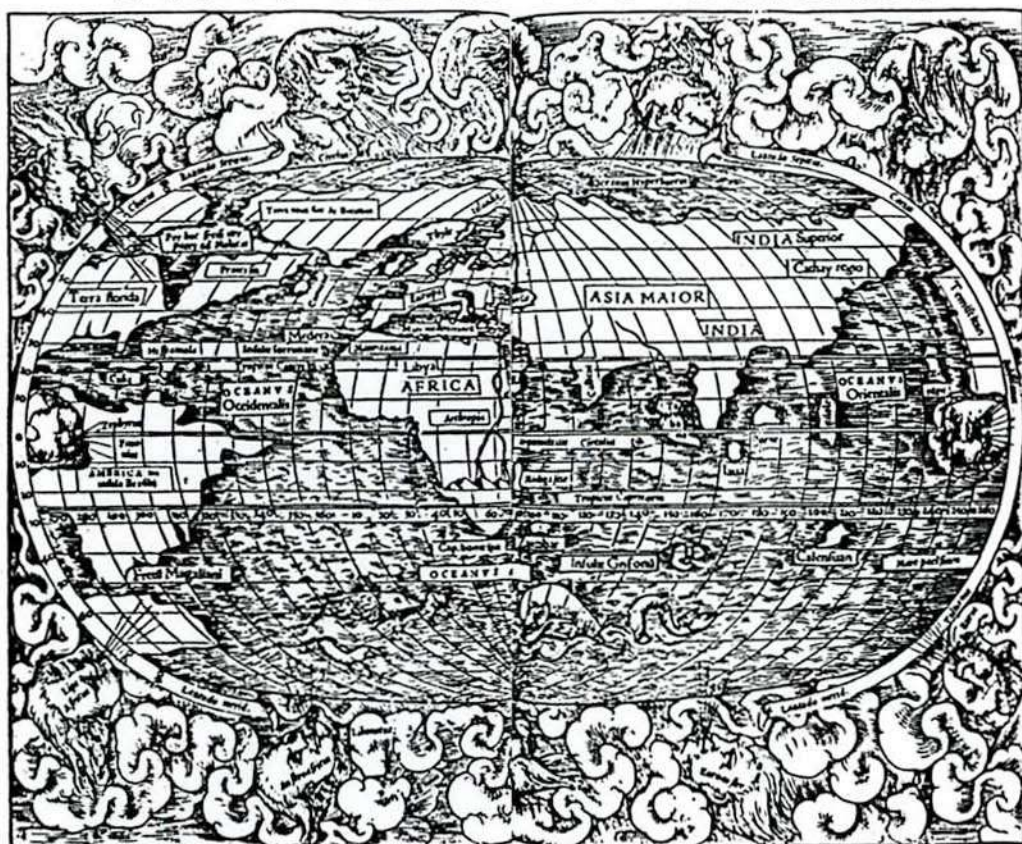


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READING CUISINE

La cuisine des Fées; or the Culinary Sign in the *Tales* of Perrault

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CUISINE (lat. *cocina*, fr. *coquina*, fr. *coquere*, "to cook")

1. Room in which food is prepared and cooked.
2. Preparation of food, art of preparing food.
3. Prepared food served at meals.
4. By extension, personnel employed in food preparation.

From the place in the dwelling where food is prepared and cooked to those whose role is to accomplish this preparation, and to the act itself, as well as its results—in this semantic circuit where one might find an illustration of the theory of four causes as well as an embodiment of the Aristotelian categories, the term *cuisine* reveals its remarkable plasticity. It is itself the site of the metamorphoses it signifies; a site occupied by agents busily applying techniques and procedures (transmitted to them or invented by them) that transform an amorphous mass of edibles into culinary products consumed according to social rules. The same relations manifest at each level between the word and its meanings inform the referent in all its dimensions. Through the constant mutation and displacement of its meanings, "cuisine" stands for the constantly displaced mutation of the random world of possible nutriments into rigorously structured systems of cooking. Cuisine is the site of specifically human acts of self-preservation through food by means of dietary regimes which signify logical systems—at once physical and mental, economic and political, cultural and ideological—that dictate both the choices organizing possible foods into strict paradigms of culinary signs and the links by which these signs combine to form a narrative syntax of the sites

and moments of consumption. The cookbook, divided by chapters (Soups, Gravies, Eggs, Fish, Fowl, Beef, Pork, Game, Vegetables, Fruits, Desserts) and the meal, with its ordered elements (hors d'oeuvres, entrées, fish and roast dishes, salad, cheeses, dessert) may be said to illustrate and, in a way, to symbolize, the two major divisions of these culinary logics: on the one hand, terms and phrases, on the other, discursive field and discourse, poles that constitute and embody the double dimension—paradigmatic and syntagmatic—of these systems. Along with language, cuisine defines man in his appropriation of himself and the world. In addition cuisine is one of the languages through which human societies constitute themselves in their mutual oppositions and differences. Finally, cuisine is structured like language, conforming to the same structural and functional constraints.

