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# **‘Sauce in the bowl, not on our shirt’: Food Pedagogy and Aesthetics in Vietnamese Ethnic Food Tours to Cabramatta, Sydney**

Rick Flowers and Elaine Swan

## **Abstract**

In this chapter, we draw on studies of taste education and food aesthetics, and from our participant-observation to analyse an ethnic food tour led by two Vietnamese Australian tour guides to Cabramatta, Sydney. We argue that the guides teach tour participants a spectrum of aesthetic appreciation for Vietnamese food including gastronomic sensory registers, practical, embodied and etiquette aesthetics. By discussing this range of aesthetic forms including their focus on our bodies, we extend the studies on taste education by Isabelle De Solier, Ken MacDonald, and Krishnendu Ray to show the complexity, skill and taste in the food pedagogy work of the tour guides. More specifically, we build on Ray’s body of work on racially minoritised restaurateurs’ ‘design work’ and his argument that their aesthetic work shapes the taste of dominant groups.

## **Bios**

Rick Flowers and Elaine Swan have jointly undertaken research of various ethnic food tour organisations, food social enterprises, food activist initiatives and food practices in a mixed race family, drawing on feminist and critical race theory. They are particularly interested in food pedagogies and with Maud Perrier have established a blog on food, race, gender, work and pedagogy. To date, they have jointly published ten book chapters and journal papers and an edited volume with Routledge – *Food Pedagogies*. Rick is in the School of Education, University of Technology Sydney and Elaine in the School of Business, Management and Economics at the University of Sussex.

## **Introduction**

Cabramatta is one of the jewels in Sydney – promoted as “A Day Trip to Asia”, this is exactly what you get, a whirl of colour and many languages, shops with exotic fruits and vegetables piled high, tastes of many authentic dishes. Our safaris are guided by experts who live in the area and are proud to show off their Vietnamese heritage, bringing us to their ‘finds’ – down little alleyways and tucked into the back of shopping areas. We visit on a Sunday when there is also a thriving unofficial market of people selling herbs and chopped lemongrass, dragonfruit and cured pork. A unique and inspiring place!

### Highlights:

- Our guides familiarise you with this wonderful suburb, sharing all the best places you’ll want to come back to.
- Start with a brunch of Banh Xeo – pancake filled with prawns and pork and many herbs – PLUS late lunch!
- Experience many tastes from roast pork and crackling to heavenly tropical fruit and wild colourful desserts
- Get all the ingredients you’ll need to create your own Vietnamese banquet at home
- Learn to eat like a local and where to get the best fabrics, cooking pots, and enjoy Vietnamese coffee. (Gourmet Safaris website, accessed March 2017)

We start our chapter with this quote taken from the website for *Gourmet Safaris*, an ethnic food tour company because it illustrates how tourism aestheticises Vietnamese food, and

Cabramatta in southwestern Sydney. Rather than marketing representations, however, we explore how guides teach food aesthetics to tourists. In particular, we draw on our analysis of a tour called Vietnamese Gourmet Safari. Thirty kilometres south west from inner Sydney, Cabramatta is marketed variously as 'Asia in Sydney'; 'Vietnamatta'; and the 'gateway to Saigon,'. It has a 68% migrant population (ABS 2014) and this includes the highest concentration of Lao, Vietnamese, Khmer - some ethnically Chinese - migrants in Australia, totalling around 40,000 (Gwyther 2008). Most arrived in the 1970s and 1980s as refugees in the wake of the second Indochina War (SBS 2012). Initially, they were housed in hostels in Cabramatta. This was mainly because in the twentieth century Cabramatta had become a migrant transition zone for British, German, Greek, Italian and Yugoslav migrants. Eventually, the Vietnamese settled here. In the first 20 years of their arrival, high percentages of Vietnamese were unemployed and under-employed. Whilst problems continue to be entrenched, by the 1990's a new professional class of Vietnamese Australian doctors, lawyers and accountants emerged (Carruthers 2008).

The arrival of Indochinese refugees challenged the Australian identity and the Australian suburb (Gwyther 2008). They 'unwittingly confronted the suburban status quo through their concentrated settlement patterns', Asian appearance and their cultural practices from language, religion to their use of non-English shop signage, a sensitive issue in Sydney's west in the 1980s (Gwyther 2008, p. 68). But these were the very features they turned to touristic advantage. Thus, Anglo-Australian and non-Indochinese tourists have been attracted to Cabramatta's temples, religious festivals, Chinese gates, Vietnamese, Lao and Khmer restaurants, grocers, gold and fabric stores since the 1980s (Dreher 2006, Meagher 1998). But tensions mounted between media sponsored racist and more cosmopolitan touristic perceptions of Cabramatta. The media played a large part in promoting fears about an exotic Vietnamese criminality. After 'intense media scrutiny of youth gangs, drug dealing, shootings and murder', tourism numbers dropped off in the 1990s (Dreher 2006). Cabramatta was seen as a Vietnamese ghetto - threatening, Other, deviant, foreign, ugly and dangerous, the 'heroin capital of Australia', 'infested' by Vietnamese drug crime, violence, and gangs (Dreher 2006, Gwyther 2008).

