

THE MYTH OF QUÉBEC'S TRADITIONAL CUISINE

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Abstract

Ever since Brillat-Savarin famously claimed that “we are what we eat,” thinkers and critics have tried, in this generation more than ever, to articulate what, precisely, can be observed about identities through culinary practices. Nowhere is the relationship between identity and foodways as explicit as in a nation’s traditional cuisine. In this thesis, I examine how Québec’s community has identified certain eating and cooking practices as being signifiers of its national identity, and how one should read this ‘gastronomic language.’ Adopting a semiological approach, based on Roland Barthes work *Mythologies*, I investigate how food’s expressive potential becomes a way to convey nationalist sentiment, and propose a preliminary canon of Québec-specific dishes and ingredients. Looking at contemporary interpretations of the gastronomical canon of Québec traditional recipes, I research the restaurant *Au Pied de Cochon* and observed how it recuperates the narrative of Québec’s cuisine to communicate the province’s current ‘bourgeois-bohemian’ ideologies, and therefore create what Barthes refers to as a *myth*. Food practices rarely escape this constant usurpation, and in order to expose the fallacy of myth, one must transform it into a *mythology*. The chain of restaurants *O Québec* in France acts as an example of a mythology, where Québec cuisine is used as a theme for the franchise’s menu, décor, and ambiance. Amplifying Québec-specific elements in a manner similar to how Disney uses stories and customs of certain communities to create fantastic worlds, the fiction of the myth of Québec’s cuisine emerges in a caricatured form and is simultaneously undone.

Résumé

Depuis que Brillat-Savarin énonça l'adage maintenant bien connu «dis moi ce que tu manges et je te dirais ce que tu es,» plusieurs penseurs et critiques se sont penchés sur la relation complexe entre les questions identitaires et les pratiques alimentaires. L'endroit où l'on observe cette corrélation le plus visiblement est sans aucun doute dans les cuisines dites 'nationales.' Cette thèse a pour but d'examiner le processus par lequel la communauté Québécoise en est venue à identifier certaines pratiques gastronomiques comme étant significatives de son identité nationale et propose une méthode de lecture de ce 'langage gastronomique.' Adoptant une approche sémiologique, basée sur le travail de Roland Barthes tel qu'expliqué dans son oeuvre *Mythologies*, j'examine comment le potentiel expressif de la nourriture devient un moyen de communiquer un discours national et propose un canon préliminaire des recettes et ingrédients traditionnels du Québec. Afin d'observer les interprétations contemporaines de cet ensemble de mets élus comme étant représentatifs de la cuisine québécoise, j'analyse par la suite le restaurant *Au Pied de Cochon* et observe comment celui-ci récupère le narratif associé à la cuisine traditionnelle québécoise pour communiquer une idéologie 'bourgeoise-bohème' et créer ce que Barthes nomme un *mythe*. Les pratiques alimentaires sont rarement à l'abri de ce type d'appropriation – mais pour exposer l'imposture du mythe, celui-ci doit être transformé en *mythologie*. La chaîne de restaurants française *O Québec* sert d'exemple d'une telle mythologie, en utilisant la cuisine québécoise comme thème à partir duquel le menu, le décor et même l'ambiance de la franchise sont calqués. En exagérant un peu les éléments typiquement québécois - de manière comparable à la façon dont Disney utilise des légendes et coutumes de certaines communautés pour créer des mondes 'fantastiques' – le mythe de la cuisine traditionnelle québécoise émerge de façon caricaturale, et par le fait même se détruit.

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INTRODUCTION

In October 2006, *Au Pied de Cochon*, the popular Montréal restaurant with chef-owner Martin Picard at its helm, released an album to celebrate its fifth anniversary. *Au Pied de Cochon – The Album*, which *The New York Times* describes as “a publishing phenomenon,”¹ and one to which, according to *The Gazette*, “no chef’s book released in Canada [that] year – or perhaps ever – can compare,”² won both the 2007 IACP Cookbook Award and the Canadian Culinary Book Award for the same year. More than a skillfully presented set of recipes, the album contains a multitude of mediums: from a comic strip, to highly stylized photos and an accompanying DVD, the level of originality of the book’s format alone would have been enough for it to claim an unchallenged place in the realm of cookbook publishing. However, this study will argue that its most daring ambition lies elsewhere than in its artistic distinctiveness.

In the Guillaume Sylvestre documentary *Dur à Cuire*,³ Picard specifies that his intention in crafting the album is not to propose another cookbook, “parce qu’on en voit partout.” Instead, he says, “je voulais que ça représente la vie du Pied de Cochon sur une année,” as well as to prove that “Montréal [est] capable de faire un livre de cuisine [...] qui puisse traverser les frontières et qu’on puisse être fière d’un livre de cuisine qui vient d’ici.”⁴ Picard rejects the regular format of the cookbook because what he wishes, in fact, is to *tell a story*: first, a story

¹ Oliver Schwaner-Albright, “Serious Cookbook, Manic Pig,” *The New York Times* 13 Dec. 2006 Dining and Wine section.

² Julian Armstrong, “Feasts are Sweeter with Swine” *The Gazette* 4 Nov. 2006.

http://www.canada.com/story_print.html?id=75f118b7-6cd1-4186-a4a1-e7d656369978&sponsor=>

³ *Dur à Cuire*, dir. Guillaume Sylvestre., perf. Hugue Dufour, Martin Picard, Charles-Antoine Crête, and Normand Laprise, DVD, Les Productions Watt et TVA FILMS, 2007.

⁴ Loose translation “because we see that (cookbooks) everywhere... I wanted it (the album) to represent the Pied de Cochon’s life over a year” - “Montréal is able to produce a cookbook that would cross borders and that we would be proud of a cookbook that comes from here.”

about the restaurant itself and its unusual approach to gastronomy; and second, a story that ‘we,’ as Québécois and as Canadians can be proud of, and that can travel to other nations. *Au Pied de Cochon - The Album*’s goal is to relate the narrative of a place and its people through food.

Food can indeed be a vehicle for storytelling. Proust’s *Madeleine* in *À la recherche du temps perdu* is probably the best known example of how a single food item can be infused with signification. As Kirchenblatt-Gimblet succinctly explains, food has the capacity to hold time, place and memory, and to “form edible chronotopes (sensory space-time convergences).”⁵ As such, food is one of the most powerful symbols of community and even nation.

As a marker of a community’s or a nation’s identity, a national cuisine – itself a kind of national community narrative - seizes a set of methods, ingredients, or recipes in order to promote a sense of allegiance to that community, and even to the very notion of nation-hood. This study will map how a national identity’s narrative appropriates foodways,⁶ and how cuisines are used to communicate its ideologies. I focus here on the nation of Québec, and concentrate on two restaurants that claim to serve its traditional foods. Firstly, I examine how *Au Pied de Cochon* understands and develops Québec’s national cuisine; and secondly, I look at *O Québec* restaurants in France and its version of traditional Québec cuisine.⁷

Nation, perhaps more than any other ideology, invests food with signification to such an extent that the two can become inseparable. Such a close association surely prompts expressions such as ‘French cuisine’ or ‘Chinese food,’ where the definition of a set of food practices issues

⁵ Barabra. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Culinary Tourism* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004) xiii.

⁶ By ‘foodways’, I mean the cultural, social, and traditional practices related to food, as well as the means of growing, preparing and serving it.

⁷ The appellation of Québec ‘nation’ will be justified later in the introduction.

from a specific national community. A country thus establishes its culinary heritage by labeling a compilation of particular methods, ingredients and recipes with its name in a way that can be categorized and repeated. The appropriation of foodways by national communities has reached a point where a) one can *recognize* a nation by its food habits and b) food service and consumption can be a way of participating in the idea of ‘nation.’ As the historian Yvon Desloges summarizes, “[o]n en vient même à reconnaître l’identité des nations par leurs cuisines, et c’est en ce sens qu’il faut comprendre l’engouement au Québec de se découvrir un patrimoine culinaire, de mettre en valeur la cuisine traditionnelle et d’en faire une cuisine nationale.”⁸

To many peoples, the correlation between food-habits and their sense of national identity is as inseparable as those of such other cultural emblems as a national anthem, a flag, or even a language. As Sydney Mintz explains, “imagine convincing the Russian people to give up black bread in order to eat rice instead! Or the people of China, to give up rice to eat black bread! Such food habits are so close to the core of that culture that they sometimes function almost like language. As with language, on many occasions people define themselves with food; at the same time, food consistently defines and redefines *them*.”⁹ Mintz suggests that the signification of black bread is so present in the discourse of Russian identity that one can not only say that ‘Russians eat black bread’ but also that ‘eating black bread is ‘Russian.’” Mintz is correct in affirming that foodways are similar to languages: unlike other identity markers, food habits and languages give the impression that they are not as arbitrary as other national cues such as a flag,

⁸ Yvon Desloges, *À table en Nouvelle-France* (Montréal. Éditions du Septentrion: 2009) 9. Includes note from Fabien Deglise, “Le noble pâté,” *Le Devoir*, vol. XCVII, n 286, 15 et 16 décembre 2007.

Loose translation: “ We even come to recognize nations’ identities through their cuisines, and it is in this sense that we must understand Québec’s infatuation to discover its culinary heritage, and to promote traditional cuisine and to make it into a national cuisine.”

⁹ Sidney W. Mintz, “Food and Eating: Some Persisting Questions,” *Food Nation: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*, Ed. Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton (New York London: Routledge: 2002) 26.

but rather, appear to be a truer, almost organic sign of commonality between the members of a nation. Such a seemingly ‘natural’ correlation is why the discourse of nationalism is so successful in its appropriation of foodways, in that the national cuisine seems to be Russian-ness *itself*, and not only a *symbol* of it.

An excellent study of how cuisines are appropriated by nation-making discourses is Rhona Richman Kenneally’s article “There *is* a Canadian Cuisine, and it is Unique in all the World: Crafting National Food Culture During the Long 1960s,” in which she parallels the release of cookbooks presenting ‘Canadian cuisine’ with the government’s effort to increase the patriotic sentiment at the time.¹⁰ Kenneally observes that:

The impulse to construct a distinctly Canadian culinary heritage can be seen as a key generating force behind a few significant cookbooks published during the long 1960s. Food seems to have been perceived, at least by the author/compiler of these cookbooks – public figures familiar to Canadian audiences as authoritative spokespersons – as an effective vehicle through which to ponder a national ethos.¹¹

Keneally suggests that perhaps Canadian cuisine is not so much a marker of Canadian-ness as the articulation of the desire to *form* a Canadian identity. National foodways are often perceived as an *expression* of nationality: for example, one associates black bread with Russian-ness because most Russians do, in fact, consume a lot of black bread – the premise being that Russian-ness exists, and black bread is simply one of its many signs, like the Russian language or its national anthem. However, for Kenneally, Canadian cuisine is part of what *creates* the Canadian identity - if there is no such thing a Canadian identity, in order to invent one, one must claim a pre-existing Canadian cuisine as proof that Canadian-ness does in fact exist.

¹⁰ Rhonna Richman, Kenneally, “There is a Canadian Cuisine and it is Unique in all the World: Crafting National Food Culture During the Long 1960’s,” *What’s to Eat? Entrées in Canadian Food History*, Ed. Nathalie Cooke (Montréal: McGill Queen’s University Press, 2009) 167-196.

On p. 169 and following, Kenneally enumerate such strategies as ‘a new flag (1965) and a new national logo (the wordmark “Canada” with a small Canadian flag over the last “a.” making the vertical stroke of the “d” look like a flagpole).’

¹¹ *Ibid*, 169.

As Keneally goes on to explain, what emerges from the struggle of cookbook authors to not only justify, but also to *define* a Canadian cuisine, is a sense that there is in fact no homogeneity in the culinary habits of the nation. Rather, the main unifying characteristic of the books she reviews is their ultimate inability to supplant the idea that Canadian cuisine is mixed, creolized and hybrid. Keneally concludes that:

[There] seems to have been an abiding desire, at least among the cookbook authors/compilers [...] to overwrite a contrary perception – that Canadian foodways can, ultimately, only be understood as a variety of culinary heritages [...] Their quest is a difficult one, for the latter point of view may well prevail (for a number of reasons) as the more automatic response of food researchers.¹²

Even after the best efforts of the long 1960s, when authors and compilers of cookbooks laboured to identify Canadian cuisine and the national canon of cookbooks, there still seems to be no definitive consensus. Further, “the idea of a good Canadian cuisine” as writes Sondra Gotlieb in the introduction of her book *The Gourmet’s Canada*, “is hazy not only in the minds of non-Canadians, but in our own.”¹³ What seems to emerge from the research is that determining an intrinsically Canadian cuisine is not necessarily as useful an enterprise as it would be to look at the *narrative* of Canadian cuisine, which persists through the many transformation Canadian cuisine undergoes. Indeed, if there is no single and definitive national cuisine, there is however a solid discourse determining Canadian Cuisine, and this narrative is a strong, shaping force in a nation’s collective imagination.

Therefore, the homogeneity of any national cuisines would benefit from being revisited in order to trace the narrative *about* its community’s foodways – placing the focus on the discourse surrounding foodways rather than on the specific origins of dishes will open up the critical space and give a larger view of the ideologies propelling societies. Indeed, the notion of a set of

¹² *Ibid*, 190.

¹³ Sondra Gotlieb, *The Gourmet’s Canada* (Toronto: New Press, 1972) 9.

foodways that could represent a national identity *in themselves* seems to crumble under close scrutiny, mainly because two important factors have to be absorbed into the notion of ‘national cuisine’ in order for it to maintain a sense of unity; first, the regional and local culinary specificities of national dishes have to be erased to give space to a standardized version of them; and second, their predominantly foreign origins have to be removed in order to give space to the standardized and ‘nationalized’ version of them.

The regional culinary leveling inherent in national cuisines is discussed at length in Arjun Appadurai’s essay “How to Make a National Cuisine”¹⁴ concerning the emergence of English language cookbooks in India over the last two decades. He explains that in the process of creating a national cuisine, except for a few countries such as Italy and China, “the regional idiom is [...] subordinated to a central, culturally superior, idiom,” or, as he clarifies elsewhere, “whole regional idioms are represented by a few ‘characteristic’ dishes” that have passed through a series of “fairly complex compromises.”¹⁵

Speaking of the many different cultural influences having an impact on what becomes a specific national cuisine, David Bell and Gill Valentine observe that “eventually, of course, the traces [of the dynamics of ‘host’ culture and ‘ethnic’ ones reacting to one another] can become all but lost, or incorporated into a hybrid culinary culture which over time comes to be seen as ‘traditional’ [...]. In other contexts, of course, these traces are not lost but reiterated constantly, in the maintenance (or even reinvention) of a separate, definable *ethnic* identity.”¹⁶ In the first case, the distinctions disappear under the umbrella of a single culinary appellation, and in the

¹⁴ Arjun Appadurai, “How to Make a National Cuisine,” *Food and Culture: A Reader*, Eds Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (New York and London: Routledge, 1997) 290.

¹⁵ Arjun Appadurai, “How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 30.1 (Jan., 1988): 17.

¹⁶ David Bell and Gill Valentine, *Consuming Geographies: We Are Where We Eat* (London and New York, Routledge, 1997) 116. From Kalcik, S. “Ethnic Foodways in America: Symbol and the performance of identity” *Ethnic and Regional Foodways in the United States*, L.K. Brown and K. Mussel (eds) (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984)

second, if the integration of other food culture fails, are placed in another category in order to maintain the appearance of a cohesive national cuisine. Kalcik also justly clarifies that the category of a certain 'ethnic' food can even be *invented* for that very purpose.

A questioning of the concept of nation *itself* follows closely the realization of the arbitrariness of national cuisine. Once it becomes apparent that the emblems of a certain national cuisine are not only arbitrary, but are sometimes even borrowed from other communities, one begins to question whether a 'nation' is a notion that is sustainable.

One of the leading theorists on the problem of the definition of 'nation,' Benedict Anderson, proposes a new approach to the issue in his book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.¹⁷ In it, Anderson explains that, to him, nations are "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign,"¹⁸ and "always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship."¹⁹ To Anderson, what determines 'nation' is the interrelationships its members imagine sharing rather than any other geographic or ethnic characteristic. The term 'imagined' as Anderson uses it is not derogatory (in the sense of 'false'), but conveys that a nation is always 'imagined' because its members will, for the most part, never meet each other, but must believe, or *imagine* that the others exist. "All communities that are larger than primordial villages of face-to face contact (and perhaps even these)," says Anderson, "are imagined," and therefore "in the minds of each *lives the image of their communion*."²⁰ Anderson's perception of 'nation' is crucial in that it reveals the 'constructed' aspect of nation. Often posited as 'self-evident,' Anderson's understanding of the idea

¹⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, (London and New York: Verso publishing, 1983)

¹⁸ *ibid.* 5-6.

¹⁹ *ibid.* 7.

²⁰ *ibid* 6, *emphasis mine*. Referring to Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nation and States: An Inquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1977) 5.

emphasizes that a nation exists because a community *believes* it does, and not because there is a *reality* of ‘nation.’

Indeed, the *image* of the nation is the only experience the members of that nation can ever have of it. Since, as Anderson explains, an individual is only in contact with a very limited part of what ‘nation’ allegedly encompasses – a very limited amount of people, whereas ‘nation’ usually signifies a multitude - the image one receives from the variety of available image-making strategies *is* the only experience one can have of ‘nation.’ Legislation, folklore, politics, mapping, history, language, and, of course, food, are only some of the forms that can be put to use by the ‘nation-making’ project and made to express it. The image of the nation lives only in borrowed forms that it must constantly shape or re-invent in order to have them convey and reinforce the constructed notion of ‘nation.’ Therefore, it is no surprise that the fragile (and often still nebulous) image of the ‘nation’ constantly impregnates these available forms to spread its agenda.

Perhaps nationalism’s overwhelming proselytizing process comes from a certain anxiety: that the concept of nation would be discovered as hollow. Since the concept has no ‘substance,’ it must engage in an unceasing ‘image-making’ process, and permeate the discourse to the point of being perceived as a ‘fact’ in order *not* to be erased. Barthes, as early as 1957, addresses this problem in his work *Mythologies*. A keen observer of how images, in general, can be used to communicate values implicitly or explicitly, Barthes takes the problem further and tries to find the *motivation* behind these values. To him, the answer is clear: the notion of ‘nation’ is a value used to promote a still very present ‘*bourgeois ideology*.’²¹

²¹ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1957) The nomenclature *bourgeois ideology* is rarely used and can appear dated. This notion is addressed by Barthes, who suggests that the name ‘bourgeois’ seems

Following a Marxist inclination, Barthes notices that a certain 'bourgeois ideology' has *naturalized* itself in many forms of discourse present in society today, and mostly through that of 'nation.' One of the fundamental aspect of the bourgeois philosophy is the concept of a universal human nature,²² or 'universal man,' which, if I oversimplify, means the belief that all men share an intrinsic commonality, and by extension, are to some level the same. The bourgeois ideology continues this rationale by stating that if all man share a universal *nature* and are equal, than they should have equal rights and responsibility. Such reasoning leads to the foundations of 'nation,' and, Barthes explains, is the motor behind the great revolutions, culminating in the French revolution of 1789, and useful to overthrow an aristocratic regime. However, Barthes warns, perhaps one should not become uncritical of the concept of 'nation,' especially as it stems from a 'bourgeois ideology.' The danger Barthes sees is that a 'bourgeois ideology' at the core of the concept of 'nation' is no longer questioned, because it is no longer *named* as such. Indeed, the concept of 'nation' represents so aptly 'bourgeois ideology' that the latter can 'hide' within it without argument. He writes: "Thus the political vocabulary of the bourgeoisie already postulates that the universal exists: for it, politics is already a representation, a fragment of ideology."²³ The political notion of *nation* is, to Barthes, a way for bourgeois ideology to *erase* itself under the umbrella of a concept that promotes its narrative, but does not bear its name. The very *language* of politics already presupposes a 'universal' or

obsolete because it has managed to erase itself through many other means, including 'nation' so that although its ideas are performed, they are no longer *named* as 'bourgeois'. In fact, Barthes explains that within the very project of 'bourgeois ideology' is the aim of becoming 'normalized'. Its goal is achieved is completely Barthes says, precisely because it seems to no longer exist, because it has infiltrated so many aspects of society that it seems to be *the norm* rather than the results of 'bourgeois ideology'. Barthes goes as far as to propose that perhaps the main decoy bourgeois ideology has is the idea of 'nation'. I will develop this notion further in the following discussion of Barthes essay *Le Mythe Aujour'hui* (1957) where he explains in detail his interpretation, as well as in the first section of Chapter 1.

²² Roland. Barthes, "Myth Today" *A Barthes Reader* Ed. Susan Sontag, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) Translation by Jonathan Cape in 1972.

²³ *Ibid*, 127.

‘natural’ which, although directly related to ‘bourgeois ideology’ is considered a ‘fact’ rather than a theory. As a political structure, ‘nation’ has become an embodiment of bourgeois ideology.

However, the concept of ‘nation’ seems to promote the idea of a shared similarity amongst its members in many ways other than solely politically. A shared language, history, customs, and evidently, food practices, which are also involved in a concept of ‘nation,’ are also useful in conveying a sense of similitude amongst its members. Indeed some of the problems involved in the contemporary definition of ‘nation’ mentioned above stem from the desire to *retain* the ideology of equality and similitude inherent in the concept of ‘nation’ (and, as we now know, motivated by ‘bourgeois ideology’) and the changing reality of ‘nations’ that now contain a variety of cultures. The contemporary tensions about multiculturalism perhaps arise from the jolt, which occurs when immigrants coming from a completely different background claim the same civil status and rights as other members of his or her adoptive ‘nation.’ The legal and political realities seem to clash with the cultural ones.

Raphael Canet explains the critique of an undivided conceptualization of ‘nation’ when he writes in his book *Nationalismes et société au Québec* that:

Une telle approche de la citoyenneté et de la nation, reposant sur l’universalisme abstrait de la démocratie formelle et politique, fait l’objet de nombreuses critiques. Nous pouvons en isoler les deux principales qui visent d’ailleurs le même objectif: la réduction de la transcendance dissociant la société de la nation. La première critique met l’accent sur la nécessaire prise en considération de l’inégalité des conditions économiques et sociales au sein de la population, que la fiction de l’égalité citoyenne tend à dissimuler. La seconde critique pointe l’indispensable reconnaissance de la différence culturelle que la prétention universaliste de ce modèle de citoyenneté tend à gommer.

²⁴ Raphael Canet, *Nationalismes et société au Québec* (Boisbriand: Athéna éditions, 2003) 193. Loose translation mine: “Such an approach to citizenship and to nation, leaning on the abstract universalism of formal and political democracy, is the object of much criticism. We can isolate the two main ones that share the same goal: the decrease of the transcendence separating society from nation. The first criticism focuses on the necessity to take into consideration the inequality of the economic and social conditions in the population, that the fiction of equal citizenship tends to conceal. The second criticism points to the indispensable acknowledgement of the cultural difference that the pretention to universalism of this model tends to erase.”