What then are the nature and the structure of the culinary sign? Can we speak of it as we speak of linguistic signs? Do culinary signs form a system? If so, what are its characteristics? How and in what way does the culinary system of a given society correspond to its economic, social political/religious and cosmological systems? What are those correspondances, and what are their specific functions? Major works whose influence on the human sciences of our time has been decisive have responded masterfully to these questions. My object, in the following pages, will be much more limited with regard to the nature and the quantity of the material considered. I propose to investigate the notion of the culinary sign in a body of French 17th-century fairy tales (*récits merveilleux*), the tales of Perrault: *Histoires or Tales of Past Times with Moral Lessons* (1967), and the *Tales in Verse* (*Donkey-Skin, The Foolish Wishes and Patient Griselda*), which appeared several years before the prose tales. Nevertheless, and perhaps because of these very restrictions, this study will make, however modestly, a double contribution to the question of cuisine as a general signifying system and to the questions that certain texts of the past continue to pose us in their familiar strangeness.

i. *From the miraculous to the marvelous in classic semiotics: From the "Logic" of Port-Royal to the "Tales" of Perrault*

The first section of the Port-Royal *Logic* sets out a representational theory of the sign in general: the sign is that "thing" which represents an "idea of a thing." In this sense, every sign is the representation of a representation. But the process of representation that constitutes the

idea of the sign ought not to obscure the presence of the material thing that the sign also is, its material component. The famous example of the hot cinder illustrates this perfectly on the level of the natural, as do, on a supernatural level, the visible human forms taken by angels on their earthly visits. Just as it is the symbol of fire, the hot cinder hides as a thing what it reveals as a sign. The very expression by which it signifies reveals this: the noun "cendre" names the materiality which hides; the adjective "chaude" designates the hidden fire of which heat is the index in the thing itself. But while this materiality persists or subsists in indexes and, to a lesser degree, in icons (from symptoms of bodily ailments to physical signs of the passions of the soul, from exegetical figures to sacramental signs), the quasi-immediate substitution of the thing (or rather, of its idea) for its sign neutralizes both the thing and its representative in favor of that which is represented. In the same way, the inverse substitution of the sign for the thing, through the deceptive charms of mimesis, offers to our sight and hearing a world of signs that is a *trompe-l'oeil* depiction of the world of things.

I have shown elsewhere that, cutting across the various classifications of signs, a singular example was, in its marginality, both the productive source of the representational model of the sign and its refusal. The eucharistic sign in fact plays across all the borders of the systematic tables by which the logicians of Port-Royal order the different types of signs: probable signs and certain signs; joined signs and separated signs; natural signs and established signs. With them, an enunciated phrase becomes consumed body, and the unbridgeable gap—natural and rational—between words and things cancels itself in a miraculous identity: that of a word and a food. A word gives itself to be eaten; the word spoken is the body consumed. The bread (and the wine) which is never spoken, never signified but shown by the enunciation "this" becomes, in the brief instant of an "is"—when pronounced by an appropriate speaker to an appropriate interlocutor in appropriate circumstances—the signified body of one who enunciates the formula "this is my body." This enunciation brings into being, or, rather, transforms—or, yet more precisely, transubstantiates—the bread shown by "this" into an expression, "my body." The edible object—bread—becomes the spoken word "my body" through the force of "is," but this spoken word, miraculously conserving a property of the object shown, that of edibility, finds itself thereupon consumed. The spoken word is eaten as a body—the body of him who speaks; the edible object is signified as a spoken word—the word pronounced by him who speaks. Between shown and signified,

between deixis and semiosis, the eucharistic sign/body plays, transforming the edible into the signified, and the enunciable into the eaten. If we add that this sign/body is consumed in a communal meal where the universal social body of the Church finds its foundation and its sustenance through the recitation of a narrative corpus that recounts its origin in a moment of past history, we may affirm without much imprecision that the enunciation of a determinate formula (by the appropriate speaker, to the appropriate interlocutor) brings into being the social (ecclesiastical) body through the consumption of the body/word in this meal, that is, at an appropriate time and place. Here we are dealing with a major historical paradigm of semiotic theory as well as with a theological dogma, with an ideological apparatus and with a political mechanism. An edible object becomes a signified term, but the term is signified only to be transformed into a consumed body, a circle in appearance only for the end of its route is not identical to its starting point. That which is eaten at the formula's end is not the material body it begins with, but is sign and body together—the body as sign and the sign as body. Thus is accomplished the recuperation by semiosis of the bread shown in the deixis; it is simultaneously denied as bread and preserved as eaten by the performative act of the enunciation. What is consumed is no longer the bread, but its negation, pronounced by one who, having said "this is my body," gives his word to be eaten.