Over twenty years, Vietnamese small businesses, the Chamber of Commerce and Fairfield Council worked to market Cabramatta as a cultural culinary tourism destination (Brook 2008). In 1998, Fairfield Council commissioned a video entitled 'Cabramatta: A New Story' which proclaimed that 'bringing tourists to Cabramatta clearly helps to break down racial barriers and misperceptions about the area and its people' (Dunn and Roberts 2006, p. 201). From the start, the tourism strategy profiled food and food businesses and in 1998, tourism authorities commissioned prominent Australian Malaysian food writer and chef Carol Selvarajah to lead food tours in Cabramatta. Over 1,000 people participated in the tours in two years (Meagher 1998). The New South Wales government and local businesses renewed their tourism strategy to 'revitalise' Cabramatta. In 1999, they produced a brochure showcasing restaurants, shops and recipes, promoted by a direct mail campaign to clubs, coach operators, schools and special interest groups and distributed by *Vogue Living* and *Australian Gourmet Traveller* (Meagher 1998). In the 2000s, food and tourism media

heralded Cabramatta as a ‘gourmand destination.’ In 2001, *Gourmet Safaris* established their food tours, run several times each year since then. In 2014, the Council, in consultation with the local Chamber of Commerce and individual restaurateurs, launched a campaign to promote ‘signature dishes’ of local restaurants. The campaign was backed up with brochures, posters and social media coverage advertising local restaurants and ‘signature dishes’.

Our chapter focuses in on the work of the culinary tour guides. Their work matters because ethnic culinary tourism is promoted as a major driver of economic and cultural regeneration of racialised suburbs (Santos, Belhassen & Caton 2008). The extent to which culinary tourism addresses deep-seated structural and racist problems in Cabramatta is, however, greatly exaggerated, signalled for instance by a newspaper headline in the *Sydney Morning Herald*: *How a little bit of Pho cured Cabramatta’s ills* (Kembrey 2014).

In particular, we study the pedagogical work of the guides. To date little scholarly attention has been paid to food pedagogy in culinary tourism. That said, there are food studies theorists who analyse taste education and the shaping of taste in various cultural domains from restaurants, food festivals to food media (Macdonald 2007, 2013a and 2013b; Ray 2007, 2011, 2014, 2016a, 2016b; de Solier 2005, 2013; Flowers and Swan 2015, 2016). Using concepts such as ‘pedagogues’, ‘televisual taste education’ and ‘gastronomic education’, these scholars interrogate the influence of food media and experts on shopping, cooking and eating practices, and their gendered and classed politics. Few, however, examine the implications of race, racialised food or racialised suburbs and the significance of racially minoritised food workers in structuring the taste of dominant groups. An important exception is Krishnendu Ray who, across his body of work, insists that racially minoritised restaurateurs – particularly from Indian and Pakistani backgrounds – mould the aesthetic and palatal taste of the largely white middle classes in New York City and their understanding of ethnic food. In insisting on the agency and influence of minoritised food workers, Ray’s study forms part of a wider project in food and tourism studies to valorise minoritised food work, both in the past (Leong-Salobir 2011), and today (Bunten 2008; Drew 2008; Hage 1997; Narayan 1997).

Ray does not use the concept of pedagogy but we interpret his use of terms such as the ‘shaping’ and ‘influencing’ of taste as evidence of the operation of food pedagogies. We are not saying that all restaurateurs set out to ‘teach’ their customers. But sometimes the effect is that customers learn from their work both formally and informally. Accordingly, we apply Ray’s analysis to the case study of the work of two expert tour guides, Angie Hong and Peter Ngyugen. We extend his theory in several ways. First, we study a different occupational group – food tour guides as opposed to restaurateurs; secondly, we focus specifically on Vietnamese not South Asian food; and thirdly, we shift geographical attention to Sydney with its specific Australian-Asian racialisation processes.

It is much clearer that tour guides are in the job of formal education compared to restaurateurs, although we suggest they enact informal education. Hence, the ethnic tour organisations in Sydney we study seek to educate participants, residents and even the media

about ethnicised culture, racism and migrant histories (Flowers and Swan 2015, Swan and Flowers 2017). Their pedagogical work has to be sophisticated given that Cabramatta occupies such an infamous place in the Australian white imaginary; persistently represented in racist ways as dangerous, insular and secretive (SBS 2012, Carruthers 2008, Dreher 2006). Furthermore, the work of the ethnic tour guides challenges the scholarly and popular assumption that minoritised migrant food workers are not interested in taste or beauty as Ray asserts. The guides educate tourists in how to shop, taste, eat, and comport themselves and in so doing tourists can learn to appreciate Vietnamese food as sophisticated, complex, and skilled. It is not just ‘cheap food’ as often portrayed in the media. In this way, they counter racist stereotypes about food and culture and offer alternative representations of Cabramatta. Representations of ethnic food matter because they are often depoliticised, racist, and overly celebratory, and reproduce social, political, economic and symbolic inequalities (Santos, Belhassen & Caton 2008). Alternative representations can challenge longstanding racism, and indeed, there has been a long history of local communities and businesses changing how people view Cabramatta (Dreher 2006).

To make our argument, we structure the chapter as follows. First, we provide an overview of writing on taste education and food aesthetics; secondly, we introduce the tours and guides, and thirdly, we discuss food aesthetics and taste education on the food tour.

