When Habiter, cuisiner, the second volume of L’invention du quotidien, appeared in 1980, Michel de Certeau was credited not as one of its coauthors (along with Luce Giard and Pierre Mayol), but only for his preface to it. When Giard edited and published a revised, expanded edition of this volume in 1994, she and Mayol decided to include Certeau as a coauthor since they were adding one essay by Certeau and another that he had written with Giard. His relatively minimal presence in Habiter, cuisiner notwithstanding, Certeau’s theory and analysis had constituted a framework for the texts by Giard and Mayol in the collection. My own English translation of it having been subsequently published as The Practice of Everyday Life: Living and Cooking, the volume now offers a unique terrain on which to engage problematic issues of translation common to this and other works by Certeau.1

In introducing her second edition of Habiter, cuisiner, Giard noted that “the translation of volume 1 and the strong presence of Michel de Certeau in California aroused a wide diffusion of his ideas which was continued and amplified...”

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after his death. Not having been translated at this time, volume 2, which the American publisher had judged too closely linked to something specifically French to interest the American public, was less read.”  

This reluctance on the part of “the American publisher” to follow up *The Practice of Everyday Life* with an English edition of *Habiter, cuisiner* may be explained (as I suggest in my “Translator’s Note” to *Living and Cooking*) in terms of the French concept of *terroir*. Etymologically linked to the Latin *terratorium* and *territorium* (hence territory), *terroir* connotes a strong attachment to the soil and land. This concept is often invoked to account for the unique flavor imparted to certain regional food products like wine and cheese by local geographic, geologic, and climatic conditions. *Habiter, cuisiner* was perhaps “judged too closely linked to something specifically French” on the grounds of “discursive *terroir*.” It is larded with cultural allusions, idiosyncratic expressions, and wordplay, which, when uprooted from their cultural-lingual soil, pose the greatest challenge to translators. Yet their deracination cannot, paradoxically, be associated with any specific or localizable place; they are torn, rather, from the much more mobile terrain of what Certeau elsewhere calls “die Mutter Erde” (Mother Nature).

In a limited literary sense, *terroir* connotes authorial regionalism and generally conservative returns to rural life, wisdom, and culture. It marks the twentieth-century work of Marcel Pagnol and Jean Giono, for whom enduring values of man and soil are equated with the political ideals of national socialisms or are intended as correctives to the perceived urban values dominating the (Parisian) administrative center of postindustrial France. Certeau, however, mixes and confounds the spaces that demarcate the urban and *terroir* in ways that seem to anticipate the experience of atopia characterizing much of the current electronic age. But his writings belong to a broader context of speculation on territoriality, by which I mean a host of concepts and practices such as those exemplified, most notably perhaps, in the dramatic reflections of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari on geography, photography, nomadism, emigration, and displacement in *What Is Philosophy*? These authors in fact serve to underscore what was already a mode of operation and a practice in Certeau’s historiography and heterology. For them *terroir* is a function of *territoire*, an abstract definition of space that cannot be mapped without changing or turning the object of its representation into a place. They would concur with Borges, in his celebrated story of impossible cartography, adducing that a *terroir* is a sort of movable mental and
physical feast, a selection of geographic and sensory shapes that carries a strong affective charge. Terroirs, plural and polyglot, are not sites of native origin, nor do they pertain otherwise to originarity. But they are—if I may offer a culinary inflection of Certeau’s sociological writings in view of their anthropology—sites where words and things acquire uncommon aroma, taste, and gustatory savor. Savor, savoir? Roland Barthes, another culinary theorist of Certeau’s generation, insisted that food, knowledge, and territory are inextricably mixed in language. Here, too, is the perpetual narration that Certeau invites in the reader of his delectable French.