Perhaps we might say without undue provocation that every culinary sign is in some sense eucharistic; or, in other terms, that all cuisine is a theological (ideological, political, economic) operation by which an unsignified edible element is transformed into a consumed sign/body. It is this history, this dialectic of the edible and the consumed, the thing and the body, the shown and its sign, need and desire, which the tales ceaselessly recount in their own manner. The universal and incessantly repeated miracle of eucharistic transformation in the Catholic church, which the Port-Royal *Logic* presents as just as natural and reasonable in its circumstances of production as any enunciation obeying the rules of good sense and normal communication, is reduced to old wives' tales where beings and actions, figures and procedures, orders and kingdoms come under the sign of the marvelous. In them, transubstantiation becomes transignification: as the miraculous eucharistic sign played across the borders of the *Logic's* taxonomy of signs, the cuisine of the marvelous in the *Tales* plays across all the paradigms of meaning: it authorizes all slippages, all displacements, all changes; it traverses all the valences of matter and symbols, it takes things at their word, and it takes

words for things, but not without design or logic. The marvelous is not chaotic. Simply put, the means through which the ends of the tale are attained (the punishment of evil deeds, the rewarding of good ones) are not always those of language or of ordinary life and society. But neither will they be discontinuous with language. The specifically marvelous difference is that means will not always be homogeneous with ends: punishments and rewards will not always refer back to the same isotopies as good and bad actions. It is in this sense that we speak of transignification; not in the sense that the tale represents processes or states transcending ordinary ones, but that these states and processes slip or leap out of the "natural" level of narration where they unfold to another level, equally "natural," but which corresponds in no natural way to the first one. To take a simple example, what could be more normal than to pick a pumpkin from a vegetable garden? What could be more normal than to arrive at a court ball in one's carriage (how, indeed, could one do otherwise)? In contrast, that a pumpkin should become a carriage is highly strange, and seems to require the intervention of a supernatural agency. And yet, we need only imagine side by side a ripe, golden pumpkin and a superb golden carriage to see that the carriage is indeed the elaborated image of the fruit, and the humble fruit the image of the carriage. *Cinderella* describes to us this double and inverse movement of high style and low style, burlesque and irony, twilight and midnight contained in the metaphor of the pumpkin and the carriage. The site of transignification in this trivial example is, we remark, the dividing line or gap between garden vegetables (in this case the gourd, *cucurbita pepo*) and manufactured objects (in this case the four-wheeled, horse-drawn luxury vehicle, *carriage*); that is to say, between common domestic horticulture on one hand and noble, social technique on the other. The sensory attributes of the pumpkin and the carriage permit us to bridge this gap in both directions. It suffices, then, to *materialize a figure of words in a metamorphosis of objects*. The sudden exchange that then affects the very being of the natural product and the product of art will materially represent in the tale's telling the rise and fall of a cultural and stylistic regime and perhaps, beyond this derisory exaltation and enobled baseness, the subtle, incisive but delicate modalities of a social and political critique.

These remarks on *Cinderella's* pumpkin and carriage that illustrate our sense of the word "transignification," can be, it would seem, generalized in a discussion of the mechanisms of the marvelous. It is precisely in this generalization that we shall encounter cuisine as a system of culinary

signs. We shall analyze its functions and effects with regard to three systems of exchange and communication: economy, or exchange of goods; marriage, or exchange of women; language, or exchange of words. In this reading of Perrault, we hypothesize that in the fairy tale (*conte merveilleux*) cuisine generally and culinary signs in particular appear both as systems of signification, albeit latent, fragmentary ones, and as a privileged process where the characteristic transignification of the marvelous inscribes itself. It is here that the slippages and leaps, the metonomies, synecdoches and metaphors linking economy, marriage and language operate. We can easily see why. In so far as the culinary sign is the result of a process transforming the edible object (the food) into a consumed work of art (the dish), the object necessarily *subsists* in the sign that signifies it, and, inversely, the sign *persists* in the object that is its material vehicle. Again, in the culinary sign, a need (hunger, an effect of the instinct of self-preservation) is satisfied by and in the pleasure provided by the dish, without either being separable from the other. The culinary sign also situates an efficient mechanism for marvelous transignification insofar as in it and through it is constituted the dialectic of *Logos*, *Eros* and *Sitos*.

