**KOMBUCHA**

Kombucha is a fermented tea made with a symbiotic culture of bacteria and yeast sometimes referred to as a SCOBY (acronym of the above description) or a mushroom.

You will need a SCOBY. Ask someone who brews for a 'baby' SCOBY or fish one out of a store bought bottle. (Every bottle of kombucha brewed creates a new SCOBY within it – a small mushroom-like disc that is the by-product of the larger batch of kombucha and the surroundings of it being bottled.)

Next brew about two gallons of tea – I prefer a green tea – add sugar 'to taste' (you need some sugar for the fermentation to occur), let cool, and pour into a large glass container.

Then float a SCOBY in it for about two weeks (cover with a towel so the mixture can breathe while protecting it from fruit flies).

After two weeks you have a fermented tea and a baby SCOBY in addition to the mother you originally floated.

Separate the baby from the mother and set the SCOBYs aside to use again.

Now you bottle your tea in air tight jars, I use old wine bottles with air tight stoppers.

Then let bottles sit in a dry airy cool place for two more weeks.

Refrigerate and drink when cool.

What you have is a carbonated tea that is full of 'good', pro-biotic bacteria similar to yogurt.

The secret to success is finding the right spot as the SCOBY collects and grows not only from the bacteria of the tea but also from its/your surrounding environment, feeding back into an ecosystem in a micro-form of permaculture.



# Object Oriented Cookery

John Cochran

Graham Harman's claim that praxis distorts 'ontology' as much as theory does,[1] is an insight that has long been missing in cookery praxis and theory. Ontology, for Harman, refers to a description of the basic structural features shared by all entities.[2] Cookery, for our purposes, will be considered to refer to all forms of cooking, including what happens in our home kitchens. Many times cookery praxis is something we take part in by consuming the practice of professionals. But whether we cook or not, from the gathering of ingredients to the eating of meals to the metabolic emergence of nutrients in our bodies, the feedback systems used to engage in complex analyses of factors in human life such as hunger, nutrition and environment are likely to be lost in the immediate experience of food or the larger narratives in which food participates. More often than not, the praxis of

1. G. Harman, 'Intentional Objects for Non-Humans', PDF, at http://www.europhilosophie.eu/recherche/IMG/pdf/intentional-objects.pdf, 4.

2. 'Henceforth, let "ontology" refer to a description of the basic structural features shared by all objects, and let "metaphysics" signify the discussion of the fundamental traits of specific types of entities.' G. Harman, 'On Vicarious Causation', **Collapse** II, 171-205: 204.

cookery distorts its 'being' to the extent that the pause required to consider why, how, when, where and what we eat, and how we participate by proxy in cookery, is non-existent. So that we may, indeed must, ask the question: In what sort of open or closed system does cookery praxis take place?

Developed through his use of Heidegger's tool analysis and Husserl's intentionality (extrapolated in his essay 'Vicarious Causation'), Harman's 'Object Oriented Ontology' [OOO] claims that the refusal to recognize non-human objects and interactions reduces all human praxis to anthropocentric proclivities that fail to acknowledge other entities besides the human. I want to consider this claim through Levi Bryant's reading of OOO, considering whether contemporary cookery praxis can join with OOO in advancing the critique of what Quentin Meillasoux has called 'Correlationism', defined as 'the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other'.[3] What sort of extra-correlational beings are required for cookery praxis in general? And how might an ontological commitment to objects inform cookery praxis? Given such a commitment, cookery would have not only to acknowledge a real outside of human experience, but also a real outside

3. Q. Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. R. Brassier (London/NY: Continuum, 2008), 5.





the immediate and actual human sensations of eating. What is important is that, in considering a food as an 'object' independent of humans, an analysis becomes possible in which we get a picture of how it behaves in collectives of human and non-human actants.

As blasphemous as this may sound to a 'foodie' – someone who 'has to know what they like, why they like it, recognize why some foods are better than others and want to have good tasting food all or certainly most of the time'[4] – cookery requires a concept of food in which food is not only an object 'for us' – whether inflated into higher ideals or considered in terms of immediate sense perceptions – but also an object *in itself* with capacities and tendencies undiscovered.

Cookery, by the very nature of its processes, must allow for a concept of food that recognizes at the very least object-to-object interaction. That is to say that food has capacities in excess of human intention and interaction, and we must recognize that food has encounters outside of its relation to humans.

