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Consuming Otherness:
Loblaw & Specular Consumption

by Clara Sacchetti

Food which is worth eating is worth discussing.

H. Marcel Boulestin (quoted in The Dave Nichol Cookbook, 1993, p. 23)

Section 1:

In our weight conscious and health crazed culture, we often think of food as a form of sustenance required by the human body. To a great extent, conversations about food tend to focus on issues of price, taste, caloric value or nutritional composition. Rarely do we think of food in its historical, political and/or cultural contexts. Yet, food, like many other things that touch our daily lives, has a sordid and unpleasant history of its own. To wit, food has been one of the driving forces behind the expansion of mercantilism, various capitalistic endeavors and neo-colonial activities, including, for example, the quest for sugar, spices and other luxury foodstuffs (cf. Mintz; Dumont & Cohen). Apart from the historical and political dimensions, how we conceive of food is always filtered through our own cultural lenses: the way we “think” of food or what we “think” constitutes food is always culturally specific. Hence, it is no accident that the famous French anthropologist, Claude Levi-Strauss, claims that food must be good to think with before it is good to eat. In following this particular train of thought, “reading” or interpreting the most mundane cultural objects (i.e. food) must also be a good way to think. Moreover, if we’ve learnt anything from the current proliferation of cultural studies, it is that everything means or signifies something, that even the most obvious objects reek with meaning; in short, that the popular world around us is a text just waiting to be read.

It should be no surprise, then, that I have chosen to talk about a particular Canadian cultural phenomena that deals with food. More to the point, I have in mind here the food product line retailed by Loblaw Cos. under its private label brand entitled "President's Choice" (PC). The PC group of foodstuffs has become an enormously successful product line and because of this popularity, it constitutes a worth “object” of analysis. As we will hopefully see, the explosion of PC products onto the Canadian marketplace has all the necessary ingredients of any social, cultural, and political text. Still, there are any number of ways to approach such a text. First, I must account for the fact that the "President's Choice" line is not only unbelievably popular but is also big business; second, I will turn more directly to the person of Dave Nichol, showing how his "private memories" invade the public imagination as both the source and confirmation of a mutual mass delirium; and lastly, I will explore the ways in which depictions of the "Other" utilized in Loblaw's marketing campaign is fraught with political and ideological significance.

However, before beginning for yet a second time, it is necessary to discuss some of the theoretical perspectives that inform my analysis. In following this trajectory, I hope to establish and in some way legitimize the semiotic practice of thinking about the most mundane or innocuous objects as texts to be "read".

Section 2: Reading Objects As Text

The idea that objects can or should be treated as text is far from an original suggestion. In Myth Today, Roland Barthes argues that objects acquire their status in society because they are, in the first instance, culturally significant. In addition, he claims that the task of the semiologist—or what he renames mythologist—is to uncover, reveal and expose the underlying ideological and cultural meanings inherent in various everyday objects. This project of un-concealing is critical in a consumer society enmeshed in a plethora of advertising technologies and mediums. In this sense, cultural meanings are deliberately constructed by the advertising industry. More particularly, manufacturers no longer merely produce goods to sell but actively create consumer desire for their commodities. And the way desire is 'manufactured' has itself become a type of commodity fetish—but not in the exact way originally formulated by Marx.

In his famous thesis on commodity
fetishism and reification. Marx suggests that the social relations embedded in capitalistic modes of production become mystified. Furthermore, he claims that the products created through human labour are conceived as "having a life of their own" and possessing "natural" value. Hence, the social basis of production is not readily apparent. Leading Marx to claim that "a commodity is a very queer thing abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties." Related to the magical aspect of commodities, Marx also claims that the capitalistic system uses value production to exchange value production. As society produces primarily for exchange value, commodities become abstract objects, items or things created for sale and consequent profit.