Note: *Sitos*, Greek substantive, masculine

1. wheat (in its natural state); by derivation ground wheat, flour, whence bread (as opposed to meat).
2. solid food in general (as opposed to drink); by derivation nourishment, human food.
3. in Athens in particular, food stipend.
4. prepared dishes.
5. residue of food eaten, excrement.

These three terms correspond to the three general types of exchange mentioned above. *Logos* refers us to words exchanged in communication, *Eros* to women exchanged in marriage, *Sitos* to the goods traded in commerce. The dish, consummate sign of the culinary art of the meal, is both object and subject of love, a word belonging to language and a being constituted by discourse, a material good possessed, transmitted, or exchanged, but transignifying in itself both words of language and amorous bodies, riches or goods, by the metonomies, synecdoches, and metaphors that the process of transignification *materializes*. In the culinary sign thus summarily defined, is not the edible through its transformation by the sign, always in some way an erotic body, desired and consumed; an economic object possessed through appropriation; a

linguistic sign of exchanged communication? Thus it is in no way surprising to see all these object/signs mutually interchangeable. Like the elements of other signifying systems, the culinary sign, at once process and result of its own transformation, represents in its own way the economic transformation of the object into manufactured good, the erotic transformation of the object into body, the linguistic transformation of the substance into sign, while at the same time it plays with the modalization of the impossible into the possible (or, indeed, into the real); of the forbidden into the permitted (or, indeed, into the mandatory); of the implausible into the plausible (or, indeed, into the certain). This transformation of the edible object into a consumed dish is equally the transformation of need into desire, of the organic complement of an absence into its psychic representation, of the consummation of desire into pleasure, of eros into satisfaction and finally of spatial/temporal or socio-cultural disjunctions into happy and peaceful conjunctions.

ii. *The Golden Galette or the Weapon of Eros: "Donkey-Skin"*

Once upon a time, as the story will be told, "as long as there are children, mothers and grandmothers in the world," a certain Master Donkey spread his two great ears at the center of King's palace stables. And no wonder, for the marvelous Aliboron, "so nicely had nature formed him," transformed the hay and barley that nourished him, not into dung, but into monetary signs: "sunburst *écus* and *louis* of all sorts which were gathered every morning from the yellow straw of his stall." The donkey of the absolute monarch thus performs a kind of cuisine, albeit a strange one: his system naturally transforms a substance inedible by man (don't we say, "He's such a dumb animal he would eat straw"?) into a substance equally inedible, by reason of the site of its production, the anal orifice of the beast. It is inedible because of what it represents (waste matter, ordure, dung), but also because of its metallic nature and its function as a universal equivalent of material goods. Inedible at their beginning and at their end, the *louis* and *écus* are pure "exchangeables," or, at any rate, "hordables," reserved for the future acquisition of goods. Master Donkey is thus both a culinary figure and the animal symbol of the transgression of any possible human system of cuisine; what he concocts in the marvelous secret of his organism is divided among three completely incongruous elements: the hay (an animal food inedible by man), dung (a remainder whose consumption is prohibited) and gold (a

non-nutriments). He thus produces a *sign*, naturally inedible, unable to be consumed, but able to be traded in economic exchange.

We know the importance of this living treasure for his fortunate master, the king. In making him "the greatest king in the world" he grants him exceptional political power. More important still, when this king conceives a mad passion for his own daughter, he meets the impossible conditions she sets for acceptance of his suit thanks to the *écus* and *louis* dropped by Master Donkey. The princess demands of her father, first, a gown the color of the heavens, next, one the color of the moon, and, finally, one the color of the sun; and it is the gold coins defecated by the donkey that permit the love-mad king to overcome each obstacle. The king's incestuous passion is the erotic homologue of his absolute political power; each resembles the other in its refusal to acknowledge limits, and in both cases economics provides the means to his ends. Aliboron and his "cuisine," then, in their transgression of all the rules of human cookery, are the image of the erotic transgressions of the king. They ground the essential conflict of the narrative while providing the mechanism through which it develops.