However, this is not to reduce food to a merely empirical status, or to claim an absolutely independent objectivity for it; for cookery also ought to avoid superficial technical approaches that reduce food to primordial units of an underlying actuality upon which cookery can only operate. Although science can

4. N. Weston, 'Foodie: What is That, Anyway?', at http://www.slashfood.com/2006/02/10/what-is-a-foodie-anyway/-ixzz0p4mnMsLZ.

certainly provide many productive analyses of what food can do, there is more to food than is revealed by science.

### OBJECTS AND OMELETTES

In 'Philosophical Ontology,' Roy Bhaskar asks, 'What must our world be like for science to be possible?'[5] To which Levi Bryant has added: *what must our world be like for science and our daily practices to be possible?*[6] Cookery, the object of our analysis here, is just such a 'daily practice'.

From the fact that actual science experiments are conducted under intentionally closed conditions, Bhaskar concludes that the world in which science is possible must be open. In other words, because the world is an open system, scientists must work to close systems in order to conduct experiments. Bhaskar's insight is that objects, and therefore events, are 'out of phase' in an open system; science works hard to close that system. In order to experiment, science spends most of its time eliminating chance, putting objects into 'phase' or into place, in order to experiment. The objects of science are transitive. Bryant extends this analysis to our daily practices, concluding that

5. R. Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science* (London: Verso, 2008), 36.

6. L. Bryant, 'Roy Bhaskar: Transcendental Realism and the Transitive and the Intransitive', at http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2009/02/02/roy-bhaskar-transcendental-realism-and-the-transitive-and-the-intransitive/.





intransitive objects have 'powers that operate without producing a particular effect'.[7] Objects have a real endo-relational structure, a 'phase space' that exceeds actualism, that is more than the local (transitive) manifestation of an object. In other words, 'we do not know what an object can do'.

I would like to propose a parallel between Chefs and Philosophers; it consists in examining what sort of ontological commitments lead to what sorts of praxis. To rephrase Bryant and Bhaskar's question: *What must our world be like in order for cookery to be possible?* If we address cookery as a question of 'philosophical ontology', then this question also involves looking at how the praxis of cookery distorts the image of this world.

Any amateur cook who has attempted to make an omelette is aware not only of the many things that can go wrong – that is to say, how hard one must work to close a system in order to make the egg not stick, brown, or dry out – but also of the powerful *distortion* that accompanies the exciting prospect of 'the perfect omelette' – a distortion that consists in the reduction of the egg to the mere ontological possibility or potentiality of its' 'being' 'the perfect omelette'. The professional, on the other hand, can make sixty omelettes in an hour, two at a time, and does so by eliminating *chance* as much as possible.

The professional therefore operates the ultimate ontological distortion, the most complete closing of

the system. Professional objects have as their credo 'give (sell) a man a fish, and he can eat for a day', rather than 'teach a man to fish, and he can eat for a lifetime'. The 'professional' distortion masks where food comes from, how it arrives at the table and what potential it has with regard to other entities, disavows chance and shapes ontology into a series of targets that must be hit in order to maintain the normative goals of the field in which the professional participates. A flat ontology might act as a corrective to this distorted field, which has a certain affinity with the primacy of economics and markets – it is important to note that the objects produced in this way by the professional are designed to eliminate the amateur and produce instead a consumer. A realist, flat ontology where 'all things equally exist, yet they do not exist equally', offers cookery the means to assert that food operates in an open system. A flat ontology for cookery would be capable of resisting the prism through which cookery praxis re-presents the world, while at the same time maintaining an awareness of the necessity of cookery – and of its concomitant distortions – for humans.

Harman and Bryant affirm that 'objects are always in excess of their relations'.[7] Two points follow from this thesis: Firstly, qualities are not something an object possesses or is, but rather something an object does.

7. L. Bryant, 'The Mug Blues', at http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2010/04/30/the-mug-blues/.





Secondly, to know an object is not to possess the skill of recalling a set of essential qualities or properties belonging to an object, but rather to know the powers or capacities of an object.

As we shall see, in the absence of this ontological commitment to open systems and a nonhuman real, food emerges either – in an empirical realist approach – as mere substance and the event of sensations, *or* – in a transcendental idealist approach – as food (solely) for thought. Either way, in an anti-realist gesture, food is reduced to the traditional dyad substance/idea. To see examples of both approaches in action, it will be instructive to examine two popular movements or contemporary practices of cookery in which debates surrounding cuisine take place: Molecular Gastronomy (MG) and Slow Food (SF). It will be seen how both demonstrate a normative lack of ontological commitment, and pose barriers to an object-oriented cookery.