By foregrounding the translation challenges that stem from the notion of terroir, the second volume of L’invention du quotidien can be read “à la carte.” Habiter, cuisiner enacts Certeau’s investment of pleasure and sensuality in his greater work by offering an exploration of topics and issues ranging from urban studies and family relations to cooking practices and the role of women in domestic and public spaces. While offering such a rich menu of Certeau-inspired scholarship, many chapters of which apply his proven recipes, this book also foregrounds local and regional practices in France. Above all, its translation into English underlines the problematic issue of terroir. In a larger context Certeau’s work can be considered “à la carte” not only in the sense that it resists preordained choices like those on a prix fixe menu, but also in the sense that it privileges the local in its mapping of practices. In contrast to more orthodox critics, Certeau refuses, precisely, to provide a prix fixe menu, a rigid paradigm, for his analysis. As he explains in his introduction to Arts de faire, the general aim of the two-volume study is “to make explicit the systems of operational combination . . . which also compose a ‘culture,’ and to bring to light the models of action characteristic of users whose status as the dominated element in society (a status that does not mean that they are either passive or docile) is concealed by the euphemistic term ‘consumers.’ Everyday life invents itself by poaching in countless ways on the property of others.”

Certeau questions the assumed passivity of “consumers” and the strategic construction of the “public” in mass-industrial society, arguing that, faced with imposed products and constraints, these users in fact reappropriate those very same products and constraints in order to turn them to their own individual, contingent, or contextual advantage. He refers to this reappropriation as braconnage, poaching, a term that also serves as his central metaphor for reading and the one with which he evokes the practice of la
perruque in *Arts de faire*. As we will see, in *Habiter, cuisiner* Giard and Mayol become the first best poachers of Certeau’s terrain, a fact with which he could only be too pleased, as suggested by his remarks in the volume’s preface: “These two studies, born of a common task, placed under the general rubric of everyday practices, have gained their freedom. They escape. They follow their own paths.” However, the translation of *Habiter, cuisiner* into English would serve as a further poaching on Certeau’s theory of practices by attempting to transplant those practices on a different soil, in a different cultural medium. The poachers’ territories are yet again poached on by others.

One of my most daunting translation tasks with *Living and Cooking* involved crossing territories along its extremely divergent paths. The first French edition essentially consisted of two monographs, one by Mayol and one by Giard, prefaced by Certeau’s brief “Annals of Everyday Life” and was concluded with the transcribed interviews of “ordinary people” conducted for both studies. Giard, charged with the editorial responsibility for Certeau’s work after his death, then reedited *Habiter, cuisiner*, and it is this 1994 edition on which my translation is based. It begins with two introductions by Giard, the one written for the second (1990) edition of *Arts de faire* (an English translation of which had not been included in *The Practice of Everyday Life*) and the other for the second edition of *Habiter, cuisiner*, detailing her revisions of the 1980 volume. Then comes Certeau’s preface to the latter, followed by Mayol’s monograph, which opens up the terrain with a study of one family’s practice of living in a particular neighborhood, the Croix-Rousse in Lyons. Mayol argues that rules of recognition and propriety determine and enable each dweller’s social insertion into the fabric of the urban landscape. The dyad of Certeau’s “Ghosts in the City” and Giard’s “Private Spaces” then marks the volume’s transition from Mayol (part 1) to Giard (part 2). “Ghosts in the City” explores the issue of urban renovation in Paris and the micro-resistances to it by “legendary” objects from the past. Then “Private Spaces,” turning the corner from the public and the urban, ushers in the private, personal space of the home, where bodies come and go, creating identities through their crossing trajectories. In part 2 Giard’s monograph then evokes and enacts the subtle tactics and gestures of what she calls “Kitchen Women Nation,” comprising those women whose bodily gestures commemorate, as they record and recall, kitchen practices in which opportunity and circumstance are combined to produce culinary virtuosities. Finally, with an *envoi*
by Certeau and Giard, the volume concludes on “a practical science of the singular,” the fil conducteur from which its divergent paths bifurcate by way of common tactics.

In addition to the cornucopia of topics engaged by Certeau, Giard, and Mayol here, one finds an abundance of discursive terroir. Almost untranslatable into English, the term illustrates another creative challenge posed by *Living and Cooking*. The dictionary—which Certeau both calls into question in his studies of its birth and normative function in early modern culture and peruses with delight and pleasure in his work on Jean de Léry’s bilingual lexicon of Tupi and French tongues in *L’écriture de l’histoire*—brings terroir back to its native soil. Etymologically, the term is a conflation of tioroer (1198) and tieroir (1212), both deriving from the popular-Latin terratorium, a Gallo-Roman variation on territorium, from which we get territoire, territory. Terroir, originally denoting land or an expanse of land, had begun by the end of the thirteenth century to be associated with agricultural land, specifically in terms of soil qualities that affected the flavor of wine. It was in response to this usage that Robert Estienne introduced, in the 1549 edition of his *Dictionnaire françois latin*, the phrase goûtduterroir (the taste or tang of the soil), meaning the particular savor of a wine that was due to the characteristics of the local soil in which the grape vines grew. As of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, terroir was being applied to the positive and negative qualities of people associated with a particular provincial region. The phrase sentir le terroir (1669), like its 1596 precursor, sentir son terroir (literally, to smell like one’s native soil), connotes the characteristics that someone from a particular region may tend to exude.10