One of the significant differences the concept of 'nation' seems to absorb is the unavoidable social and economic disparity between its members, and the second one Canet points out is cultural diversity. Canet seems to echo Barthes' comment - when speaking of the way in which the concept of 'nation' blends together a multitude of importantly different elements which compose it - that the naturalizing process of the bourgeois ideology acts like a 'paste,' covering all forms of national representations.²⁵

To come back to Benedict Anderson, one can see that the concept of nation is nonetheless signified through a *collective imagination*. As Barthes explains: "The bourgeoisie is constantly absorbing into its ideology a whole section of humanity which does not have its basic status and cannot live up to it except in imagination, that is, at the cost of an immobilization and an impoverishment of consciousness."²⁶ The process through which a 'nation' can *imagine* itself must involve a level of 'fixation' and 'impoverishment': 'fixation' because the image must be clear and unchanging enough to be grasped by people, and 'impoverished' because it must remain vague and weak enough to accommodate all its inherent differences.

Therefore, if the concept of 'nation' moves away from notions of ethnicity and history, what is it moving *towards*? I would argue that far from abandoning a bourgeois ideology of commonality amongst its members, the contemporary notion of 'nation' is in fact reiterating its core belief in equality amongst humans by making equality *the* value around which the 'nation' rallies. 'Nation' is no longer a question of identity, meaning that it is no longer perceived as an umbrella under which people sharing some sort of inherent commonality gather (such as history or ethnicity). Rather, 'nation' is now a term under which people sharing the same *values* rally.

²⁵ Roland Barthes, "Myth Today" *A Barthes Reader* Ed. Susan Sontag, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) Translation by Jonathan Cape in 1972. 129.

²⁶ *ibid*, 129.

Increasingly, nations define themselves as a people sharing a belief in that very equality amongst mankind, rather than any other historical or cultural markers. The ‘forms’ that used to be borrowed by the concept of nation to legitimize its existence are being abandoned because they are no longer needed: only the shared belief in equality is necessary to justify ‘nation.’ As Raphael Canet explains concerning Québec: “En effet, à l’heure où le nationalisme civique, inclusive et tolérant s’affirme comme la seule référence identitaire acceptable dans l’univers de la représentation nationale, toute tentative de promotion d’une culture, d’une histoire ou d’une langue particulière conduisant à ériger l’un ou l’ensemble de ces éléments comme *la* référence commune et obligée de la collectivité réanime les spectres de l’ethnicisme et de l’exclusivisme frileux.”²⁷ As values of tolerance and acceptance increasingly become the only marker of national identity, other markers that seemed to reference ethnicity are pushed into the margins. Through this process, the concept of nation becomes one where the ethics of bourgeois ideology stand as self-evident, and do not need any other justification. The nation is now a set of bourgeois values that does not need the decoy of culture or history to promote itself – nation is now synonymous with it.

As Barthes explains, it is especially through its ethics, that is, its moral belief in equality, that the bourgeois ideology infiltrates the concept of nation: “Yet it is through its ethics that the bourgeoisie pervades France: practiced on a national scale, bourgeois norms are experienced as the evident laws of a natural order – the further the bourgeois class propagates its

²⁷ Raphael Canet, *Nationalismes et société au Québec* (Boisbriand: Athéna éditions, 2003) 203-204. Loose translation mine: “Indeed, at a time where civic nationalism, inclusive and tolerant, affirms itself as the only acceptable mode of identification in the world of national representation, any attempt at promoting a culture, a history, or a particular language leads to the possibility of erecting one or all of these elements as *the* common and mandatory reference of the collectivity and brings back the cautious specters of ethnicity and exclusivity.”

representations, the more naturalized they become.”²⁸ The bourgeois ideology is the basis of national values that are accepted as truths and at the core of the national discourse.

Therefore, what is to be done with the remnants of the former version of national identity? I would suggest that they are recuperated in a form of *nostalgic simplification*, where markers and signs of national identity stand-in to embody a melancholic and somewhat edited memory of the traditional mores. Since a different reality such as, for the purpose of this paper, the one associated with Québec identity, cannot continue to exist in this new context of ‘nation’ where every culture is equal, it must exist at a distance, as an image from the past. Celebrated in festivals and embodied in specific symbols, what defines Québec’s national identity is less a coherent way of life than a few items or stories where a version of history is supposed to be contained. Québec cuisine is certainly one of those items often referred to as representing the Québec’s history. Indeed, many cookbooks labeling themselves as catalogues of Québec cuisine mention that the recipes are echoes from the past rather than samples of today’s eating habits found in Québec homes. For example, Suzette Couillard and Roseline Normand in the preface to their book *Cuisine traditionnelle d’un Québec oublié* write “Nous avons voulu vous rappeler la bonne table d’antan ... Que ce retour dans le passé puisse être une véritable aventure.”²⁹ The recuperation of emblematic items, including recipes, seems to make complete the shift from a definition of ‘nation’ based on ethnicity and culture, to one based on shared moral values issuing from ‘bourgeois ideology.’ It hides the fact that there was no more of a ‘Québec nation’ one hundred years ago than there is today. Québec folklore takes *a certain* history, dilutes its elements, and then re-packages it to present it as a myth of Québec culture that can be accepted

²⁸ Roland Barthes, “Myth Today” *A Barthes Reader* Ed. Susan Sontag, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) Translation by Jonathan Cape in 1972. 129.

²⁹ Suzette Couillard and Roseline Normand, *Cuisine traditionnelle d’un Québec oublié*, (Montmagny: diffusion Suzette Couillard, 1981).

as such. Nothing is lost, but everything is recuperated through a transformation into folklore, where a history can live without threatening the ideology of ‘nation’ of today. I will argue that both restaurants examined in this study perform precisely this recuperation and transformation.

How does Québec cuisine adapt or survive to fit these shifting definitions of ‘nation’? The notion that a strong correlation exists between the national imaginary and the foodways associated with that community is not new. However, much of the relevant literature approaches the topic through exploring the vexed concept of authenticity³⁰: how can one trace the origins of certain dishes, how do notions of authenticity affect one’s experience of food and the other, and which criteria are appropriate to determine the authenticity of foodways, the latter leading to attempts at defining the notion of authenticity. Rather, in this study, I position national cuisine as a system of communication. I argue that food practices are a vehicle through which the ideology of nation promotes itself, while also questioning whether the very concept of nation might not deserve some renewed attention.

The complex process through which the ideology of a Québec ‘nation’ appropriates foodways as a myth-making strategy is the task I propose to tackle in this study. I choose the nation of Québec mainly for two reasons. First, Québec is involved (and has been over the last fifty years) in a very prevalent debate over the question of its identity, which makes the question of national cuisine a topic of great interest as it might add to the ongoing discourse about what

³⁰ Some examples are Lisa Heldke, “But is it Authentic? Culinary Travels and the Search for the ‘Genuine Article,’” *The Taste Culture Reader: Experiencing Food and Drink* Carolyn Korsmeyer (Oxford: Berg, 2005) see also Lucy Long (ed). *Culinary Tourism* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), and Richard R. Wilk, “Food and Nationalism: The Origin of ‘Belizean Food’,” *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*, Eds Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton (New York London: Routledge, 2002)

and who is Québécois. Secondly, although recognized as a nation,^{31 32} Québec does not have full political autonomy, a quality usually intrinsic to the definition of nation. This chasm between cultural and political realities also exemplifies the difficulties inherent with description of what ‘nation’ means, and justifies the need for a new approach to the question.

Significantly, the release of *Au Pied de Cochon – The Album*, preceded the recognition by the Canadian government of Québec as a nation by about a month. While none could sustain the idea that this is a *sign*, I believe it should, however, awake one to the *already* existing correlation between nation and food, and investigate the dialogue nation and foodways have been entertaining.

³¹ Isabelle Rodrigue, “La motion sur la nation québécoise adoptée” [archive] (Presse canadienne, 27 novembre 2006).

³² Anne Pélouas *Le Monde.fr*, 29 Nov. 2006: “La Chambre de communes a voté à une majorité écrasante, lundi 27 novembre, en faveur d'une motion du gouvernement conservateur minoritaire qui reconnaît que « les Québécois forment une nation au sein d'un Canada uni” Loose translation (mine): “The Chamber voted with a crushing majority, on Monday, November 27, in favor of a motion brought on by the conservative government that recognizes that Quebecers form a nation in a united Canada.” January 31, 2011 http://www.lemonde.fr/cgi-bin/ACHATS/acheter.cgi?offre=ARCHIVES&type_item=ART_ARCH_30J&objet_id=967582&clef=ARC-TRK-D_01

CHAPTER 1

1: Electing a National Meal

“À la recherche du plat national du Québec: *Le Devoir* vous demande quel est le mets qui porte en lui l’identité québécoise”³³ – thus reads the title of Fabien Deglise’s article, which appeared in *Le Devoir* on November 3rd, 2007. This interrogation was prompted by a discussion with Charles Alexandre Théoret, author of *Maudite poutine!*³⁴ about the infamous dish composed of fries, gravy, and cheese curd, where Deglise questions whether or not, despite its rise in popularity, poutine could truly hold the position of Québec’s national dish. The journalist soon disqualifies the “improbable” layering of cheese curds, fries, and gravy from claiming the status of national meal for two reasons: poutine’s origins are commercial rather than familial, and it is a meal rarely cooked at home.

The quest for the quintessential Québec dish was launched. Readers were asked to submit entries for the meal they thought met the following criteria: that is, being solidly anchored in Québec families’ culinary traditions, cooked in the home environment, eaten with pride and gusto, popular throughout Québec’s territory in a constant form, found on popular restaurants’ menus, and able to represent Québec [through food] to a visitor coming from abroad³⁵. A selection committee -- composed of Bernard Landry, ex-prime minister of Québec; Anne Desjardins, chef at *L’Eau à la bouche*; Hélène Biziner, historian; Jean-Pierre Lemasson,

³³ Fabien Desglise, “La recherche du plat national du Québec,” *Le Devoir*, 3 novembre 2007.

<<http://www.ledevoir.com/loisirs/162916/a-la-recherche-du-plat-national-du-quebec>>

Loose translation mine: “Looking for Québec’s national meal: Le Devoir asks you which dish embodies Québec’s identity”

³⁴ Charles-Alexandre Théotrêt, *Maudite Poutine!: l’histoire approximative d’un plat populaire* (Québec: Les Éditions Héliotrope, 2007).

³⁵ Fabien Desglise, “La recherche du plat national du Québec,” *Le Devoir*, 3 novembre 2007.

<<http://www.ledevoir.com/loisirs/162916/a-la-recherche-du-plat-national-du-quebec>> Loose translation mine

gastronomic sociologist; Boucard Diouf, comedian; and Jocelyn Brunet, owner of *La Binerie Mont-Royal* -- was assembled to determine the winner. The result: *pâté chinois*.

1.2: Food as national symbol

But how can the layering of ground beef, creamed corn, and mashed potatoes claim to embody Québec's national identity? As *Le Devoir*'s project exemplifies, a specific arrangement of ingredients can do more than produce a succulent dish: it can also signify national identity. However, one must remember that the meaning attributed the food is just that: attributed and not innate. *Pâté chinois*, despite being selected as the dish most emblematic of the province, is not inherently a symbol of Québec identity; the newspaper's project is a systematic illustration of how a dish is and can be transformed into a sign. Indeed, what prompted the inquiry as to which dish most appropriately signifies Québec was the rising popularity of poutine, and not *pâté chinois*, as culinary ambassador of the province, which would suggest that the latter perhaps has a more rightful claim to the title of Québec national dish. Whether poutine or *pâté chinois* has a more genuine right to represent the province gastronomically is not what I am attempting to determine here. What is of more significance for this project is what this tension reveals: that the selection of a dish through which a national identity expresses itself is partially arbitrary, and the fact that it comes to *signify* Québec is a notion imposed upon, rather than emerging from, the dish.

The well-known recipe, with its specific list of ingredients, measurements, and method is 'hijacked' to incarnate a sentiment of national identity. *Pâté chinois* has a specific meaning in

itself, based on its own history and properties³⁶. However through what might be called a ‘nationalization process,’ these properties recede, and, instead, ‘*pâté-chinois-as-a-sign-of-Québec*’ takes precedence. To use semiological terminology, the meal becomes a ‘sign’ and is used to express national identity. Roland Barthes in his essay “*Pour une psycho-sociologie de l’alimentation contemporaine*” addresses the notion of food as sign when he writes that it is not only “une collection de produits, justiciables d’études statistiques ou diététiques [, c]’est aussi et en même temps un système de communications, un corps d’images, un protocole d’usages, de situations et de conduits [... c]omment étudier cette réalité alimentaire, élargie jusqu’à l’image et au signe?”³⁷ Food is not only described in terms of diet and economics, but also in terms of its expressive potential, and how it conveys atmosphere, attitudes and conditions, similar to the way signs function in other structures of communication.

Section 1.3: How food carries meaning

Barthes uses the example of coffee to demonstrate how food can shift from being what one may call a ‘usage referent’, meaning that it refers only to itself as food, to a sign, where it also expresses an additional concept, one that is not inherent to its usage. Barthes observes that coffee, in essence, is a stimulant (i.e. a beverage that dispenses a momentary sense of vitality and wakefulness). However, coffee as portrayed in advertisements and used in social contexts, connotes a sense of enjoyment, rest, and even relaxation. In social practices, friends meet over coffee not only with the intention of absorbing its stimulating effect, but also to appreciate a

³⁶ For more on *pâté chinois*’ history, see Jean Pierre Lemasson’s *Le mystère insondable du pâté chinois*, (Verdun: Amérik Média, 2009).

³⁷ Roland Barthes, “Pour un psycho-sociologie de l’alimentation contemporaine,” (*Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 16.5, 1961) 979.

moment of pleasure and idleness. Coffee advertisements present instances of coffee-drinking associated with taking time away from the demands of daily life to savor a moment of self-indulgence, recreation, or even contemplation, and the atmosphere depicted is one of ease and calm³⁸. This ambiance carries over into the professional world as well, where the ‘coffee break’ sends a message of retreat from activity and is literally institutionalized into the moment of ‘pause.’ Coffee’s own properties, such as the region where it grows, the process of harvesting, roasting, grinding, and brewing involved in transforming the fruit into a beverage, its nutritional features (or one could say the coffee’s own ‘meaning’) recede and become secondary so that another ‘meaning’ may be expressed, namely, the concept of repose and leisure. It is in this manner, as Barthes indicates, that coffee is transformed to communicate circumstance rather than substance³⁹.

Coffee is a powerful example since its inherent properties and the imposed meaning are antithetical. Yet, I would argue that the same process is at work not only in the case of *pâté chinois*, but also in all recipes thought of as traditional Québécois dishes. But to which recipes does one refer when speaking of Québec traditional cuisine ?

Section 2: A provisional canon of traditional Québec dishes

To begin the inquiry into Québec’s canon of traditional dishes, I will first look at the other nominees from *Le Devoir*’s survey as an entry point into what ‘Québec cuisine’ means in the population’s collective imagination. Although only *pâté chinois* fulfills all of the listed

³⁸ A few example of coffee being associated with relaxation, leisure and self-indulgence are: Starbucks Frappuccino brand advertises with the tagline ‘Starbucks Frappuccino. Work can wait.’ And ‘Smooth out your day, everyday’. The German coffee company Melitta uses the following slogan: ‘When it’s time for Me, it’s time for Melitta’ (Canadian campaign), as well as ‘Melitta. Coffee Indulgence’. < <http://www.textart.ru/database/slogan/2-coffee-advertising-slogans.html> > July 20, 2010.

³⁹ *Ibid. supra note 4, p. 986.*

criteria, *pouding chômeur* was chosen as the typical dessert of the province. Not surprisingly, *tourtière*, *ragoût de boulettes*, *ragoût de pattes*, and Québec's specific twist on spaghetti sauce (sauce à *spaghat*, usually including carrots and celery), were popular contestants, as well as sugar, pecan, apple, and blueberry pies in the dessert category. Also proposed were the Reine-Elizabeth cake, potato candies, creamy cabbage salad, boiled beef's tongue and heart, blueberry pie, 'chiard au baloney' (cubed baloney meat cooked with potatoes and aromatic herbs), tomato macaroni, 'trottoirs' (a dessert made of puffed pastry and berry jam), veal liver, 'corn flakes' pie, onion soup *au gratin*, smoked salmon, rabbit and beans, and cabbage soup. The sugar-shack menu was often mentioned as well, including pea soup, eggs in syrup, maple ham, and *oreilles de crisses* (the literal translation, 'Christ's ears', has little relation to this delicacy made by frying salted lard)⁴⁰. These recipes are a good indication, even if provisional, of a spontaneous response to the question of which meals embody Québec's culinary identity in the province's population.

However, the article falls short of addressing the opinion of other communities concerning Québec's cuisine. Indeed, as indicated in a related article in *Le Devoir* by Manon Savard, environment and human geography professor at the University of Québec in Rimouski,⁴¹ the above study is missing an outside perspective: to determine a national meal, one should also take into account how that community's cuisine is perceived by others, and which dishes are known by foreigners as belonging to Québec culture.⁴²

To glance briefly into such territory, I propose relating what well-known travel guides suggest as the 'not-to-be-missed' culinary attractions of Québec. *Le Guide du Routard*, a

⁴⁰ Fabien Deglise, "La tourtière de la discorde," *Le Devoir*, December 15 2007, Society section.

⁴¹ Manon Savard, "À Chacun son plat national," *Le Devoir*, December 15 2007, Society section. Professeure en géographie humaine de l'environnement à l'Université du Québec à Rimouski 1 <<http://www.ledevoir.com/societe/168650/a-chacun-son-plat-national> >

⁴² *Ibid*, This topic will be further explored in the third chapter of this paper.

popular French travel guide, records the following list of dishes to its readers as specialties of Québec cuisine: *tourtière* (meat pie) comes first followed by *fèves au lard* (baked beans) and *ragoût de pattes de cochon* (pig's feet ragout), *canard au sirop d'érable* (maple syrup duck), *gibelote de lapin au cidre* (cider and rabbit stew), *tarte au sucre* (sugar pie), *pudding chômeur* (while *chômeur* translates as someone who is unemployed, the dish is commonly translated as working man's or poor man's pudding, a dessert made of white cake and a type of brown-sugar caramel sauce), *poutine* (fries, gravy, and cheese curds), *cretons* (pork pate), *pâté chinois* (layered ground beef, creamed corn, and mashed potatoes), as well as lobster and oysters in the regions of Gaspésie and Îles de la Madeleine. The section ends with a mention of the annual *épluchette de blé d'inde* as a family reunion tradition where corn on the cob is the main meal⁴³.

An English-language tourist guide in the same vein, *The Lonely Planet*, selects the following dishes as main elements of the Québec culinary canon: *poutine*, *pâté chinois*, *soupe aux pois*, *fèves au lard*, *tourtière*, *tarte aux bleuets*, *tarte aux pacanes* and *tarte au sucre*. The guide also mentions maple syrup and the different smoked fish: salmon, herring, trout and sturgeon⁴⁴ as dishes that can not be ignored when visiting Québec. Finally, Wikitravelguide, which, as a volunteer and collaborative site can be an appropriate indicator of the common, popular understanding of Québec culture as those who may be from Québec or other parts of the globe, gives the following dishes as typically from Québec: first, the sugar shack menu, then *pâté chinois*, *poutine*, *pudding chômeur*, maple syrup, baked beans, *tourtière*, and *cretons*⁴⁵.

However, historical research, though slim on the topic, provides a significantly different list of the meals most often prepared, eaten and enjoyed in Québec's homes for decades. I must

⁴³ Guide du Routard, Mars 2010. <http://www.routard.com/guide/quebec/595/cuisine_et_boissons.htm>

⁴⁴ Lonely Planet, Novembre 2007

<<http://www.lonelyplanet.fr/html/destinations/index.php?mode=notice¶m1=quebec¶m2=culture>>.

⁴⁵ Wikitravel, Québec, January 31, 2011 <<http://wikitravel.org/en/Quebec>>.

acknowledge for these findings the groundbreaking work of Caroline Coulombe. Her Master's thesis entitled "Un siècle de prescriptions culinaires: continuités et changements dans la cuisine au Québec, 1860-1960"⁴⁶ compiles the recipes which appear most frequently in Québec cookbooks, home-economic manuals, newspaper articles, industry cookbooks or publicity, and hand-written home recipes between 1860 and 1960. I copy here the results of her findings⁴⁷:

Soups	Main	Dessert	Others
Cabbage soups	Boeuf à la mode	Doughnut	Crêpes
Pea soup	Macaroni au gratin	Fruit cake	White sauce
Oyster soup	Pot au feu (beef stew)	Blanc-manger	Ketchup
Tomato soup	Pan bifteck	Apple pie	Potato croquette
	Fèves au lard (beans)	Bread pouding	Cretons
	Pâté au poulet	Rice pouding	Tête fromagée
	Ragoût de boulettes	Sucre à la crème	
	Roasted chicken	Lemon pie	
	Roasted turkey	Charlotte Russe	
	Roasted beef	Apple cream	
		Macaroons	
		Molasses cookies	
		Bagatelle	

Although some dishes named by contemporaries as symbolic of Québec cuisine also appear regularly in the culinary literature and most likely on families' tables (namely pea and cabbage soup, *fèves au lard*, macaroni, and *creton*), a greater number of dishes are missing⁴⁸. Many reasons could explain this disparity: the fact that Coulombe's list stops in 1960, that many dishes such as *pâté chinois* were perhaps thought too 'common' to make their way into

⁴⁶ Caroline Coulombe, "Un siècle de prescriptions culinaires: continuités et changements dans la cuisine au Québec, 1860-1960," (Mémoire présenté à l'Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Maitrise en Études québécoises, Septembre 2002).

⁴⁷ Copied from the table found in Annex 6 of the Coulombe's memoir, loosely translated.

⁴⁸ For proof of the reliability of cookbooks and manuals as reflection of actual culinary habits, Caroline Coulombe, "Entre l'art et la science : la littérature culinaire et la transformation des habitudes alimentaires au Québec," (Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française, vol. 58, n° 4, 2005) 513 <<http://www.erudit.org/revue/haf/2005/v58/n4/012211ar.pdf>>.

cookbooks, or that the sugar shack and the holiday menus are too specific and seasonal to be mentioned regularly in home-economics manuals. Whether or not such qualifications are pertinent, what one must retain from the noticeable gap between the ‘historical’ and the ‘popular’ lists of Québec traditional recipes, is that what is perceived as Québec cuisine is not a straightforward reflection of habits and practices of a people. In other words, a historical presence in the culinary world of Québec is not enough for a meal to be emblematic of the province: it must be undergo a process of ‘nationalisation.’

2.2: Nationalization process

Food has to undergo a few significant transformations before it can become emblematic of nationhood. Tellingly, as Coulombe’s research reveals⁴⁹, recipe books, from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century focus on notions of function and usage. Ingredients and methods are presented in advertisements and manufacturer’s cookbooks in ways that emphasize their superior nutritional qualities or practical elements. Coulombe sees this emphasis as a reflection of the industrialisation process that marks the turn of the century. She explains that: “[l]a prédominance de l’aspect pratique de la cuisine ne devra pas surprendre. La période étudiée correspond, comme nous l’avons vu, à un processus d’industrialisation et de mécanisation du travail... [l]e caractère rationnel associé à ce mode d’organisation se transpose dans l’aire domestique: l’organisation de la cuisine domestique passé donc, selon les mêmes schémas que le monde industriel, pas des principes d’efficacité et de planification.”⁵⁰ Such a

⁴⁹ *Ibid* footnote 14

⁵⁰ *Ibid* footnote 14, p. 38 “The emphasis on the practical aspect of cooking should not come as a surprise. The period that concerns us, as we have seen, corresponds to the industrialization process and the mechanization of work. The rational character associated with this type of organization is transposed into the home settings: the

utilitarian, practical approach to food denotes a rapport with food that is based on its inherent properties.