At this point in the narrative, we recall, the unfortunate princess's fairy godmother plays her trump card. She advises her charge to demand the skin of the donkey whose golden dung has been the economic vehicle of production of the marvelous dresses, symbols of a lawless eroticism. She thus steps outside the rules of the game to play the donkey against the king because it is the former's transgressive cuisine which from the beginning sustains the transgressive power of the latter, his lawless law. In so doing, she wagers the very mechanisms of representation that sustain the tale, and, with them, the general mechanisms of semiosis that underlie human culture and society. But the stakes for which she plays are not so much those of representation as of its supplement. With the donkey are wagered the figure of the reality of power (the gold coins) and the figure of its imaginary nature (to be unlimited). The monstrous/marvelous cookery of the donkey is the reality of royal power, its economic foundation, and the means to the end of its fundamental desire, to be unlimited. But as a narrative schema it is also, obviously, its limit; the all-powerful king is subject to its "anti-dishes," its inedible, unassimilable but exchangeable confections. The moment the king grants his daughter's wish ("The skin was gallantly granted as soon as the Infanta demanded it."), thus empowering himself to consummate his desire, he simultaneously loses his unlimited power. Paradoxically, at this instant the father's desire is *as if* accomplished, while the king's loss

of power is *not yet* accomplished. Nevertheless, we may equally well say that at this moment the king *does not yet* possess the erotic body of his daughter, while he has *definitively lost* the economic source of his power; the donkey as culinary mint.

We remember the subsequent adventures of the princess, carried out under the double sign of verbal and visual disguise: "The fairy arrived and assured her charge that he who does a good deed has nothing to fear. She advised her to make the king believe she was ready to submit to their marriage while in secret preparing to fly, disguised, to some far country. . . . 'The donkey's skin, serving as your mask, will render you unrecognizable. No one will believe that a beautiful princess could be hidden beneath its frightful ugliness.'" The skin become cloak thus envelops the princess and dis-figures her. It is at once clothing and mask, vestment and disguise. To escape the sin of royal incest the princess becomes, metonymically, the donkey whose skin she dons. Its mask, its disguise, are in some way the trace of her flight "far, farther, farther yet" into the space of the marvelous; a flight, we note, which begins with a postponed banquet and ends in a kitchen. At court: "black despair: no marriage, no banquet, no tarts and no sweetmeats. Most of the court ladies were so depressed they went without dinner. But the priest was saddest of all, for he dined extremely late, and lost his fee." As for the princess, "At last she arrived at a farm where the farmer's wife was in need of a kitchen wench to wash out the dirty linen and clean the pigs' sty. They put her in the farthest corner of the kitchen, where those insolent vermin, the stable-boys, did nothing but tease her." At this moment, the negative metonymic slide which substitutes a beast for a beauty and a kitchen for a banquet metaphorically completes its work of transformation. If the princess's flight entails the sacrifice of her royal place and title at the banquet of her father, she will soon acquire a new title in the farm kitchen: "Donkey-Skin . . . they called her, because of the skin she wore on her back."

And now Donkey-Skin herself will cook. Not *as* a cook, however, but as a princess, and not in the kitchen, but in her chamber. Her delicate cuisine, at once a strategy of love and a token of the charm of signs, will replace the monstrous cookery of the ass, source of absolute royal power and incestuous paternal desire. Her supplementarity, as indicated by her nickname, is double. "Donkey-Skin" (body and skin, face and mask, being and disguise) she divides herself between her kitchen corner, the site of her degrading weekday work, and her tiny chamber, site of her ennobling weekend recreation. The princess's fairy godmother, we re-