## MOLECULAR GASTRONOMY

In Spain in 2010, what some have called 'the world's greatest restaurant' shut its doors due to financial losses. El Bulli, with the development and expansion of *haute cuisine* as its charge, plans to reopen as a culinary academy in 2014. Since 1987, El Bulli had developed the 'science' and technologies of food production and presentation, and pushed dining to the edge, by

exploring how all senses (sight, sound, texture, smell as well as taste) can be engaged while eating. El Bulli was thus at the forefront of what has been labelled 'Molecular Gastronomy'. Although El Bulli's chef Ferran Adrià resists the tag, MG has become a convenient way of referring to technologically-advanced practice that resists the traditional myths of cookery while employing texture, sounds, smells and visuals to create an 'extreme dining experience'. Adrià's self-identification as 'deconstructivist', along with French Chef Thierry Marx's claim of practicing 'techno-Emotional' cookery, prompts us to question what sort of ontological commitments are present in the practices of these two chefs in particular and in the movement of MG more generally. Mostly concerned with shocking diners by presenting unusual or unexpected sensual encounters, MG, like most human praxis that refuses to engage with the problematic of a real beyond human mediation, more often than not finds only and exactly what it seeks.

That this movement represents or identifies itself as a *science of the senses* is made clear by a recent report entitled *Molecular Gastronomy: A New Emerging Scientific Discipline*. The report, mostly celebratory of MG as a scientific discipline, dedicates its first section to a study of the senses:





> Before we begin to look in any detail at the chemistry of food production and preparation, we should take in a brief overview of the way in which we actually sense the food we eat. Questions such as what makes us enjoy (or not) any particular food and what it is that makes one meal better than another are of course largely subjective. Nonetheless, we all share the same, largely chemical based, set of senses with which to interpret the taste, aroma, flavor, and texture of the food. In this section we will explore these senses and note how they detect the various food molecules before, during, and even after we have consumed them.[8]

Much like ancient Epicureans, Molecular Gastronomists' ontological commitments are to the *senses* as heralds of truth. Much like ancient Epicureans, they regard objects as reducible to primordial units such as atoms or molecules. And much like contemporary Epicureans (but unlike ancient Epicureans) this approach implicates pleasure as immediate, unbound and limitless. Ultimately, in MG, food – the ultimate non-human actant intertwined within human collectives – is 'undermined' and seen only as a means to immediate aesthetic experience. Despite its ostensibly

8. P. Barham, L.H. Skibsted, W.L.P. Bredie, M.B. Frøst, P. Møller, J. Risbo, P. Snitkjær, L.M. Mortensen, 'Molecular Gastronomy: A New Emerging Scientific Discipline', *Chemical Reviews* 110 (4), 2010: 2313-65, at http://pubs.acs.org/doi/abs/10.1021/cr900105w.

radical and scientific credentials, in MG food is not considered in itself, but only as a means to the end of human pleasure or (more rarely) sustenance.

In some ways Molecular Gastronomic praxis is no different to most other culinary praxes: Through the study of time, temperatures, chemical reactions, and cooking materials, food is prepared for consumption. However, by carrying out this practice in radically closed environments, these (mostly European) chefs tend to finish up producing 'advanced' versions of practices first developed by industrial food scientists in the United States. The supposedly 'artisanal' MG as contemporary haute cuisine, and industrial food science as the basis for fast food, have at least three things in common: 1) the methods and techniques practiced; 2) distinctive ingredients such as additives, traditionally rejected by haute cuisine; and 3) actual fast or junk food products such as Fishermen's Friends, Altoids, Corn Nuts and Pop Rocks, that float between the two practices – produced by industrial food science, traditionally sold as junk food, and now used as an ingredient by MG.

Haute cuisine's genesis is usually traced baked to François Pierre La Varenne and his codifying of French cuisine. His book *Le Cuisinier François* was written in the Middle Ages and marks the transition of French cookery into the modern age. One of the revolutionary aspects of La Varenne's approach was





the abandonment of heavy exotic spices in favour of regional herbs and local vegetables.[9] La Varenne's concepts of freshness and of food's ability to stand on its own without much adulteration still stand today in much of haute cuisine. However, if one were to conclude that a defining characteristic of haute cuisine consists in its logical extrapolation of a region's food, then MG can only be seen as a logical extrapolation of industrial science practiced as globalized food. And in employing the products and methods of food science, MG seeks to manifest the most exciting immediate 'experience' possible.