### **Gastronomic Education and Food Aesthetics**

In the following three sections, we introduce key scholars – Isabelle de Solier, Ken MacDonald and Krishnendu Ray. All three foreground food aesthetics and the politics of food expertise when theorising taste education. Whilst authors such as Carol Korsmeyer (2002) and Emily Brady (2012) are well known for their writing on food and aesthetics, these three scholars bring an analysis of aesthetics, together with food pedagogy. We start with de Solier’s study of ‘gastronomic education’: how ‘foodies’ learn culturally legitimated food knowledge informally or formally from material media (2005, 2013). She moves beyond broad assertions about foodies’ learning of taste to highlight the range and types of food knowledges that make up gastronomic education. For example, it might be expected that food pedagogies in the media offer knowledge mostly about the material production of food and practical culinary skills. But de Solier stresses that the curriculum extends beyond these. Hence, gastronomic education encompasses aesthetic knowledge from how to flavour and style food; consumption knowledge about restaurants, chefs, cuisines, ingredients, producers, suppliers; and historical anthropological knowledge about food practices of cultural groups (2013, p. 49). In essence, she suggests that chefs provide production knowledge, while critics and food writers, consumption knowledge. Foodies value the credentialised food expertise of haute cuisine chefs but also ‘traditional knowledge’ from uncredentialed family-taught chefs (2013, p. 63). Indeed, foodies admire traditional knowledge for its lack of professionalised skills and for being handed down through the generations: ‘cuisine as craft, not art (as in haute cuisine)’ (ibid).

Overall, her work responds to a hoary question in food and media studies of whether television cooking educates viewers. Her argument is that yes, ‘televsual taste education’ does teach viewers, and not only practical and aesthetical knowledge but indeed goes further to inculcate ideologies of gender, class, ethnicity and nationality (2005, p. 479). To take an example, de Solier argues that culinary television teaches the aestheticisation of food. To illustrate she discusses the television programme *Rockpool Sessions*, presented by Australian chef Neil Perry, who teaches home cooks how to prepare the most elite form of restaurant cuisine, using the practical culinary knowledge of haute cuisine recipes and techniques. But the programme additionally promotes knowledge about the aesthetics of food: from flavour aesthetics such as smell, visual appearance and presentation, all of which valorise the form of food over its function of feeding and nutrition. Accordingly, gastronomic education attends to two layers of meaning to food: its sensory properties and its stylistic properties. Thus, viewers can learn about the practical knowledge of cookery skills and the aesthetic culinary capital defined by TV chefs and critics, informed by culturally legitimate systems of food taste to aestheticise their domestic cooking.

### **Pedagogical Entrepreneurs and Aesthetic Registers**

Whilst de Solier’s research identifies the variety of knowledges in gastronomic education, and their elite food aesthetics, MacDonald’s ethnography of taste education (2007, 2013a/b) focuses on one ingredient, ‘fine’ cheese, but across various ‘instructive sites’ (2013b, p. 304). In particular, he examines the taste practices of ‘pedagogical entrepreneurs’ and institutions from a maître de fromagers to a Cheese Museum in Gruyere, and a Slow Food Cheese Festival. His analysis focuses on pedagogues’ ‘practices of qualification’ (2013b, p. 296). By which he means the cultural practices through which brokers communicate specific meanings about cheese so that consumers create an affective relation to ‘fine’ cheese and change their cheese buying habits.

His focus is on the pedagogy of connoisseurship with its structure of authority to make judgments. Pedagogues have to display that they appreciate and distinguish a sense of taste. They are cultural brokers and arbiters of taste who not only provide knowledge of the product but also the means through which to recognise and engage in acts of distinction. The pedagogues do not work on their own but are guided by ‘an institutional and organisational structure responsible for attributing, stabilising and objectifying qualities’ (2013a, p. 94). Thus, social institutions and a range of actors reproduce and regulate new discourses, modes of education and prescriptive models of consumption. As a result, the taste aesthetics of the connoisseur cultivate the taste of cheese consumers and retailers and expand cheese markets transnationally through these ‘micro-pedagogical processes.’

MacDonald attends carefully to how such food pedagogues teach retailers and consumers taste aesthetics. In essence, they inculcate them in the types of qualifiers which describe how cheese ‘should’ taste. Hence, their teaching focuses on drilling learners in a transnational prescribed language: a register of cheese. This ‘register of aesthetic terms’ covers physical,

symbolic and aesthetic taste – and disciplines the palates of pedagogues and consumers (2013a, p. 98). Various seminars and maître de fromager classes indoctrinate ‘proper practices and registers of engaging with cheese, explicitly performing the proper vocabulary required to describe its qualities’ (2013b, p. 306). For instance, the Slow Food script describes broad categories such as nature, tradition, culture, and place i.e. the ‘language of naturalist aesthetics’ (2013a, p. 98). But the register also includes specific sensory and aesthetic descriptors such as ‘creamy, firm, unctuous’ (2013a, p. 97). Through this structured approach, consumers learn the proper way to talk about, categorise and taste cheese. Learners refine their taste but more importantly, develop their competence in a specific vocabulary, the ‘mastery of a register’ (Silverstein 2006, cited in McDonald 2007, p. 40). The mastery of the fine cheese register not only demonstrates knowledge of a commodity and a ‘characteristic way of talking’ about it but serves to ‘index one’s membership in the social group that characteristically does so’, and ‘distinguish one from social groups that do not’ (ibid).

The pedagogical experience trains bodies as well as language. For instance, the cheese museum ‘is designed to structure bodily movement, channel visitors through a series of sensorial encounters, and orchestrate a particular narrative of an object’ (MacDonald 2013b, p. 293). The maître fromager classes discipline the palates of MacDonald and his classmates so that they use the prescribed qualifiers to ‘translate sensory experience into language’ (2013b, p. 310), learning how to refine not only a ‘practiced tongue and nose’, but also an ‘aesthetic memory to assert sensitivity to quality’ (2007, p. 39). Ultimately, this kind of taste education aims to reduce consumer anxiety about gaps in their knowledge about cheese – its safety, authenticity, production (2013b, p. 308). As MacDonald puts it, the pedagogues train their learners in ‘providing comfort.’