call, granted her a magic chest to follow her in her travels and contain her dresses, her jewels, her mirror and toilet articles—an invisible chest, which remains hidden underground but appears at the wave of a magic wand. Thus, on Sundays, in the privacy of her locked chamber, "Donkey-Skin arranged her toilet articles. Content and satisfied, she tried on, before her mirror, first her dress the color of the moon, next the sky-blue dress or the third, whose fire outshone the sun. She delighted to see herself in her youthful beauty, all pink and white, a hundred times lovelier than any other, and this sweet pleasure sustained her from Sunday to Sunday." Here we see those gowns that were demanded in order not be received—those gowns finally obtained in the urgency of the father's desire, and as a sign of his power—worn in the leisure of the Lord's Day, metaphors of fulfilled desire and triumphant order. Above all, we see them reflected back to Donkey-Skin in her mirror and contemplated by her in her brief retransformation to a princess "a hundred times lovelier than any other." Their reflected representation gratifies their wearer with the sweet pleasure of identification (I am she whom I see, wearing the signs of her royal rank)—a pleasure that, repeated every week, sustains her through the next six days. Thus she "morally" sustains herself in her ordeal, but we also read this notion of sustenance literally: on Sundays, Donkey-Skin nourishes herself with the exquisite confection of her own image. She feeds on the narcissistic identification of subject and object afforded her by the precious reflection of her own mirror, and devours her own image with her eyes. We read, "I represent myself to myself, therefore I am." Or, rather, "I consume myself in the form of a representation that was the object of the impossible desire of my father-king. Therefore I am truly that which I am: the subject-object of desire—but of my own (*propre*) appropriate desire." Or, alternately, "I preserve myself as myself, not by eating every day, but by looking at myself once a week." On Sundays, Donkey-Skin takes communion under the species of her own body clothed in royal robes, eucharistic signs of a divine body materially present under forms metaphorically edible and specifically visible. Donkey-Skin is metaphorically—on Sundays only, in her chamber—*cuisine* in the four senses of the word. She is the site where foods are transformed into dishes, the art that governs this transformation, the artist who performs it, and the exquisite dish that results. The role of the narrative is to concretize these metaphors, and in so doing to retransform Donkey-Skin into a princess.

The farm where Donkey-Skin takes refuge is (the narrator forgot to tell

us) the property of a "great and powerful king." What could be more natural than that the king's son should "often pause there after a day of hunting to refresh himself with cool drinks amid the lords of his court. . . . He was of royal air and martial mien. . . . Donkey-Skin gazed at him with tenderness, and thereby she recognized that under her rags and filth there still beat the heart of a princess. . . . 'How amiable he is,' she said, 'and how fortunate the beauty who possesses his heart. If he had honored me with a cast-off gown, I would feel myself more finely adorned by it than by any of those that I now own.' " The prince thus enters this other world which is nevertheless his own, a world circumscribed by dirt, animality and labor on the one hand and by leisure, cleanliness and celestial beauty on the other—by Donkey-Skin and Princess, both equally invisible to his royal eyes. Donkey-Skin, adorned in the marvelous gowns given her by her father-king, *sees herself* adorned by the gown that she imagines the prince to have given another; she contemplates herself *as* this other, and derives pleasure from her self-representation in the imaginary: "I devour the king's son (with my eyes) in the image of this imaginary woman who would make me the object of his desire. Thus, I remain what I am—the subject-object of the other's fictive desire."

And now we come to the first encounter of prince and princess—an affair of an eye and a gaze: "One day the young Prince wandered aimlessly from one kitchen court to another. He entered the obscure passage where the humble abode of Donkey Skin was to be found. By chance, he put his eye to the keyhole." The humble abode of the scullery maid proves to be the radiant temple of a celestial divinity: "Since it was a holiday she had put on rich adornments, and her superb gown, woven of fine gold and sprinkled with diamonds, shone to outshine the sun." This "chance" of the tale is none other than the necessity of the narrative process; the keyhole, an image of narrative point of view, and the dark passage of the mean court, the black box of the spectacle. The tableau/representation that the prince perceives through the keyhole has a triple effect. The first and most immediate is a catching of the breath, a vocal syncope: "The Prince contemplates her at the prompting of his desire and is so overwhelmed with pleasure that he scarcely breathes." The second, which prolongs the first, is loss of appetite: "He retires, pensive, into his palace, and night and day he sighs . . . he has lost his appetite, everything gives him pain." And finally, the third, intimately linked by inscription and memory to the first two: he cannot believe "that Donkey-Skin is by no means a young beauty, but the ugliest beast in the world

after the wolf, that the features which love traced, still present to his memory, will ever be effaced."

In the donkey's moment of glory, his cooking produced, by defecation, not dung, but *écus*, royal coins doubly marked with the sun and the royal profile, signs and instruments of absolute power. Donkey-Skin's cookery passes through the keyhole as an image, the sunburst radiance of a divine profile, a living, ineffaceable portrait: a medallion. Thus it is the inscription of a representation and a memento of love. The *écus* and *louis*, culinary signs reproduced and multiplied each morning, inedible and unable to be assimilated, but able to be exchanged, have become a single medallion, consumed and assimilated in the depths of the prince's soul. The royal donkey, economic operator of the transformation of foods into money, is the homologue of Donkey-Skin, erotic operator of the transformation of event into monument, and the gold coins that disappeared along with the former return as a medallion in the prince's memory. This is possible only because once the royal donkey is reduced to its skin, the skin becomes its metaphoric-metonymical representation.