If they were to take into account a mind-independent and human-independent reality, Molecular Gastronomists would have to consider food to be more than aesthetic experience *for us*. A Molecular Gastronomist could gather organic ingredients, ingredients chosen with concern not only for ecosystems humans participate in and affect but also for food-to-food interactions. This hypothetical chef could consider not only an object's effect on systems but also that of its absence from systems. She could then tinker with objects, allowing for manifestations independent of intentions, acknowledging that an 'object does', allowing epistemology to flow from an open ontology that admits that *we do not know what an object can do.*

9. See V. Leschinzer & A. Dakin, 'Theorizing Cuisine from Medieval to Modern Times ', present volume.

Techniques she could consider are fermentation and developing probiotics, which stand in contrast to the highly closed practice of MG. Kombucha, the ancient art of brewing fermented tea, is a process of using imperceptible bacteria that is specific to its brewing facility. All kombucha is different and is celebrated because it picks up bacteria from the environment where it is brewed, independent of human manipulation – resulting in healthful 'good' bacteria. Such experiments are taking place for many reasons other than the tantalising of human senses: alternative sources of protein, ecology, ethics and probiotics.

Foods will either invite you to eat them, or not, for many reasons, of which human sensation is *only one*. Therefore if cookery involves an object-oriented understanding of food, it cannot be limited to a study of immediate sensations involved in dining. Food entices through basic Darwinian concepts: adaptation, abundance, repetition and proximity. But it thereby sets itself up to become ensnared in social convention and markets that develop certain habits and play into other human machinations. If MG does approach a form of realism, object-to-object interaction and flat ontology, it squanders its insights by making aesthetic immediacy the only goal – a problem rooted in a lack of interrogation of ontological commitments, which leaves it open to being easily co-opted by neoliberal capitalism. Tantalizing the senses above all leaves MG





open to the charge of contributing to a spectatorship culture: What is the role of the practitioner or artist here? Is the goal to create food as a magician-genius-professional in order to 'blow people away', or is the goal to create an engagement with food that empowers others to enter the kitchen, whether professional or not? MG's approach values professional closure at the expense of opening up food to the amateur – a high price to pay.

Here it is important to keep in mind the totemic hero of MG: Roald Dahl's Willie Wonka. Wonka's approach is best exemplified in his interaction with Violet Beauregard. The chapter entitled *Good-by Violet* begins with Wonka exclaiming:

> When I start selling this gum in shops it will change *everything*! It will be the end of all kitchens and all cooking! There will be no more marketing to do! No more buying of meat and groceries! There'll be no knifes and forks at mealtimes! No plates! No washing up! No garbage! No mess! Just a little strip of Wonka's Magic Chewing Gum and that's all you'll need at breakfast, lunch and supper! This piece of gum I just made happens to be tomato soup, roast beef and blueberry pie, but you can have almost anything you want.

Of course Violet Beauregard – a child and a world-record gum-chewer – cannot resist, and reaches out and snatches a piece. After chewing the gum she balloons up to twice her size and shows every sign of turning into a blueberry. Here we see in no uncertain terms what 'food' can 'do'. However, Dahl's Willie Wonka is as much a social scientist as a food scientist. His goal goes beyond sensation; it is to 'change *everything*' not by revolutionizing, but by *eliminating home amateur culinary praxis*. Through Wonka, Dahl explores immediate gratification even in the face of an abject poverty where humans are reduced to bare necessity. Candy is but a means for Willie Wonka in his quest for total market domination – as can be seen in his obsession with secrecy, his exploitation of Oompa-Loompahs, and his creation of a fake rival in Old Fickelgruber.

But what in Dahl's tale is a dramatization of the dark side of desire, avarice and human society, set in dark economic times resembling early twentieth-century capitalism, has been misconstrued by MG as offering a joyful playground for mad scientists, obsessed with their own 'genius' and unaware or unwilling to admit that they are manipulating more than just the senses. The aforementioned self-descriptions of Ferran Adrià as 'Deconstructivist' and Thierry Marx as 'Techno-Emotional', are rather apt: deconstruction considers above all the text (the meal), and 'Techno-Emotional'





describes a seamless stimulation by the author of his passive eater, by means of secondary qualities or 'bundles of sensations'.