The practical and useful qualities attributed to food at the turn of the century are akin to what Barthes calls the ‘language-object.’ Indeed, for Barthes, a language that is ‘operational, [and] transitively linked to its object’⁵¹ is one that only represents itself, and does not carry an additional meaning but its own. The language-object refers to the essence of the object (or food) alone, and the way in which one interacts with it is all that is evoked in a language-object system of communication. There is no second degree of reference, and it does not have more than one meaning – that is, its functional and practical one. To illustrate this idea, Barthes uses the example of the way in which a woodcutter uses and thinks the word ‘tree’ as one where one “‘speak(s) the tree’ and does not speak *about* it.”⁵² The language-object, Barthes continues, is one where “nature [exists] for me only inasmuch as I am going to transform it, it is a language thanks to which I ‘act the object’: the tree is not an image for me, it is simply the meaning of my action.”⁵³ The emphasis on efficiency and the nutritional attributes of food found in the culinary literature make it, indeed, a language-object.

It is therefore not surprising that practicality, nutritional value, and hygiene are the primary concepts food comes to convey. Indeed there is a subtle yet crucial difference between cooking as language object, meaning cooking as a function-based interaction with food, with cooking that *is conscious* of being pragmatic and nutritious. In the words of Barthes, this is where one goes from ‘speaking food’ to ‘speaking about food.’ Advertisements promoting the

organization of families’ cooking is thought through the same model as the industrial sphere, through principles of efficiency and pacification.” Loose translation mine.

⁵¹ Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” *A Barthes Reader*, (ed) Susan Sontag, (trs) Jonathan Cape (1972) (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 134.

⁵² *Ibid* footnote 19

⁵³ *Ibid* footnote 19

health benefits of the product are a significant place to notice this trend, as Coulombe finds in her research when she writes that “[l]a santé et la nutrition ont la cote en cette matière [...] que ce soit par le biais des recommandations des hygiénistes et professionnels de la santé, ou en raison de leur valeur nutritive propre ou de leur effet sur la santé des enfants, les produits alimentaires doivent prouver leurs saines vertus.”⁵⁴ The focus on vitamins and the invigorating or cleansing virtues of food is a language that, at first, might appear to be simply explaining and defining the attributes of the merchandise, but it is already a language that does not focus on an active transformation of food, but rather on the discourse about food. The movement away from the language of object is hardly perceivable since the meta-language, the language *about* food, is at first simply describing the way in which food is performed. Yet, to describe is, in a sense, to dissect: the breaking apart of food’s properties as a way to define it, and such scrutinizing inevitably goes beyond the simple designation of the language-object; it explains *how* something is, and not only that it is. In other words, a definition-based language cannot be neutral.

What inserts itself into the definition and description of food, into the meta-language *about* food, is *value*. From encouraging customers to buy a certain products for its vitamin content to emphasizing the speed of using a particular utensil, the narrative surrounding merchandise also suggests that nutrients are desirable as well as rapid execution. Eventually, the values food carries have less and less to do with the food’s properties, and more with the social currents and pressures. As Coulombe notes, “les valeurs sociales comme le prestige, la

⁵⁴ Caroline Coulombe, “Un siècle de prescriptions culinaires: continuités et changements dans la cuisine au Québec, 1860-1960,” (Mémoire présenté à l’Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Maîtrise en Études québécoises Septembre 2002) 36. Loose translation mine: “Health and nutrition are important markers in the matter. Whether it is through a hygienist’s or health professional’s recommendations, or because of their intrinsic nutritional values, or of their effect’s on children’s health, culinary products must prove their health virtues.” Translation mine.

valorization personnelle, le respect de la mode sont autant d'éléments qui imprègnent la plupart des discours de cette époque [milieu du XXe siècle], du moins dans la presse consultée."⁵⁵

This shift in values also corresponds to a transformation in the role of women. Where wives used to be praised for their skill in the kitchen, they are now required to be entertainers and display their good manners. "Nous percevons aussi, au cours de la période étudiée [between 1860 and 1960]," Coulombe writes, "une mutation du modèle de la "parfaite cuisinière" en celui de la "parfaite hôtesse" les qualités sociales se substituant aux qualités essentiellement techniques [...] l'accueil des invités devient alors tout aussi important que la confection même de la nourriture [...] on encourage la femme à cuisiner pour plusieurs convives, non plus pour nourrir une famille nombreuse mais pour impressionner les invités."⁵⁶ What one could call the gentrification of Québec, where concerns about one's social standing and the demands of belonging to the emerging middle class, directly affect how people relate to food. Indeed, how wives prepare food and their choice of menu now explicitly embodies social condition, a level of familiarity with new technology, and a desire to show their knowledge of trends and current fashions. Thus, in less than a century, a language-object conception of food is quickly replaced by food as an 'image-at-one's-disposal';⁵⁷ first it is taken over by promotion of the hygiene driven, health-conscious discourse of industries and educational voices, and later, it becomes a sign of social status, education, and class.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 35 "social values such as prestige, personal valorization, and following fashion are all elements present in the discourse of the time (mid XXth century), at least in the newspapers consulted." Translation mine

⁵⁶ Caroline Coulombe, "Entre l'art et la science : la littérature culinaire et la transformation des habitudes alimentaires au Québec," (Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française, vol. 58, n° 4, 2005) 528. Loose translation mine: "We also notice, during the period studies (between 1860 and 1960), a transformation from the model of the 'perfect cook', to the model of the 'perfect hostess', where solely technical skills are being substituted for social qualities. Welcoming guests becomes as important than the making and preparing of the food. Women are encouraged to cook form many guests, not in order to feed a large family, but to impress the guests."

⁵⁷ Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," *A Barthes Reader*, (ed) Susan Sontag, (trs) Jonathan Cape (1972) (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 135.

However, another meaning is also inserting itself gradually in the advertising of ingredients produced locally: nationalism. Although arguably prompted by economic motivations, considerable efforts are made to encourage people to consume certain products based on the fact that they are made or grown in the country, using the ‘terroir’ quality of the food to simultaneously promote the idea of ‘nation.’

Publicity strategies, as Coulombe writes, not only serve the culinary industry, but also serve the national interest. A good example is the forceful milk campaign of the 1920’s until the 1950’s, which, she argues, should be interpreted “comme le reflet d’une sensibilité grandissante aux questions d’hygiène et de nutrition, mais aussi comme un moyen de stimuler la consommation d’une production nationale.”⁵⁸ The overlapping of dietary and national arguments to convince customers to buy certain products is no coincidence; both are actually more closely related than one might first presume.

Indeed, Barthes forms the argument that the notion of ‘nation’ issues from a bourgeois ideology. To summarize his point, one could say that for Barthes, the word ‘nation’ is as much a political reflection of bourgeois ideology as the word ‘capitalism’ is of its economic philosophy. Capitalism’s narrative suggests that every man has an equal potential access to wealth, and sees all men as identical, at least in their economic potential. In the same way, the concept of ‘nation’, especially if one thinks of it as it emerges in France during the Revolution, where it assumes that every man has an equal right to political power, as opposed to a monarchical system where power is inherited and concentrated to a few individuals. Such a view does not

⁵⁸ Caroline Coulombe, “Un siècle de prescriptions culinaires: continuités et changements dans la cuisine au Québec, 1860-1960,” (Mémoire présenté à l’Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Maîtrise en Études québécoises Septembre 2002) 36. Loose translation mine: “As the reflection of a growing sensitivity to questions of hygiene and nutrition, but also as a means of stimulating the consumption of national products.” Translation mine.

accept that, in fact, people are not necessarily born with the same possibilities of self-realization.

It is in this way that the concept of ‘nation’, under which each citizen, in theory, has the same opportunities and political possibilities, becomes a sort of ‘blanket’ word that encompasses all members of a given political society, and negates or muffles the voice of what Marx would call the proletariat, or of any other possible political nuance amongst its constituents. This is how “politically, the hemorrhage of the name ‘bourgeois’ is effected through the idea of *nation* [...so that] today, the bourgeoisie merges into the nation.”⁵⁹ It is therefore not surprising that as Québec society strives to become not only more industrialized, but also more modern and middle-class, the notion of nation closely accompanies and supports societal change.

2.3: From national product to national symbol

As the concept of nation grows and finds a multitude of forms in Québec, so does what I would call a nostalgic image of what a typical Québécois is and eats. Traditional Québec cuisine seems to emerge from a ‘golden epoch’ in Québec, consisting of large Catholic families living in rural areas and elaborate feasts in times of celebration where numerous people would be present and need to be fed (such as Christmas), and a certain *joie de vivre* was always present. This image of the Québécois lifestyle is common until the 1940’s: that is, before the mass exodus of the Québec population from the farm to the city, following the Post WWII baby-boom, or what one could re-name the ‘grandmother’ era. I choose this name because it is perhaps the most usual figure cookbooks latch onto when branding themselves as carrying

⁵⁹ Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” *A Barthes Reader*, (ed) Susan Sontag, (trs) Jonathan Cape (1972) (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 126.

typical Québec cuisine. Titles such as *Secrets et recettes de ma grand-mère*, *Recettes traditionnelles de ma grand-mère: saveurs et odeurs de mon enfance*, and *Recettes culinaires des pays d'en haut: recettes des grands-mères Levesque, Lazure et Aveline*⁶⁰ for example, clearly illustrate an association with the post WW11 era.

The notion of a golden epoch in Québec society, with grandmothers as the facilitators and protectors of that time, is recuperated by Suzette Couillard and Roseline Normand when they set out to publish their 1982 recipe book entitled *Cuisine traditionnelle d'un Québec oublié*. As they indicate in the introduction, the collection of recipes is one that aims at bringing the readers back to the time of their grand-parents, where tables full of children would gather to share these meals. Such moments 'full of warmth and laughter'⁶¹ seem to echo the romantic ideal of large united families and festive conviviality mentioned above.

Au Pied de cochon, which will be explored further in the following chapter, introduces its 'holiday tradition recipes' section of its cookbook using a similar tone:

À l'époque ou Noël était une fête essentiellement religieuse, l'Avent était une période de privations, un compte à rebours qui culminait avec les fameux temps de réjouissance et de joie dont on parle encore aujourd'hui.

Début décembre, on faisait boucherie. La maîtresse de maison affûtait alors son rouleau à pâte et s'installait à son poêle. De longs préparatifs précédaient les rencontres des familles unies et nombreuses.

Tourtières, pâtés, cretons, ragoûts de pattes, on n'a qu'à mentionner ces plats associés aux repas des Fêtes pour réveiller le souvenir d'un temps fort de la culture québécoise. Ces plats emblématiques de notre cuisine sont en quelque sorte les membres fondateurs de notre tradition culinaire.⁶²

⁶⁰ Jeanne Benoit, *Secrets et recettes de ma grand-mère*, (Saint-Lambert: Éditions Héritage, 1996) et Yolande Chevrier, *Recettes traditionnelles de ma grand-mère: saveurs et odeurs de mon enfance*, (Montréal: Éditions Québecor, 2007). Jacline Aveline, *Recettes culinaires des pays d'en haut: recettes des grands-mères Levesque, Lazure et Aveline* (Sainte-Adèle: Éditions de la Chouette, 1977).

⁶¹ Suzette Couillard and Roseline Normand, *Cuisine traditionnelle d'un Québec oublié* (diffusion Suzette Couillard Inc. Montmagny, 1982).

⁶² *Au Pied de Cochon – l'album*. 110. Loose translation: "Back in a time where Christmas was mostly a religious celebration, Advent was a period of restrictions, a count-down that peaked with the infamous time of celebration and joy that we still speak of today. At the beginning of December, it was time to butcher. The woman of the house would sharpen her rolling pin and station herself at her stove. Long preparations preceded the reunion of united and large families. Tourtière, pâtés, cretons, ragout de pattes, we only have to mention

The combination of the folkloric ideal of Québec with specific dishes that were identified above as part of what is now a well-established traditional culinary canon, namely *tourtières*, *pâtés*, *cretons* and *ragoûts de pattes*, exemplifies how such dishes are embedded in Québec national iconography.

The well-known travel guide, *Le Routard* (1990), describes the context in which Québec cuisine developed in a similar fashion to *Au Pied de cochon – l'album*. Louis-Martin Tard, writer of the guide, says that “la vraie cuisine canadienne, rarement servie, sauf dans quelques établissements spécialisés, est une cuisine riche et frustrante, créée autrefois pour des paysans sans grands moyens qui, travaillant en plein air, avaient besoin de nourriture très solide.”⁶³ Based on the image of typical Québécois as being hard-working farmers, *Le Routard* describes Québec food as too heavy and rich for the urban dweller, which is why (according to *Le Routard*) it is only found rarely and in specialized restaurants.

In these examples, one can detect traces of a narrative concerning Québec’s cuisine that works with, and is supported by, specific recipes and meals. But perhaps the assumption of Québec’s cuisine as based in a farming lifestyle is more accepted fiction than fact. Indeed, such a narrative, promoted by both Québécois and foreigners alike, might have limited historical legitimacy. As Gérald Fortin describes in his entry in the Canadian Encyclopedia on Québec’s rural society observes:

Québec has often been identified with rural life, an identification based more on myth than fact. In 1890 Québec, like Ontario, was 90% rural, but by 1931 the majority of Québec's population was urban and by 1956 less than half the rural population worked in agriculture. In 1962 barely

these dishes associated to Holiday meals to summon the memories of a strong era in Québec culture. These meals are emblematic of our cuisine, and in a way the founding elements of our culinary tradition.”

⁶³ Louis-Martin Tard, *Au Québec*, (Paris, Hachette, 1990). Loose translation: “the real Canadian cuisine, rarely served, except in certain specialized establishments, is a rich and frustrating (in the sense of full of privations) cuisine, created a long time ago for poor peasants who, since they worked outside, needed very solid food.”

4.2% of the province's work force was employed in agriculture, the smallest percentage of any Canadian province.⁶⁴

Although Fortin also specifies that the period following the Second World War was a time where “more than three-quarters of all farms were abandoned, [in less than fifteen years],”⁶⁵ which can account for the sense the lost of the rural lifestyle in the province at that time, he also justly hints that this view is more of a constructed narrative that serves a sense of nationalism. Indeed, he writes that “the view of Québec as a backward, rural society originated primarily with Québécois themselves rather than with others outside the society. After the mid-19th century, a form of nationalism developed in Québec which insisted that the best way to preserve the heritage of language and faith was to develop a strong, well-integrated rural society.”⁶⁶

Similar to the Canadian government’s endeavour to enhance a sense of national identity through a variety of strategies in the 1960s⁶⁷, the provincial government of Québec displayed considerable efforts to develop a sense of national pride in Québécois by reviving its old customs. To create a momentum in the population, as Handler found in his 1988 study on *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture*, “in the 1970s and 1980s efforts were made - often by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs of the province of Quebec - to organize all sorts of fairs and festivals with the aim of objectifying what was imagined to be Quebecois culture.”⁶⁸ As Handler specifies, such a strategy seems to emphasize these food-artefacts as objects-of-meaning of Québec’s cultural heritage. The objectification of food, in the sense that its properties as a food

⁶⁴ Gérald Fortin, *Rural Society, Québec*, *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (Historica-Dominion Institute, March 5, 2010). <<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0007008>>

⁶⁵ *Ibid*

⁶⁶ *Ibid*

⁶⁷ See Rhonna Richman Keneally, “There is a Canadian Cuisine and it is Unique in all the World: Crafting National Food Culture During the Long 1960’s,” *What’s to Eat? Entrées in Canadian Food History* Ed. Nathalie Cooke (Montréal: McGill Queen’s University Press, 2009).

⁶⁸ Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988) 11-12.

product recede and to give place to their communicative potential as a food that is tied to Québec's land and particular history but with nationalist undertones. Local produce, such as bread or shrimp, are cause for festivals, and positioned as signifying 'Québec-ness,' making food one of the essential reasons for gatherings celebrating regional identities. As Handler continues to explain, "parish dances and communal meals were scheduled during festival time, and dances and foods unique to a village or area were chosen to symbolize local, regional – and, through these, national – identities."⁶⁹

It is important to note that, here, food is appropriated as a symbol of national identity: the identification between the food items and nationalism is explicit in a way that food now *represents* a national sentiment. This is different from the moment where national products were branded and publicized as such as merchandise, where the origin of the product, namely Québec, was used as a marketable trait. In the instance described by Handler, the national element is not a specific property of the food that is isolated and then placed in a discourse about food, suggesting that eating homegrown food is desirable. Rather, food is here almost completely emptied of its own properties, and serves only as a vehicle for national pride, is only a signifier (*tourtière* for example) for the signified (Québec nationalism).

However, despite the efforts invested in promoting Québec culture and reviving its gastronomic traditions, citizens have not gone back to cooking like their grandparents on a regular basis. The success of the government's campaign seems to be limited to the imagination of the nation rather than actual practices. This chasm indeed echoes Benedict Anderson's definition of 'nation' as a community that exists mostly through a collective imagination rather than through daily evidence of the existence of 'nation.' Not only is the concept of a national

⁶⁹ Ibid.

cuisine a vehicle for nationalist discourses, in other words, but perhaps the concept of nation itself is motivated by ideologies, and if one accepts Barthes' arguments, then the origin would be a bourgeois world view.

The fact that Québec's traditional cuisine does not find its way onto tables very often, but is usually circumscribed to specific holidays is also reflected in the restaurant industry of the province. As Edward Behr discovered when he visited Québec in the late 1980's, Québec has few restaurants that serve traditional cuisine. While visiting the region in order to discover some of the 'traditional' food, Behr found the task harder than expected:

"The experience soon became frustrating because the cuisine he was hoping to study could not be found⁷⁰. Instead of traditional restaurants serving tourtière (meat pie), soupe aux pois (pea soup), ragoût de boulettes (meatball stew), and cretons (cracklings from pork fat), he discovered a landscape saturated with international hotels offering contemporary gourmet fare, fast-food outlets, ethnic restaurants, and roadside hot-dog and French fry stands, such as one could find in most other parts of North America."⁷¹

Behr's experience illustrates well how meals closely associated with Québécois culture are not readily apparent in the everyday reality of Quebec's homes and restaurants. As *Le Routard* writes, "La cuisine québécoise traditionnelle, bien grasse, calorique et roborative, a pratiquement disparu des cartes des restaurants. Les seuls établissements qui la proposent sont précisément spécialisés dans le "traditionnel." Ces plats font désormais partie du folklore."⁷²

⁷⁰ Edward Behr, "La Cuisine Québécoise," *Journal of Gastronomy* 5(4), 1990: 1-18.

⁷¹ Laurier Turgeon and Madeleine Pastinelli, "Eat the world: Postcolonial encounters in Quebec City's ethnic restaurants." *Journal of American Folklore*. 115.456 (2002): 247-269.

⁷² Routard.com, destination Québec, section cuisine, Mars 2010, http://www.routard.com/guide/quebec/595/cuisine_et_boissons.htm

' Traditional Québec cuisine, greasy, high in calories, and filling, has practically disappeared from restaurant's menus. The only establishments offering it are precisely those specialized in 'traditional' food. These dishes now belong to folklore.' Translation mine.

Conclusion

Thus far, I have explained how certain meals in Québec have become ‘nationalized’. Dishes such as *tourtière*, *ragoût de pattes*, and of course, *pâté chinois*, gradually became known not only as belonging to Québec’s culinary repertoire, but as representative of the province’s cuisine. The particular properties and history of these recipes were usurped as signs of attachment to Québec, and soon the meal itself became a symbol of national pride. To eat pea soup and *oreilles de crisse* can no longer be seen as the savouring of a simple seasonal meal, but rather as the means of participating in Québec culture and tradition

A new generation of chefs who grew up with the idea of a canon of Québec recipes and restaurants is taking a new approach to these well-established staples of Québec cuisine, and re-interpreting the cultural symbols in new ways. So much so that one could say it is a trend in Montreal to ‘re-think’ well known meals. As Marie Claude Lortie points out in *La Presse*: “la ville commence à avoir un bon nombre de ces lieux où on réinvente la poutine.”⁷³ How the symbols of Québec traditional dishes have been accepted, and today, reinvented, is what I will explore in the following chapter.

⁷³ Marie-Claude Lortie, *La Presse*, 22 Février 2008. “the city (Montreal) is beginning to have quite a few places where ‘poutine’ is being reinvented” Translation mine.

CHAPTER 2

PART 1

Instead of a traditional introduction, *Au Pied de Cochon – The Album* opens with a forty-eight page coloured comic strip. Jean François Boily, writer, and Alexandre Brunel, illustrator, combine their talents to create *Un Cochon Errant*, which merges two story lines: Québec’s history from the 1950’s onward, and Martin Picard’s journey towards opening the *Au Pied de Cochon* restaurant in 2001. Throughout the frames, Québec’s significant historical events coincide with pivotal moments in the life of Martin Picard, having to do with his discovery of food and cooking. Perhaps one of the most striking instances occurs about mid-way through the story, when the character of Martin Picard makes his entrance. The few frames preceding this moment relate Général Charles de Gaulle’s memorable visit in to the province in 1967, and show him parading the streets of Montréal until he reaches the city hall. As de Gaulle prepares to deliver his memorable speech, the story suddenly cuts to the Picard kitchen, where Martin Picard’s parents and siblings are watching de Gaulle on television while eating dinner. The crowd is responding with enthusiasm to de Gaulle’s address, when young Picard notices Antoine on the screen, the three-legged pig and unseemly hero of the comic strip, next to the General and exclaims “cochon!” or (pig) (21). A larger than life de Gaulle appears in the following frame, and proclaims the epoch-making sentence “vive le Québec libre!” (22) The two utterances seem to share a sense of genesis: in Picard’s case, it is his emergence into the world of language which comes through food, and not *any* food, but the meat that would later be the emblem of his restaurant. The foreshadowing seems almost prophetic of what lies in Picard’s future, as if his first words determined or even revealed his fate. A similar aura surrounds de Gaulle’s proclamation, which, as mentions *The Canadian Encyclopedia* “would

change the history of Canada,”⁷⁴ and stands as a symbol for many of the culmination of the Quiet Revolution as well as a the beginning of considerable changes in the political landscape of Québec. As important as both events are according to their scale and context – an infant’s first words, and a head of state’s endorsement of a nationalist movement – it is in their correlation that they become even more significant.

Indeed, the marriage of Québec history and that of *Au Pied de Cochon* is neither arbitrary nor meaningless. In fact, *Au Pied de Cochon* seems to insist, with its ingredient, menu choices, decor, and overall atmosphere marinates itself in Québec tradition. As one reads in the first pages following the graphic novella of *Au Pied de Cochon - l’album*, “Il (Martin Picard) aspire depuis lors à évoluer dans un contexte culinaire propre au Québec,”⁷⁵ and concerns about promoting Québec’s gastronomical culture permeate the entire book. It would seem that Québec cuisine and overall folklore actually upholds *Au Pied de Cochon*’s project, since it is the basic narrative that the famous eatery claims to promote. In a sense, one could say that Québec foodways as described in the previous chapter serve as a ‘raw material’ that Picard and his team revive and re-think.