The problem that remains to be resolved somewhere between the bedchamber/kitchen of Donkey-Skin and the banqueting chamber of the prince's palace is the following: how can the medallion be eaten? If the royal coinage which the king stores in his purse is the donkey's excrement, how can that which Donkey-Skin produced once only—the event that is her portrait, assimilated to a memorial medallion—be taken in or digested? The prince without appetite is the victim of sad and fatal languor: he is starving for love: "He cries, he weeps, he sighs. He can speak of only one thing—his desire that Donkey-Skin make him a cake with her own hands. And his mother cannot understand what her son means." The queen is speedily informed: "'Heavens, Madame,' " they tell her, "this Donkey-Skin is a filthy creature, uglier and more deformed than the dirtiest scullion." "No matter, says the queen; he must be satisfied. We must think only of that." How may the medallion be eaten? The son finds the solution, and the mother's command executes it. The princess, assimilated in the prince's memory as a portrait, now becomes a pastry—specifically, a *galette*—prepared by the hands of Donkey-Skin for his stomach. Master Donkey confected golden coins in place of dung; Donkey-Skin is transformed into a princess by the prince's gaze. Having become a medallion, an absolute erotic object, in his memory, she confects for him a *galette* to be eaten in place of a medallion to contemplate. Instead of being gazed on in a representation/icon, she

will be eaten as a cake/symbol. At the end of the narrative chain, the pastry eaten by the prince, the dish/medallion ingested in his stomach, the Princess Donkey-Skin—through metonymy, synecdoche, and metaphor, all at once—is none other than the dung defecated by the donkey in the form of coined gold with which the father filled his purse: transformation of the gold/money, rejected and recuperated excrement of a monstrous animal cookery, into a pastry/symbol, a dish consumed and prepared through a refined human cuisine. The culinary sign is the end point of a signifying chain that begins with the monetary sign, and the iconic sign, the imaged representation of Donkey-Skin, is the operative key to the process. At this point, the narrator can intrude the comment: "His mother loved him so much that, had he wanted gold to eat, he would have had it."

The insistence with which the tale dwells on the confection of the *galette* is remarkable: not only is a process of culinary art described—as if the narrator were determined to acquaint us with the recipe—but once again a signifying process develops whose object is *Sitos* and whose motor is *Eros*. It is a question not only of an agent, but of a nutriment. While the anonymous public ("on") describes Donkey-Skin as "uglier and more deformed than the dirtiest kitchen scullion"—that member of the kitchen staff charged with the lowest tasks, who turns the roasts and sweats over the sauces—to bake the royal cake she once again becomes a princess: an under-cook in the kitchen, she becomes a master-chef in her chamber, the one place where she has been a princess. Indeed, when all is said and done, it is not a cook who bakes the prince's *galette*, it is a princess who plays at cooking for the prince. And the *galette*, we know, is much more than a *galette*: a medallion/portrait assimilated by the prince's memory, it is also the sign and weapon of *Eros*. Let us see if this is not the case: "Donkey-Skin thus takes her flour, which she had had sifted on purpose in order to make her pastry more delicate, her salt, her butter and her fresh eggs, and, in order to perfect her *galette*, she shuts herself alone in her little room. First she carefully washed face, hands and arms till they shone like silver. Then, quickly dressing herself so as to approach her work worthily, she began." To style her a princess who plays the cook for the prince is still an understatement; not only does the *Sitos*, the flour, become a *galette* fit for a prince in the hands of this "filthy scullery maid," the body of Donkey-Skin, cleansed and purified like her flour itself, becomes silver through a play on meaning, a sort of transubstantiation that is not merely poetical. This "silver body" of the princess/cook will, through the familiar triple movement of metaphor,

metonymy and synecdoche, reproduce its own image in its culinary product, leave its trace in the prepared dish, double the culinary sign with an erotic index.