That social relations of production are disguised through an obsession with exchange value (vs. use value) is an important consideration of any economic-political-cultural analysis. Still, I want to argue for an increased emphasis on consumption rather than production or distribution. In saying this, I don't mean to de-emphasize the latter aspects of capitalism nor imply that these factors are somehow mutually exclusive. On the contrary, these connections and interrelationships are serious factors that warrant close and critical attention. However, for the purposes of this essay, the ways in which the advertising industry serves to promote exchange value adds perhaps another dimension to Marx's original proposition. Indeed, the power of current marketing techniques and technologies is a crucial force in constituting consumer desire (Berger, 1977). We may even suggest that the creation of this type of consumerism is a sort of hyper exchange value wherein we no longer simply purchase the commodity but the "idea" surrounding the product. Thus, it may be more accurate to consider Marx's initial formulation as a first-order fetishism while calling the kind of abstract "magic" manufactured by the advertising industry a second-order fetish one that attaches itself to the concept of the product and not simply the thing-in-itself.

In creating this second-order fetishism, various advertising strategies are utilized to fix ideas, concepts and desires in a visual format. Moreover, the idea of a commodity—or what can alternatively be called its glamour—is also promoted through the evocation of images and the associated meanings attached to those images. As such, there is an affinity between these visual effects and the types of meanings or myths produced within society. These visual significations are so widely disseminated through photographs, films and television that Barthes claims they have become another system of communication. In this spirit, Barthes writes:

Pictures become a kind of writing as soon as they are meaningful: like writing, they call for a lexis...We shall therefore take language, discourse, speech etc., to mean any significant unit of syntheses, where verbal or visual: a photograph will be a kind of speech for us in the same way as a newspaper article... (p. 95)

Thus we ought to consider the seriousness of images used or evoked in the advertising of commodities. More particularly, the images employed, stereotypical perceptions invoked, and meanings created in the publicity strategies in promoting the "President's Choice" product line.

To his credit, the father of the PC product line, Dave Nichol, understands that food can have meaning, and meaning can be developed, marketed, packaged, and sold; and for Loblaw Cos. Ltd., this kind of meaning is and has been incredibly profitable. Yet, the way in which food acquires its meaning through the marketing strategies employed by Loblaw Cos. Ltd. is representative of a second order fetishism: food becomes not something we simply eat but something we consume on a conceptual level. Food, a la the PC product line, becomes an exciting and unforgettable adventure into the mysterious, the gourmet, the exotic and the decadent. Nonetheless, however we choose to talk about it, food - especially the "PC" product line - is admittedly big business for Loblaw Cos. Ltd. "Let's be honest," Nichol writes, "in the great capitalist tradition, one of our primary reasons for assembling these reports (referring to a advertising supplement called the Insider's Report) is to encourage you to shop at our stores." Needless to say, the phenomenal success of Nichol's President's Choice product line is certainly food for further thought and further contemplation.

**Section 3: How Popular Is Popular?**

"What has your grocery store done for you lately?"

