiration, legal disputes with its French franchisee, Raymond Dayan, severely slowed its expansion until the mid 1980s. Meanwhile, European entrepreneurs and corporations flooded France with fast food chains with American-style menus, décor, and names, like Quick and FreeTime. Another of this chapter’s most fascinating revelations is how the American fast-food model was actually transmitted to these European copy-cats. Some French businessmen had witnessed the fast-food phenomenon while visiting the United States. But it was in the pages of trade magazines, especially *Néorestauration*, where the methods, equipment,

and profit potential of this model were explicated, beginning even before McDonald's arrival. Fast food introduced new products, high-tech equipment, counter-service methods, marketing techniques, computerized management, and labor practices. Through a process of "oligopolization" many early fast-food chains disappeared, merged, or were absorbed by food-industry conglomerates (p. 102). McDonald's eventually did come to dominate the French market by the 1990s by investing heavily in prominent real estate and advertising.

The engrossing final chapter examines the "breach of the firewall" between haute cuisine and industrial food beginning in 1970s (p. 173). In 1976, Michel Guérard was the first haute-cuisine chef to "go slumming with an industrial corporation," helping Nestlé improve its frozen foods (p. 174). Despite initial scoffing, more and more famous chefs eventually formed partnerships with food-industry corporations like Sodexo, lending their expertise (read: their celebrity, or "signature" in Bourdieu's terminology) to packaged foods, cookware, and casual restaurants. Chefs such as Alain Ducasse increasingly operated more like business moguls than artisans. Bernard Loiseau's company even went public on the Paris stock exchange in 1998. By 2002, Loiseau operated several restaurants, a hotel, and a boutique, had published eight cookbooks, and had lent his name and "consulting" services to numerous products and corporations. While some critics worried these cash-grab distractions kept chefs from their kitchens, fueling the crisis of French cuisine, others noted how such activities subsidized their unsustainable high-end restaurants. Other sectors of the gastronomic field also saw the lucrative melding of artisanal tradition and industrial efficiency. Old-fashioned restaurants and bakeries surreptitiously utilized factory-made dishes and dough. Wine and cheese makers concealed industrial methods behind an image of tradition and terroir reinforced by official labels guaranteeing their authenticity. As Fantasia points out, such developments represent both capitulation to the mass market and strategies for rural development and survival for local communities in a modern global economy.

This book is most illuminating in its dissection of social practices and beliefs, marrying textual analysis with statistical data. Fantasia goes beyond simply exposing the inconsistencies and ironies within French gastronomy; he demystifies them by applying social theory. In addition to Bourdieu's concepts of "field" and "signature," Fantasia makes innovative use Marcel Mauss's insight that "magic is fundamentally a social phenomenon and so the powers of the magician are not primarily vested in the magician's skills or sleight of hand but in the beliefs of his audience and, indeed, in the entire field of social action" (p. 134). It was this "magic" that could make a corporation like McDonald's seem cool to French teenagers or the "loss-leader" seem like retail alchemy. As Fantasia explains, "Symbolic power, or the 'magic' of Americanism...can be seen as a reflection of both the real position of American-based corporations in certain (even many) international markets, including food processing, and the symbolic 'aura' that they have held in certain business circles in France and internationally" (p. 209). It was this belief in the "magic of Americanism" that made it possible for French entrepreneurs, companies, and consumers to be the ones executing the Americanization of French gastronomy.

Fantasia's "relational analysis" of the competing interests and beliefs within and between the sectors of the French gastronomic field during the period in question is keenly incisive. However, if we extend that critical eye for contradiction and paradox to the broader historical and geographical framework, it complicates the picture of American industrial food invading French gastronomy beginning in the 1970s. This study's primary research mainly covers the 1980s through the early 2000s. For the earlier periods, it relies on secondary sources, which, until recently, have mostly ignored industrial food in France. Consequently, Fantasia tends to discount

the impact of industrialization on French gastronomy prior to McDonald's arrival in 1972. For instance, apart from a passing mention, there is no discussion of Jacques Borel, the notorious "Napoléon du prêt-à-manger."<sup>[3]</sup> His some twenty locations of the hamburger chain Wimpy both outnumbered Dayan's McDonald's franchises and debuted a decade earlier. By 1973, Borel's industrial-food empire of rest-stops, cafeterias, and restaurants were serving more than 300,000 meals a day, with the gastronomic magazine *Gault-Millau* declaring Borel "public enemy no. 1."<sup>[4]</sup>