In effect, in order for the problem the tale poses to be definitively resolved, the dish Donkey-Skin prepares for the prince must produce an inedible remainder, and that remainder must be significant. The *galette*, a projection of the assimilated medallion, must also generate through its assimilation—through its annihilation as a sensory object, as Hegel would say—waste, but waste that, like the donkey's waste, the product of his animal cookery, is not garbage or filth, the leavings of ordinary food, but a precious sign. However, unlike the *écus* that Master Donkey defecates, this sign will not be infinitely reproduced and reproducible, multiple yet always the same, a general equivalent in general exchange, but a singular sign, the unique token of an incomparable individual, the equivalent of a proper name. "They say that through working a little too quickly she let one of her precious rings fall into the batter. But those who are held to know the end of the story insist that she put it there on purpose." A foreign body from the silver body of the cook becomes part of the dish. It will function as a sign and, more precisely, as index and insignia of recognition. Let us read what follows: "One never bit into a more delicate morsel, and the prince found the *galette* so good he nearly swallowed the ring through gluttony." From the busy hands of Donkey-Skin falls a ring that represents a finger, a fragment of the body/ring that is Donkey-Skin, an index in the anatomical sense, in that of Peirce and that of deictics, the body's remainder, something that is part of it, yet detachable, which one may lose or renounce, yet which permits one to be found, recognized, reappropriated, index and symbol. Here we have the ring ingurgitated with the delicious *galette* by the love-starved prince; we have the ring swallowed with the pastry, but—as foreign body and inedible metal—immediately expelled, defecated from above, if I may put it thus, as the sunburst *écus* of Master Donkey were from below. "No, it's not good to eat," as Freud would say in the *Verneinung*, but "It's good to think with, to know with, to recognize with." No, it is not a food; it is, in the dish, something that transcends the dish; it is a sign. A sign in the culinary sign, the sign of a sign, a representation and almost, already, a judgment: "When he saw the wonderful emerald and the narrow circle of the golden band, his heart was touched with an incredible joy. He put it under his pillow on the instant. . . ." Let us link to this ring all the rings of the signifying chain: golden *écus* of the father-king defecated by the donkey = golden medallion of Donkey-Skin contemplated and

assimilated by the prince = silver body of the princess/cook = golden *galette* of the princess/cook eaten by the son (of the) king = golden ring of the princess swallowed/regurgitated by the prince.

Does the ring fall in the *galette* by chance, or is it put there on purpose, the narrator asks. Perrault inclines me toward the second hypothesis: "As for me, frankly, I could well believe it. I am sure that when the prince approached her door and peeked through the keyhole she knew it. On this point women are so quick and their eyes so rapid if one contemplates them for a moment that she must have known the ring would be most welcome to her young lover." The ring/deposit (index, symbol, insignia) nearly eaten, immediately regurgitated, is thus in addition a trap: the trap of representation, of the iconic sign in the culinary sign: Donkey-Skin knows the prince sees her baking the *galette*, but the dropping of the ring goes unperceived by him—if not, he would not have swallowed it. Nevertheless, it is not the prince hidden behind the door that she sees, it is his gaze; and if she catches his gaze it is because the eye of the latter is itself caught in the keyhole, a voyeur immobilized, as by Medusa, at the sight of the spectacle, struck dumb by the fetish. An entrapper entrapped. The princess returns the voyeuristic gaze to its origin and, taking it in its own trap, she makes of herself a representation; she constitutes herself as a *tableau*, and she succeeds so well that the dropping of the ring into the *galette* goes unnoticed. The culinary sign functions perfectly as a fetish of the body of love. And what this fetish shows and hides at the same time, the essential nature of the body of love, the ring the fetish/dish encloses within it as its center (a center as round as itself—but that is its inassimilable part), besides being index, sign, symbol, insignia, is the image/trap of this body itself, a trap put there to catch a finger, a hand, a word; in a word, to give the princess's hand to the prince who demands it, to constitute her an object of exchange in marriage.

A "deposit," then, given and received, fallen and nearly swallowed,—the golden circle of the ring in the golden *galette* is a symbol, *symbolon*, of recognition—but in the sense in which we speak of the recognition of a debt—proof of identity between the contracting parties: the ring by the princess and the prince by the ring: "Since Hymen, no matter what one may say, is an exquisite remedy for this malady (of love), it was decided that he must marry. He let them beg him for a time, then said, 'I am willing if I am given in marriage the person whom the ring fits.' "

We know the rest, and the end—the search for a finger for the ring, that of Princess Donkey-Skin, and her marriage with the king's son; and

the return of the father-king for the marriage banquet of his daughter. The banquet cancelled in the first act is only postponed, but his daughter, the Infanta, weds another. And yet this "*differance*" recuperates both society and morality: "The father of the bride . . . who once desired her, had seen time purify the love that burned in his soul."

And Perrault, in one of the "moral lessons" of the tale, makes explicit the operation that authorizes the culinary sign as the negation of the edible, object of need, and its recuperation in consumed sign, in dish, figure of desire, in a body of love that can also be a body of silver: "Clear water and brown bread are sufficient nourishment for any young maiden if only she have fine clothes."

—translated by Beatrice Marie
and Richard Macksey