## **Food Design Work**

Whilst de Solier and MacDonald study food elites and their food aesthetics, Ray examines the cultural production work of racially minoritised food producers. He challenges widespread assumptions that racially minoritised food workers are not interested in beauty or skilled at aesthetics and creativity. Drawing on Sharon Zukin’s work (1995) on how racial and ethnic groups have shaped culture and cultural institutions in major US cities, he insists that they have made aesthetic changes not only to public institutions but also to aesthetic taste in food. Ray’s project is to recalibrate the sociology of taste to position racially minoritised food workers as agentic, creative, taste shapers.

Hence, Ray criticises food scholars who focus on the taste of white middle class consumers and ignore the ‘sensorial world of the immigrant’ (2011, p. 248). They ‘eras[e] subaltern palates, hands and imaginations’ and construct immigrants as subordinated, impoverished, suffering labourers (2011, p. 248). He calls for researchers to profile ‘the habits, memories, work and dreams of immigrant entrepreneurs’ (2011, p. 243) and their ‘designs on the world’ (2011, p. 248). Scholars overlook joy, pleasure and aesthetics because they imagine that minoritised people are suffering too much to care about taste. As a result, researchers not

only ignore the aesthetics of individuals and families but also the larger ‘role of immigrants in the culture of consumption and the aesthetics of work’ (2016a, p. 3). To address the ‘cultural subservience’ of immigrants (2014, p. 388), researchers need to ‘pay attention to the good taste of poor people, especially immigrants, as we have done to the tastes of the rich and powerful’ (2016a, p. 3). Minoritised people are ‘turn[ing] the table on the dominant culture of taste’ (2016b, p. 194).

To produce culture means that minoritised food workers mix taste and beauty with the practical. To get at these interactions, Ray uses the concept of design to encompass restaurateurs’ ‘aesthetics of work’ (2014, p. 389). The aesthetics of work range from designing the décor and layout of cafes and restaurants, to naming businesses and putting together menus, recruiting staff and reproducing foods, flavours, and ambience (2014, p. 389; 2011, p. 251). As he explains:

By design, I mean not only the physical infrastructure of the restaurant, but also the concept, the name and the menu, and the ways of reproducing it through investment, recruitment of labor, recipes and cooking. I use the word *design* because of: (1) its ability to convey an attempt to remake the world within material and conceptual constraints; (2) its functionality—you have to deliver a certain kind of food, repeatedly, at a price, at a place; and (3) the fact that it relates the body to space, economics to aesthetics, habits to consciousness, and inhabitation in a locale to global gastronomic “discourse” (2011, p. 251).

Ray’s use of ‘design’ underlines the extent, scale and complexity of restaurateur’s creativity, labour and skill. Moreover, minoritised food business owners do their aesthetic work in response to real and imagined white customers, critics, advertisers, bloggers, and commentators, through ‘transactions of taste’. They respond to white demand but are not ‘overwhelm[ed]’ by it (2011, p. 249). Not only have such transactions in taste built up historically, but they proliferate through contemporary eating practices and food media. This means that numerically and culturally, racially minoritised restaurants are of some consequence. And foodie discourse on ethnic foods is structured by minoritised aesthetics and taste in profound ways.

### **Tour Guides’ Aesthetic Food Pedagogy**

This literature raises a number of questions: what kind of transactions in taste happen on the tours? How do the guides represent the design work of food business or do aesthetic work on the tours? Do they teach sensory registers? To answer these questions, we turn to our wider study of ethnic food tours and in particular, our participant observation of the *Gourmet Safari* tour to Cabramatta. In order to get at the finer details of the tour guides’ aesthetic work, we analyse our data through conceptual framing of food aesthetics culled from the literature and which includes: gastronomic sensory, gustatory, practical, embodied and etiquette.



## **Gourmet Safaris**

*Gourmet Safaris* run a wide range of ethnic food tours in Australia and international destinations. The CEO of *Gourmet Safaris* is Maeve O'Mara, the creator and co-presenter of TV programmes *Food Safaris* and *Food Lover's Guide*, which air on the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), Australia's multicultural and multilingual public station. The Gourmet Safari food tours relate to the TV programme *Food Safaris*, which feature people shopping, cooking and eating 'ethnic' food. Experienced guides who have extensive food experience and expertise and local food knowledge front the tours. Many have led the tours for several years.

The guides on the Vietnamese *Gourmet Safari* tour in which we participated were Angie Hong and her nephew, Peter Nguyen. A qualified engineer, Hong ran two well-known Vietnamese restaurants in Sydney for 8 years and occasionally appears on cooking slots on morning television and in Sydney media. Nguyen arrived in Australia at the age of three, worked as manager in one of Hong's restaurants, and is a qualified engineer who now works at Ryde Council. Hong and Nguyen are not key players in the international connoisseur network or foodie elite such as the chefs, critics and maîtres de fromagers discussed by de Solier and MacDonald and but on a par with the chefs about whom Ray writes. The tours have run since 2001 with Peter at the helm for many of these. Lasting four hours, the tour visits a number of restaurants, markets, cafes and shops, costs \$110, and provides opportunities for tasting, sampling, eating and shopping. The pre-tour information sent to us explains:

We start with tea and some snacks (Vietnamese coffee and juice available to buy and try) - followed by an introduction and a brief "show and tell" of some Vietnamese herbs and ingredients. Next, we tour the shops in central Cabramatta visiting bakers, fruit and veg merchants, a huge supermarket plus more followed by a light lunch at one of Cabramatta's top local Vietnamese restaurants. We walk several blocks on this tour (at a leisurely pace) so it's a good idea to wear comfortable walking shoes. Tour finishes around 3.30pm.