Looking back further, Fantasia illustrates the emerging dichotomy between haute cuisine and industrial food during the Belle Epoque by contrasting Auguste Escoffier, the archetype of culinary excellence, with Auguste Corthay, author of an industrial-food-production manual. However, Fantasia later notes that Escoffier's influential "brigade system" for kitchen labor was "a product of the managerial cult of industrial efficiency prevalent in the late nineteenth century that had sought to break down craft-based knowledge and systems of production," namely, Taylorism (p. 71). And while Escoffier was nicknamed "the king of chefs and the chef of kings," Corthay really had been a chef to the Italian royal family. This suggests that "the interpenetration of the artisanal and the industrial" has a longer history and might not necessarily put "the symbolic aura of haute cuisine...in danger of being perforated and potentially destroyed by too obvious an embrace or association with economic practices, preoccupations, and interests" (p. 196). After all, Escoffier's famous business partnership with César Ritz launched both a hotel empire and an unparalleled culinary legacy.

Perhaps the interpenetration of the industrial and artisanal sectors has always been the hidden flipside that sustains and necessitates their ostensible opposition. Fantasia describes how Roquefort cheese, prized as local and traditional food of Southern France, has survived (and sustained an entire rural community) by quietly adopting industrial and corporate methods. Indeed, Roquefort is made by Lactalis, the world's largest dairy conglomerate. What Fantasia does not mention is that Roquefort has been highly industrialized, capitalized, monopolized, and exported since the nineteenth-century.<sup>[5]</sup> If this is "the appropriation of existing traditions by industrial corporations" (p. 207), the inverse could also be said: Roquefort is a pioneering example of a local tradition (and community) exploiting industrialization and globalization for its own survival.

These examples of French innovation beg the question: how "American" is the industrial model? This is not to question the dominance of American corporations but to ask whether nationality is necessarily the best way to characterize the phenomenon. For Fantasia, the transcendent "magic of Americanism" still depends on most of the corporations, methods, products, and ideas that drive the industrialization of food being actually American. Yet, surprisingly few Americans or American companies appear throughout the book, apart from McDonald's, whose actual presence in France was small until the mid 1980s. Everywhere—even McDonald's—we see French businessmen and restaurateurs adapting and developing industrial methods for the French food system. Of course, many of these same French industrialists perceived an "American model" pitted against "French" traditionalism. Whatever McDonald's setbacks in France, the success of its "formula" in the United States alone certainly had a huge influence on fast food in France. But this seems to me less a story of an American invasion than of an ongoing transnational exchange. The fact that both "American" fast food and "French" haute cuisine have flourished in both countries attests to their transnational character behind the national stereotypes. Still, Fantasia is right to warn against trivializing fast food's popularity in France as

mere “alimentary cosmopolitanism” (p. 208). McDonald’s worldwide dominance reminds us that neoliberal globalization does concentrate power and wealth in the United States. But French-based corporations like Carrefour, Sodexo, Lactalis, and Accor have also been global leaders and innovators in the food industry. It is multinational corporations that drive globalization more than any particular country.

Ultimately, Fantasia succeeds in achieving his primary objectives. His detailed analysis of the social practices, relations, and organization within and between different sectors of the French gastronomic field is an enormous contribution to our understanding of French cuisine, Americanization, and applications of Bourdieusian social theory.

## NOTES

[1] Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, “A Cultural Field in the Making: Gastronomy in Nineteenth Century France,” *American Journal of Sociology* 104, no. 3 (November 1998): 597–641. This exploration was later expanded into a book: Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, *Accounting for Taste: The Triumph of French Cuisine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

[2] Fantasia originally made this point in an important 1995 article that forms the basis for much of chapter three. Rick Fantasia, “Fast Food in France,” *Theory and Society* 24 (1995): 201–243.

[3] William Reymond. *Toxic Food: Enquête sur les secrets de la nouvelle malbouffe* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009), 25.

[4] Gault-Millau [Henri Gault and Christian Millau], “Jacques Borel: L’ennemi Public No 1,” *Le Nouveau Guide Gault-Millau* 50 (June 1973): 58–61, 94.

[5] Sylvie Vabre, *Le Sacré du Roquefort: L’émergence d’une industrie agroalimentaire: Fin XVIIIe siècle-1925* (Rennes and Tours: Presses universitaires de Rennes and Presses universitaires François-Rabelais de Tours, 2015).

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