English offers no satisfactory equivalent for terroir and so must fall back on more general terms such as “soil” or “land” with, at times, references to something rural. Goût de terroir is often translated as the “tang” or “taste of the soil,” sentir son terroir as “to be of one’s native heath or soil,” and poète du terroir as “poet of the land.” For accent du terroir we find “country or rural accent,” and mots du terroir become “words with a rural flavor.” Terroir thus oscillates between references to geologic characteristics like soil content and to traits from the classical tradition of descriptive geography, such as city/country (or urban/provincial) distinctions. Interestingly, the positive connotations of the term are most often associated with things, particularly examples of daily sustenance like wine that are said to have a unique character or flavor. Negative connotations, though, occur more often in references
to people or their language as having a provincial (“country-bumpkin”) character. Terroir may thus convey either esteem or disdain, depending on the context.

At least one other significant oscillation occurs in such phrases as goût de terroir or produits de terroir: often the intervening partitive du is replaced by the preposition de, shifting the register from the specific or localized to the more general or nearly universal. This oscillation appears even in the dictionary.11 Interestingly, the Grand Larousse de la langue française cites Estienne’s 1549 Dictionnaire francois latin for “gout de terroir,” but the phrase Estienne actually glosses is “goust du terroir.” In contemporary French one finds the de/du oscillation wherever produits de/du terroir are sold. Often at large food fairs or markets, these products (typically wine, cheese, terrines, pâtés, and sausages) will be referred to as “produits de terroir,” meaning that several different regional cuisines are represented. When it is a “produit du terroir,” the reference is to a product presently made or sold in that particular region or locale, with its geographic specificity understood or going without saying. The straightforward grammatical movement from a produit du terroir to a produit de terroir may, however, involve a geographic slippage with much more at stake than correct usage. In recent years, many producers in France have been trying to take advantage of the popularity of produits de terroir from the southwest. We can imagine the incongruous situation of driving through Normandy and coming upon a sign that reads produits de terroir only to discover a producer of foie gras, magret de canard, and duck sausage. Each is a produit de terroir, in that it once had a specific geographic origin and is locally produced, but it has little at all to do with local Norman culture.12 This particular example thus implies a translation of practices from one terroir to another that in turn foregrounds the mobility of the terrain in which terroir is supposedly so firmly rooted. While economic interest would appear to be the most obvious motivation, something more personal is nevertheless at stake, at least in the practice of everyday terroirs.

Moving then from the lexical and grammatical to the personal, the concept of terroir in France also evokes issues of roots and identity at once national and regional. Two recent articles published in French ethnographic journals underline this association with terroir, arguing that it poses a major dilemma involving France’s participation in the construction of the EEC.13 Laurence Bérard and Philippe Marchenay point out that the concept of terroir played a large role in the 14 July 1992 regulation of the Council of
European Communities that established the protected status of various food products. The labels of both the Appellation d’origine protégée (AOP) and Indication géographique protégée (IGP), covered by this international regulation, are based on that of the French national AOC (Appellation d’origine contrôlée), a label often found on bottles of French wine. Bérard and Marchenay suggest that the concept of terroir has been given unprecedented attention in discussions over such regulations “even though the interpretation of this concept remains as variable as it is ambiguous.” They then go on to invoke the de/du distinction:

Terroir is a polysemic concept. Whether it integrates the human dimension or not, it takes into consideration the thickness of time and gives another meaning to the relationship to a place. The inherent ambiguity of this term can be found in the expression “produit de terroir,” which refers just as easily to a product simply made in a particular place—for example, foie gras made in the Dombes—as to a product intimately associated with that place like foie gras from the Périgord. The historic depth integrating the accumulation and transmission of a savoir faire and the inscription of production in a particular community make the difference.