If we fail to acknowledge that *we do not know what an object can do,* and approach and figure sensation as an end point for cookery, the latter becomes a radically closed system that terminates upon human swallowing. We neglect the fact that food is a non-human actant involved in human and non-human collectives. Food as an object continues to translate you, and you continue to translate food, even after swallowing; appearance and taste are only a subset of a food's manifestation. For example, someone who has a thyroid problem has to regulate his or her metabolism. Through trial and error and the introducing of minimal foods at certain times, such a person is able to monitor the effects of certain foods on their bodies during certain parts of the day. This person would also have to monitor the food-to-food interaction within their bodies. In modulating such a diet we must consider food as a non-human actant necessary in order for a whole (person) to act. The elegant balance of, for example, grapes and salmon has to be considered in terms of the food-to-food interactions it might set off. All the while a person's aesthetic proclivities cannot be ignored. Such a condition perfectly illustrates how praxis distorts, for it is only when we need to externally regulate our metabolism that we recognize how much

goes into the elegant system of processing food for humans. Considering food as a non-human actant not only offers us a path to avoid reducing cookery to primordial units, thus destroying a proper object analysis; it also avoids treating food solely in terms of immediate sensations, ideological struggles or marketing schemes. OOO rejects universal approaches that homogenize the needs of individuals and hierarchize humans above all others.

Where MG understands the proper being of an object to be manifested in a phenomenal actualization, object-oriented cookery would see the proper being of an object as consisting in its virtual endo-relational structure, which only ever expresses a part of its powers in any manifestation or actualization. An apple should never be reduced to 'sweet' or 'red' – that would be only an apple *for us*. An apple *apples* even after it enters into a set of exo-relations through which objects translate each other.

These ontological commitments are important for cookery for two reasons: 1) They are necessary in order to recognize unintended consequences and therefore to allow for a constant openness and a resistance to monolithic approaches; 2) They establish an awareness of praxis – which is to say that entering into exo-relations with objects as attractors, although maybe constant, necessarily sets up a disposition to interaction as 'wonder'. The disposition of wonder being: we are





never totally sure of what an object can do, as when it becomes entangled with other objects, it only presents certain expressions owing to its exo-qualities. Without the constant disposition of wonder we fall into the trap of the professional – an instrumental being in the service of nothing but markets, delivering all creative breakthroughs into the hands of neoliberalism and encouraging a spectator mentality on the receiving side – the professional chef creating the professional eater. The point is not just that we should be open to unexpected things in cookery, but that if our disposition of wonder, a form of affirmation, is restricted by a concentration on the human senses, then an arcane, highly laboratorial practice such as MG will create nothing more than interesting meals for professional spectators. MG begins with material forces (chemical reactions ...) but ultimately turns those forces, the 'primordial units' of its cuisine, into nothing more than sensation, without considering social material consequences. Disciplines that base their practice on aesthetic outcomes only further alienate food from its source, process and eater. MG engineers consent to alienate.

An apple manifesting in a pie is only expressing certain powers as it enters into a set of exo-relations. Once the apple has been translated into pie, a new object is present, with apple as a part of its whole. But the pie as an endo-relational structure can express itself

in a myriad of ways: It can become a doorstop, fall off the windowsill and feed animals, be used in a comic gag to hit someone in the face, entice someone off a diet, move through a human providing nourishment ... The apple present in that pie as a part still has an endo-relational structure and further powers of manifestation – for example, providing fibre or vitamin C to humans, being processed through fermentation, or housing ants. MG presents us with a prime example of an actualism that refuses the sort of open system that could accommodate these powers, and aligns the objective-subjective distinction with that of primary and secondary qualities.

All chefs must consider which objects they wish to exclude and which to include; and this (along with the use of cling film) is how we know cookery praxis as closed. However, in another sense, chefs have an opportunity to experiment with open-ended processes. A recent example of object-oriented cookery is a five-course Mexican feast concocted to bring the wonders of edible insects to New York.[10] Serving larvae and live insects, Phil Ross created one dish of squirming wax moth larvae. Popping a live bug in one's mouth, if taken seriously, would have to open a diner's eyes to a multitude of alternative sources of protein. Ross's invitation to experience live food explicitly acknowledges that we do not know exactly what an object will

10. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/22/dining/22bug.html.





do – for this chef in some sense has no control over what these bugs will do. A bug bugs.