However, by re-interpreting Québec’s traditional dishes and overall food-related narrative, *Au Pied de Cochon* not only engages in more than a mere re-visiting of the culinary past, but also conveys a message about Québec’s culture and national identity. Indeed, *Au Pied de Cochon* opts for food that is inspired by Québec’s classics, yet also uses techniques and ingredients of fine dining to create what Revel calls ‘bourgeois’ cuisine. Bourgeois cuisine is one that “retains the heartiness and the savor of peasant cuisine while at the same time

⁷⁴ *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. 2008. January 11, 2010
<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/PrinterFriendly.cfm?Params=A1ARTFET_E53>.

⁷⁵ Martin Picard, *Au Pied de Cochon – L’album*, (2007) 58. Loose translation mine: “Ever since, he (Martin Picard) aspires to evolve in a culinary context proper (specific to) to Québec”

introducing into it the subtlety and the ‘distinction’ of *haute gastronomie*.⁷⁶ Alongside its insistence on the *terroir* quality of its cuisine, *Au Pied de Cochon* highlights that it is possibly the biggest buyer of *foie gras* in North America⁷⁷, one of the most luxurious products in gastronomy, and that Martin Picard’s favorite drink is champagne. By adding these products to traditional recipes, ingredients that are indicative of haute cuisine rather than family or local fare, *Au Pied de Cochon* clearly indicates that it is resuscitating Québec’s cuisine in a specifically ‘gentrified’ way. Armed with the ambition to prove that “la création d’ici se compare à ce qui se fait de meilleur,”⁷⁸ *Au Pied de Cochon* then re-appropriates Québec’s culinary narrative and related customs to convey a certain message about the province and its contemporary sense of national identity.

I believe the way in which *Au Pied de Cochon* expresses its new approach to Québec cuisine is what Barthes terms in his 1957 essay *Myth Today*, a “myth.” By myth, Barthes means first and foremost a “type of speech,”⁷⁹ and a form of expression. It is a manner of telling, a “system of communication, [... a] mode of signification, [or a] form.”⁸⁰ In other words, myth is a specific type of narrative: it is not one specific story, or a particular message, but rather, the way in which a message is conveyed. As Barthes continues to explain, myth is not defined by “the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message.”⁸¹

Although myth is neither a concept nor an ideology, nor a symbol, nor a specific object, but rather a combination of social usage and pure matter, which are joined to convey a

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 149.

⁷⁷ Martin Picard, *Au Pied de cochon – L’album*, (2007) 77.

⁷⁸ Martin Picard, *Au Pied de cochon – L’album*, (2007) 59.

⁷⁹ Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” *A Barthes Reader*, (ed) Susan Sontag, (trs) Jonathan Cape (1972) (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 93.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 94.

meaning⁸², its *function* is to support established political and social powers. As John Stuttock explains, speaking of Barthes' notion of myth, it is "another word for the doxa, a common, unexamined assumption rooted . . . in the prevailing political [or social] order."⁸³ The unquestioned feature of myth is what acts as a veil: myth appears as an accepted fact and as such can carry a political message un-noticed.

The workings of myth are therefore the very core of communities, giving them not only a sense of belonging, but also a notion of legitimacy. A Peter Heehs specifies,

[One] may define it [myth] as a set of propositions, often stated in narrative form, that is accepted uncritically by a culture or speech-community and that serves to found or affirm its self-conception. "Myth" in this sense includes most traditional narratives as well as some modern literature, but also "texts" such as performance wrestling, certain advertisements, and so on. More generally it consists of any set of related propositions whose "truth" is not demonstrated by the working of logos.⁸⁴

As social discourse, myth needs a specific context to be relevant. Barthes quickly points this out, when he writes that myth "is not *any* type [of speech]: language needs special conditions in order to become myth"⁸⁵ meaning that as any structure of communication, myth can carry meaning only in a particular speech-community, in a given society.

The particular form of myth I will address in this paper is that of the entire project of *Au Pied de Cochon*. By this I mean the restaurant, the cookbook-album, the television series entitled *Martin sur la route* (Radio-Canada, or *The Wild Chef* as the slightly modified Canadian Foodnetwork version) the restaurant staff, the food producers, associates, reviews, publicity or any other item or person related to the enterprise. These I take to compose a set of propositions, an overall form and instance of myth. Through this set of propositions, I believe a certain

⁸² *Ibid*

⁸³ John Sturrock, "Roland Barthes," *Structuralism and Since From Levi-Strauss to Derrida*, (ed.) John Sturrock (Oxford, 1979) 61-62.

⁸⁴ Peter Heehs, "Myth, History, and Theory," *History and Theory*, 33.1 (Feb.1994): 3.

⁸⁵ Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," *A Barthes Reader*, (ed) Susan Sontag, (trs) Jonathan Cape (1972) (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 93.

message or 'concept' can be grasped concerning a contemporary understanding of Québec society.

In order to understand properly how myth constructs itself, I will first give a brief review of Barthes' explanation of the system, after which I will demonstrate how this applies to *Au Pied de Cochon*, and what might be at stake.

Section 1 - Explaining the Basic Structure of Barthes' Notion of *Myth*

As a type of speech and a form of communication, Barthes turns to semiology to explain his understanding of myth. The semiological structure is typically constructed of the following three main elements: a signified, which is the concept one is trying to convey; a signifier, which is the appearance (either visual, auditory, or other) that expresses the signified; and finally the sign, which is the combination of the signified and signifier.

A myth is usually constructed by combining *two* systems of communication. To try to simplify this structure, one may say that the first system is one where signs refer to a *single signified*: the meaning of the sign is readily available to members of the speech community, and refers to only *one* general concept. The sign can be verbal, visual or other, but in every case, in a first level system, the meaning is simple and unique. A country's flag, for example, would belong to a first-degree semiological system: the signifier is the cloth of a specific dimension, colour arrangement, etc. The signified is the general concept of a specific nation. And the final term, the sign, is the flag of, for example, Canada.

The second degree semiological system, also called *metalanguage* or *mythical system* by Barthes, is what characterizes myth. Myth is a type of speech that builds on a pre-existing,

linguistic system. Myth takes already recognizable signs of a first-degree structure and uses them as signifier to convey another signified, therefore creating a new sign. Barthes demonstrates this superimposed, two-level organization of the first and second-degree systems that I copy here⁸⁶:

	1. Signifier	2. Signified	
language	3. Sign <i>(meaning)</i> ↓ I SIGNIFIER <i>(form)</i>		II SIGNIFIED <i>(concept)</i>
MYTH	III. SIGN <i>(signification)</i>		

What was the *sign* in the first level of language becomes the *signifier* (form) in the meta-language of myth. Another *signified* (concept) is injected, creating a new, second-level *sign* (signification). All of the elements of a semiological structure are present in myth, but the difference is that the signifier is itself already a sign in a first-degree system.

Section 2 - Example and Terminology

In order to give the reader a concrete example, Barthes describes an instance of myth he witnesses on the cover of the magazine *Paris Match*. He writes:

On the cover, a young Negro in a French uniform is saluting, with eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolor [French flag]. All this is the *meaning* of the picture. But, whether naively or not, I see very well what it signifies to me: that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without

⁸⁶ Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," *A Barthes Reader*, (ed) Susan Sontag, (trs) Jonathan Cape (1972) (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 100.

For the table to be even clearer, I added the words in *italics*.

The lower case terms refer to the linguistic system, the CAPITAL LETTER terms refer to the structure of myth, and the *terms in italic* and in parentheses refer to the new nomenclature Barthes creates to differentiate between linguistic and mythical systems, since the structure is the same. This is explained further in the following paragraphs.

any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors. I am therefore again faced with a greater semiological system: there is a signifier, itself already formed with a previous system (*a black soldier giving the French salute*); there is a signified (it is here a purposeful mixture of Frenchness and militariness); finally, there is a presence of the signified through the signifier.⁸⁷

All of the elements of myth are present in this example. First, there is the image of the soldier in the military French uniform. As a recognizable image, in a first degree system, a ‘soldier in uniform’ would be a simple sign, its meaning would not extend beyond that recognition. This is what Barthes calls the *meaning* of the picture, its single reference. “As the final term of the first system,” Barthes writes, “I shall call [it] *meaning* ([...] *A Negro is giving the French salute*); on the plane of myth, I shall call it: *form*.”⁸⁸ In short, the *meaning* and the *form* are the same image, item or instance, but the former is the final term (sign) of the first degree system, and the latter is the first term (signifier) of the mythical, second degree system.

The *meaning* already possesses its own history and signification: it exists on its own, without the interference of myth. As Barthes writes, “the meaning is already complete, it postulates a kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, ideas, decisions.”⁸⁹ Myth captures *meaning* and partially empties it, transforms it into a shell, somewhat void of its origins. In the example above, the soldier’s personal *meaning* in terms of his own biography, history, origin, etc, is ‘put in parentheses’ in order to transform it into a *form*, one ready to receive a new *signified* (i.e., the *concept*).⁹⁰ The soldier as himself fades, retreats in the background, and becomes, literally, a shape, a container, a *form*.

⁸⁷ Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” *A Barthes Reader*, (ed) Susan Sontag, (trs) Jonathan Cape (1972) (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 101-102.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 102.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 103.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*

However, *form* does not obliterate *meaning* completely: it needs to retain enough of its properties for the *form* to appear legitimate. Since myth is an altogether imposed system, it needs the ‘authenticity’ of the *meaning* to make the myth seem ‘natural.’ “The meaning,” explains Barthes, “will be for the form like an instantaneous reserve of history, a tamed richness [...] the form must constantly be able to be rooted again in the meaning and to get there what nature it needs for nutriments; above all, it must be able to hide there.”⁹¹ The metaphor of the *form* as a parasite is here very helpful: the parasite needs its ‘host,’ the *meaning*, to stay alive and be its source of nourishment, but the *form*-parasite inevitably lessens, depletes, and drains the *meaning*-host.⁹² To return to the example of the saluting soldier, as *form*, the photograph must retain the *meaning* of the uniform and of the assumed ethnic origins of the soldier. However, the image is not intended to express ‘a black soldier wearing a French military uniform.’ The form is an appropriated *meaning* that has been attenuated just enough to remain a good hideout for the *form*, yet not *mean* quite itself: it is *meaning* made ready to receive the *concept*.

The *concept* is the signified of the myth. In the situation of the saluting soldier above, the *concept* is a type of French imperialism (as per Barthes nomenclature). It acts with the *form* to create *neologisms*: taking already existing ideas, the *concept* gives them a *new* meaning. The *concept* distances the soldier’s own biography, for example, to reduce it to the *concept* of French imperialism, it “deprives [it] of memory, not of existence.”⁹³ In its specific *form* on the

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 104.

⁹² Barthes does use the term ‘parasite’ to describe the *meaning-form* relationship, but he also gives an additional metaphor to illustrate how the *form* both retains and curtails *meaning*, that one may call the window-landscape image. Imagine a traveler in an automobile and admiring the landscape through the window. He may decide to focus his gaze either on the window, where the landscape becomes blurry, or on the landscape, where the window almost disappears: in the first case, at times, the window is both present and empty - the landscape is both unreal and full⁹². The form is the window, which makes itself manifest yet holds nothing, and the landscape is the *meaning* that is made distant yet is literally meaningful.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 109.

cover of *Paris Match*, the soldier saluting is already not *himself*, his own meaning has already faded in order to be made available for the *concept* of French imperialism. The ‘new sense’ of the *concept* always stays closely connected to the *meaning*, but distracts and deforms the reader’s attention from the *meaning* as itself to introduce another, more general, wide-ranging *concept*. The soldier is indeed part of the French army, and does serve under her flag, but the *concept* is not interested in a particular soldier: it makes a statement about the historical position of France. The *concept* is often very large and open, yet is vague; it is “not at all an abstract, purified essence; it is a formless, unstable, nebulous condensation”⁹⁴ such as “Goodness, Kindness, Wholeness, Humaneness, etc.”⁹⁵ or in this case, French imperialism. The *concept* is the movement from the particular to the universal, and in that movement, a certain negation of the particular’s own *meaning* is inevitable. Also, the movement from the particular to the universal is always done in a specific direction: a certain judgment is involved as to *which concept* the particular is going to ‘stand in’ for: that judgment or motivation is the *signification* itself.

The *signification* is where the intention of the myth lies and what the myth is trying to express. It is the sum total, the final sign in the second degree of the overall structure of myth. In the example above, the reader is *not* meant to understand that there is a black soldier giving the French salute on the cover of *Paris Match*, nor ‘French imperialism’ per se, but rather “that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors.” One could say that *signification* is the message intended to be communicated through myth, what the myth means.

⁹⁴ Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” *A Barthes Reader*, (ed) Susan Sontag, (trs) Jonathan Cape (1972) (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 105.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 106.

Signification is indeed the most clear of all the elements of myth, “the only one which is allowed to be seen in a full and satisfactory way:”⁹⁶ in other words, a myth is ‘successful,’ meaning that the *form* and *concept* have performed their work of appropriation and deformation effectively, when all that appears and is read by the community for which the myth was intended is the *signification*.

Myth, in its constant negotiation between the first and second semiological systems, works, ultimately, towards transforming history into Nature⁹⁷. Indeed, when myth achieves its purpose, the reader will take its signification as a given fact: i.e., as if Africans serving the French empire were the most likely turn of events, when in fact, the cover of *Paris Match* reflects but one version of provisional historical circumstances. A successful myth is one where “everything happens as if the picture *naturally* conjured up the concept, as if the signifier *gave a foundation* to the signified.”⁹⁸ Myth functions when the *meaning* and the *concept* seem inverted – in other words, when a soldier giving the French salute seems like an expression of French imperialism, when in reality, it is French imperialism that is appropriating the image of the soldier to *make* it its representative; it is then that “it [myth] is not read as a motive, but a reason.”⁹⁹

Since myth is a constant exchange between the *meaning, form, concept* and *signification*, in order to understand its work in a particular instance, one must, as Barthes puts it, “voluntarily interrupt this turnstile of form and meaning, [... and] focus on each separately, and apply to myth a static method of deciphering, in short, [one] must go against its own dynamics: to sum up, [one] must pass from the state of reader to that of mythologist.”¹⁰⁰ Such a

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 107.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 116.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 117.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 116.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 116.

standstill is what I shall impose on *Au Pied de cochon*, in hope of determining the working of myth within it.

PART 2

Section 1 - *Au Pied de Cochon* as Myth

Having given a brief explanation of Barthes' notion of myth, I can now demonstrate how it applies to Québec traditional cuisine as exemplified at the *Au Pied de cochon (PDC)* restaurant. First, I will reproduce the myth structure and assign each term a corresponding one from *Au pied de Cochon*'s universe, and then support this argument by tracing myth at *PDC* through what was identified in Chapter 1 as being specific elements of Québec's traditional cuisine narrative, such as particular ingredients, recipes, as well as the accompanying discourse of large families and convivial atmosphere.

In the *PDC* myth, I take the first degree semiological structure to be what was described in Chapter 1 as the narrative of Québec's traditional cuisine. To summarize, I demonstrated how certain foodways, recipes, and even situation and ambience became symbolic of Québec national identity; *pâté chinois*, for example, as Québec's national dish, is now a symbol in Québec's speech community of national identity. In the same way, *tourtière*, *poutine*, *cretons*, *oreilles de crisse*, cannot be mentioned without evoking, or *meaning* Québec cultural heritage. The narrative of Québec traditional cuisine is so firmly established, and has been for the last few decades, its *signs* are defined and immediately understood, as in a first degree semiological system. I would argue that although the process is somewhat more complex, Québec's traditional cuisine and its associated social context and character works in a similar way as the

French military uniform of Barthes' example is used in a first degree semiological structure. The cloth, ornaments, cut, colours, etc, arranged in the specific way as to create the uniform is comparable to, for example, the ground beef, creamed corn, and mashed potatoes layered and prepared so as to make *pâté chinois*. However, in both cases, the 'raw materials' the specific garment and meals, come to *mean* and be associated with a nation: in one case the French army, in the other the gastronomic heritage of Québec. Both the uniform and *pâté chinois* are invested with national significance, and just as one could not look at the military uniform and simply think 'clothing,' but one is immediately urged to think 'France's military,' in the same way one cannot see a *tourtière* and not be compelled to read 'Québec traditional dish'. As national symbols, both act as *signs* of their respective nations. In the mythological structure of *PDC*, Québec's traditional cuisine's narrative will therefore occupy the role of the third term of the first semiological structure, namely the *meaning*.

What I take to be the *form* is the specific shape Québec's culinary narrative takes at *Au Pied de cochon*; the way in which maple syrup and pork are used and served, the particular changes applied to recipes, the special place given to family, all of these instances and others similar I perceive as miniature *forms* at *PDC*. Element of Québec's traditional cuisine's narrative, particularly ingredients, recipes, a convivial atmosphere, as well as a rustic and unpolished aspect, are 'hijacked' and appropriated to become the particular *Au Pied de Cochon form*, and to express its *concept*. These particular *forms* will be examined further on in this chapter.

As mentioned earlier, the *concept* is perhaps the most difficult term to define, as it has a specific historical position, yet appears common. I would venture that the *concept* present at *Au*

Pied de Cochon is one of “Québec ‘boboality’.”¹⁰¹ I derive the term ‘boboality’ from the David Brooks book published in 2000 entitled *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper-Class and How They Got There*. Quickly introduced into pop-culture, the neologism ‘bobo,’ which stands in for ‘bourgeois-bohemian,’ is used to signify the new ‘ruling’ class of America, which aims to “wed the bourgeois world of capitalist enterprise to the hippie values of the bohemian counterculture.”¹⁰² Soon adapted to most Western societies, in France, as Christophe Guilluy’s article in *Liberation* on January 8, 2001 “*Municipales: les bobos vont faire mal*”¹⁰³ determines, the term ‘bobo’ refers to a new bourgeoisie from the left that “has evacuated the social question, and identifies itself primarily with concerns having to do with quality of life to individual well-being.”¹⁰⁴ Though the term emerges from the perhaps dated and overly economic notion of ‘bourgeois,’ it also adds a crucial cultural component to it: the ‘bobo,’ says Brooks, typically “[combines] the free-spirited, artistic rebelliousness of the bohemian beatnik or hippie with the worldly ambitions of their bourgeois corporate forefathers, the Bobo is a comfortable contortion of caring capitalism.”¹⁰⁵ As Xavier de la Porte remarks, the term ‘bobo’ is thriving because in one word, “il devient possible de parler de populations qui n’entrent dans aucune catégorie statistique mais partagent des comportements: vivre dans les quartiers anciennement populaires, voter plutôt à gauche, avoir un souci de l’écologie, des goûts vestimentaires et

¹⁰¹ Similar to Barthes’ ‘French imperialism’ (and not French imperialism), I retain the principle of adding the suffix ‘-ity’ rather than ‘-ism’ to suggest a ‘state of’ rather than a doctrine or a characteristic. To summarize then, the *concept* embodied by *Au Pied de cochon*’s project is an identification with both Québec and ‘boboality’.

¹⁰² David Brooks, *Les Bobos*, (trs) Mariane Thirious and Agathe Nabet (Paris: Florent Massot, 2000).

¹⁰³ Christophe Guilluy, “Municipales: les bobos vont faire mal,” *Libération*, (January 8, 2001, section ‘Rebonds’). As indicated by Xavier de la Porte in “ ‘Bobos’ et ‘travailleurs pauvres’: Petits arrangements de la presse avec le monde,” *France Invisible* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2008).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁵ *The Observer*, Sunday 28 May 2000 < <http://www.guardian.co.uk/theobserver/2000/may/28/focus.news1> >.

culinaires néohippie et proches du terroir.”¹⁰⁶ Because ‘bobo’ puts less emphasis on income and more on behaviour, it can rally a wide variety of communities, the intellectual and the unemployed. Sometimes pejoratively named the ‘gauche caviar,’ meaning the ‘caviar left,’ ‘bobo’ is both sufficiently politically charged and yet remains open and large enough to function as part of the *concept* at *Au Pied de Cochon*.

What is the *myth* of *Au Pied de Cochon*, the overall *signification*? I believe that what *Au Pied de Cochon* signifies is that Québec has a rich culinary heritage that should not only be served as part of a folkloric image of the province, but can rival the very best tables. And to all who thought it too primitive or hearty, *Au Pied de Cochon* aims to prove that rustic can be chic. Indeed, *Au Pied de Cochon*’s *myth* is articulated in its own mission statement, where one reads that the restaurant, “firm in the belief that the food here stacks up with the best that anyone, anywhere, has to offer, [...] wants to be recognized as a popular eatery, where authentic meals can be enjoyed and choice wines savoured.”¹⁰⁷

Indeed, though Québec’s traditional cuisine may be known (perhaps in part as a result of the efforts made, as explained in Chapter 1, to publicize it), it does not enjoy a unanimously enviable reputation. Québec has in fact been accused by Louis-Martin Tar in the re-edition of the travel guide *Au Québec* published in 1990, of being a place where the word ‘gastronomy’ does not exist, and where “the real Canadian cooking, rarely served, except in certain specialized establishments, is a cuisine that is frustrated and rich, created a long time ago by

¹⁰⁶ Xavier de la Porte in “ ‘Bobos’ et ‘travailleurs pauvres’: Petits arrangements de la presse avec le monde,” *France Invisible* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2008). Loose translation mine: “ it is now possible to speak of populations that do not enter statistical categories but share behaviours: living in old popular neighbourhoods, voting more towards the left, caring about the environment, has a ‘neohippy’ and close to the terroir’ sense of fashion and culinary tastes” loose translation mine.

¹⁰⁷ *Au Pied de cochon – The Album*, (2007) 11.

peasants without any means, who worked outdoors and needed very solid food.”¹⁰⁸ Such a biased opinion, which reflects a pejorative stereotyping of Québec traditional cuisine, nonetheless points to how standardized the narrative of Québec traditional cuisine has become by the end of the twentieth century. *Au Pied de cochon* speaks directly to the polemic raised by Tard, as it aims to re-appropriate the familiar discourse of Québec’s typical foodways and transform it into a fashionable, contemporary, even trendy cuisine.

As Barthes indicates that “the repetition of the concept through different forms is precious to the mythologist, [since] it allows him to decipher myth,”¹⁰⁹ I will now turn to specific examples of the working of *myth* at *Au pied de Cochon*, looking at the use of Québec-specific ingredients, the choice of traditional recipes, the overall cheerful and festive atmosphere, and the rustic, unadulterated style of cooking of the restaurant.

Section 2 – Ingredients

Perhaps the first *form* manifest at *Au Pied de cochon* is its particular use of Québec-specific products. Indeed, the restaurant insists on using primarily ingredients that are grown or farmed in the province. As Picard explains in Guillaume Sylvestre’s movie *Dur à Cuire*, he aims to have, on a regular basis, eighty percent of the produce served at *Au Pied de Cochon* come from Québec, but is only able to maintain an average of about sixty-five percent. Emblematic ingredients, such as maple syrup and pork, are therefore fundamental to Picard’s cooking, and one can see how, as a *meaning* in a mythical structure of communication, such

¹⁰⁸ Louis-Martin Tard, *Au Québec*, (Paris: Hachette, 1990).