Bérard and Marchenay suggest not only that the concept of terroir is rooted in the localization of a particular place, but also that it acquires the cumulative history of human practices associated with it. Sedimentation, accretion: a geology of layered differences begins to complicate the matter and manner of identity.

In “Goût du terroir et tourisme vert à l’heure de l’Europe,” Jean-Pierre Poulain argues that a growing insistence on regional cuisines and produits de terroir stems from a French identity crisis in the face of its national dissolution within the larger political and economic entity of the EEC. On the national level, the inertia behind this crisis can be seen in, for example, the ongoing publication of the Inventaire du patrimoine culinaire de la France, a multivolume series on regional French cuisines commissioned in 1990 by the Ministries of Agriculture and Culture and undertaken by the Conseil National des Arts Culinaires (CNAC). At the local level, the new wave is “ecotourism”: planned trips to rural areas where tourists “take part” in the local culture (usually by partaking of the local cuisine) rather than simply observing it. Poulain sees the popularity of this kind of tourism as linked to both
France’s identity crisis and its produits de terroir. As he explains, French mythology presupposes a “lost culinary paradise” in which the concept of terroir occupies a hallowed place. Terroir is supposed to be stable and ahistoric, founded on an immutable tradition in opposition to the transformations and cycles of market economy modes, as well as authentic, in opposition to the artificial nature of urbanicity, where the “constructed” supplants the natural. In this “authentic space,” products and practices rest on use-values and not those of logical distinctions. From consumer demand emerges an edenic vision of rural life elevated to the level of an anthropological universe of harmony among men and with nature.\footnote{16}

Here the concept of terroir offers an identity buffer, in both psychological and economic terms, for a France faced with the homogenization of Europe within the 
\textit{EC}. The fact that French produits de terroir cannot ever be adequately copied or reproduced by a mass-industrial economy ensures the survival of at least some shreds of France’s national identities. The differences that are necessary for the projection of an identity depend on these territorial variations, but the latter are also the \textit{prima materia} of ideology and commodity nationalism. Terroir thus also becomes imbued with the idealism of a cult of authenticity in which only things with clear origins have value.

Before venturing further into the analysis of terroir, however, I want to return to \textit{Living and Cooking}. The concept of terroir is in fact invoked, if not explicitly discussed, several times in both volumes of \textit{L'invention du quotidien}. Certeau alludes to it in one particular passage of \textit{Arts de faire} from his chapter on reading as poaching. Speaking of readers, he says: “Far from being writers—founders of their own place, heirs of the peasants of earlier ages now working on the soil of language, diggers of wells and builders of houses—readers are travellers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves.”\footnote{17} Certeau establishes a distinction here between writers who must create their own place and readers who in fact have no place of their own. Both seem to share a similar nonidentity or, inversely, an identity obtained by no affiliation with a terroir. In a real way the writer who creates his or her own space, be it “a room of one’s own” or not, is compelled to invent his or her own public. In this sense any writer is a minoritarian, if we follow Deleuze’s formulation of the au-
thor (Kafka), or a cineast (Glauber Rocha, among others), who, rather than appealing to or inspiring a real or imagined public that is pregiven, cannot even be sure of the world for which the work is destined. Terroirs in the plural, as in “culture in the plural,” would assume a receptive audience that cannot be said to exist, especially in the case of urban writers or revolutionary filmmakers. In this respect, a single “ground,” soil, or bedrock of any cultural formation becomes problematic even though its force of attraction is seductive.

In Certeau’s “Ghosts in the City,” from Living and Cooking, the concept of terroir is again invoked in his discussion of “mythical texts of the city.” Arguing that the gestures and narratives of the street and the neighborhood are being drowned out by the grand narratives of advertising and television, Certeau suggests that “renovation should come to the aid of” the former. “It does so already by recording and distributing the memories that are recounted in the bakery, the café, or at home. But this is done so by uprooting them from their spaces. Festivals, contests, the development of ‘speaking places’ in neighborhoods or buildings would return to narratives the soil from which they grow.” Once again, writing appears within the conceptual field of terroir as the soil from which narratives grow. Certeau argues here that urban renovation in fact destroys the narratives it is trying to preserve by uprooting them from their places of origin, their own terroirs. Paradoxically, the ground for these local practices is not composed of soil but of asphalt. The city becomes the site of the terroir from a perspective where its own propensity to change rapidly and to harbor immigrants and sans-papiers responds to a motivating concept of reterritorialization.