MG's ontological commitments are to an *actualism* informed by *relationism*. That is to say, MG, even with all its chemical reactions and experimenting with food, by taking human sense as its end goal is ultimately a praxis that takes the basic structural feature of entities to be expressed in immediate events *for us* (actualism). Global relations inform this event (relationism): MG is a logical extrapolation of globalized cuisine praxis (fast food, junk food) or food science praxis located in globalized corporate food companies. A praxis that is then interjected into haute cuisine and returned to globalized cuisine with enhanced credentials.

## SLOW FOOD

On the other hand, the 'basic structural feature of all entities', as far as Slow Food is concerned, is determined by a *relationism* informed by *actualism*. SF can be seen as a logical extrapolation of Chef José Andrés' words: 'McDonald's as genius of organization, development, and marketing.'[11] That is to say, paradoxically, that the ideology that McDonald's promotes is the same as Slow Food's: *food is more than cooking and eating*. An ideology interjected into localities, singular

11. http://living.glam.com/articles/latest_stories/exclusive_interview_with_chef_jose_andres/.

villages, towns, food markets and bazaars and then returned to globalized cuisine circuits with cogent arguments for food to be seen as more than a material substance involving real makings and doings. SF's denial of foods as individual objects and actants that move through human and non-human collectives leaves issues of nutrition, local organization and development aside in order to promote counter-progressive causes such as the preservation of what SF's (mostly European and White American) leadership perceive as valued traditions of cookery and food production. SF's inability to recognize different speeds, to see that many places in the world don't suffer the same affects and effects as 'fast' paced technologically-advanced cultures, puts into question SF's very framing of the solutions and problems. As Louise Fresco states:

> Now it is not surprising that with this massification and large-scale production, there is a counter-movement that emerged – very much also here in California. The counter-movement says, Let's go back to this, Let's go back to traditional farming. Let's go back to small-scale, to farmers' markets, small bakeries and all that. Wonderful. Don't we all agree? I certainly agree. I would love to go back to Tuscany to this kind of traditional setting, gastronomy, good food. *But this is a fallacy. And the fallacy comes from idealizing a past that we have forgotten about.* If we do this, if





> we want to stay with traditional small-scale farming we are going, actually, to relegate these poor farmers and their husbands – among whom I have lived for many years, working without electricity and water, to try to improve their food production – to relegate them to poverty. What they want are implements to increase their production – something to fertilize the soil, something to protect their crop and to bring it to a market. We cannot just think that small-scale is the solution to the world food problem. It's a luxury solution for us who can afford it, if you want to afford it. In fact we do not want this poor woman to work the land like this. If we say just small-scale production, as is the tendency here, to go back to local food means that a poor man like Hans Rosling cannot even eat oranges anymore because in Scandinavia we don't have oranges. So local food production is out. But also we do not want to relegate to poverty in the rural areas. And we do not want to relegate the urban poor to starvation. So we must find other solutions.[12]

SF has taken on as its goal the task of preserving ingredients and food production methods from collectives, populations and communities that may be disappearing from cookery praxis due to global economic pressures. For example, posted on a calendar

12. http://www.ted.com/talks/louise_fresco_on_feeding_the_whole_world.html.

of events on Slow Foods San Francisco's website was this announcement for the film *Mr. Bene goes to Italy*:

> One of SF founder Carlo Petrini's favorite films was screened at the Delancey Street Theater on April 4th. Benedito Batista da Silva, 60 years old, is considered a reference when it comes to manioc flour production in the Brazilian Para State, deep within the Amazon. This documentary shows his trip from Braganca to Turin and back home. The encounter of different cultures, of small-scale farmers from all over the world and the enchantment of coming into contact with European culture blends with the profound affective bond Mr. Bene forges with his Italian host family. The film is about breaking barriers, whether cultural, economical or even physical, in this amazing *anthropological* adventure whose premise is that hope still exists for small Brazilian farmers.[13]

A small village in Brazil produces manioc flour deep in the Amazon. In order for the art of manioc flour production not to be lost and the practice maintained for centuries to come, SF invites artisans to a world conference where chefs and other small farmers interact on a global stage to figure out how to preserve 'best practices' – authentic practices. Professional chefs are

13. http://www.slowfoodsanfrancisco.com/cgi-bin/slowfood/sf_events.html?evcode=00023;id=TYTwX5Zx (emphasis mine).





put into contact with a product that may be useful to them, thereby opening up a global market for what was once food for a single village and was in danger of becoming 'lost'.