These words, trumpeted by Dave Nichol, gained popularity during the 1980's and early 1990's. This marketing slogan, designed to promote the genius of our Canadian-made PC products, has become the hallmark expression of the Loblaw family of grocery stores. Taken on its literal level, it may well be a question worth reflecting upon. For without doubt, the Loblaw chain of supermarkets does offer an impressive selection of unique and novel products. These products include: a full compliment of distinctive sauces and marinades marketed under the "PC Memories of..." trademark (which sold over 1.8 million bottles last year alone); a variety of prepared gourmet foods for the true gastronome ranging from "designer" cannelloni, lasagna, marinade chicken sections, gourmet hamburgers, chicken kiev, stir-fry vegetables, and
so on; a whole array of environmental and "Body Friendly" products (the "G-R-E-E-N line); an entire selection of low sugar, low fat and all natural "Too Good To Be True" products for the avid health enthusiast; a newly introduced line of specialty wines ("Memories of Napa"); and finally, a whole array of environmental and "Body Friendly" products (the "G-R-E-E-N" line); an entire Good To Be True" products for the avid health enthusiast; a newly introduced line of specialty products are minimal. As such, private label products have the distinct advantage of sparing the consumer the extraordinary costs associated with most recognized brands. As Dave Nichol puts it: "When a person looks at Ray Charles talking about Pepsi-Cola they're probably paying a couple of dollars of the eight dollars they pay for a case of Pepsi to cover this sort of advertising. [...] I think there is going to be a consumer rebellion to all the advertising expenses of the major North American retailers and it could be the downfall of the great branded companies" (BJ, March 1993, p. 20). As a result, not only do consumers get "better" products for less money, but retailers are still able to sell some PC products for a 30% mark up—double what they make on national brands. As one observer puts it: "They've created premium brands at value pricing with higher margins. It's like the old alchemist making gold. It's quite a feat." (CH, Dec. 18, 1993). It is not surprising, then, that Loblaw angered many manufacturers with their aggressive new approach. As Doug Tough from Cadbury Schweppes Canada complained, "We draw the traffic and generate lots of profit for them... [and] then they prey on that traffic" (FP, May 25, 1988). Nichol's response is typical: "My advice for them would be to make better products" (FP, May 26, 1988).

The perception of a "better" made product is clearly an important factor in creating a market for private label brands. Prior to the Loblaw initiative to develop store brands, they were usually viewed by the public as low status goods; the ugly yellow and black labels, combined with inconsistent quality, conjured hard times and product rationing. In short, store brand products were usually considered a sort of lumpenproletariate food falling short on style, quality and image. As a result, the sale of store brands increased during economic downturns, but decreased during subsequent upturns. Usually considered food for the poor and disenfranchised, consumers generally kept their distance.

However, Loblaw and Nichol has changed North America's view of store brand products forever, if not their food habits. Rather than simply copy national brand products, Nichol's PC line distinguished itself by introducing new and innovative products. As columnist Jeffery Miller notes, Nichol and PC have taken "the grocery business straight from "Leave it to Beaver" to "Thirty Something"... [What we have here is a renovation of not just our bellies, but of our minds."

As such, PC in-house products became highly credible purchases for the "upwardly mobile and in the know," in other words, the yuppie baby-boom generation. As some suggest, Dave Nichol has kept "his finger on the pulse of baby boomers' gastronomic desire" (TS, Jan. 23, 1993).

The "yuppification" of private label products has made Loblaw a huge corporate success. Although this usually goes unnoticed among those of us who are neither customers, fans, nor stock-holders, product development, profits, and corporate expansions have been massive. In 1984 Loblaw launched the PC label with just under 20 items. Between 1984 and 1994, the PC label increased from 20 to over 1100 items. During this same period, dollar sales for these products in North America grew from $20 million to a staggering $1.2 billion. These figures are even more impressive if we compare them to the dismal performance of Loblaw prior to the introduction of their private label. Until the first generation of in-house products called "No-Name" appeared in 1978, Loblaw suffered annual losses of up to $50 million. But with help from the new PC products, gross sales increased to $7.9 billion in 1988 and $9.2 billion in 1992. The net income for this same time period illustrates an incredible earning record with figures ranging between $40 and $104 million (cf. Financial Post Historical Reports).

The popularity of the PC line is also evidenced by its wide distribution. Within Canada, PC products are available from coast-to-coast. For example, in the Maritimes Canadian consumers find PC products in markets such as Capital, Save-Easy, The Real Atlantic Superstore, and
No-Frills. In Central Canada they are found at Loblaw, SuperCenter, Zehrs, No-Frills, Mr. Grocer, Valu-Mart, Fortinos, and Hasty Market. In the Prairies, stores such as The Real Canadian Superstore, O.R. Economy, EconoMart and SuperValue carry the line. And finally, PC products are found in British Columbia at The Real Canadian Superstore, Extra Foods, and Super-Value. As you can see, the line really travels. Loblaw has even established free-standing "boutiques," the first prototype being a 2000 square foot outlet in Terminal 3 at Toronto's Pearson International Airport. Presumably, PC products are now a convenient carry-on export.