The issue of uprooting something from its terroir reemerges in Living and Cooking with Giard’s “Plat du jour,” in which she addresses the questions of why and how certain groups of people in certain areas eat certain types of food. Posing the entailed question of how regional cuisines were “established throughout the slow movement of centuries by generations of anonymous artists,” Giard argues that “if a particular ‘way of operating’ has been invented . . . it is generally in order to respond to a necessity, to a local law.” In other words, the availability of the specific food products in any given region more or less determines the range of regional cuisine there. At the same time, however, modern means of transportation in Western societies of spectatorship and travel enable borrowings of regional cuisines on such a large scale as to obviate the original necessity or “local law” that brought
them about. Uprooting “a regional cuisine from the tang of its soil [terroir]” has had predictably unsavory results, boiling these rich cuisines down to “pale copies.” In the “Translator’s Note” to Living and Cooking, my allusion to the concept of terroir partly expresses the goal of the translation more generally, that is, to uproot and carefully transplant the French original without breeding a “pale copy” in a familiar idiom. Translation invariably runs the risk of “cooking” a text, specifically of poaching it in such a way as to drain it of its savory terroir. In “A Practical Science of the Singular,” their envoi to this volume, Certeau and Giard relate cooking to communication in terms that also apply to the art of translation: “The art of the cook is all about production, based on a limited choice of available ingredients, in a combination of gestures, proportions, utensils, and cooking or transformation methods. Similarly, communication is a cuisine of gestures and words, of ideas and information, with its recipes and its subtleties, its auxiliary instruments and its neighboring effects, its distortions and its failures.”

Keeping these issues in mind, I want to turn now to the specific examples of discursive terroir that risked making Living and Cooking a pale copy of Habiter, cuisiner. The recipes and subtleties of the translation—this “cuisine of gestures and words”—together with its distortions and failures underscore the striking mobility of its terroirs. Paradoxically, this very mobility is one of the cornerstones to Certeau’s conception of translation, his interest in which had less to do with its impossibility than with its fascinating, if ambiguous, possibilities. As we have seen with terroir, a distinction always remains at stake between the local or regional and the national (or universal) register, between a product made in a particular place under particular circumstances and its reception or appreciation elsewhere. In transposing the movement from the regional to the national (and hence to the universal), Living and Cooking accordingly shifts the local terroir, France, or more precisely the French language, to a place of reception, the United States, or more generally the English-reading world. But even before Habiter, cuisiner became Living and Cooking, its terroir had undergone some uprooting.

Arts de faire, the first volume of L’invention du quotidien, had been published in Steven Rendall’s English translation by the University of California Press in 1984. The Practice of Everyday Life took its title from that of the two-volume French work rather than from the specific title of volume 1. While this allowed for a concise—if not elegant—solution to rendering “arts de faire” in English, it sacrificed the specificity of invention. In a note from his
afterword to *Culture in the Plural*, his translation of Certeau’s *Culture au pluriel*, Tom Conley offers a pertinent judgment on “the practice of everyday life,” maintaining that it “does not carry the sense of ‘invention’ resonant in the French, *L’invention du quotidien*. Because of its roots in *invenire*, meaning an act of choice or selection, of letting happen what happens, the idea of ‘practice’ is aligned with the performative world of classical rhetoric, in which topics and places are infused with the force of speech. For Certeau, invention does not begin ex nihilo, but comes from a set of practical choices.”

Paradoxically, it was Certeau himself who chose *The Practice of Everyday Life* as the title for the translation of *Arts de faire*. Although Rendall proposed an alternative close to the French, Certeau wanted the English title to highlight the importance of practices. As we will see, other authorial interventions made by him in the translation of volume 1 would problematize the second volume’s translation as well.