Obviously SF elevates food to a representation of human experience, a symbol of human cultural uniqueness. Where MG can be criticized for reducing food too much, SF can be faulted for attributing *too much* to food. Where MG reduces food simultaneously to primordial units and bundles of qualities, SF elevates foods to a status beyond autonomous entities, refusing a flat ontology.

For SF not only are objects, such as food, reduced to relations; human collectives as autonomous objects are identified and ignored in order to develop seamless global patterns and connections of '*more than cooking and eating*'. SF's ontological commitments or lack thereof raise questions of how to recognize actual collectives and cultural distinctions. Globalized cuisine's quest to discover the food products of underprivileged or developmentally marginalized peoples of 'cultural value' and open them up to new markets, emulates the emerging markets approach promulgated by World Bank neoliberalism and the 'Washington Consensus'. The goal of such structural and developmental reforms is to reduce objects to relations in order to place these products and collectives within a globalized food system. For SF, value lies not so much in financial economics

(although that plays a large part) as in an economy of authenticity and in the ability of specific objects to seamlessly move into other economies. Contemporary inclinations, technological innovations or caloric intake, are not considered in deciding how useful the preservation of a certain product could be within a specific collective. In other words, what a food does is not as important as how it is perceived by Western diners.

What is clear is that SF's ontological commitments are deceptive. On the one hand, SF presents an outdated mode of anthropology in which foods are idealized and cultural artifacts are preserved for the sake of preservation. On the other hand, it heralds the possibility of a radically connected network of relations where an emerging market approach can take hold. On one hand, SF values a food on the basis of its origin, taking into account its participation in collectives, but only on its own selective terms. On the other hand, SF posits a background of potential relations in which we should view food, and that frame does not allow a *food* or a *collective* autonomy, does not allow for food as a non-human actant with an endo-relational structure. A food's potential outside of human intention, outside of a perceived market, is what is at stake for an object-oriented approach. SF mobilizes food in an idolized or idealized fashion. Authentic culture and roots supersede all other concerns, in order to





introduce relation-fetishism as ingress for leftists to neoliberalism.

An object-oriented analysis of what food *does* would be useful for a political global food movement such as Slow Food. Such an approach could demonstrate how food organizes human and non-human chains; how food translates us and other objects individually and collectively in ways that resist reified generalities. In SF's case, *relationism* (in this case, the notion that 'food is the sum of its relations') informed by *actualism* (authentic immediate collectives to be subsumed) ultimately amounts to little more than a human-thought-being correlation. A correlation that neo-liberalism depends on, given that it is the 'seamlessly global' nature of the market that allows SF to *believe* that shopping at Whole Foods and eating at fine dining establishments are radical political acts.

Ultimately, either SF is redundant (because the people practicing SF do not need instructions – specific cultures in specific locations are and have been practicing SF production and preparation for a long time); or SF is dogmatic in its approach as well as its practice because it charges itself with the measurement of authentic virtue without allowing that metric to be determined in an open system that critically addresses the food it proposes to 'save'. The breaking down of cultural, economical or even physical barriers by a neoliberalism dissimulated by outmoded 'anthropology'

or self-righteous 'conservation' is yet another form of praxis being trapped within a correlation of being and thought. Without ontological commitments to a 'real' independent of humans, SF is simply subsumed into economics.

### FLAT COOKERY

In view of what has been said above, MG might be seen as object-oriented in its first stage, in that it acknowledges food as an object. Experimentation, albeit ultimately geared towards the senses, does foreground *what an object can do*. And SF's object-oriented inclinations lie in its recognizing of collectives, towns and regions and even farmers as objects in Bryant's sense. What MG does well is break us out of the traditional myths that have dominated cookery praxis – myths such as the searing of meat in order to encapsulate juices are debunked in favour of some progressive praxis. What SF does well is to observe the wider implications of a fast-paced technologically-advanced approach, identifying problems such as monoculture and the shortcomings of industrially-produced food.

If we return to Harman's claim that praxis distorts, we notice that OOO at the level of praxis offers nothing new. In other words, OOO is not offering a *new* distortion, only a levelling of ontological distortion. What is revealed in this levelling are intricate webs in which





*no* thing (language, power, ideology, religion, food or knowledge) dominates or provides the exclusive conditions of possibility. This is not a form of materialism, but rather a realism that allows the independence or autonomy of non-material objects – any 'thing' that makes a difference.