The success of the PC product line is not confined to Canada alone. Indeed, since the 1985 launch of the PC line in the United States, this home-grown concept has become the most popular private label south of our border. As a deliberate strategy to capture part of the enormous U.S. food market, Loblaw has exported their private label to at least one major supermarket chain in each of the 10 largest U.S. cities. As such, PC products can be found in stores in Manhattan (D'Agostino), Pennsylvania (Acme), Northern Ohio (Sparkle Markets), Virginia (Harris Teeter), Louisiana (Real Superstores), Michigan (Kroger), Illinois (Jewel) and in New England (Big D). In total, PC products can be purchased in 34 states across the U.S. It is worth adding that PC products are also distributed outside North America to New Zealand (Woolworth's), Bermuda (The Marketplace), Singapore (Cold Storage Retail), and soon to Hong Kong.

Projected to hit the S 100 million mark in U.S. sales alone this year, Loblaw's entrepreneurial expansion into the U.S. is described by some as a "Napoleonic" thrust into America. But such language merely repeats Loblaw's own rhetoric "Napoleonic" thrust into America. But such language merely repeats Loblaw's own rhetoric. Though this is certainly true, his autobiography is literally plastered on posters, life-size cut-outs, commercials, late-night infomericals, videos, Insider's Reports, a cookbook, and so on. Though this is certainly true, his autobiography is literally written into such mediums in the form of anecdotes and personal asides. For example, Nichol often waxes nostalgic about the moment "Where It All Began" apparently. on his grandmother McGuigan's farm in Cedar Springs, Ontario. In a typically direct to Nichol's personality and the consumption of what may be called "specular autobiography." 3.

Spectacular Autobiography And Consuming Dave Nicol

After a degree in business administration at Western, a law degree at U.B.C., graduate studies in law at Harvard, and a three year stint at the business consulting firm of McKinsey & Co. in Toronto, Nichol was recruited in 1972 by Western pal Galen Weston to help save the family business, Loblaw Cos. Ltd. After saving the company from certain bankruptcy, Nichol stepped down as President of Loblaw Cos. Ltd. in 1985 and he was then put in charge of the newly created Loblaw International Merchants where he developed the successful PC product line, the Dave Nichol Insider's Report and his own very public profile.

Without question, Nichol is a great entrepreneurial success, a regular Canadian Donald Trump: he drives a $110 000 BMW 850i, lives on Clarendon Road in Toronto's prestigious Forest Hill, lounges after-hours in his Hawaiian "Dome in the home" with his wife Terri and their four French bulldogs, owns a vineyard in the Stag's Leap District of Napa Valley, California, and in his semi-retirement continues to consult for Loblaw while producing his own popular wine. This past February 9 he turned 54 years old.