Touree numbers range from 20-30 per tour and include families, small groups of friends and couples.

### **Vietnamese Gourmet Safari**

On Saturday morning, we meet at Ngoc An, a casual dining restaurant in Cabramatta at 11.00am. On Arthur street just off the main street, a few minutes from the train station, it makes a good place to meet. Ngoc An is glass fronted with a bright yellow and green fascia, rows of clean formica tables, tourism posters on the walls, and serves a range of Vietnamese food, dine in or take-away. As we walk in, we can see a few Vietnamese families eating, and a group of people who are very obviously tourists.

We are a large party of tourees of 28 people, mostly white Australians, aged between 30-45,

couples and small parties of friends. We find out that some of the participants have holidayed in Vietnam and others are what Peter refers to as ‘Vietnamese food virgins’. At the restaurant, we are seated at tables of four and six and meet Angie and Peter the guides. Angie is an older woman in her early sixties, well made up and dressed very distinctively with big sunglasses, red lipstick, pearl earrings, a necklace, and several large rings. Peter refers to her as ‘Fabulous Angie’ and she is authoritative, charismatic and commands attention. Peter, in his early forties, wears a red and white company shirt and name tag and sports a portable microphone and speaker. They are both lively, confident, humorous, speakers who hold the floor and a polished double act who have a fine line in banter. They have refined a well-developed curriculum on Vietnamese and Cabramatta history, politics, food, and culture and over the four hours, they cover a lot of ground, introducing us to drinks, fruit, ingredients, and dishes, taking us into food business and encouraging us to taste and shop. As we have written elsewhere, food tour guiding work is complex and multifaceted information giving, story telling, shepherding and marshalling, emotional labour and body work (Flowers and Swan 2015; Swan and Flowers 2017). The depth of their skill in guiding can be understood given Cabramatta’s position at the

‘intersection of diverse and competing representations and definitions: represented as an example of ‘multiculturalism gone wrong’ and as ‘multicultural success story’, an ‘Asian ghetto’ and a vibrant, diverse tourist attraction – an ‘exotic destination for cheap shopping and restaurants’ (Dreher 2006, p. 95).

In this chapter, we focus on their teaching of food aesthetics and we begin with a discussion of the guides’ use of gastronomic sensory vocabulary and compare this to food pedagogues such as the *maîtres de fromager* and celebrity TV chefs.

### ***Gastronomic Sensory Register***

It is notable that in contrast to TV Chefs and *maîtres de fromager*, Peter and Angie minimally express aesthetics through a gastronomic sensory vocabulary. We observed at most four examples in which they describe the taste and texture of food with sensory adjectives. To give examples: half way through the tour, Peter marshals us to a small takeaway business on the main street. Talking his way fastidiously through each dish in the large heated countertop bain-marie, he tries to convey their flavour and texture to us, a group of non-Vietnamese neophytes. At one point, he gestures to a dish with fish sauce and then explains the taste: ‘Anchovy sounds strong. But it’s just the seasoning. And it really gives you a wonderful, salty sweet and flavoured taste’. At another moment, he points to a pork belly dish cooked in coconut juice and labels it ‘chocolate meat’ to help us understand its texture: ‘it melts in your mouth’. Later on in the tour, when we visit a grocer’s shop, Peter tells us that Vietnamese coffee - made with condensed milk and coffee beans roasted in butter oil - tastes like ‘popcorn and butterish’.

Whilst Peter repeats ‘salty-sweet’, a classic descriptor for Vietnamese cuisine, his expressions, chocolate meat and popcornish, are idiosyncratic and not part of the wider foodie ‘social organization of judgment’ (MacDonald 2007, p. 39). Neither he nor Angie

reproduce the gastronomic sensory register for Vietnamese cuisine found on Australian TV programmes such as Luke Nguyen's Vietnam, and Masterchef, and which circulates in international circuits of gastronomy and connoisseurship (Hage 1997, MacDonald 2013). This register typically qualifies Vietnamese food as pungent, aromatic, sourness, fragrant, clean, fresh, or redolent.

To understand the guides' limited use of sensory descriptors, we note that de Solier claims that non-elite 'professional chefs' find it difficult to describe tastes and smells. But it might be argued that they express an aesthetic sensibility and criteria through other forms. Furthermore, anthropologist Jon Holtzman cautions us about 'EuroAmerican constructions of the sensuousness of food' which underpin gastronomic sensory aesthetics (2006, p. 365). In drawing attention to class and race, our intention is not to essentialise, but rather to emphasise that Angie and Peter do teach us about food aesthetics even though they do not use a gastronomic sensory register.

### *Gustatory Aesthetics*

To broaden our analysis of the aesthetics Angie and Peter convey, we draw on Jessica Jacques (2015) who extends ideas about food aesthetics to encompass the gustatory. By this, she means food's flavour and its material properties, and embodied sensory reactions to these such as touch, smell, sight, hearing, thermoception and synaesthesia. Whilst her definition refers to broader food art practices, it illuminates how Angie and Peter teach us to how to combine food and dishes aesthetically according to flavour and texture. As Ray argues, literal taste is an important and under-theorised aspect of food aesthetics, which too often stays at the level of the metaphoric or symbolic.