To produce an appropriate English title for volume 2 of *L’invention du quotidien*, I had to make a practical choice first between using *The Practice of Everyday Life* or breaking with it entirely for the sake of restoring the French sense of “invention,” with its Latin soil at a great remove from the empirical sense connoted by *l’invention* in postindustrial France. Given that the English-reading world now recognized Certeau’s two-volume project under *The Practice of Everyday Life*—and since the publication of the two English editions would be separated by almost a decade and a half—it seemed prudent to keep it while adding a subtitle that would retain the specificity of *Habiter, cuisiner*. My compromise, then, reflects the divisional history of the French-/English-edition titles and subtitles. But *The Practice of Everyday Life, Volume 2: Living and Cooking* is still not unproblematic; while “cooking” seems an adequate translation of *cuisiner*, the rather too general register of “living” fails to capture the specificity of *habiter*. In his preface to *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Certeau glosses *habiter* as the “fine art of dwelling” and *cuisiner* as the “fine art of cooking.”

Given that Mayol’s term *habitants* is translated throughout his monograph as “dwellers,” it might have been appropriate to use “dwelling” in the title, but by itself and devoid of context, it sounds no better than “living.” Moreover, referring to either practice as a “fine art,” Certeau’s glosses notwithstanding, is doubly inappropriate, given the term’s connotation as a cultural-elite practice, about which he was expressly not writing. The only other option (proposed to but rejected by the University of Minnesota Press) involved modifying the two gerunds in such
a way as to capture their specificity. While translating habiter as “living in a neighborhood” would have contextualized it, the necessarily parallel rendering of cuisiner as “cooking in a kitchen” would have been awkward, if not redundant as well. The uprooting of L’invention du quotidien, 2. Habiter, cuisiner thus concluded with its transplanting as The Practice of Everyday Life, Volume 2: Living and Cooking.

From this titular point of initial engagement, the ensuing translation problems fell into several different categories. Given the connotations of terroir described already, it should come as no surprise that many of those problems involved terms for food or the places where it is either consumed or purchased (e.g., cuisine, market, café, etc.). Another problematic category was that of idiom, including slang and other types of speech that give Habiter, cuisiner its unique vocal texture, which relates by extension to the notion of terroir.

In terms of culinary vocabulary, simply not translating a word or phrase at all was often the only possible choice, but this effective evasion of responsibility by a translator can introduce a kind of deracination-by-equivocation in its own right. The three main checkpoints of Living and Cooking were entrée, entre-deux, and envoi. While the decisions to keep “envoi” as English and to translate entre-deux as “intermezzo” did not present much difficulty, keeping entrée as English was another story. In French, entrée (from the verb entrer, to enter) enjoys a wide range of meanings, covering the royal entry of a king into a city, entry into a particular profession, and the “entrée,” or first course, of a meal. Although the first instance of the term in Living and Cooking occurs under the section title preceding Certeau’s preface, where it evokes all of these possible meanings, Giard’s subsequent inflection of it in the first subheading of chapter 10, “The Nourishing Arts,” then foregrounds its culinary sense. “Entrée” had to be kept in both cases, despite its meaning (in American English, at least) not the first course of a meal but the main one, yet neither “appetizer” nor “starter” seemed to ring true. Whatever their advantages as direct translations, either one would have erased all the other connotations of entrée at play with each instance of the term in Habiter, cuisiner.

Another example of a French phrase better left in its original form occurs in chapter 13, “The Rules of the Art” by Giard. In discussing the role of women in the kitchen, who do “ordinary, everyday” cooking as opposed to the (male) chefs who create culinary art, Giard quotes a particularly telling
remark by the famous French chef Paul Bocuse. After arrogantly proclaiming women “good cooks for so-called traditional cooking,” he goes on to say, “Such cooking, in my opinion, is not at all inventive, which I deplore.” Giard’s very next sentence, “Et hop, passez muscade,” means in effect “Let’s move on to something else” (which is precisely what she then does here). Unfortunately, no such spicy phrase (muscade being “nutmeg”) is available in tasteful English. Then there is the fact that “passez muscade” also smacks of the Latin (liturgical) *te misse est*. Given the options of either substituting a bland English equivalent or adding a third language to the mix, retaining the spice of the original French seemed the most savory choice to this translator.