Among his fans, Nichol has been called a "business visionary," "superstar grocer," "marketing guru," gregarious gourmand," and less believably, "heartthrob of the shopping-cart set." More critically he is known as "Mr. Ego," "arrogant," "control freak," "erratic," "hyperbolic," one of the toughest bosses to work for in Canada. According to Weston, the young Nichol was "Brash, arrogant, opinionated—he hasn't changed a bit." But one thing everyone agrees upon is Nichol's consuming passion for food; he is sometimes referred to as a food "cultist." Thus it is perhaps not surprising that the 6 foot 3 inch, 230 pounds Nichol is also known by waiters at Les Frere Troisgros restaurant in the Rhone Valley, France, as "le monsieur avec deux estomach." As Nichol puts it, his vocation is also his avocation. It is probably no accident, then, that Loblaw's PC product line reflects Nichol's personal autobiography. It is not just that he is everywhere plastered on posters, life-size cut-outs, commercials, late-night infomericals, videos, Insider's Reports, a cookbook, and so on. Though this is certainly true, his autobiography is literally written into such mediums in the form of anecdotes and personal asides. For example, Nichol often waxes nostalgic about the moment "Where It All Began" apparently. on his grandmother McGuigan's farm in Cedar Springs, Ontario. In a typically overstated gesture, Nichol commemorates the occasion with his PC "Memories of Cedar Springs" sauce. On the recipe card he writes: "It took only a spoonful to evoke a flood of images. I closed my eyes and I was sitting in my grandmother's kitchen with Boyd and the other hired hands... See if you don't agree that this sauce is an elixir of fond memories." As if this wasn't enough, Nichol commemorates yet another beginning, a second "Where It All Began" with his PC "Memories of San Francisco" sauce: "When I was in Law School in Boston..." Moreover, in his new cookbook we are exposed to a "Miscellany of Passion"—a full listing of Nichol's favourite markets, restaurants, fantasy dinner guests, dishes, and creature comforts (i.e., "a great shower," "a featherbed, etc.). So pervasive is
Nichol's personality in the cookbook that one almost forgets he is selling products and yet, in one recipe he actually calls for nine PC sauces!

Nichol's identity operates at the gravitational centre of the marketing strategy for the PC line. Like the "Memories of..." sauces and the cookbook, the Insider's Report is what he calls "a very personal statement of mine about food" (cf. G&M, Nov 18, 1993). Still, despite its autobiographical nature, or perhaps because of it, the Insider’s Report has been an extremely effective and cheap marketing tool for Loblaw’s in-house products. It even enjoys a certain cult following among educated urbanites with an eye for pulp journalism, absurdity, and cheap gourmet dishes. Repeatedly referred to as a cross between Mad Magazine and the Consumer Report, the second issue (April 1984) was already declared "A Great Canadian Tradition Since November 1983."

In fact, the Insider's Report is a smashing success at every level, as Nichol notes in his equally successful The Dave Nichol Cookbook (selling 100 000 copies in 6 weeks):

My Insider's Report has been a culinary phenomenon. Famous for its comic-book appearance, it's published four times a year and is read by about 6 out of 10 Ontario households. (And they spend about four hours browsing through it!) Every year we print more than 10 million copies. (1993, p. 24)

In case you're not counting, that's about 24 million hours annually spent reading not just pulp journalism, but pulp advertising—an absolutely mind boggling, even surreal statistic. As cartoon figures exclaim on the back of an Insider's Report: "You mean we invented the printing press for this!" Needless to say, the Insider's Report is reported to have the largest circulation of any food publication in the world. In a similar vein, people have gobbled up his promotional videos for PC products. Although they cost about $20 000 to produce, one video sold 50 000 copies at $5 each. In a reversal of the usual order, customers are directly financing the costs of advertising at Loblaw.

As President of Loblaw International Merchants, Nichol has been free to indulge his fancy, traveling around the world in search of exotic foods: a veritable Indiana Jones of "culinary archaeology". Hence, it is not surprising that the opening pages of The Dave Nichol's Cookbook has a two page colour photograph depicting a worn out leather suitcase plastered with pictures of exotic locales (these same images are used in the "Memories of..." product line). Furthermore this photo is "topped off" with a brown felt hat similar to one made famous by the character of Indian Jones. Nor is it too shocking to learn that a reference to Dave Nichol as Indian Jones has previous appeared in the Insider's Report. Echoing this sentiment Marketscan recently wrote: "A world traveler, Nichol plasters exotic labels on President's Choice sauces as if they were steamer trunks" (Jan. 27, 1994). Consequently, if Loblaw really is a "deliberately designed fantasy-land," as Eye Magazine suggests (Feb. 20, 1993), it is one built around Nichol's own self-absorbed image; these are, after all, the President's choices. As Nichol says: "I rely on taste—my taste. Nobody chooses the President's Choice products except me. And we don't do market research either. I just know what I like, and I think I know what other people like, too." Indeed, as the Globe & Mail suggests, "This is not exactly a democracy: the President's taste buds rank higher than anyone else's, and he has line-item veto power" (Nov. 25, 1993).