Their aim is to advise us how to order dishes if we visited Vietnamese restaurants after the tour. An easy way to do this, Peter explains at our first stop, is to choose the restaurant's 'signature dish'. Here, Peter refers to a tourism strategy developed by the Council in consultation with the local Chamber of Commerce and individual restaurateurs to market certain restaurants for particular dishes through a monthly campaign, posters, social media coverage and a signature dish brochure with photographs and restaurant details. At our first stop, a large poster affixed to the wall and a sign on the door promote the crispy stuffed rice flour Vietnamese pancake, *Bánh xèo*, as the restaurant's signature dish. Peter stresses, 'when you come ...to Cabramatta...Fairfield Council always has a signature dish on the door so that you can at least pick one [right] dish for your meal, okay?' Peter assumes, probably quite rightly, that many of us would not know what to order if we were not accompanied by guides. By giving us this tip, he helps us to enhance our chances of a better palatal, sensory and aesthetic experience. As well as bolstering the tourism of the local area, he (and the Council) enable us to consume dishes collectively agreed to be the best version of a dish representative of Vietnamese cuisine in Cabramatta. In affirming the collective taste decisions of the restaurateurs and the Council, Peter shows us that the 'design work' of taste goes beyond the aesthetic decisions of single independent restaurateurs as discussed by Ray.

Throughout the tour, Peter and Angie are concerned that we learn about gustatory aesthetics and understand how to combine Vietnamese food in ways that are culturally, palatally and sensorially appropriate. For instance, at the takeaway, Peter instructs us how to combine foods: to eat pickles with the pork belly and cucumbers and salads with the pork and lemongrass ('because it's very salty and sweet'). In explaining what goes with what and what follows what, Peter and Angie aim to reduce our anxieties about how to consume Vietnamese food by teaching us how to appreciate gustatory aesthetics. The reason most people go on ethnic food tours is because they don't know what to buy, what to order, where to eat, or how to eat (Flowers and Swan 2015, 2016).

### ***Practical aesthetics***

The guides do not just express aesthetics in terms of gastronomic sensory or gustatory aesthetics. Towards the end of the tour, we visited a Pho restaurant for our lunch. Cabramatta is famous for Pho, a Vietnamese aromatic broth made from beef or chicken and eaten with flat rice noodles, *bánh phở*, thin slices of meat, herbs and salad leaves and condiments, traditionally eaten for breakfast in Vietnam. We trundle into a large bustling restaurant, Vietnamese families and friends eating Pho at long formica tables, we found seats at two tables organized for us at the back of the restaurant. Angie and Peter stand amongst us and take a slug of time to describe the preparation, cooking and consumption of Pho. After introducing us to cumin, coriander and purple basil – 'the three amigos that go with Pho', the guides explain that Pho takes a lot of time and skill to cook and so is not eaten often at home. After encouraging us to smell cinnamon and Chinese cardamom spices, Peter and Angie describe in practical language, layer by layer, how the chefs make the Pho we are about to eat. Taking us from the frying of onion, they emphasise the clarity of the broth which can't be cloudy, drawing our attention to its aesthetics. They stress the importance of bone marrow, from bones which you get from a butcher and then wash and blanch to get the blood off, again in an aesthetic move. You have to add meats and keep the stock clear and add spices and simmer for at least four hours. In a restaurant, they explain, they have a big pot and let it go all night on the lowest heat. In the morning they get all the solids out and then you get a very clear soup and you can start seasoning with raw sugar, salt and fish sauce, half hoisin and half chilli sauce, like yin and yang. And you eat with beansprouts, basil and lemon.

The guides are keen to teach us about the labour, art, and skill of the chefs, and the quality of ingredients they use. In effect, they detail a recipe which conveys what Ray calls 'toil and taste': the combination of the sweat of hard work, and the 'aesthetics of work' or what Mara Miele and Jonathan Murdoch (2002) call 'practical aesthetics'. The concept of practical aesthetics, inspired by Gary Fine's study of restaurant work (1996), refers to decision-making about the styling of food and which 'animates the labour process' of chefs and other restaurant workers (Miele and Murdoch 2002, p. 323). In evoking practical aesthetics, the guides educate us about the artfulness, sophistication and complexity of Pho, countering the idea that Pho is just a 'cheap eat', as often positioned in mainstream and social media. Unlike the *mâtres de fromager*, the guides don't qualify the Pho with a range of adjectives to prescribe the 'correct' taste but teach us about the chefs' craft skills, style decisions and tacit

knowledge. Here we emphasise the guides' teaching or formal education, and – connecting to Ray's work – their cultural production and food design work, and that of the chefs whose food they encourage us to taste and eat. The guides may not be elite chefs or foodie writers, of whom de Solier writes, indeed they are racially minoritised food workers, but they are clearly concerned with instructing us in matters of taste and beauty.

### *Embodied aesthetics*

Having described how the Pho is made, we now discuss how the guides teach us to use our bodies – eyes, hands, mouths, arms, tongues – to prepare, taste and eat various dishes. Tourists are often anxious about how to embody the right kind of comportment and bodily propriety when eating ethnic food and this can be a reason why they participate in tours. To do this, first, we discuss how Angie and Peter show us how to assemble and eat our Pho, disciplining our bodies so that we can appreciate its gustatory aesthetic. Waitresses place large bowls of steaming broth, plates with a generous mound of herbs and salad leaves garnishes, slices of lemon and condiments fish sauce, soy sauce and chilli sauce on the tables. As we pile herbs into the Pho and choose how much sauce to put into the dish, Angie explains how we should taste and eat it:

So the first spoonful, you understand the fresh rice noodle shapes and...the tenderised beef that's used...That will wash your palate. It will wash down your first mouthful...Can you smell that aroma? Now you understand why we use a holy basil not the plain basil... Yes. See, the beansprout, it gives you another crunchiness texture. Also, the beansprout cools it down for you as well.