In terms of one’s relationship to the table and eating, it also seemed appropriate to keep the original French in another culinary reference involving the distinction between *gourmand* and *gourmet*. In the transcript of Giard’s interview with Irène, which concludes her monograph in *Habiter, cuisiner*, the subject describes the eating habits of her sons-in-law, Pierre and Emmanuel. Her husband, Jean, interrupting to explain a shift in Pierre’s diet, says, “He became a real *gourmand*. Now he’s a real *gourmet*.” My initial instinct was to convey the distinction between the two terms here with “glutton” and “gourmet.” However, in contemporary French usage *gourmand* ranges to *gourmandise* and harks back to *gourmer* and *gourmander*, making the distinction a very fine one. Furthermore, in spite of the theologically negative implication of gluttony’s being one of the seven deadly sins, French society has not, by and large, observed its proscription. *Gourmander*, both a transitive and an intransitive verb in the sixteenth century, meant to eat with exceeding excess. *Gourmer* means to hit, strike, battle, or otherwise engage in combat, whereas a *gourmet* watches over a collection of wines or serves as a “vigilant, faithful” guardian of good things in general. Nowadays, hearty good eating, which is not necessarily without fine taste or fraught with excess, constitutes a normal part of French social life. (As Roland Barthes noted about another kind of excess in France, “Drunkenness is a consequence, never an intention.”) A textual imperative for capturing this sense in the translation of Giard’s interview specifically arose from the fact that “gourmand” and “gourmet” are used by Jean, who comes from a traditional French family in this regard, and not by Irène, whose Swiss Protestant origins lend a somewhat puritanical air to her attitude toward the sensuality of French *gourmandise*.

Other types of culinary vocabulary, however much they might also up-
root the ostensibly fixed sense of terroir, did not need to be left untranslated in *Living and Cooking*. The terminology of bakeries and breads, for example, betrays none too subtle differences between French and American culture. In the interview with Irène, the relative merits of home-baked versus store-bought (i.e., bakery) cakes and pies are debated, with Jean firmly of the opinion that it’s safer to buy them at a *pâtisserie*.

In France pastries alone grace the vitrines and displays of a *pâtisserie*, whereas one usually buys bread and sometimes pastries as well at a *boulangerie*. While “pastry shop” is certainly an English usage, American bakeries (at least) fold in the provision and sale of the one good with the other. By the same token, French practices of bread and pastry shopping are both more ritualized and more deeply entrenched than is ordinarily the case in the United States. Although substituting “bakery” for “pâtisserie” in *Living and Cooking* uprooted this ritualized practice from its *Habiter, cuisiner* ground, it did at least reflect an effort to complement the French practice with the roughly corresponding American one. Indeed, such a rough equivalent of the *pâtisserie*’s well-laden vitrines may be found in the shelves with which any stateside Dunkin’ Donuts is heavily larded. There, a seemingly infinite variety of fresh-baked doughnuts meets the eye of the sweet-seeking *gourmand* at any time of day. That very freshness, though—a selling point at Dunkin’ Donuts, which advertises its fare as deep-fried every one to one and a half hours—may soon be subject to industry restraints if calls for fundamentally preservative-laced doughnuts with a twelve-hour shelf-life give rise to such a regulation.

Doughnut shops (the people’s *pâtisseries* in fast-food America) are now getting some competition from vendors of bagels, the breadstuff that Jews have long baked for greater conservation. Bruegger’s seems almost as common as Dunkin’ Donuts in the United States, and, if the current European appetite for fast food continues to swell, we will soon see bagel shops all over the hexagon.

That said, the translation (or, in fact, the untranslatability) of one particular bread product, the *bâtarde* loaf, elicited a criss-crossed uprooting of terroir from me. Again during the interview with Irène, Jean talks at one point about his bread-buying practices, particularly his preference for the *bâtarde* over the *baguette*. The former is rendered by the *Collins Robert French Dictionary* and most other French–English lexicons as a “Vienna-style loaf,” but when Giard encountered this translation in reviewing the manuscript of *Living and Cooking*, she rejected it on the grounds that what the French call *viennoiseries* are sweet, croissantlike rolls that bear no resemblance to
the everyday bàtard. However, since the Vienna loaf is not a type of viennoiserie either, the English term was not all that far off. In fact, like many another item of mixed ingredients or components, a bàtard is a “bastard bread,” though not bastardized, or adulterated, which is the best thing to be said of American sliced bread. A bàtard loaf, in short, is an abbreviated bread, a baguette derivative. As a term, baguette—however traumatically uprooted an example of terroir its flaccid American mutation may be—is readily recognized and understood by U.S. readers. “Yuppie food” has parlayed the baguette and cappuccino into a nouvelle nouvelle cuisine consisting of a few slices of bread (cut invariably at acute angles for the chic effect) to dip in wine-laced sauces bereft of a flour base.