Whether Nichol knows what people really like, or is someone able to market his own desires as our own (cf. CB, Oct. 1987, p. 46), is a good question. For although he eschews brand label "image," Loblaw has been successful to the extent that Nichol's image has been closely identified with their products: to be sure, like any good salesman, Nichol doesn't just sell products; he sells himself.

In other words, when we purchase "Memories of Lyon," "Fuji, or "Ancient Damascus," we are also consuming Dave Nichol—a sort of ritualistic totem feast. More to the point, our mass consumption of the President's personal choice validates his personal taste as public, his autobiography as public mythology, his delusion as collective consciousness. Consequently, while he might be "the bite, chew, swallow that's heard around the world" (G&M, Nov. 25, 1993), ours is the consumption which makes him possible. Or again, although he might be King of food, we're the collection of No-Name subjects who authorize his reign, his specular autobiography, as our really real, the true gourmet.

Finally, things get "curiouser and curiouser until history itself becomes just another in-house label, the exotic just another PC trademark. If so it's a very short distance from the exotic to the quixotic. And in fact, through various marketing methods brought together to promote PC products images of the exotic, the mysterious and the romantic are evoked and represented on labels, photos, and captions. With this in mind, I will turn to a closer discussion of the images used or evoke by Loblaw in creating and maintaining the popular private label product line.

Section 4: Remember Image Colonialism!

Though we usually don't give it a second, even, first thought, consumption is always a matter of social and political import—especially when our feasting rituals are so deeply influenced by the

Working in tandem with their enticing titles, the packaging also contributes to the exotic and mysterious aura of these products. Take, for instance, the packaging attached to a pomegranate sauce introduced in 1992 entitled "Memories of Ancient Damascus." The marketing of this item employs a portrait of a Muslim woman whose face is covered by a blue veil. Under our curious and insistent gaze, the woman evokes mystery and illicit seduction. Perhaps impressions of the Middle-East run through our minds, an exotic locale that, following Malek Alloula (1986), strikes the Western imagination as cruel and barbaric. Hence our fascination and disgust, what Edward Said calls "orientalism." But above all, the sauce promises to transport us to a remote and distant setting.

Ironically enough, though, this sauce was found in Seattle, Washington. Thus behind the facade of Nichol's "memory" lies not Ancient Damascus but modern Seattle. So much, then, for "authentic" exotic! Moreover, this very same image is also used to promote an altogether different product—"Memories of Marrakech." Instead of evoking images of the Middle-East we run through our minds, an exotic locale that, following Malek Alloula (1986), strikes the Western imagination as cruel and barbaric. Hence our fascination and disgust, what Edward Said calls "orientalism." But above all, the sauce promises to transport us to a remote and distant setting.

In fact, Nichol rounds off the trip with various fragments of cultural and historical information about food, a sort of "thin" description characteristic of some ethnography. This type of historico-anthropological knowledge is provided "free" to the Loblaw consumer through the Insider's Report and PC recipe cards. Through these various advertising devices, we too can become amateur ethnographers and historians; like Nichol, we too can become cross-culturally educated. For instance, in one Insider's Report we learn about the Hungarian and Viennese origins of the French baguette; discover that the favourite mushroom of Japanese and Chinese cuisine is the shiitake mushroom; and find that couscous is a traditional ingredient in many North African dishes. In another, we find that "Ching Chun Bao" is a Chinese beverage originating from the Ming Dynasty in the 15th century (developed for the Emperor Cheung Zu), and learn about BrillatSavarin, a 19th century French gastronome, whose celebrated cheese is an essential part of any "Epicurean epiphany." In yet another edition we are familiarized with "Gravalax," a Swedish dish of marinated salmon traditionally served with sweet and sour mustard; learn the location of the "best" olive oil in the world (in Spain from the Nunez de Prado family estate near Cordoba); and are advised of the reasons for England's reputation for producing the best sweet peas in the world, including factors such as English variety, English soil and harvesting processes. By the 24th volume of the Insider's Report (of which there are currently 29), we hear about an Italian flatbread found at the Splendido Hotel in Portofino (Italian Riviera); are informed of a soy and ginger glaze discovered in Kyoto Japan; and learn that the best salmon in the world is in the Bay of Fundy. To round off this most liberal education, Nichol throws in scattered references to Freud, Einstein, McLuhan, Newton, Kant, etc.

