about the people who write cookbooks and the people who buy them, but it cannot tell us about real-world practice.

Flandrin’s graphs leave much to be desired. For example, in a discussion of the separation of sweet and savory dishes that took place after the Middle Ages, he displays a graph showing a rise in the percentage of dishes containing sugar, using an unidentified selection of cookbooks, both manuscript and printed, from France, England, and Italy, from the fourteenth century to a peak in the sixteenth and then a decline in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (fig. 5, p.81). There were few culinary texts in the period Flandrin’s analysis.

The Culture of Food: The Dialectic of Material Conditions, Art, and Leisure
Edited by Matti Itkonen, Gary Backhaus, V.A. Heikkinen, Chris Nagel, and Sam Inkinen
Jyväskylä, Finland: University of Jyväskylä, and Helsinki: Haaga University of Applied Sciences, 2006
(available from kirjamyynti@kampusdata.fi)
312 pp. Illustrations. 50€ (paper)

“Either there is a meaningful relation at the core of our experiences of food and eating, which can be investigated and described on the basis of the culture(s) of food, or else there is nothing here to understand other than the production of food and the science of nutrition and sensation” (p.33). This dialectic, posed in the introduction to The Culture of Food, sets the tone of the book’s internal investigations: a medley of engaging, scholastically critical essays juxtaposed by a couple of entries that, unfortunately, feel like self-indulgent, free-association musings. The reader’s brain must engage in mental gymnastics as she moves from reading a rococo, descriptive essay about a three-course meal that, at times, reads like an etiquette manual, to the subsequent chapter in which the author quotes Shakespeare, Marx, and Mao Zedong. Despite this inconsistency, the anthology deserves consideration.

The Culture of Food is a rumination about the phenomenology of food; that is, about the science and study of food. Its authors do not consider food as sustenance, but perceptions and experiences of food as part of diverse totalized experiences, from restaurants to popular culture, in the mouth and in the mind. Sound a bit heady? For those of us with only rudimentary training in philosophy, philosophical texts can quickly become intellectual quagmires. Such is rarely the case in this anthology, the majority of which consists of thought-provoking philosophical meditations and critical interpretations on food-centered experiences.

“Food as Process: A Genetic Phenomenology,” for example, takes an intellectual step back to ask fundamental questions about somatic experience, including, importantly, “What is food?” To answer that question Gary Backhaus, a philosopher affiliated with Loyola College in Maryland, presents an excellent discussion on “meaning-constitution and the ontology of food.” Jonathan Wender, a Washington State–based social philosopher and criminologist, expounds on ontological contingencies that comprise what he terms “the poetics of eating” (interestingly, his forthcoming book is titled Policing as Poetry).

Among the chapters are several explorations of food in popular culture forms, including a Finnish women’s

—Barbara Ketcham Wheaton, author, Savoring the Past

NOTES
magazine (Kinnunen), the “cosmopolitan project” of the contemporary food media landscape (Chi), Finnish film (Valkola), and Estonian tourism (M. Itkonen). Among the more unusual topics explored is what Adhi Nugraha considers the “imbalance” between tableware and food in some “ethnic” restaurants. Among her examples is the besek, an Indonesian meal box traditionally woven from banana leaves. A contemporary besek is manufactured from plastic, and although it is more economical and in some ways more practical, it is an unsuitable vessel for the totality of the besek experience.

It is difficult to tell if the collection’s textual shortcomings lie with individual authors and/or the translators and/or the editors, or if the different styles of rhetoric reflect the disciplinary and continental divides among the Finnish, Canadian, American, and Indonesian authors who describe themselves as (among other titles) chef, criminologist, philosopher, scholar, and writer. The quality of writing is inconsistent and, at times, problematic, so that even when a noteworthy argument is registered—such as the unidirectional synesthesia of food writing—it is sometimes obfuscated. Repeated lapses in grammar or syntax, mostly confined to the translated chapters, confound an author’s intentions and break the reader’s concentration. For example, should “clear defined” be read as “clearly defined” or “clear, defined”? Or does the author really mean “clear defined”?

The potential for translation-related problems is one of the attractions of works such as this one. The fact that someone else’s words require translation for me to begin to understand them foregrounds the phenomenology of the experience of thinking. During one of the several pauses needed while laboring through the first of two forewords, I mused that commencing the book while en route to Istanbul was existential exercises that meant while laboring through the first of two forewords, an introduction, eleven essays, and an epilogue, the “cosmopolitan project” of the contemporary food media landscape (Chi), Finnish film (Valkola), and Estonian tourism (M. Itkonen). Among the more unusual topics explored is what Adhi Nugraha considers the “imbalance” between tableware and food in some “ethnic” restaurants. Among her examples is the besek, an Indonesian meal box traditionally woven from banana leaves. A contemporary besek is manufactured from plastic, and although it is more economical and in some ways more practical, it is an unsuitable vessel for the totality of the besek experience.

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