She educates us how to eat to appreciate the gustatory properties of the ingredients in the Pho, ensuring that we understand how cleansing our palate will enhance our taste ability so that nuances of flavour and texture can be sensed. But she underlines that there is an aesthetic to this. We are being encouraged not just to chow it down but to appreciate the delicacy with which we should consume Pho. This entails leaning an aesthetic sensitivity towards the olfactory and the gustatory (Brady 2012). Thus, like the TV chefs of which de Solier writes, the guides not only teach us about production knowledge but also consumption knowledge, and in the case of the tours, consumption knowledge is not constructed by critics or elite chefs.

The guides don't just train our eyes, mouths and tongues but also our hands. Whilst Ray briefly mentions the sensory body of restaurateurs informing their recipes, and MacDonald refers to the disciplining of the palate in learning how to taste cheese, we show how the guides see the body as a site for aesthetics. To illustrate, we describe how Angie explains the construction of the Vietnamese pancake, *Bánh xèo*, made from rice batter and turmeric and stuffed with beansprouts, fatty pork, shrimp, and spring onion, and eaten with herbs and lettuce leaves. We are all seated at tables and Angie stands in our midst, labelling a variety of herbs, perilla, basil and mint and holding them in the air high above her head so that we can all see them. She then holds up a plate with a pancake on it and prises it open to reveal the tasty innards of beansprouts, vermicelli, shrimps and beef.

So guys, I'm so hungry. Okay, so the way we're eating them is to use your hands. You know, like use your hands and make a roll, like sang choi bow... So... this pancake is cut into four pieces and you just help yourself, one piece to your plate, and then you break them into small pieces... so what you do is you get a lettuce leaf - and this one, because pancake is crispy, you fold it in half, like this. Put it inside, put the one perilla, and one mint, and then just cut a piece of pancake, put it inside, and fold it and dip it in your dipping sauce. Let's have a go at it.

From a functional eating point of view, it doesn't matter how you eat the pancake. But we are taught carefully how to combine and assemble the herbs, pancake and lettuce in a specific sequence, controlling the amount of herbs and the pancake's shape. Angie stresses the precision of the steps. In so doing, she attends with care to the visual aesthetics and gustatory aesthetics in the balance of ingredients, and their respective size, volume and combination. The palatal taste depends on precision. Hence, we are inculcated in a particular demeanour so that we eat with care and enjoy the sensuousness, delicacy and balance of the food.

### *Etiquette aesthetics*

In this final section, we turn to the disciplining of our bodies in etiquette. First, we explore how we are taught to use our hands and fingers to make Vietnamese rice paper rolls - *gỏi cuốn* - made from rice paper, or *bánh tráng*, and stuffed with vegetables, meat, shrimp and vermicelli. We are seated in a smaller restaurant at tables of four and Angie demonstrates how to assemble the rolls and people strain from their seats to see what she is doing. It is a tricky process and none of us is as adept as she is. People struggle to muster the ingredients - shrimp, beef, vermicelli, and herbs - inside the sheet of moistened rice paper. To help us, she gives us tips:

You have to go nice and tight... Remember, you're making spring rolls, not a doner kebab.  
[Laughter]

Angie is concerned with teaching us not only how to prepare the rolls but how to do this aesthetically so that we don't make them large and lumpy. She underlines this by referring to a popular takeaway food, the doner kebab, a pitta bread sandwich stuffed to the gills with slices of spit roasted meat, an abundance of tomato, onions lettuce and yoghurt sauce, spilling out of the seams and offering a very different visual aesthetic with the gaping pitta and its unruly oozing insides. Angie and Peter often use humour in their teaching and here, Angie not only drills us into the visual aesthetic of the rolls but also insinuates that we lack a certain finesse, and cajoles us into producing something more delicate.

We have much to learn about the rolls including how to eat them with the dipping sauce, *nuoc cham*, typically made from lime juice, sugar, water, fish sauce, and chilli. Angie begins:

So I don't want to see any sauce in there. It's called dipping sauce. Okay? When you dip, bring the sauce to the mouth. That way you don't get the sauce on your shirt. Certainly please don't have any fish sauce on the plate. Because your next roll is going to be really hard to handle. So you keep the plate dry please. Okay? Sauce in the bowl, not on your shirt.... and then when you're dipping them, you hold it like this. No, no, don't hold it [there].

Peter: Hold it up to your mouth. Hold it up to your mouth...Hold the bowl up to your mouth.

Angie and Peter direct us in several ways. First, with keen humour, Angie stresses the function and aesthetic of the dipping sauce. Secondly, she disciplines us in how we should use our hands, arms, mouths and head to eat the roll. Her instruction is about understanding the practicality of eating the rolls, the function of the implements, and the sequence of the ingredients. But she insists on bodily propriety and aesthetic demeanour. The aphorism ‘sauce in the bowl, not on our shirt’ is a little infantilising because we need to learn our manners and stay clean, to ‘act in a manner’ that is appropriate (Coleman 2013, p. 23). In this way, Angie disciplines us in the embodied aesthetics of how to eat the food in a daintier manner, in light of our *guache* and ungainly ways. The guides train us that the ‘demeanour of the act of eating’ is important and that there are codes of etiquette we need to follow (Coleman 2013, p. 22).