In addition, through recipe cards attached to the "Memories of...n product, we learn about Japan's famous Kobe beef which is fed sake-soaked grain and "massaged daily like a Sumo wrestler"; that any "serious pursuit of gastronomy" should include trips to Lyon, France. which is a "mecca for food lovers and widely regarded as the gastronome capital of France"; that Mt. Fuji, situated outside of Tokyo and dormant for three centuries, still serves as a sacred site and "reminder that life is driven by the unexpected and enhanced by the exotic." Moreover, we are familiarized with how a caribbean marinade—"jerk"—got its name, that it is
"chili peppers and pungent seasonings that reveal its African, Indian and Calypso origins"; that Hawaii is a "rich kaleidoscope of cultural and culinary influences" (America gave it pineapples and sugar, Asians contributed beans and noodles, and the Portuguese furnished spices).

As you can see, these products not only add savory delicacies to our everyday diet, but they bring the Other to our homes. Consider, for example, the ceremonially painted white, red, and black face from a Japanese opera on the "Memories of Kobe" marinade; the Caribbean island scene complete with sand, palm trees, resort hotels and two "local" men on the "Memories of Montego Bay" sauce; the "native" Polynesian woman, draped with a garland of whitish-yellow tropical flowers, who stares out from the "Memories of Hawaii" label; or the oriental dragon on the "Memories of Singapore" glaze.

At last, through all this excessively thin description, we consume less the product than its specular image, less the contents than the advertising on the bottle or box. Consumption is always conceptual-consumption that tells us more about ourselves than any "other" culture; more about mass delirium than fond memories. Finally, then, let's be clear about this rich textual scene. These gross stereotypical conceptions work to both sensationalize and domesticate Otherness. For although these images invoke notions of the authentic Orient, the real Caribbean, the true Africa, and so on, they in fact betray themselves as nostalgic "Memories" of our own invention. As Nichol once said: "We're not happy with today's world. We want to go back. We want something traditional to hold on to, something that doesn't last for just Andy Warhol's 15 minutes." The Other, then, is really a tasty morsel of our own imaginings which we consume and master. Or again, we eat, digest, and excrete the Other in order to validate our own self-image as stable, secure, eminently unified. Nichol services this need by making the indigestible digestible for our all-too sensitive North American palates. In this sense, PC products are just placebos masquerading as the real thing. As for the elusive "real" thing, well, it always slips away, evading all capture and consumption.

I have tried in this paper to demonstrate the cultural significance of President's Choice products at Canada's Loblaw supermarket. To this end, I have briefly focused on profit, development, expansion, personality, consumption, and cultural appropriation. Though parts of the paper may have been, alas, hard to swallow, our exploration has the merit of framing and analyzing issues that are part of everyday culture. Of course, the frame itself is contentious and open to the reader's revision. For I no doubt, have engaged in a kind of production, and this inevitable closure marks both the beginning and end of our delirium and mass consumption. And maybe even a case of indigestion.

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Abbreviation Key

BJ - Business Journal
CB - Canadian Business
CH - Calgary Herald
FP - Financial Post
FT - Financial Times
FW - Financial Weekly
G&M - Globe & Mail