¹⁰⁹ Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” *A Barthes Reader*, (ed) Susan Sontag, (trs) Jonathan Cape (1972) (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 106.

items would come filled with a strong association to Québec. The particular *form* these items find at *Au Pied de Cochon* are therefore an ideal place to observe the working of myth.

Section 2.1- Maple Syrup

One of Québec's most representative food items is undoubtedly maple syrup. It is therefore no surprise to find it used in many ways at *Au Pied de Cochon*: in the album, on the restaurant's menu, and more recently, Picard even went as far as to open his own sugar shack, the new venture of the *PDC* enterprise. This sweet liquid is indeed quite invested with national pride and since Québec produces over 75 percent of the world's stock¹¹⁰, the association between the food artefact and Québec is obvious. *Au Pied de Cochon* makes full use of this ingredient's *meaning* in order to anchor itself in tradition and history.

To begin the chapter dedicated to maple syrup dishes of its cookbook, the *PDC* team reminds the readers of the cultural and historical importance of the golden elixir in the province. Going back to the first exchanges between Natives and Europeans, one reads that the long-standing and still popular ritual of the sugar shack owes its origins to the First Nation's tradition of boiling maple sap. Indeed, as Yvon Desloges supports, Natives used maple sap in a number of ways; however, since in order to make maple syrup the sap needs to reach a temperature of one hundred and four degrees Celsius, the metal containers of the Europeans, with their high resistance to heat, were necessary to maple *syrup*'s discovery, since the Native's pottery could not have sustained such temperatures¹¹¹. This example of culinary cross-cultural collaboration positions maple syrup as distinctively fundamental to Québec's culinary history.

¹¹⁰ Martin Picard, *Au Pied de cochon – L'album*, (2007) 133.

¹¹¹ Yvon Desloges, *À table en Nouvelle-France* (Montréal, Éditions du Septentrion: 2009) 31-33, 39, 72-75.

Following the historical contextualization of maple syrup in Québec, the album presents an excerpt from Brother Marie-Victorin's book *La Flore laurentienne*, published in 1935. The citation describes, quite poetically, the Laurentian forests as filled with maple trees that produce a sweet sap in the spring, and ends by saying that "the maple leaf, as well as the beaver, symbolizes the individuality of the French-Canadian race."¹¹² One can observe in Brother Victorin's writings the juxtaposition of maple syrup as a food item with cultural identification, a combination that again emphasizes the *meaning* of maple syrup as especially fitting to be recuperated by *Au Pied de Cochon's* concept.

One only needs to read further to see this *concept* manifest itself. The following text, signed by Picard, expresses his surprise that such a Québec-specific product as maple syrup has not been better protected by government legislation. According Picard, maple syrup has the potential to become the gastronomic ambassador of the nation¹¹³ ; as such, Picard suggests that the product should be coded with the same type of 'controlled designation of origin' as French wines have established. Indeed, maple syrup in Québec is categorized by its colour, a system that does not reflect properly the different tastes maple syrups can have, says Picard. Instead, he proposes a codification based on boiling time or the specific kind of maple tree the sap was extracted from as a more appropriate way of determining the quality of product, and ends by stating that "to this pride effort, there would only be missing a dating system that would come and support the work of the true artisans and celebrate a national resource."¹¹⁴

The desire to change the categorization system of maple syrup to one that supports and values both Québec's *terroir* and the artisanship of the maple syrup producers aptly depicts the

¹¹² Frère Maris Victorin, *La Flore laurentienne*, (1935) – as found in Martin Picard, *Au Pied de cochon – L'album*, (2001) 132. Loose translation mine.

¹¹³ Martin Picard, *Au Pied de cochon – L'album*, (2007) 133.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 132.

concept of ‘Québec boboality’: on the one hand, an attachment to Québec’s land and culinary history, and on the other, the wish to ennoble, honour, and distinguish the maple syrup produced in Québec from all others. The reference to French wines ‘controlled designation of origin’ system as a model to follow for Québec’s maple syrup industry distinctly points to Picard’s aspiration to give Québec’s maple syrup a certain cachet and prestige. The perception of maple syrup as a product produced by local syrup-maker would change to one where maple syrup is the result of attentive cultivation by specialized craftsmen.

David’s Brooks example of Williams-Sonoma sausages, a typical ‘bobo’ product, justly expresses how a certain spirit of boboality is employed to seduce customers in a manner similar to that suggested by Martin Picard for maple syrup. Brooks writes of the Williams-Sonoma sausages that:

The enlightened catalogue of Williams-Sonoma does not try to shove morally neutral sausages down our throats. The catalogue informs us that the sausage it is advertizing comes from the secret smoking practices of that the Natives taught the first Europeans of Virginia [...] “the sausages are made with pure pork and natural spices according to the family recipes passed on from generation to generation” [the add reads][...] This is a noble line of artisans making sausages, and we, members of the socio-cultural elite [bobo] accept to pay \$29.,50 for 24 small sausages in order to perpetuate this heritage.¹¹⁵

The insistence on the authenticity of origin of the product along with the ambition of giving maple syrup a certain standing and luster clearly embodies *PDC*’s ‘bobo’ *concept*.

To push this point even further, Picard continues by appealing to Québec’s pastry chefs to use maple syrup instead of white sugar, and to create new desserts with it. Picard writes:

Il faut le décostumer [le sirop d’érable] de son habit flêché folklorique pour le faire évoluer en cuisine. C’est un défi que les cuisiniers québécois doivent relever. S’il y a une chose que je veux dire aux pâtisseries d’ici, c’est d’ ‘entailler’ leurs connaissances, de lâcher leurs bâlises, d’utiliser l’érable et de créer, sirop! C’est un peu plus cher que du sucre blanc, mais bâtir une identité, ça n’a pas de prix.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ David Brooks, *Les Bobos*, (trs) Mariane Thirious and Agathe Nabet (Paris: Florent Massot, 2000). Pp 105-106. Loose translation mine

¹¹⁶ Martin Picard, *Au Pied de cochon – L’album*, (2007) 133. Loose translation mine: “(maple syrup) must cast off its folkloric costume in order to evolve in the kitchen. It is a challenge that Québec cooks must rise to. If there is one thing that I would like to say to pastry chef from Québec is that they must ‘sharpen’ their

The new *concept* Picard wishes maple syrup to embody is even more manifest in this excerpt. Arguing that maple syrup must be derobed of its folkloric costume and should evolve gastronomically, Picard stresses that one should overlook the higher costs of maple syrup over white sugar, since building an identity is priceless (133). Here, Picard acknowledges the cultural and national significance of maple syrup, while making the case that it must be transformed and modernized. The existing *meaning* of maple syrup as a folkloric emblem of Québec cuisine is distanced in order to make room for a new one that would come from Québec's culinary pastry elite, namely, a more polished and refined one. This is the kind of new culinary identity Picard aims for and supports, one that takes the existing quintessential ingredient, maple syrup in this case, and re-appropriates it to express a new *concept* of Québec cuisine, one that is rooted in *terroir*, yet also suggests a certain glamour.

Section 2.2 - Pork

As the self-proclaimed 'Temple of lard,'¹¹⁷ *Au Pied de cochon* proudly serves pork "from the nose to the tail,"¹¹⁸ and no investigation of the workings of myth at this restaurant could avoid addressing its use of the animal. Pork indeed holds an important place in Québec's gastronomic history and is a key ingredient of many recipes, as Caroline Coulombe sustains, "le porc sous toutes ses formes a été abondamment employé dans la cuisine québécoise."¹¹⁹ Used

knowledge, let go of their pre-conceived notions, to use maple and to create! It is slightly more expensive than white sugar, but building an identity, that is priceless."

¹¹⁷ Martin Picard, *Au Pied de cochon – L'album*, (2007) 57.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 68.

¹¹⁹ Caroline Coulombe, "Un siècle de prescriptions culinaires: continuités et changements dans la cuisine au Québec, 1860-1960," (Mémoire présenté à l'Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Maitrise en Études québécoises, Septembre 2002) 56. Loose translation mine: "pork in all its forms has been use abundantly in Québec's cuisine"

mostly for its lard in *Nouvelle-France*¹²⁰, pork maintained the second rank as the meat most employed in Québec's kitchen (after beef) until the mid 1900's¹²¹. It is therefore no surprise to find pork as the main ingredient in many iconic Québec meals, such as '*ragoût de pattes*,' '*tourtière*,' and '*oreilles de crises*.' The *meaning* of pork as could therefore not be lost on *Au Pied de cochon*, which made this animal its mascot.

Indeed, according to Carol J. Adams, meat is a privileged ingredient through which stories are told and identities inscribed:

Meat eating is story applied to animals, it gives meaning to animals' existence. To say this is to take Roland Barthes's statement literally: "Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances – as though any material were fit to receive humans' stories." Animals' lives and bodies become material fit to receive humans' stories: the word become flesh.¹²²

The inevitable violence involved in killing in order to eat has generated a multitude of narratives to explain, justify, and rationalize itself: every community throughout human history has turned to story-telling in order to give meaning to the process of hunting or farming beasts for men's consumption.

Au Pied de Cochon also has developed a narrative that supports its adulation of meat, pork more than any others, one that again infuses the *concept* of 'Québec boboality' to the established *meaning* of pork in Québec. In fact, Picard goes through quite an elaborate apology for his use of pork 'from nose to tail' that seems to confirm Barthes' assertion that *myth* is

¹²⁰ Yvon Desloges, *À table en Nouvelle-France* (Montréal, Éditions du Septentrion: 2009) 47,48,101

¹²¹ Caroline Coulombe, "Un siècle de prescriptions culinaires: continuités et changements dans la cuisine au Québec, 1860-1960," (Mémoire présenté à l'Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Maitrise en Études québécoises, Septembre 2002) 56.

¹²² Carol J. Adams, from "The sexual politics of Meat: a Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory," *Cooking, Eating, Thinking*, (eds) Deane W. Curtin and Lisa M. Heldke, (Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1992) 267.

“speech justified in *excess*.”¹²³ To begin, Picard explains why he opts for using the word ‘*cochon*,’ ‘pig’ instead of ‘pork’ by saying that ‘*cochon*’ is instantly more likeable than ‘pork,’ and is also used in many typically Québécois expressions¹²⁴. On the one hand, *PDC* solicits tradition by reminding the reader of the importance of the word ‘*cochon*’ in the jargon of the province, while on the other distances pork meat from its usual nomenclature to make it appear friendlier. Picard has good reason to re-name this meat since it has been the source of much controversy in the province¹²⁵, and by the same token loosens the meat from its usual *meaning*, making it available for the *concept*. As Barthes insists that “the relation which unites the concept of the myth to its meaning is essentially a relation of *deformation*,”¹²⁶ *PDC*’s slight alteration of the nomenclature of its meat is an exemplary instance of such *deformation* as performed by the *concept* on the *meaning*; pork as a regularly utilized meat in Québec’s traditional cuisine and the industry that supports it is slightly alienated, and the *concept* of a jovial, even comic animal becomes more prominent at *PDC*.

In keeping with the *concept* of ‘boboality,’ *PDC* displays considerable effort to make its use of meat, especially pork, appear as ethical, conscientious and noble as possible. The album and the accompanying DVD both have sections dedicated to a visit to the *PDC*’s supplier’s farm, *La Porcherie Ardennes*, where an entire tour of the all organic pigsty is given, along with descriptive explanations of the entire raising process of the animal. An emphasis on an honorable, fair, and exemplary treatment of the pigs is underscored throughout by pinpointing, for example, that the owners of the pigsty choose to produce an all–natural pork by using only

¹²³ Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” *A Barthes Reader*, (ed) Susan Sontag, (trs) Jonathan Cape (1972) (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 117.

¹²⁴ Martin Picard, *Au Pied de cochon – L’album*, (2007) 68.

¹²⁵ For an example of the polemic raised in Québec concerning the pork industry, see Hugo Latulipe’s documentary entitled “Bacon, le film”, released in 2001 and produced by the NFB, which addresses the state of the industry and the legislation concerning pork in Québec.

¹²⁶ Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” *A Barthes Reader*, (ed) Susan Sontag, (trs) Jonathan Cape (1972) (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 108.

OMG-free grains that are produced on-site at their farm¹²⁷, or literally stating that they “do everything that could possibly be done for the well-being of the animals.”¹²⁸ On the cooking side, the reiteration that the pig should be eaten in its entirety, ‘from nose to tail,’ also exhibits a respectable, ethical approach to cooking, where parts that are usually discarded are recuperated in an effort to have no waste, honor the animal, and in order to “remind us that behind the finely prepared presentation is an animal whose sacrifice should not be abstracted from our appreciation of the food.”¹²⁹ From pork to pig, and from ribs and bacon to *foie gras* stuffed pig’s feet, *PDC* clearly roots its use of this ingredient in the pork industry’s history, as well as in Québec’s culinary canon, while presenting a version of the animal that is morally elevated, and corresponds to a ‘bobo,’ neo-hippy mentality¹³⁰.

Section 3 – Menu

Section 3.1 – Traditional Recipes

Another way in which *Au Pied de Cochon* claims to embed itself in Québec foodways is by proposing re-visited versions of the province’s traditional canon of recipes (as observed in Chapter 1). However, it is important to notice that most of the suggested traditional dishes appear in the album in quite a traditional form, as well as on the special holiday take-out menu, but not on the restaurant’s regular one. Indeed, apart from two entrées, *tongue in vinegar* and

¹²⁷ Martin Picard, *Au Pied de Cochon – L’album*, (2007) 69.

¹²⁸ Martin Picard, *Au Pied de Cochon – L’album*, (2007) 69. Loose translation mine.

¹²⁹ Martin Picard, *Au Pied de Cochon – L’album*, (2007) (English version) 11.

¹³⁰ I believe the same argument could be made concerning the hunting and fishing component of the *PDC* enterprise. Martin Picard’s attitude towards hunting and fishing is an extension of the approach described concerning pork meat. As animals that literally inhabit the land and are, again, emblematic of the province’s rich flora, the link to the many episodes of *Martin sur la route* or *The Wild Chef* where Picard and his sous-chef, Hugo Dufour, travel the province to hunt or fish game meat or fish (such as eel, seal, sturgeon, woodcock, dear, etc) and then cook as many comestible parts of the animal as possible on camera also stresses the honest, honorable, humane inclination *PDC* wants to accentuate concerning its use of meat.

oreilles de crisse, the few pies (lemon, sugar, maple and pecan), and the *pouding chômeur*, the *PDC*'s regular menu is surprisingly void of *tourtière*, *pâté chinois*, *cretons* and other traditional dishes it claims to want to 're-visit' and be inspired by. These dishes are not part of the every day repertoire of the restaurant, but are a set as specialties reserved for certain occasions, and offered by *Au Pied de Cochon* only 'take-out' during the festive season. This decision seems to marginalize these recipes rather than make them the cornerstone of *Au Pied de Cochon*'s menu.

What one does find on *PDC*'s *carte*, however, are many dishes using less-typical cuts or organs (such as brains, shank, head, or feet), beef and deer *tartare*, blood sausage, duck *carpaccio*, steak frites and even more *foie gras* dishes than there are pork ones. On closer look, it would seem that the major part of the *PDC* menu could be served at any high-end French bistro; *tartare*, blood sausage and steak frites are iconic French meals, and brains and shank are part of its gastronomic tradition (even if less often served today). Getting some of its inspiration from the international model of *fine cuisine*, French cooking, suggests a desire to appeal to a clientele attracted by recipes from this established illustrious catalogue. Additionally, *foie gras*, though produced in Québec for the last thirty years or so, is certainly not found in any of Québec's traditional recipes, yet occupies a larger part of the *PDC* menu than any other item. Being one of the most luxurious ingredients on the market, the predominance of this controversial delicacy at *Au Pied de Cochon* signals an attachment to a hedonistic or gastronome approach to food, one that goes against the narrative of rural and rustic cuisine usually attributed to Québec's culinary tradition.

The fact that *Au Pied de Cochon* adopts this sort of menu should raise skepticism about the restaurant's discourse. Instead of proposing a menu composed *mostly* of Québec traditional dishes or 'revisited' versions of them, as Picard repeatedly asserts he aspires to do at *PDC*, the

meal-selection at *Au Pied de Cochon* betrays an inclination towards lush, extravagant, epicurian, indulgent and gourmet dishes, in other words, a ‘bobo’ carte rather than one based on Québec’s canon of typical meals. Indeed, a ‘bobo’ mentality favors products that are “not marked as a symbol of class, yet still indicative of one’s purchasing power, expressing a comfortable art of living, open yet protected.”¹³¹ By serving *foie gras* stuffed pig’s feet, *Au Pied de Cochon* provides the ideal ‘bobo’ product – the pig’s feet offers, literally, an exterior that denotes an animal-conscious, rustic, *terroir* quality, while the *foie gras* provides the luscious, recherché, costly characteristic which conjures the optimal meal according to ‘bobo’ criteria.

The gap between *Au Pied de Cochon*’s narrative, claiming to “want to revitalize certain old Québec recipes,”¹³² and the actual choice of dishes offered at the restaurant uncovers the workings of myth at *PDC*. It is an instance where the careful mythologist, as Barthes would say, can observe the distortion of the *meaning* by the *concept*:

If [one] focuse[s] on a full signifier [one where the *meaning* and the *concept* are present, in this case, the entire *PDC* project (narrative, cuisine, etc)] in which [one] clearly distinguish[es] the meaning [here the *meaning* being Québec’s traditional dishes] and the form [*PDC*’s actual menu], and consequently the distortion which the one imposes on the other, [one] undo[es] the signification of the myth, and [one] receives the latter as an imposture: the saluting Negro becomes the *alibi* of French imperialism [or, at *PDC*, Québec’s traditional cuisine becomes an *alibi*, an excuse, and a justification for serving the type of menu it offers].¹³³

In other words, by taking *Au Pied de Cochon* at its word and actually verifying whether its menu presents a ‘revitalizing’ of Québec traditional dishes, one sees that such a discourse perhaps serves more as an *alibi* for the *concept* of ‘Québec boboality’ than as a foundation for its menu. To invoke Québec’s traditional cuisine as *Au Pied de Cochon*’s guide for its own

¹³¹ “ « Bobos », « gentrifiés », « gentrificateurs », « néo-bourgeois » crème d’une idéologie douce” *Oeil Critique* lundi 18 déc. 2006 <<http://www.oeil-critique.org/spip.php?article117>>.

Loose translation mine.

¹³² Martin Picard, *Au Pied de Cochon – L’album*, (2007) 68. Loose translation mine.

¹³³ Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” *A Barthes Reader*, (ed) Susan Sontag, (trs) Jonathan Cape (1972) (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 115.

cooking functions as a justification for serving food that is in fact luxurious, elaborate, succulent, and addressed to a bon vivant-connoisseur clientele. By devoting a section in the album to Québec's typical recipes, adding a temporary 'take-out' menu to sell these during the holiday season, and putting a few *entrées* and desserts (themselves more marginal courses) on its carte, *Au Pied de Cochon* maintains enough of the presence, of the *meaning* of Québec's typical dishes and its narrative to allow for the *concept* of 'Québec boboality' to appear without being questioned – as Barthes remarks that “however paradoxical it may seem, *myth hides nothing*: its function is to distort, not to make disappear.”¹³⁴

Section 3.2 - Poutine

The recipe that perhaps most emblematically embodies the mechanism of myth just described at *Au Pied de Cochon* is its infamous *foie gras* poutine. Indeed, *foie gras* poutine is the ideal marriage of a meal that is both inseparable from Québec national identity and also carries a 'bobo' attitude. Though born in the fast food industry, poutine is nonetheless one of the meals most associated with Québec, as seen in Chapter 1. Charles-Alexandre Théorêt's humoristic yet informative and book on the bizarre dish, *Maudite poutine!* traces the origin of the meal as well as the many ways it has been interpreted, popularized, and appreciated since its 'invention' in the 1950's in Québec. Although the meal incontestably originated in Québec, its actual birthplace is still a cause of debate. Indeed, the disputed authorship of poutine, claimed by both the Fernand

¹³⁴ Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," *A Barthes Reader*, (ed) Susan Sontag, (trs) Jonathan Cape (1972) (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 107.

Lachance and Eddy Lainesse duo and Jean Paul Roy from *Le Roy Jucep*, actual holder of the registered trademark since 1997, persist even today. That poutine is now found in the Québec version of the game *Monopoly*¹³⁵, and numerous international fast-food chains such as Burger King, McDonald's and Harvey's¹³⁶ serve it demonstrates that poutine's *meaning* as representative of Québec foodways remains both steadfast and current, regardless of whether its precise origin is ever discovered.

In fact, Théorêt esteems that poutine has become a literal emblem of the province, even if its fame does not always stem from praise, but sometimes from rather pejorative attitudes towards the meal¹³⁷. “Yet fortunately,” writes Théorêt, “a counter-attack is coming together and today young Québécois without inhibitions are re-appropriating this symbol, and even go as far as to make it an object of pride.”¹³⁸

At the head of this re-appropriation movement, Théorêt positions none other than Picard. Indeed, his reinterpretation of poutine, which includes a lobe of seared *foie gras* and *foie gras* cream sauce, has attracted a lot of attention from diners and critics alike. When asked whether his metamorphosis of the dish could not be called a ‘gentrification’ of poutine, Picard specifies that to him, poutine is not the most interesting meal from a gastronomical standpoint, but that it is nonetheless ‘magical’ while “far from being the best-selling item” at his restaurant¹³⁹. As with other fast foods, he thinks there must be a secret to the prevalence of

¹³⁵ Charles-Alexandre Théorêt, *Maudite Poutine!: l'histoire approximative d'un plat populaire* (Québec: Les Éditions Hélioïtrope, 2007) 26.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, 51.

¹³⁷ See *Maudite Poutine*'s chapter “À l'enseigne de la poutine” for examples of *poutine* being used in a pejorative way in newspaper articles and in politicians' comments.

¹³⁸ Charles-Alexandre Théorêt, *Maudite Poutine!: l'histoire approximative d'un plat populaire* (Québec: Les Éditions Hélioïtrope, 2007) 11. Loose translation mine “fort heureusement, la riposte s'organise et, aujourd'hui, de jeunes Québécois sans complexe s'approprient ce symbole, et vont même jusqu'à en faire un objet de fierté.”

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, 125 ff.

such meals that have enjoyed universal popularity, and sees his work as one that “reworks these dishes with better products so as to give them more nobility through their marriage with *foie gras*.”¹⁴⁰ Adulated by the press¹⁴¹ and endorsed by Anthony Broudain, who describes eating *foie gras* poutine as being similar to “driving down Hollywood Boulevard naked, wearing a cowboy hat and holding a white castle hamburger in one hand, having sex with two hookers while listening to ZZ Top. Total trash. [And I love it.]”¹⁴² *foie gras* poutine officially transforms the once frowned upon meal to one recognized as a culinary revelation.

The modifications Picard performs on poutine are not arbitrary, but create a dish that both retains its status as one of Québec’s culinary staples, while being infused with trendy opulence and rebellious self-indulgence; in other words, the *concept* of ‘Québec boboality’ “deforms but does not abolish the meaning [...] it alienates it.”¹⁴³ Thus, *foie gras* poutine, like *foie gras* stuffed pig’s feet, becomes a telling *mise en abyme* in *au Pied de cochon*’s overall myth.