So it not just our mouths and tastebuds but also our hands and manners that need disciplining. Our body needs to be taught how to assemble and taste and to appreciate visual and etiquette aesthetics. Angie and Peter are quite insistent that we learn to eat Vietnamese food with some manners, to follow codes of etiquette and eating demeanours in ways which have aesthetic dimensions and ‘concern physical and sensory characteristics’ (Coleman 2013, p. 23). Elizabeth Burns Coleman argues that etiquette can be understood as a social aesthetic, social because it is based on shared codes about interpersonal relations and aesthetic because manners often have aesthetic qualities such as grace or elegance (2013, p. 69). Indeed, she writes that food etiquette entails the ‘manipulation of sensory qualities of life such as colour, texture, loudness and taste, and a fit between the world, other people and one’s behavior’ (ibid: p 71), all of which nicely encapsulates much of what the guides stress on the tours. Eating etiquette as taught by the guides regulates our comportment, making our own bodies more aestheticised, but also as Coleman stresses, means that show respect for people.

Although Coleman’s analysis of food etiquette as aesthetics is significant to our discussion, she neglects the racialisation of aesthetic rules around eating. Asian ways of eating such as slurping and eating with hands are seen in the white imaginary as less civilised. White people believe that they have the proper table manners, with correct bodily conduct associated with whiteness. Historically for example, in India, Singapore and Malayasia the woman in the colonial home was seen by the colonialists as the ‘arbiter of manners’ (Leong-Salobir 2011, p. 82). Indeed, civility and manners were part of the British colonial project (Swan 2010). The ‘(in)capacity for bodily control’ is, and has been, racialised (Roth-Gordon 2011, p. 2). In the words of Jennifer Roth-Gordon:

understandings of race are centrally preoccupied with the ability to discipline ourselves and exhibit proper bodily control. White bodies are defined by their “natural” proclivity towards discipline and their capacity for refinement and control, in contrast to nonwhite bodies that can be defined by excessive (or overly restrictive) consumption practices...and, especially, a lack of personal hygiene or bodily cleanliness (2011, p. 213).

Thus, Angie and Peter reverse the norms of who gets to dictate normative standards of etiquette and disciplining of bodies. They teach us that Anglo manners might need minding. Their attention to manners can be understood as an expression of aesthetics in the sense that, as Coleman argues, eating etiquette has a quality, not dissimilar to ‘qualities of proportion or symmetry’ (2013, p. 23) and furthermore, can be understood as an expression of food design work. As Ray insists, he uses the word design because it relates the body to aesthetic, and the guides’ work brings this to life.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, we build on studies of food pedagogy and aesthetics to extend Ray’s research on minoritised food workers’ cultural production and design work. His project is to decentre the white middle class eater and to challenge us to recognise the creativity and taste of minoritised food workers. In our study of food tour guides in Cabramatta, Sydney, introduce a new occupational group and racialised context to the growing studies on the agentic cultural production work of minoritised others and their aesthetic sensibilities and expressions (Bunten 2008; Drew 2008; Hage 1997; Leong-Salobir 2011; Narayan 1997; Ray 2011, 2014, 2016a, 2016b). In particular, we show how the guides attempt to teach us an aesthetic appreciation based on a range of food aesthetic forms and practices, which goes beyond current studies of food aesthetics and reference points for aesthetic judgment discussed by de Solier, MacDonald and Ray. Thus, our findings reveal that the guides demonstrate an aesthetic sensibility which includes attention to the preparation of food and its cooking, the design work and processes of aestheticisation of chefs, and acts of tasting and eating. In so doing, they stress the sophistication and refinement of Vietnamese food and eating and heighten our understanding of aesthetic forms and expressions. They help us come to our senses.

More specifically, we discussed how the guides foreground bodies as a site of pedagogy and aesthetics, teaching our bodies to appreciate gustatory, practical, embodied and etiquette aesthetics. In showing how bodies are central to their expression of food aesthetics, we extend de Solier’s and MacDonald’s work on taste education and Ray’s conceptualisations of design work and the aesthetics of work. Moreover, in disciplining our bodies, the guides turn the tables, to use Ray’s phrase, on who gets to teach manners and civility. In his analysis of the role that migrants played in ‘designing’ cultural tourism in Cabramatta, Scott Brook (2008) argues that Ghassan Hage’s influential critique of white food tourism neglects the role of various Vietnamese interest groups in shaping tourism development strategies. Our work adds to this argument, showing how Vietnamese Australian food tour guides help tourism in Cabramatta and influence and educate the taste of white Australian tourists.

At the same time, we cannot overegg the influence of the tour guides, the chefs and food workers or under-estimate the power of elites and dominant groups in transactions in taste. Thus, as Carruthers (2008) argues that although Indochinese migrants are cosmopolitan, and often more interculturally skilled than professional inner city foodies, exploring each others’ food and sharing intercultural knowledge, ‘many can’t convert, or don’t wish to convert’ this



expertise into elite foodie capital. Some like Angie and Peter, are part of the rising Asian middle class who have created a role as cultural brokers. At the same time, Angie and Peter work for a powerful white Anglo TV presenter, food business person and food writer specialising in promoting various ethnic foods, and are subject to a number of economic, social and cultural power asymmetries on the tours and in the food industry. But the work of the guides is just one small part of the increasing wider food and arts cultural production and design work of racialised minorities in Western Sydney, which includes emerging elite connoisseur producers and critics of Vietnamese food, such chef and TV presenter, Luke Nguyen and of Sydney's Red Lantern. What our study, and other research in this area show, is that minoritised food workers such as the guides are influenced by not overwhelmed by dominant white tastes or bodies and are sophisticated, skilled knowledge and cultural producers, who come from a long line of minoritised transactors in taste and aesthetics. Furthermore, these transactions work on multiple registers including , the senses, linguistic, gustatory, and bodily, all of which flesh out Ray's concept of design work.

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