At the level of object-oriented praxis and epistemology, Bryant is clear:

> I think it is the hypothesis that objects *act* or are encountered in their doing. In other words, *knowing*, not passively *mirroring*, knowledge is a product of *doing* and is a discovery of *doings*. We know things, we discover them, through their *acts*, and if we wish to discover the powers of objects we have to *act* on these objects to see what they do in these conditions. It is through provoking objects to discover what properties flash forth that we discover their powers ... to find out what objects are capable of doing.[14]

Therefore, cookery becomes an elegant configuration of entities in a feed-forward-feed-back clumsily-woven web of objects interacting on equal footing. If we do not know what a specific food can do, and this food is interacting with all sorts of other objects at a specific instant, then even in a radically closed environment,

14. L. Bryant, 'Object-Oriented Empiricism', at http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2010/03/26/object-oriented-empiricism/.

cookery becomes a lot like surfing. It consists of a series of tiny adjustments, prompted by anticipations and responses from an openness to utterances from all human and non-human actants entangled. Of course, in order to prevent short circuits, a chef must allow herself to be translated by other objects. In feeling her way through, aesthetics forms a *new* epistemology where the abundance of local manifestations forms a meal. Keeping in mind that the entanglement that constitutes this meal does not begin or end with this specific event of eating – objects stretch out through other objects. Anticipating objects' behaviours and responding to both expected and unexpected acts, even the most experienced chef benefits by adopting the disposition of an amateur home cook. A disposition which is simply a commitment to objects being out of phase.

Other than money and love, the conventional distinction between professional cookery and amateur home cookery is primarily one of epistemology and praxis. Epistemology, because the professional possesses extreme forms of the type of 'knowledge' that contributes toward an instrumental distortion of being. Knowledge built on error, keeping cookery on track. Praxis, because the professional possesses a skillset that dictates a specific set of actions. The professional's mode is one of eliminating chance, restricting the 'phase space' of objects. It is clear that





there is a financial interest in maintaining this distinction between professional and home amateur – as seen in the fact that 'home amateur' status is coveted by a local bistro offering *homemade* bread in the attempt to sell us something back that has been all but eliminated from actual homes; but equally in the disparaging distinction made by chain restaurants encouraging us to 'eat out' because 'we deserve a break' from the chores of cookery. On one hand amateur cookery is praised as a delicious enticement only available at local restaurants, on the other hand disparaged as a mere menial task to be avoided. The uncritical adulation of Willie Wonka, whose genius leads him to wish to do away with amateur home cookery, illustrates this drive of professional cookery to dominate and destroy home amateur cookery.

Flat Cookery praxis levels the distinction between professional and home amateur. Flat Cookery's ontological commitments to objects and a real outside of the correlation between thinking and being are evident in 1) the entwining of epistemology and praxis, allowing food the ability to speak back or objects to act; and 2) the amateur's indirect disposition, allowing for a wandering off the exclusive tracks of thinking and being as they pertain to cookery. Which is to say that the inclination of an object-oriented approach to cookery is that of a particular know-how that flows from acting – from doing. Flat Cookery operates out of

the acts of feeding people. Acts that have been passed down from generation to generation on one hand and yet refuse the myths, nostalgia and romance that accompany professional disciplines. The professional invents objects with minimal phase space in order to dominate amateur home cooking – objects such as frozen dinners and washed mesclun mix that pacify the non-professional. But the amateur is free of the restraints of 'knowledge and skill' to experience the 'phase space' of objects. This is not to say an amateur is ignorant, that he lacks knowledge. No, the amateur acts out of affirmation. Here affirmation is instinct, experience and the acknowledgement of webs of objects that act autonomously and in aggregate. The professional, on the other hand, not only operates in alienation but also alienates. The professional motivated by the representation, the symbolism and the distortion of markets dismisses the amateur's clumsily-woven affirmation. The amateur is an object in this ontology. An object *does* feed one's family or *does* socialize with others or *does* regulate one's metabolism or *does* counteract one's diabetes or *does* volunteer at a soup kitchen or *does* enjoy a fine repast. Of course the question of *what an object does* motivates the amateur, for as a tree trees and an apple apples, the amateur amateurs, and in doing so avoids the excesses of distortion. Object Oriented Cookery amounts to a commitment to autonomous





entities, but also to an openness to food as an actant independent of human intention.