Section 4: Familial, Convivial Atmosphere

The narrative of Québec traditional cuisine involves more than food: it extends itself to attitudes, contexts, and atmospheres. Indeed, the canon of Québec traditional recipes seems to be associated with the folkloric image of a ‘golden’ epoch in Québec, where large rural Catholic families lived in a culture of elaborate celebrations involving food (such as the holiday

¹⁴⁰ Martin Picard, *Au Pied de cochon – L’album*, (2007) 82. Loose translation mine

¹⁴¹ Marie-Claude Lortie, “La poutine au foie gras ? une révélation,” *La Presse*, 6 novembre 2004, section Actuel, 1.

¹⁴² Charles-Alexandre Théotrêt, *Maudite Poutine!: l’histoire approximative d’un plat populaire* (Québec: Les Éditions Hélio tropé, 2007) 123.

¹⁴³ Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” *A Barthes Reader*, (ed) Susan Sontag, (trs) Jonathan Cape (1972) (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 109.

season), and an overall merry, unassuming, and festive ambiance reigned. *Au Pied de Cochon* re-iterates this idealized past in its brief historical references, and seems to extend it by its own efforts to portray a convivial atmosphere. As explored in Chapter 1, *Au Pied de Cochon – l’album* sets up its traditional recipe section by reminiscing about the past: “À l’époque ou Noël était une fête essentiellement religieuse, l’Avent était une période de privations, un compte à rebours qui culminait avec les fameux temps de réjouissance et de joie dont on parle encore aujourd’hui [...] début décembre, on faisait boucherie. La maîtresse de maison affûtait alors son rouleau à pâte et s’installait à son poêle. De longs préparatifs précédaient les rencontres des familles unies et nombreuses.”¹⁴⁴ The warmth of social gatherings around food in a casual, cheerful setting, is indeed the type that *Au pied de Cochon* attempts to build for its diners, as Patrice L’Écuyer confirms when he specifies in his comments on the album’s accompanying DVD that:

Ici pour moi c’est l’esprit des... tu sais quand tu es jeune, et que tu as des moments de bonheur, c’est souvent autour de la table, au Québec, c’est ça, le temps des fêtes, mes parents viennent de la campagne, les grosses tables de vingt personnes, du monde partout... ça mange les enfant à une table, les adultes à l’autre, la fête... c’est cet espèce de bonheur là que tu retrouves, mais décupler parce que c’est pas la même cuisine, mais c’est les mêmes ingrédients, les mêmes de notre enfance, mais servit de façon sublime... il y a ce côté là ... le *Pied de cochon*, je trouve que ça nous ressemble à nous autre, si on était bon”

And Picard answers by saying “Ça c’est bien dit... ‘ça nous ressemble le *Pied de cochon*’ ... moi ça, ça j’aime ça.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Martin Picard, *Au Pied de Cochon – L’album*, (2007) 110. Loose translation mine: “A long time ago when Christmas was mostly a religious celebration, Advent was a period of restrictions, a count-down that peaked with the infamous time of celebration and joy that we still speak of today. At the beginning of December, it was time to butcher. The woman of the house would sharpen her rolling-pin and station herself at her stove. Long preparations preceded the reunion of united and large families.”

¹⁴⁵ Martin Picard, *Au Pied de Cochon – L’album*, (2007) – accompanying DVD – recipe section, Patrice L’Écuyer. Loose translation mine: “Here, for me, it’s the spirit... You know, when you’re young and you have the moments of happiness, it’s often around the table, here in Québec, its that, the holiday season, my parents come from the country, the big tables of twenty people, people everywhere... we eat, children at one table, adults at the other, a party... it’s this kind of happiness that you find (here), but increased ten fold because it’s not the same cooking, but it’s the same ingredients, the same as in our childhood, but served in a sublime way... there’s that side.... The *Pied de cochon*, I think it’s like us, it’s like us if we were good.” And Picard answers: “That’s well said... ‘it looks like us the *Pied de cochon*’ ... me, I like that”

The re-appropriation of the folkloric image of traditional Québec foodways at *Au Pied de Cochon*'s is evident in L'Écuyer's comment, when he states that *PDC* embodies the same spirit as his childhood memories of holiday gatherings in the country, with large tables filled with joyful family members. Indeed, the discourse surrounding Québec traditional cuisine provides a very fitting camouflage for the 'bobo' desire for moments recalling ancient traditions and 'simpler times.' As Brooks writes, the typical 'bobo' "is always looking backwards, [and] feels like [he does] not have the time to enjoy the essential things of life, [he] wants to re-establish a way of communicating that is more natural with the people around him [...] [and] wants to return to a golden age of coherence and structure, (or at least what [he] takes as such)."¹⁴⁶ By adopting Québec's jovial, grass-roots hospitality narrative, *PDC* can embody the 'bobo' longing for a traditional sense of community and a return to an uncomplicated, unaffected way of life, while simultaneously seeming to simply carry on the Québec-specific attitude surrounding food. The *meaning* of the discourse of Québec's traditional convivial atmosphere serves as a "reserve of history, a tamed richness"¹⁴⁷ for the 'bobo' *concept* of longing for and remembering an unadulterated cooperative society, and appreciating a 'back to basics' approach to life. The *meaning* of Québec's foodways narrative simply 'states' that this type of atmosphere was the norm in the province¹⁴⁸, while the *concept* is an attitude of longing for *all types* of simplified, 'grassroots', communal settings and ambiances, which finds the perfect *form* to express this at *Au Pied de Cochon*.

As a way of evoking the importance of family in Québec's culinary narrative, *Au Pied de Cochon – L'Album* includes two 'family-recipes' that are also part of Québec's culinary

¹⁴⁶ David Brooks, *Les Bobos*, (trs) Mariane Thirious and Agathe Nabet (Paris: Florent Massot, 2000) 256-258.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 104.

¹⁴⁸ Even though somewhat fictional itself, and motivated by a sense of nationalism that wanted to create a folklore for the population of Québec, as observed in Chapter 1.

canon: Lyne Guilmette's 'tarte à l'érable,' and Caroline Dumas' 'pouding chômeur.' Including recipes that are not signed by the restaurant's chef or team breaks the usual dichotomy of restaurant versus home cooking, and gives to these recipes an added sense of authenticity. The fact that they come from home kitchens also creates a direct link between what Québécois actually eat and what *Au pied de Cochon* proposes, and reinforces the overall legitimacy of *Au Pied de Cochon's* meal choice. Both recipes are also accompanied by pictures of their authors and their children, making the recipes personal and intimate, as if the reader is given privileged access to a genuine dish, while also extending the reach of these recipes by suggesting a generational continuity; these recipes were likely passed down from family member to the present author, and will also continue through their descendants, also present in the photo. The *concept* of a return to strong family bonds and wholesome traditions (such as passing recipes through generations), finds a means of expression at *Au Pied de Cochon*, where Québec's culinary canon acts as an 'alibi,' as explained above, of these ideals and emotions.

The *form* of *Au Pied de Cochon* works so fittingly to convey the 'bobo' mentality that one almost forgets that this, in fact, is not a home kitchen, but a very successful high-end restaurant. As Joanne Finkelstein points out:

Like other entertainment industries, dining out is much concerned with the marketing of certain states of mind, emotions, desires, and moods. The entertainment industries construct the practices and expressions through which individuals are encouraged to interpret their personal longings. Indeed, the ultimate accomplishment of these industries is the replacement of the consumer's sense of reality with that promoted by the manufacturer of the entertainment. This is precisely what the fashionability of dining out can accomplish.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Joanne Finkelstein, *Dining Out: The Hyperreality of Appetite*, in Ron Scapp and Brian Seitz (eds), *Eating Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998) 203-204.

Au Pied de Cochon provides a context, through which the ‘bobo’ *concept* can effortlessly articulate its yearning for reminiscing about old customs. In the same way that Finkelstein declares that entertainment industries, such as the restaurant business, are successful when consumers find in the dining establishment’s ambiance, narrative, or *form* a place to read their own desires expressed, Barthes reminds one that a myth is working when “everything happens as if the picture [or *form/meaning combination*] *naturally* conjured up the concept, as if the signifier *gave a foundation* to the signified.”¹⁵⁰ The re-appropriation of Québec’s traditional narrative core elements at *Au Pied de Cochon* is done in a way that makes the *concept* of yearning for community-based gatherings and pared-down life seem as though it ‘naturally’ extends from the *meaning*. One need only think of the reactionary attitude against a discourse of traditional value and conventional family lifestyles of the hippies of the 60’s and 70’s, or of the busyness and career-oriented culture of the 80’s, to see that although one may be aware of the established narrative that states a specific atmosphere and setting for Québec’s traditional cuisine, the *concept* of longing for an access to the conviviality and warmth of such events *does not* ‘naturally’ ensue.

In the spirit of acknowledging the traditional view of Québec’s familial atmosphere surrounding important food gatherings, Picard also devotes another portion of the album to “family Mondays.” Although the restaurant is closed on Mondays, as a matter of principle, Picard writes that it becomes a ‘second home’ and a ‘playground’ to him and his family, and is a way of truly ‘inhabiting’ the restaurant and not simply utilizing it¹⁵¹. In September, however, Mondays are reserved for canning, which Picard specifies is a way for *PDC* to “*try, as much as*

¹⁵⁰ Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” *A Barthes Reader*, (ed) Susan Sontag, (trs) Jonathan Cape (1972) (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 117.

¹⁵¹ Martin Picard, *Au Pied de cochon – L’album*, (2007) 176.

*possible, to respect the culinary customs born out of the constraints of our seasons*¹⁵² another typically Québécois food-related custom. Picard describes these Mondays in the following way:

Les lundis de septembre, c'est le temps des conserves! J'ai l'impression qu'avec les années, cette période est en train de devenir un point de repère dans la vie des enfants et dans celle de notre famille.

Il s'agit de prendre le temps de faire les choses. C'est un moment qu'on se donne pour vraiment apprécier les légumes. Le jardinier y a mis du temps. On y met du temps. Et on en profite plus longtemps. [...] Il y a aussi l'idée de mémoire derrière ça. Mon plus grand legs en tant que père et cuisinier, je pense que çaserait de réussir à laisser à mes enfants un héritage olfactif et gustative. Des ancrages. Pour qu'ils puissent, un jour, sectionner leurs souvenirs. Pour moi, c'est important de sectionner le temps. Sinon, on finit par s'y perdre.

J'adore aussi quand mes neveux et nièces participent à ces moments-là. C'est une sorte de privilège familial qu'*Au Pied de Cochon* nous apporte [...] Toutes les occasions sont bonnes pour se retrouver.¹⁵³

Expressing his wish to leave a culinary legacy to his children, the eagerness to gather not only his immediate but also his extended family through these large-scale food-related moments, as well as his desire to 'take the time' to perform these undertakings, Picard creates a narrative that, though very distanced, echoes Québec's traditional culinary narrative, while literally incarnating the 'bobo' attitude of being, which is:

Turned towards the past, towards tradition, the rites and the rituals of the past. [...] [since they] have become so opulent, have filled their lives with superficial things, they must return to the past to re-establish a contact with simpler and more natural ways of communicating with the people around [them]. It may be the time, says the bobo to himself, to re-discover the old values, those of a world of patience, strong roots, and simplicity.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² *Ibid*, 173. *Loose translation mine*.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 177. *Loose translation mine*: "Mondays in September are devoted to canning! I feel like over the years, this time is becoming a landmark in the children's lives and in that of our family. It's about taking the time to do things. It's a moment that we give ourselves to really appreciate the vegetables. The gardener invested time. We invest times. And we enjoy it longer (...) there is also the notion of memory underneath all this. I think that my greatest legacy as a father and cook would be to be able to leave to my children an olfactory and gustative heritage. Anchorages. So that they may, one day, divide their souvenirs. For me, it's important to divide up time. If not, we end up losing ourselves. I also like it when my nephews and nieces participate to these moments. It is a kind of family privilege that *Au Pied de Cochon* gives us)... every occasions is a good one to get together."

¹⁵⁴ David Brooks, *Les Bobos*, (trs) Mariane Thirious and Agathe Nabet (Paris: Florent Massot, 2000) 256. *Loose translation mine*: "tournés vers le passé, vers les traditions, les rites et les rituels du passé. [...] nous

Indeed, *Au Pied de Cochon* is a place where the desires inscribed in ‘bobo’ philosophy find an ideal *form* to express themselves: as a myth, *PDC* both recalls Québec’s traditional culinary narrative, while infusing it with the nostalgia and idealism of the ‘bobos.’

Conclusion

As a type of communication, myth conveys concepts through pre-existing semiological structures. At *Au Pied de Cochon*, myth is the process through which the entire project of the restaurant and connected ventures recuperate the narrative of Québec traditional cuisine, and distances its *meaning* in order to transform it into a *form* fit for the *concept* of ‘Québec boboality.’ As Barthes explains, “myth is speech *stolen and restored*. Only, speech which is restored is no longer quite that which was stolen: when it was brought back, it was not put exactly in its place”¹⁵⁵ and in the same way, *Au Pied de Cochon* uses Québec’s traditional cuisine’s narrative as a basis for its methods concerning food and its atmosphere, yet what is experienced at the restaurant is a distortion of it: it looks and feels like Québec cuisine, yet something else is present, the *concept*, acting like the undetectable ingredient that changes everything in a well-known dish.

By taking ingredients such as maple syrup or pork from Québec’s culinary discourse and infusing them with ‘bobo’ ideals, *Au Pied de Cochon* becomes a myth that naturalizes a ‘bobo’ world view, just as the *Paris Match* cover naturalizes ‘French imperialism.’ As ‘the new upper-class’ in positions of power, yet adhering to leftist notions of equality and rebellion against the

sommes devenus si opulents, nous avons rempli nos vies de tellement de choses superficielles, qu’il nous faut revenir en arrière pour rétablir le contact avec des façons plus simples et plus naturelles de communiquer avec le monde qui nous entourent. C’est peut-être le moment, se dit le Bobo, de redécouvrir des vieilles valeurs, celle d’un monde de patience, d’enracinement et de simplicité.”

¹⁵⁵ Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” *A Barthes Reader*, (ed) Susan Sontag, (trs) Jonathan Cape (1972) (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 112.

'system,' 'bobos' find at *Au Pied de Cochon* an accomplished myth in which to negotiate their dilemma and, more importantly, justify it. In this way, myth fulfills its function of turning history into Nature¹⁵⁶ - making the contingent state of social relations and powers appear natural. Yet, is there any way for Québec cuisine to escape being used by concepts to express, maintain, and legitimize social systems? Barthes indeed offers a way out of myth, which is what will be explored in the following chapter.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 116.

CHAPTER 3

The “Croquant de brie,” a large portion of brie cheese wrapped in phyllo dough resting on a green salad and drizzled with maple syrup, is one of the many starters served at *Ô Québec* restaurant. Based on Québec’s cuisine and folklore, *Ô Québec*, a chain of restaurants in France, owned and operated by M. André Peaudeau, aims to give diners a sense of the province's traditional food and atmosphere. The franchises, in their menu and décor, recreate an imaginary Québec-land for their guests, of which the starter described above is a quintessential example. However, this dish did not transport me back home in a sugar induced reverie, but rather reminded me of a confession a Polish friend of mine made years ago while telling stories over tea, trying to chase the harsh Canadian winter away. He and his brother, ages 8 and 11 at the time of this tale (pre-1989), had heard of this fantastic Italian dish called ‘spaghetti,’ pasta topped with tomato sauce, and decided to impress their neighbourhood friends by offering them a taste of this exotic delicacy. They reached high into the cupboards to find a box of long-forgotten macaroni and poured it into boiling water where it cooked for twenty minutes, drained the little water that was left, placed five portions into bowls, and submerged each one with bottled ketchup.

The anecdotal and charming misunderstanding came back to mind as I bit into the large piece of melting cheese because both the starter served at *Ô Québec* and my friend's childhood version of spaghetti share a similar approach to the myth of a foreign culture's cuisine. Both the restaurant and the young boys are working from a certain comprehension of the Québec or the Italian myths – for the youngsters, their pasta dish is a prime example of Italian foodways, and

for diners enjoying a meal at *Ô Québec* restaurant, they are given the sense that food they are eating close to the province's cooking tradition.

However, for a native of one of these two communities, as I am from Québec, what becomes immediately apparent is the gap between the myth presented at home, and the version of it found in other cultures. In the case of *Ô Québec*, what one observes upon entering the log cabin restaurant is more than the sum of all the markers of Québec traditional cuisine and folklore under one roof; *Ô Québec* restaurants are, as Robert Charlebois justly puts it in the promotional video for the chain, “plus Québécois que le Québec.”¹⁵⁷ Every aspect of the restaurant, from the placemats to the music to the artefacts to the design of the space, do not only evoke Québec-ness but amplifies, exaggerates, magnifies, and dramatizes the province's typical ingredients, recipes, or culture.

As a result of the way in which *Ô Québec* interprets Québec foodways, created by such 'staging' of some of Québec's traditional recipes and customs as can be observed at *Ô Québec*, the myth of Québec's traditional cuisine begins to fracture. The cracks that start to appear in the myth's structure possess an invaluable function: through it the *un-* natural and fictitious constitution of myth is exposed. The over-production of the myth begins to put in question its foundations - by pushing the myth a little over its usual limit, the habitual play between *meaning, form, and concept* is disturbed just enough to observe that their inter-relationship is constructed and in no way an axiomatic, given fact. In the case of the myth of Québec's national cuisine, the attempt to use it in order to convey a certain 'bobo' ideology at work in the maintaining and developing of a national narrative comes undone. This chapter aims at

¹⁵⁷ *O Québec* website, January 31, 2011 < <http://www.oquebec.com/video-concept.php> >. Loose translation: “More like Quebec than Quebec itself.”

identifying the semiological structure that enables one to bring myths to light, as well as give an example of this process by looking at the chain of restaurants *Ô Québec*.

Part 1: Making a Mythology of Myth – The Theory

Since myth recuperates pre-existing semiological systems in order to convey certain *concepts* and make these *concepts* appear natural, obvious, or unquestionable, one can easily live amongst myths without being conscious of them. As one will recall, myth's aim is, intrinsically, to operate unnoticed, and to make the ideologies it carries appear indubitable. Therefore, efforts to uncover myth can prove very frustrating, as myths are extremely malleable and can quickly adopt a new *concept* or even a new *form* and continue to exist unseen. As Barthes explains:

It is extremely difficult to vanquish myth from the inside: for the very effort one makes in order to escape its stranglehold becomes in its turn the prey of myth: myth can always, as a last resort, signify the resistance which is brought to bear against it. Truth to tell, the best weapon against myth is perhaps to mythify it in its turn, and to produce an *artificial myth*: and this reconstituted myth will in fact be a mythology. [...] All that is needed is to use it [myth] as the departure point for a third semiological chain, to take its signification as the first term of a second myth.¹⁵⁸

What Barthes suggests is that the way to escape myth is not to try to find a 'pure' form of language, one that could never mean anything but itself (an unadulterated system of *signs*, where signifiers would only refer to their signifieds), and therefore would be protected from myth's ability to appropriate it for its own sake¹⁵⁹. Rather, the way to escape myth is to expose it

¹⁵⁸ Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," *A Barthes Reader*, (ed) Susan Sontag, (trs) Jonathan Cape (1972) (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 123.

¹⁵⁹ Barthes addresses this proposition by giving the example of mathematical language, as having a meaning so full that it would seem impossible for myth to invade it. Yet, "myth takes it away en bloc; it takes a certain

by ‘overdoing’ myth - to create a ‘mock myth,’ an artificial, exaggerated version of it. In the same way that myth proper appropriates a first degree semiological system, converts it into a *form*, and infuses it with a *concept* to create a third *signification*, the ‘mock myth,’ or mythology, (which is the term I will use from here on to refer to Barthes’ ‘mythification of the myth’) recuperates an existing myth and uses *it* as a primary semiological system. Mythology then follows a very similar process as a myth proper: it appropriates, hollows, and distorts myth (as its primary semiological system) – but its aim is not to naturalize itself: it is to *expose* the workings of myth.

As seen in Chapter 2, the *meaning* of the first semiological system is distanced and transformed to become the *form* of the second semiological system. In the case of mythology, myth itself (as the first term in this semiological system, and to which I will refer as the *myth-meaning* from here on) is hollowed to become the *form* in the mythological system. However, the *form* in a mythological system is slightly different than in a myth proper; it is “ornamental.”¹⁶⁰ In the mythological system, the *form* adds embellishments that enhance the *myth-meaning*’s main characteristics, in order to make them appear *un-natural*. The *form* tries to amplify the *meaning* of myth to point to the fact that the connection between its *signifier* and *signified* is fabricated. One could think of the mythology’s *form*’s ‘ornamental’ quality as being similar to makeup. The *form* refers to the *myth-meaning*, yet distances it, just like lipstick suggests and highlights the lips underneath it, while at the same time slightly altering them in their contour and colour, and making them less accessible in their ‘original’ state, as unadulterated lips.

mathematical formula ($E=mc^2$), and makes of this unalterable meaning the pure signifier of mathematicity.” (*Ibid*,123)

¹⁶⁰ Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” *A Barthes Reader*, (ed) Susan Sontag, (trs) Jonathan Cape (1972) (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 124.

Additionally, “these ornaments,” Barthes writes, “are subjunctive in kind.”¹⁶¹ The subjunctive form, in French, is a grammatical mode that is used to express a fact as a thought or as imagined; it is the form used to express opinions, and foreseen or unreal events, as opposed to the ‘indicative’ mode that is used to state facts. In short, the subjunctive is an indirect style of discourse¹⁶², a reported speech. The *form* in a mythological system is the *myth-meaning* that has been ‘ornamented’ in order to point to the fact that it is present as a reconstitution of itself. It is the difference between the elocution “Barthes says that *myth* is a semiological structure,” and the statement “*myth* is a semiological structure,” where the ornamental, subjunctive *form* of mythology is the former, and the *form* of myth proper the latter (as a naturalizing process). To return to the simple lipstick analogy above, as an ornamented *form*, the applied lipstick refers to the lips underneath, in a way that ‘reports’ the lips to the outside world, while not giving a direct access to them – the lips have to be imagined and inferred in their ‘natural’ state through the lipstick. In short, one could say that the ornamented, subjunctive *form* in a mythology is the *myth-meaning* that has been distanced, highlighted, and glossed.

The workings of the *concept* in mythology, just as it was in myth proper, is perhaps the most difficult to grasp. The *concept* of mythology is a type of ‘gaze’ or sense of ‘awareness’; it is a consciousness - the intention of observing myth *as a myth*. The *concept* is the act of staring at myth¹⁶³. This gaze can be translated in many ways: it can be the use of a humourous tone in

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*

¹⁶² *Ibid*, footnote.

¹⁶³ Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” *A Barthes Reader*, (ed) Susan Sontag, (trs) Jonathan Cape (1972) (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 123-124 - Barthes uses the example of Flaubert’s novel *Bouvard et Pécuchet* to explain mythology, especially in the case of the ‘concept’ at work in it: the main characters, Bouvard and Pécuchet, attempt throughout the book to achieve an ideal life of learning, and the rhetoric of the characters about the ideology of being men of science and the value of a life devoted to learning, is what Barthes sees as the *myth* of the novel. Flaubert then intervenes, and takes the myth as the basis for his mythology. The *concept* he inserts, says Barthes, is *the Flaubert gaze* – Flaubert’s gaze translates as the way in which his characters are in a constant state of dissatisfaction about their learning experiences, their inherent naïveté towards their approach to the myth of the “learned men”, and their relentless hope to find a new topic or avenue to explore

addressing the myth, a ‘staging’ of myth, the portrayal of a circumstance where myth fails, etc. In all of these cases, myth is put ‘on display’ and this is what the *concept* of mythology is. Contrary to myth proper, in mythology, the *concept* is *not* ideological. The *concept* must indeed stay clear of ideology: if it were to adopt a critical slant, to stare ‘in judgment’ one could say, then what one would have is a *new* myth, one that reacts against the *signification* of the myth is it using as *meaning*. The result would be an infinite cycle of myth transforming itself to adapt to ideological changes, and therefore make it impossible, as Barthes puts it, to “vanquish myth.”¹⁶⁴ Mythology’s *concept*, in short, is an intentional gaze directed towards the *myth-meaning*.

The final *signification* of mythology is to reveal myth *as myth*. As Barthes puts it, “the power of the second myth [mythology], is that it gives the first its basis as a naïveté which is looked at,”¹⁶⁵ which means that in mythology, the *myth-meaning* is made somewhat simplistic, harmless, benign and obvious, and therefore cannot communicate its signification as an undeniable statement. *Myth-meaning* is not filled with another ideology but rather with a gaze, and as an emptied *signifier* of itself - myth appears somewhat like a puppet – it has retained its characteristic features, but its force and agency has dissolved.

Another way of understanding mythology’s signification is to say that it reveals the myth as a semiological structure, and by the same gesture, points to its *un-naturalness* and fabricated

knowledge – the result is a humorous take on a simplified ideology about being men of knowledge. The *simple presentation* of the ‘failure’ of the myth Bouvard and Pécuchet aspire to live up to is what Barthes refers to as the ‘gaze,’ which is the *concept* of mythology. However, I must mention that Flaubert himself did intend this book as a type of ‘revenge’ on what he called ‘la bêtise humaine’ (human stupidity) – which could have turned the book into another type of myth, one that resists the myth of ‘the learned men’ but would not have escaped the myth’s cycle of constant recuperation. However, this fate is avoided because revenge is not an ideology, but an intention, and as intention, fits into the ‘concept’ of gaze at work in any mythology (for more on this see introduction of the Gallimard Folio Classic Edition of the novel). The ‘gaze’ Flaubert inflicts on the myth driving Bouvard and Pécuchet’s adventures is not, in itself, ideological, but only intentional, in the sense that it does want to *reveal* the myth *as a myth*.

As a note, it is interesting to consider that Flaubert was developing the novel *Bouvard et Pécuchet* in parallel to his perhaps better known ‘dictionary of received ideas’, and that they are even published together in the Gallimard Folio Classic edition, as the ‘dictionary of received ideas’ could itself be seen as a mythology.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 123.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 124.

quality. Since myth proper aims to *naturalize* its concept, mythology undoes myth by showing that it is, in fact, a *usurpation* of the original *meaning*, and that the association with the *concept* is manufactured. One should also mention that mythology does not add a value to the process of exposing myth– it does not attempt to say whether the myth is desirable or condemnable, it simply brings to light the fact that myth is a constructed semiological system. Evidently, one might argue that such a disclosure constitutes *itself* a judgment, namely that myth as a semiological structure should be exposed as such, and that much is true. Ultimately, for Barthes, myth is not a helpful structure: it appropriates an existing language of signification, distorts it by infusing it with an ideological concept, and finally naturalizes this ideology through the myth - as such, myth is a deceitful system.

Part 2: O Québec Restaurants as Mythology

2.1 Rooted in the myth of Québec's traditional cuisine

With the elements of the structure of mythology in mind, I can now explain how *Ô Québec* acts as a mythology based on the myth of Québec's traditional cuisine (seen in Chapter 2). In the mythology of *Ô Québec* restaurants, the first semiological system is the myth of Québec traditional foodways. One will remember that the myth of Québec's national cuisine discussed in Chapter 2 is one where the narrative of the province's culinary customs is appropriated by a 'bobo' concept. The folkloric foodways of Québec are distanced from their history to become a space for the bohemian-hyppie ideology of the 'bobos' to merge with their capitalist-chic ambitions. These same elements are at play at *Ô Québec* restaurants: the franchise steeps every aspect of its décor, food, and atmosphere in Québec-specific customs,

thus using the narrative of Québec traditional cuisine as its foundational ‘image,’ while also allowing the ‘bobo’ desire to participate in an activity that affirms one’s purchasing power and social status to find ways of expressing itself. As the opening page of *Ô Québec*’s website states, the restaurant aims at recreating, the span of an evening, a typical Québécois ambiance where one can eat its food and enjoy its warm, convivial atmosphere:

Découvrez la vraie cabane au Canada !

Le temps d’une soirée, devenez l’aventurier que vous avez toujours rêvé d’être en pénétrant dans l’un de nos restaurants habillés gros rondins de bois qui sentent bon la forêt. Pour vous recevoir dans une ambiance typiquement québécoise, nous avons aménagé nos salles d’un décor de trappeur avec de l’animation musicale, qui fera rêver toute la famille.

Venez découvrir et déguster les spécialités québécoises dans un univers authentiques qui vous rappellera l’ambiance chaleureuse et conviviale des « cabanes à sucre du Québec ». Nos équipes attentionnées se feront un plaisir de vous renseigner et de partager avec vous la passion pour les grands espaces naturels du Canada. Au plaisir de vous voir... Ô Québec !¹⁶⁶

The invitation *Ô Québec* sends to its potential guest is to be transported into a ‘typical’ Québec ambiance, reminiscent of the ‘sugar shack,’ where one will be taken by the music, the décor, and information about the great natural spaces found in Canada and Québec. Such an introduction strongly positions the restaurant in the narrative and imagery of the province of Québec, and stresses characteristics such as ‘warm atmosphere’ or emphasizes ‘Québécois specialty dishes’ to indicate its commitment to recreating a version of the myth.

The food of *Ô Québec*’s menu emphasizes icons of Québec foodways by including ingredients, dish-names, or presentation-styles that draw on Québec’s narrative of traditional cuisine and overall symbolism of the province. Some of the popular dishes include the Classic

¹⁶⁶ *O Québec* website, January 31, 2011 < <http://www.oquebec.com/video-concept.php>>. Loose translation: Discover the real Canadian log-cabin! For one evening, become the adventurer you’ve always dreamed of by waking into one of our restaurants dressed in logs and that smells as good as the forest. To receive you in a typical Québécois ambiance we have equipped our rooms with a ‘trapper’ décor and musical animation that will make the whole family dream...

Come discover and taste Québec specialties in an authentic universe that will remind you of the warm atmosphere of the ‘sugar shacks’. Our attentive teams will be delighted to inform you and share with you their passion for the great Canadian nature... looking forward to seeing you... in Québec!

Ô Québec Poutine (French fries coated with maple brown sauce and cheese curds), Cheese and Smoked-Meat Tourtière (a golden crust pie filled with smoked meat, cheese, and onions), the *Ô Québec* burger (a bison burger with cheddar, pickled onions and smoked meat), the logger's pie (traditional Québec sugar pie), and many other dishes that are named after Québec cities, native animals such as bears and loons, or are presented to the dinner with a Québec flag planted on the plate¹⁶⁷. The use of Québec specific names, ingredients or recipe types, even if sometimes loosely interpreted as will be observed later on, clearly aim to locate the *Ô Québec* menu in the culinary tradition of the province.

The furnishings, ambiance, and interior design are also orchestrated to evoke Québec in every way. At their Rennes location, for example, you will find the following inside the large log-cabin building that houses the restaurant: snow shoes on the walls, a blazing fireplace, a canoe attached to the ceiling, native artefacts, traditional Québec music playing on the speakers or some greatest hits by famous Québec singers, Québec flags, moose silhouettes, deer antlers, lumber-jacks plaid flannel shirts hanging on hooks, vintage maple cans and containers, many stuffed racoons and beavers, and photos of the CEO, M. André Peaudeau, with famous Québec personalities such as Robert Charlebois, Gilles Vigneault, and Fabienne Thibodeau, the spokesperson for the chain. Through each item, from the napkins to the edifice, *O Québec* exploits the province's folklore and traditional icons to construct a space that is hermetically Québécois, and where nothing is left neutral. Thus, through the food and interior design, *Ô Québec* is immersed in the narrative of Québec's traditional cuisine.

The 'bobo' *concept* inherent to the myth of Québec's traditional cuisine as observed in Chapter 2 is also prevalent in *O Québec*'s design. The 'bobo's' duality finds a fitting place to express

¹⁶⁷ *O Québec* website, January 31, 2011 <http://www.oquebecrennes.com/pdf/Rennes_Menu.pdf>.

itself: on the one hand, the rustic and grassroots ambiance created through Québec artefacts and jovial, casual atmosphere at the restaurant legitimizes the indulgence in ‘exotic’ products and capitalistic activity. As one will remember, though the bobo is involved emotionally and ideologically with notions of freedom, alternative lifestyles, and supporting minorities, he or she also needs to negotiate their ‘hippy’ values with their comfortable bank accounts and more-than-satisfactory salaries. As Brooks writes, “les bohèmes s’identifiaient à ceux qu’ils considèrent comme les victimes de l’ordre bourgeois... [i]ls admiraient les cultures exotiques qui ne semblaient pas touchées par les moeurs bourgeoises [...] [i]ls idéalisaient ceux qu’ils prenaient pour de nobles sauvages, mettant d’étranges objets africains dans leur chambre”¹⁶⁸ and in this manner, the bobo fetichises other cultures. The presence of the ‘bobo’ ideology at *Ô Québec* supports the claim that the chain of restaurants is not only loosely using Québec-specific ingredients and icons, but is motivated by all aspects of the myth of Québec cuisine – the culinary narrative *and* the ‘bobo’ philosophy.

During an interview with M. Christophe Barbé¹⁶⁹, owner of the *Ô Québec* restaurant in Rennes, he confessed that although the decision to open an *Ô Québec* restaurant was driven by the desire to merge his experience in the restaurant industry with his great love for Québec (having visited the province multiple times), he also thought that it was a safe ‘marketing’ choice to associate the restaurant with the province of Québec, since it enjoys a very enviable reputation: “Le Québec, c’est le ‘peace and love,’ c’est la nature, c’est gentil... ce n’est pas comme ouvrir un restaurant Afghan!”¹⁷⁰ says he laughing. As being both foreign enough to seem exotic, yet close enough to French culture to be unthreatening, Québec is an ideal ‘theme’

¹⁶⁸ David Brooks, *Les Bobos*, (trs) Mariane Thirious and Agathe Nabet (Paris: Florent Massot, 2000) 71.

¹⁶⁹ Interview conducted June 24th, 2010, at the Rennes *O Québec* restaurant. *Loose translation mine, since interview was conducted in French.*

¹⁷⁰ “Québec is associated with ‘peace and love, with nature, its thought of as a welcoming place.... It’s not like opening an Afghani restaurant!” *Loose translation mine.*

for a bobo mentality to affirm its interest and support of other cultures, while at the same time be a secure financial ventures for investors who can be confident that supporting a Québec ‘product’ has very little chance of turning against them. As Books confirms, “ceux qui réussissent à cette époque sont ceux qui savent transformer des idées et des émotions en produits.”¹⁷¹ Indeed, effective branding is often achieved by focusing on the feeling or ideology it is propelled by, rather than by focusing on the object itself: “the brand message,” says Jeremy Iggers, “is not so much about the product as it is about the consumer - [b]rands, taken in their totality, become a vocabulary through which the consumer can articulate an identity; it is a shared language.”¹⁷² This lexicon of products through which bobos can both enjoy their wealth and yet feel like their spending is in line with their principle in part what *O Québec* tries to articulate.

When asked why the *Ô Québec* of the Rennes region opted to be located in a suburban area rather in the city centre, M. Barbé explained that “en étant plus en périphérie, on élimine la clientèle qui n’a pas les moyens de manger à notre restaurant – les gens qui vivent en banlieue ont habituellement un certain revenu, une voiture, et un budget pour pouvoir ce permettre une belle soirée à notre restaurant.”¹⁷³ Economic and financial concerns are important motivations for the *Ô Québec* brand, and even informs their location. However, the financial success necessary for *Ô Québec* to continue functioning as an enterprise is not generated by exploiting a luxurious setting or ingredient, but rather merchandising an exotic atmosphere and

¹⁷¹ David Brooks, *Les Bobos*, (trs) Mariane Thirious and Agathe Nabet (Paris: Florent Massot, 2000) 12. Loose translation mine: “those that succeed today are those that know how to turn ideas and emotions into products.”

¹⁷² Jeremy Iggers, “Taste and the Power of Branding,” *Food and Philosophy: Eat, Drink, and Be Merry* (eds) Fritz Allhoff and Dave Monroe, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, ltd. 2007) 100.

¹⁷³ Interview conducted June 24th, 2010, at the Rennes *O Québec* restaurant. Loose translation mine, since interview was conducted in French. “by being in the peripheral region, we eliminate a clientele that might not have the means to afford a full meal at our restaurants – people in the suburbs usually have a certain income, a car, and a budget to enjoy what we have to offer”

unconventional products, which makes the experience of dining at *Ô Québec* seem glamorous because of its foreign, wild flair.

Perhaps the most telling example of the ‘bobo’ *concept* at work at *Ô Québec* is contained in their ‘boutique.’ This section of their website suggests to customers that they may relive their Québec experience again and again by enjoying their ‘terroir’ products, their decorative dishes, or recipe kits. “Vous rêvez de découvrir le Canada,” asks their opening ‘boutique’ page, “vous voulez retrouver les sensations authentiques des saveurs de la Belle Province du Québec ? Alors laissez nous vous inviter à magasiner dans notre boutique en ligne pour y faire vos achats de produits Québécois.”¹⁷⁴ Following this invitation to find authentic Québec products at their boutique, one may browse through the different items available such as: maple syrup, maple, blueberry, or cranberry tea, Québec microbrewery beer, cider and ice-wines, Québec flags, pictures of typical Québec autumn landscapes, a lumber –jack shirt, *Ô Québec* dishes, sculptures, and even old-fashioned Québec license plates. Purchasing artefacts or participating in different types of foreign cultures’ customs, the economical aspect of such transactions is somewhat erased by its bohemian flair. As much as the bobo attempts to avoid it, Lawrence Grossberg is right when writing that “difference is no longer viewed as a form of resistance to an invading global capitalism but, rather, as another product to be commodified [...] [c]ultural diversity sells; in fact, it is now in the service of capitalism.”¹⁷⁵ Thus, the myth of Québec’s national cuisine appropriated and re-infused with a bobo mentality as seen in Chapter 2 is also present at *O Québec*, and is used as the first semiological system of its mythology.

¹⁷⁴ *O Québec* website, January 31, 2011 < <http://www.oquebecboutique.com/shopping/index.php?language=fr> >. Loose translation mine: “Do you dream of discovering Canada, you would like to find the authentic feeling of Québec? Then let us invite you to shop at our on-line boutique to buy Québec products.”

¹⁷⁵ Lawrence Grossberg, “The Space of Culture, the Power of Space,” *The Postcolonial Question: Common sides, Divided Horizons*, (eds) Lain Chambers and Lidia Curti (London: Routledge, 1995) 184-185.

2.2 – The ‘ornamented’ and ‘subjunctive’ form: the Disney influence

The *form* of *O Québec*’s mythology is implicit in its geographical displacement of Québec cuisine to France. The gap created between the myth of Québec’s national cuisine and how it is used at *O Québec* is inherent to the fact that the chain operates in France while branding itself as serving Québec food. The displacement of a community-specific narrative to another society that does not recognize these practices as belonging to itself is a process that separates the narrative from its source, making it more available for a new *concept*. Ethnic food is increasingly being promoted as synonymous with ‘high-end’ food, based on its sheer alien quality. “For this reason,” writes Curtis Deane in *Recipes for Values*, “‘ethnic’” food is now being advertised as the new chic form of high cuisine. But this “elevation” in status destroys its true character. In fact, it is neither “high” nor “low.” What makes food “ethnic” is its deep connections to a specific cultural context. It is ordinary food in context.”¹⁷⁶ Contrary to Deane’s statement, *O Québec* restaurants de-contextualizes food and this new status forces its own historical relevance to recede, and make way for a different *concept*. The geographical distance does, in a way, symbolize the space between the myth of Québec’s traditional foodways and the mythology of it found at *Ô Québec* – a space to be filled by the *concept* or ‘gaze.’ *Ô Québec* ‘looks’ at the narrative of Québec cuisine from afar, and the distortion inherent in this myopic view shapes a new ‘form’ in which to address this myth.

In its specifically *mythological* position here, however, one must add how the *form* is also ‘ornamental’ and ‘subjunctive’ – the two main characteristics of mythology’s *form*. I would suggest that these are modeled, in this case, after a Disney type of aesthetics, methods, and philosophy. Whereas in Bouvard et Pécuchet, Flaubert uses humour as a style in which to

¹⁷⁶ Deane W, Curtis, “Recipes for Values” *Cooking, Eating, Thinking: transformative philosophies of food*, (eds. Deane W. Curtis and Lisa M. Heldke) (Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana Press University, 1992) 129.

express the ‘gaze’ by creating amusing situations and comic characters that bring attention to the fabricated quality of the myth, *O Québec* is inspired by the Disney approach, where a theme is exploited in all its form to create a ‘realer-than-real’ and idealized version of whatever subject they hone in on.

André Peaudeau, creator, designer and director of the franchise, recalls in an interview that he began shaping his idea for the restaurants after working at Euro Disney¹⁷⁷. Inspired by the mega production company’s methods, and motivated by his affection for the province where he lived for many years, he started sketching a restaurant that would reference Québec, its nature, wild-life, food, and lively attitude¹⁷⁸. In the same way that a Texan or Moroccan-inspired restaurant at Euro Disney would ensure that every detail, from the décor to the music to the waiters’ outfits, would reflect its theme, *O Québec* is developed in a way that creates a ‘dream-version’ of Québec’s narrative – an over-polished set of ideas, stories, and icons re-assembled in the space of the restaurant to make, as stated above by Charlebois, a place that is “plus Québécois que le Québec.”¹⁷⁹

In an excellent article entitled *The Great Indoors: Disney’s Wilderness Lodge* by Jennifer Cypher and Eric Higgs, what could be called the Disney aesthetics is aptly laid out, especially as it pertains to Disney’s representation of nature, and of its specific depiction at the Wilderness Lodge in Florida. The Disney approach, simply stated, is to play out fantasies by eliminating all the negative elements, and reinforcing the cheerful, safe, sanitized and intensified version of the theme or story. Disney distills the theme it chooses to focus on, the American National Parks, or, in this case, Québec cuisine, and condenses them into simplified symbols, icons, or practices

¹⁷⁷ Interview conducted with André Peaudeau on November 25th, 2009

¹⁷⁸ From interview with M. Peaudeau on November 25, 2009

¹⁷⁹ *O Québec* website, January 31, 2011 < <http://www.oquebec.com/video-concept.php>>. Loose translation: “More like Quebec than Quebec itself.”

that are instantly recognizable in order to insist on the ‘reality’ of the fictitious world they are creating, and distance the ‘real’ world outside the space of the restaurant or the lodge as well as the ‘real’ world from which this theme is extracted. Cypher and Higgs outline this process when they write:

The honesty that typically accompanies [a] faithful and coherent original is unnecessary. Direct comparison is replaced by vague impressions, distant experiences, and the imagination. Going through the Lodge, one can pick out elements from other, real, places. The light fixtures closely resemble those at Jasper Park Lodge (in Canada) for example, but nothing is exact, it is ‘bricolage’ at its most exact. This imitation intrigues and enchants, but it does not have much substance. Eventually the discontinuous elements begin to intrude, and the hot, humid air beyond the sliding glass doors contrasts too sharply with the coolness within and Florida is recalled.¹⁸⁰

A very similar statement could be made about *Ô Québec*: the distancing of the myth of Quebec’s national cuisine to give room to more nebulous notions about it can also be observed by the presence of incongruous elements in its food, interior design, and overall visual representations. The *Ô Québec* menu, though using ingredients such as maple and wapiti meat, or naming dishes with such names as ‘coupe ‘Jack’ Cartier’ (dessert playing with the name of Jacques Cartier) or ‘brochette du trappeur’ (trapper’s brochette) also includes many references to the larger canon of Canadian cuisine or ingredients, as well as many dishes adapted to be closer to the French palate. The ‘tourtière fromagère et smoked-meat’ (tourtière with smoked-meat and cheese) is an interesting example of this hybridization: the name ‘tourtière’ is associated with one of the most recognizable Québec-specific recipes, yet it would never be filled with neither cheese nor smoked meat – the smoked-meat seems to be used as stuffing because of its connotation as belonging to a more Jewish culinary tradition, one that might find its way into a decidedly modern canon of Québec dishes with popular Montréal restaurants such

¹⁸⁰ Jennifer Cypher and Eric Higgs, “Colonizing the Imagination: Disney’s Wilderness Lodge” <<http://www.ethics.ubc.ca/papers/invited/cypher-higgs.html>>. Also published in *From Virgin Land to Disney World: nature and it's discontents in the USA of Yesterday and Today*, (ed) Bernd Herzogenrath (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001).

as *Schwartz's* being raised to the level of icons of the city's culinary map, but that would not have been very well-known sixty years ago, or would be found in rural cookbook of the post WWII era in the province. The mix of smoked-meat with cheese, potatoes, and onions, as indicated on the menu, actually resembles a popular French dish, the *tartiflette* (a mix of potatoes, reblochon cheese, cream, and lardons (a kind of bacon) baked in a small dish in the oven). This dish is actually very far from the mixture of ground meat, flavored with cinnamon and savory spices that most Québécois think of as 'tourtière.' The golden-crustured smoked-meat and cheese pie illustrates well how *Ô Québec* uses an element of Québec's traditional cuisine to then significantly distance its culinary history and replacing it by 'ornaments' that are more peripheral (smoked meat) or clearly from another culture. Other examples such as the 'croquant de brie à l'érable' described earlier in this chapter as a piece of brie cheese wrapped in phyllo dough resting on a green salad and drizzled with maple syrup, the *Ô Québec* burger made with bison meat imported from Alberta, or the 'crème brûlée des Hurons,' also reflect a similar 'bricolage' of the menu and recipes served at *Ô Québec* restaurants.

The collage present in the culinary influences of the dishes spills over into the décor and design of the franchises as well. Just as Disney often turns to an array of incongruous, anachronistic, or historically and geographically inaccurate details, to enhance and solidify the theme they have picked, so does the restaurants of the *Ô Québec* chain. Such errors might stand out to members of a community familiar with the setting or the narrative being used, but its de-contextualization is so carefully weaved in with other correct elements that the Disney version of the tale becomes acceptable, even if only momentarily. The log building and traditional Québec music aside, the space of the *Ô Québec* dining rooms also includes bar stools made of ridding saddles and fictional 'wanted' posters hang on the wall, referencing more of a western

theme than Québec. Alongside some cow-boy influenced items are also many Native-inspired artefacts such as a bust of a ‘generic’ Native American chief, dream-catchers, drawings or vintage photographs of the typical dress of different Native tribes such as the Hurons and Iroquois, and the napkins are folded to stand as mini tee-pees in front of each diner’s place. More Canadian-specific articles, perhaps the most obvious of which being the waiter’s uniforms, a Canadian Mounted-Police inspired costume, also contribute to the hodge-podge of artefacts found at *Ô Québec*. Though Québec is a Canadian province, the Mounted Police uniform is not one that specifically identifies Québec and its specific culture, but rather the larger nation it is a part of. The fact that other culture’s symbols can find their way into the *Ô Québec* décor quite unnoticed by most customers points to the arbitrariness of cultural artefacts in general – in other words, the ‘bricolage’ found at *Ô Québec* restaurants is also present in the construction of most societies’ cultural heritage. This conglomerate of cultural representations signals that the myth of Québec cuisine is definitely neither natural nor untouchable, but rather something that can be flexed and moulded to fit other ambitions or concepts – in short, the co-habitation of elements external or only tangentially related to Québec culture at *Ô Québec* begins to poke at the ‘naturalisation’ process of the myth of Québec’s national cuisine.

Also complying to the ‘ornamental’ quality required in a mythological *form*, the Disney aesthetic is recognized for making everything bigger, brighter, and of epic scale compared to the original. *Ô Québec* does indeed seem to fill every part of its interior design with as many references to its Québec theme as possible. The salt and pepper shakers rest in a mini canoe on the table, the placemats show vintage pictures of the Château Frontenac in Québec city or of a Mountee and a Native Chief shaking hands, drawings of rustic log cabins, short explanations of what a typical ‘sugar shack’ is or of a typical Québécois expression or

proverb; the walls are covered with pictures of Québec celebrities, stuffed beavers, raccoons or antlers, flags, wood sculptures, and the list goes on. “What is created by this layering of theme upon theme,” explain Cypher and Higgs, “is a simulacrum, or a simulation which has no true original. In the absence of an original, distinguishing characteristics can be cobbled together to suit the needs of the creators and designers,”¹⁸¹ and, one might add, to loosen the myth from its privileged position as axiomatic, unquestionable, and self-evident.

The inevitable editing, cutting and re-shaping that occurs when Disney tries to re-create a world in its micro-version such as the jungle for productions like Tarzan or The Lion King, Imperial China for Mulan, or Native American worlds for Pocahontas, for example, it cannot *but* participate in forming myths, since it literally uses these cultures as backgrounds for the telling of another story – just like the *form* in a myth keeps the ‘original’ narrative or particular history at bay in order to invest it with another. Exactly like a *form* acts in a typical myth, by constantly negotiating between retaining enough of the initial semiological system while emptying it to insert the *concept*, Disney takes these pre-existing narratives but remodels them to suggest a slightly different final meaning or *signification*. The universe re-created by Disney productions, with its exaggerations and inaccuracies, acts as a very efficient ‘ornamented’ *form* for *mythologies* - it magnifies some elements of myths, and even adds peripheral emblems or thematic effigies to create an overall narrative and image that, while trying to reinforce its ideology, in fact helps to uncover myth and therefore constructs *mythologies*.

However, the difference between a *myth* proper and Disney is that the latter always has a basic frame of fantasy – Disney deals with entertainment, the magical, the enchanting, and the

¹⁸¹ ¹⁸¹ Jennifer Cypher and Eric Higgs, “Colonizing the Imagination: Disney's Wilderness Lodge” <<http://www.ethics.ubc.ca/papers/invited/cypher-higgs.html>>.

imaginary – it never claims to be presenting the world as it is. This is how the ‘Disney approach’ is also conducive to the ‘subjunctive’ characteristic of the mythological *form*. The framing of the tale utilized by Disney often implies a sort of ‘reported speech’: whether it is through direct narration by a character, or by using the introductory locution ‘in a land far far away’ or other devices, Disney finds a way of giving the main body of the narrative a sense that it is imagined or unreal, or at least not experienced first hand, which again acts as a device for the ‘subjunctive’ quality the mythical *form* typically has.

M. Barbé also adopts the view that *Ô Québec*’s goal is not to be accurate in its depiction of the province and its foodways, but rather, that “it is a place where people come to *dream* about Québec – people want to live out their imaginary Québec... Just like when Disney presents an image of the ‘Far West,’ nobody actually thinks it is like that, but it is the image we have of it, and here we try to re-create that image that people have of Québec...we re-create the imaginary Québec people have and not what Quebec is in reality.”¹⁸² Therefore the espousal of the Disney aesthetic by *Ô Québec* fulfills the requirements of a mythological *form* and gives the overall *mythology* a coherent and easily understandable aesthetics through which to express its *concept*, the *gaze*.

2.3 The concept: the gaze and the stage

The *Ô Québec* franchise retains the myth of Québec’s national cuisine and ‘hides’ in it as a usual myth would, and then distances the *myth-meaning* by giving it a new *form* (in this case identified as inspired by Disney), to make room for the mythological *concept*, the *gaze*. At *Ô Québec* the gaze is present in the very premises on which the chain’s is conceived: first,

¹⁸² Interview conducted with M. Barbé on June 24th, 2010

Québec's cuisine is displayed as foreign, exotic, unfamiliar, and intriguing; and secondly, the gaze is felt through the theatrical attitude or 'staging' of the myth of Québec's national cuisine. The restaurant, through its Disney-influenced *form*, creates a space where Québec-ness is being performed, which, by definition, implies an audience, a viewer, a 'gaze.' The wild and foreign flair attached to the presentation of Québec's food and customs invites the guests to think of them as novel, rare, peculiar, enticing, or even bizarre or romantic, which favours a viewer standpoint's towards the restaurant's project. As David Bell and Gill Valentine explain in their book entitled *Consuming Geographies*, "national cuisine other than [one's] own are often celebrated, even fetishized, for their exotic difference, adding spice to life."¹⁸³ By fetishizing another culture, one asserts not only a position of control but also of voyeurism towards it.

Ô Québec's constant pressure to reinforce the 'otherness' of Québec culture and food not only reiterates the restaurant's allusions to the myth of the province's national cuisine, but also puts the focus on its exoticism, and as such provokes a voyeuristic attitude from guests. Québec's otherness is expressed by emphasizing the differences, to a mainly French audience, between Québec and France. The emphasis on the distinctiveness of Québec, in its language, its fauna, and its history, is translated in the artefacts and ingredients used at *Ô Québec* – even in non-traditional recipes, the 'poulet à l'érable' (maple chicken), for example, includes maple in its accompanying tomato sauce, and the vegetarian salad adds cranberry, so that at every turn and in every details a touch of a typical ingredient from Québec's traditional cuisine is present. The small anecdotes found on the placemats explaining certain Québec expressions also suggest that *Ô Québec* is eager to point to the singularity of Québec's culture and food. The idioms 'se sucrer le bec' (literally translated as 'to sweeten one's beak'), 'tomber en amour' (to fall in

¹⁸³ David Bell and Gill Valentine, *Consuming Geographies: We Are Where We Eat* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) 165.

love), ‘mauditement bon’ (damn good), and ‘pas dispendieux’ inexpensive’, found under the heading ‘Le parler Québécois’ (The Québécois speech), are all accompanied by a corresponding French phrase. In this short example of Québec colloquialisms, *Ô Québec* highlights the locutional singularities of Québécois’s speech in contrast to the equivalent French ones to underline the slight but crucial disparity between the two cultures which often refer to each other as ‘cousins.’ Yet here, even a somewhat negligible difference in vernacular expressions is put on display to enhance the feeling of engaging with a dissimilar culture than one’s own.

The notion of restaurant spaces as theatrical spaces and of the dining experience as a highly orchestrated performance through which one can safely observe a foreign culture’s foodways is not unprecedented. As Arjun Appadurai remarks on the growth of restaurants in India, “restaurants, both humble and pretentious, have increasingly become arenas for the transcendence of ethnic difference and for the exploration of the culinary Other.”¹⁸⁴ The guest is also the viewer, and such a position is enhanced when one chooses to dine at a restaurant offering another culture’s food. Although this claim could be made about any restaurant, it is particularly the case at *Ô Québec*.

As indicated by Joanne Finkelstein in *The Careers of Chefs* “The theatricality of food presentation in these spaces of consumption is a self-conscious production of the waiters and the chefs, with the willing collaboration of customers who, it is said, subordinate their true social identity to roles scripted by the restaurant.”¹⁸⁵ A restaurant can be thought of as a stage, where etiquette and custom dictates the roles and the expected behaviors of the participants. At *Ô Québec*, the décor and ambiance, with their avalanche of references to Québec customs, does

¹⁸⁴ Arjun Appadurai, “How to Make a National Cuisine,” *Food and Culture: A Reader*, Eds Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (New York and London: Routledge, 1997) 294.

¹⁸⁵ Alluding to Joanne Finkelstein, *Dining Out* (New York: New York University Press, 1989) in Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson and Sharon Zukin. “The Careers of Chefs.” *Eating Culture*. (eds) Ron Scapp, and Brian Seitz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998) 92.

create a space that resembles a theatre stage ready for a production of a Québec fairy-tale. The waiters literally wear Canadian mounted Police costumes, and the wall decorations as well as table settings are filled with ‘props’ inspired by Québec culture or nature-adventurer themes. Additionally, a few of the restaurants also propose musical evenings, where a live band comes and plays popular Québécois songs. The duo ‘Mic-Mac,’ for example, played on June 24th, Québec’s national holiday. The live performance truly enhanced the idea that the surroundings act as a type of stage on which to ‘play Québécois.’ The presence of so many elements that indicate that *Ô Québec* is a performance and staging gives the diner a privileged position as onlooker, audience, member, or reader of this ‘play.’ In the role of someone who has to literally *gaze* at the display, or observe the over-extension of the myth of Québec traditional cuisine as it is presented at *Ô Québec*, one holds the necessary position for this very myth to be uncovered.

2.4 The final signification: myth uncovered by mythology

Finally, the signification of the *mythology* of *Ô Québec* is, simply put, to uncover the myth of Québec’s national cuisine as observed in Chapter 2 and exemplified by *Au Pied de Cochon*. The process through which a recipe like *tourtière* mutates from being a staple holiday dish to a hedonistic two-kilo meat pie that was instrumental in raising *Au Pied de Cochon*’s sugar shack to the top ten new Canadian restaurants of 2009¹⁸⁶ and the underlying myth at play in this shift recedes at *Ô Québec* to give rise to another *concept*. Instead of a celebration of the myth of Québec’s national cuisine, the *Ô Québec* franchise seems to frustrate one’s ability to give in to myth; with a few modifications and a new context, a mythology disturbs the unquestioned status of myth and unveils it as artificial.

¹⁸⁶ EnRoute magazine, January 31, 2011 <<http://enroute.aircanada.com/fr/articles/les-meilleurs-nouveaux-restos-canadiens-2009/page:2>> .

Typically, one can have three different readings of a mythology depending on which community one belongs to or which association to the core narrative one has. To the guest that does not belong to the culture or associates with the central narrative of the mythology, the *Ô Québec* experience will most likely be effective. The customer will be aware of a certain degree of divergence between what dining in Québec might be and an evening at *Ô Québec*, but the travesty of the ‘counterfeit’ for the ‘real’ is fully accomplished. Even though *Ô Québec* never claims to give an accurate replica of what one might experience when dining in the province, their efforts to make their version of the myth seem larger than life is in conflict with the insistence on authenticity. As mentioned by Cypher and Higgs concerning the Disney Wilderness Lodge, “all of the work that Disney does to highlight the fantasy of the Wilderness Lodge is overshadowed by the work they do to convince [one] of its realness; this bid for realism camouflages the fact that the Lodge is a representation,”¹⁸⁷ and a similar reflection can be applied to *Ô Québec*. For such diners, the experience at *Ô Québec* will be similar to someone reading *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and seeing merely a humorous and entertaining story, or someone taking their family to see the latest Disney film and simply enjoying the entertainment value of an animated production.

To someone familiar with the myth, two reactions are possible: resistance or recognition of myth as such. Resistance is bound to be the initial response – one recognizes the *myth*, but also observes the ‘ornaments’ and ‘subjunctive quality’ at play, and this disrupts the usually obvious and unquestionable way in which myth performs. Mythology then appears threatening since it menaces the ideology and narrative one has adopted as one’s own. One’s cultural point of reference is taken away from its habitual position as a natural or accustomed assumption

¹⁸⁷ Jennifer Cypher and Eric Higgs, “Colonizing the Imagination: Disney's Wilderness Lodge” <<http://www.ethics.ubc.ca/papers/invited/cypher-higgs.html>>.

about one's community, and put on display as an ingenuous, callow, and naïve fiction loosely based on historical and anthropological notions about one's society. This recognition is often met with opposition because the myth has so convinced a given group of its legitimacy that any unfitting representation undermining it, even tangentially, is either seen as offensive or dismissed as a humorous take on the established myth but not really putting it in peril.

The third type of reader comes to the conclusion that the myth they had adopted and believed in about their social mores and tradition is in fact not only fabricated in the mythological version they are faced with, in this case the *Ô Québec* restaurants, but that its central premise is a conjecture designed to propel social values beneficial to the established ruling powers. In other words, the very idea of a coherent and historically-accurate traditional cuisine in Québec as a heritage that should be protected and celebrated, as well as elevated and gentrified to solidify a sentiment of connectedness to the nation, is not implicit nor innate to a community. In the words of Beaudrillard, "it is a generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal."¹⁸⁸ The semiological structure of myth breaks down, and the initial reaction of protest where one might want to say, when faced with a mythology, that this is not a genuine representation of the 'real' crumbles as one realises that there is no 'original' or 'true' first semiological system.

¹⁸⁸ Jean Beaudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations," *Literary Theory: An Anthology second edition* (eds) Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Balckwell Publishing 2004) 365.

CONCLUSION

In this study, I have argued that foodways and culinary narratives offer much more than anthropological and sociological data, but actually function as a semiological system. Through gastronomic practices, individuals and communities express their sense of identity as well as their values. As Barthes points out, “ce qui prouve la communication, ce n’est pas la conscience plus ou moins aliénée que ses usagers peuvent en avoir, c’est la docilité de tous les faits alimentaires à constituer une structure analogue aux autres systèmes de communication.”¹⁸⁹ Whether a community is conscious of it or not, its food practices are communicating beliefs and a philosophy about itself. “Like a language,” support David Bell and Gill Valentine, “food articulates notions of inclusion and exclusion, of national pride and xenophobia, on our tables and in our lunchboxes.”¹⁹⁰

However, the communicative potential of food can also be exploited to carry ideologies *unnoticed*, and perpetuate truths in a society merely because it manages to avoid critical inquiry, and not because the beliefs have been selected by the community. Myth, as a form of speech, is especially constructed to achieve such a *slight of hand*: by recuperating pre-existing narrative, yet infusing its own principles and dogma in them, it carries its message like the Trojan horse its warriors, inconspicuously. The work of the *mythologist* as Barthes would say, or of any critic, is to uncover such concealed processes and to bring them

¹⁸⁹ Roland Barthes, “Pour un psycho-sociology de l’alimentation contemporaine,” (*Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 16.5, 1961) 980. Loose translation mine: “the proof that there is communication is not the that its users are conscious of communicating, but rather it is the ease with which all culinary facts can constitute a structure analogous to other communication systems.”

¹⁹⁰ David Bell, and Gill Valentine, *Consuming Geographies: We Are Where We Eat* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) 168.

to light so that they might be analyzed, and that both the individual and the community would heed Socrates' warning that "the unexamined life is not worth living."

The purpose of this paper has been three-fold; first, to map a preliminary canon of Québec traditional dishes, and the accompanying narrative that has labelled those recipes as iconic of the province's cuisine; second, to expose how the working of *myth* described by Roland Barthes, where narrative of Québec's traditional cuisine has been appropriated to convey ideologies, namely, that of the rising middle class named by David Brooks as 'bobo,' looking more specifically at how this is worked at the well-known Montreal restaurant *Au Pied de Cochon*; and third, to show a possible avenue 'out' of the process of *myth* by transforming it into a *mythology*, as exemplified by the French chain of restaurants *Ô Québec*.

In order to be able to speak of 'Québec's traditional cuisine,' the preliminary task was to find strategies through which one can piece together a tentative list of meals that have a historical basis as being popular amongst Québécois, as well as be *recognized* by that community as specific to its food tradition. With the assistance of *Le Devoir's* unofficial survey electing *pâté chinois* as Québec's national dish, as well as with the invaluable research conducted by Caroline Coulombe, where she drafted a list of recurring recipes found in cookbooks, home-economic manuals, journal articles, and corporate material over a century (1860-1960), an ensemble of Québec traditional meals were selected. I was then able to use this list as a reference throughout this paper, and compare the *narrative* of Québec's traditional cuisine with some excerpts from history.

The narrative of Québec's traditional cuisine was then gradually identified as being linked to the post-WWII baby-boom era, associated with a rural lifestyle, where large

families gather around the dining-room table during major Catholic celebrations to enjoy some of their favourite dishes. However, it also became clear that there is a gap between the *narrative* of Québec's traditional cuisine, and historical accuracy.

In Chapter 2, the narrative of Québec's traditional cuisine is recuperated and transformed into a *myth*. Following a theoretical explanation of Barthes' notion of *myth*, I discuss how the enterprise of *Au Pied de Cochon* constitutes an instance of *myth*. Taking the narrative of Québec's traditional cuisine, *Au Pied de Cochon* then infuses it with a 'bobo' concept. Based on David Brooks 2001 book *Les Bobos (Bobos in Paradise)*, I trace how *Au Pied de Cochon* takes the narrative of Québec foodways, distances its meaning to shape it into a new form in which to show the knowledgeable, conscientious, and attached-to-the-past ideology of the 'bobo' while also allowing its capitalist aspiration to find an outlet without compromising their value. Through ingredients such as maple syrup and pork, and through recipes such as *pudding chômeur*, as well as through its overall menu and narrative, *Au Pied de Cochon* establishes itself as a restaurant that strives to uphold Québec's cuisine, but *also* aims to prove that "the food here [in Québec and Canada] stacks up with the best that anyone, anywhere, has to offer, [...and] wants to be recognized as a popular eatery, where authentic meals can be enjoyed and choice wines savoured."¹⁹¹

Although *Au Pied de Cochon* projects a very jovial and unassuming image, and that the people involved in its promotion undoubtedly harbor genuine affection for Québec's food narrative and wish to celebrate it, it nonetheless is involved in the furthering of a 'bobo' ideology. The threat inherent in myth's mechanism is not that it encourages and propagates ideologies, but rather, that it does so unnoticed – through myth, concepts such as 'nation,'

¹⁹¹ Martin Picard, *Au Pied de cochon – The Album*, (2007) 11.

capitalism, progress, etc., are being communicated in communities as being self-evident and unquestioned. As Barthes reminds his readers, “[m]yth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact.”¹⁹²

The only way to escape a ‘myth-making’ world is, according to Barthes, to make a *mythology* of *myth*. To do so, one must take *myth* and exaggerate and embellish its features so as to make its fabricated character come out. By making what one might think of as a ‘soft-caricature’ of *myth*, its *un-real* nature is uncovered: in other words, the ideology is exposed as not inherent to whichever pre-existing narrative it was using as ‘host.’ In Chapter 3, I have explained how the French chain of restaurants *Ô Québec* is an example of how the myth of Québec’s traditional cuisine can be *mythologized*, and therefore uncovered.

Though one might have unmasked the workings of myth in Québec’s traditional cuisine, the work must not stop here. Myth is one of the most active forms of speech present in contemporary society, and it is the academic’s role to observe the workings of ideologies and narratives performing in public discourse. By understanding the form of myth and the process of mythmaking, one can become a better *mythologist*, and determine which concepts are being put into play in one’s own community and one’s own lifetime. In this study, I have focused on notions of national identities, but investigation into other narratives -- such as those engaging debates on health, ecology, the body, healing, longevity, and death, as well as on ways in which food is appropriated to direct these debates must be topics for future studies.

¹⁹² Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” *A Barthes Reader*, (ed) Susan Sontag, (trs) Jonathan Cape (1972) (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 132.

Joanne Finklestein describes the urgency of continuing to research and study foodways when she writes:

“At first, this may seem relatively trivial and unproblematic. After all, how serious could it be that we dine out too much and think about it too little? Yet, the danger of an over mannered life, where not enough time has been given to self-examination, produces a passivity that can leave us confused and victimized. [...] The mannered life is a refuge from critique and judgment, yet critique and judgment are nevertheless understood to be the basic elements of civility. So, if the pleasures of dining out derives largely from an acceptance of its overprescriptiveness, then it seems that a strong appeals of dining out is its provision of a formalized code of behaviour which is advertised as pleasurable and urbane, but which in practice may be incipiently uncivilized.”¹⁹³

The mannerism, or endless recuperation of semiological systems, is indeed a threat to living a fully conscious life, and processes through which this illusion can continue should be uncovered.

Recently, the increase in interest in food practices should alert critics to apply theory, discernment, and knowledge to these issue that are captivating the social discourse. Close to home, the single dish of *poutine* has been the cause of numerous publications and debates, and as Charles-Alexandre Théorêt writes, has found its way around the world: “la poutine à fait son chemin jusqu’en Corée au Pub Rocky Mountain Tavern de Séoul et dans les succursales coréennes de la chaîne New York Fries, jusqu’au Vietnam dans la ville de Hanoi au café Le Pub, jusqu’à Ouagadougou au Burkina Faso, en Russie et finalement à New York ou elle a un succès fou.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Joanne Finkelstein, *Dining Out: The Hyperreality of Appetite*, in Ron Scapp and Brian Seitz (eds), *Eating Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998) 206-207.

¹⁹⁴ Charles-Alexandre Théorêt, *Maudite Poutine!: l’histoire approximative d’un plat populaire* (Québec: Les Éditions Hélio trope, 2007) 64-66. Loose translation mine: “the *poutine* has found its way to Korea at the *Rocky Mountain Pub* Tavenr in Seoul, and in the participating restaurants of the *New York Fries* fast-food chain, to Vietnam in the city of Hanoi at the café *Le Pub*, to Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso, in Russia, and finally to New York City where it is becoming very popular.”

As Ron Scapp and Brian Seitz remind us, “[e]ating practices embody some of the most dramatic philosophical conundrum, including the puzzling divisions and linkages between culture and nature as well as those between appearance and reality.”¹⁹⁵

Finding harmony between a simple, first degree semiological system and its usage, which only rarely avoids being recuperated by some form of myth, is exactly what Barthes sees as the challenge of the mythologist as he ends his exposition of myth. He writes: “And yet, this is what we must seek: a reconciliation between reality and men, between description and explanation, between object and knowledge.”¹⁹⁶ To find a space where language reflects the world in its purest way, free of political and ideological meaning is both the difficulty and the aim of communication.

¹⁹⁵ Ron Scapp and Brian Seitz, Eds., *Eating Culture* (State University of New York Press: Albany, 1998) 1.

¹⁹⁶ Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” *A Barthes Reader*, (ed) Susan Sontag, (trs) Jonathan Cape (1972) (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 140.

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