Just as the French employ a strikingly different and relatively ritualized set of practices in terms of their breads and bakeries, so too do France’s “market practices” contrast sharply with those of the United States, where open-air farmers’ markets can still be found but not quite as ubiquitously as their French counterparts. Nearly every village in France has its own market, and most major cities have several dispersed among their neighborhoods. Both Mayol and Giard invoke the French practice of market shopping in Habiter, cuisiner, particularly the linguistic turn it often takes. In these markets, potential customers are verbally exhorted to buy, with all advertising accomplished by the boisterous shouting of market-stall vendors, and it is their language that foregrounds the book’s discursive terroir. American market shoppers also differ practically from their French counterparts, being more likely to stroll casually through a farmer’s market in Boston or Minneapolis, perhaps carrying a styrofoam cup of Dunkin’ Donuts coffee creamed and sugared to the point of topping off a crème de marrons. If deracination and estrangement seem to have translated the terroir of Living and Cooking onto American soil, it might indeed be more a work of transengineering than of translation.

In his chapter entitled “Propriety,” Mayol analyzes the role of language in the “minuscule repressions” that make living in a neighborhood possible. One such repressive practice involves the use of double meaning, particularly within the context of the marketplace. He cites the example of a Parisian market-stall vendor who occasionally shocked his (mostly) female customers with his vegetable double entendres. “It went from ‘mounds’ of lettuce to ‘well-hung’ onions, and moving on to carrots ‘that, when squeezed enough, the juice comes out.’” Here, realistic descriptions of objects take
on an erotic sense. As Mayol explains, “These real details are doubled on a linguistic register that finds its root in spoken language: ‘Almond Joy’s got nuts—Mounds don’t,’ ‘to be well hung,’ ‘to come.’”

The main difficulty in translation here involves the resonance between something so everyday as touffes de salades (mounds of lettuce) and the erotically suggestive phrase au ras de la touffe used, for example, of a miniskirt that barely covers the pubic mound. In English “mound” can, of course, lend this same double meaning to “mounds of lettuce,” but a corresponding slang equivalent for “au ras de la touffe” was not forthcoming. The solution, using the Almond Joy/Mounds advertising slogan, preserved the double entendre, but only by twisting the slogan around to ensure that its erotic potential could not be missed. While Mounds not only don’t have “nuts” as women don’t have testicles, the two pieces in which a Mounds bar comes could also suggest, perhaps even more strikingly, a pair of breasts—hence “Almond Joy” or “Almond jouissance.”

Such wordplay was also at stake in the translation of Giard’s evocative language of the market in “Plat du jour.” Discussing the recurrent cycles of these markets, where the passage of time can be measured by the changing wares of the vendors, she mentions the most obvious example of terroir: the fruits and vegetables in varieties found only in France and often in certain parts of France exclusively (e.g., Périgord strawberries and Belle de Boskoop or Reine des Reinettes apples). These regional names are inherently resistant to translation. However, Giard also cites the highly performative language of market-stall vendors, including one who induces potential customers to buy his produce with a play on words: “Pour trouver les coings, Mesdames, suivez les côtés”—to find quinces, ladies, step right this way”—a translation that in its perfect accuracy completely loses the French wordplay. The original’s double meaning turns on the homonyms coings (quinces) and coins (corners), so a literal translation would be “to find the corners, ladies, follow the sides” (there go the quinces!). The impossibility of rooting out both senses of this French statement foregrounds the kind of everyday practice (in this case, going to market) and its associated usage praxis (in this case, market-erotic wordplay) that cannot truly take root in another language.

The practice of frequenting cafés is far more established in France than in the United States, the growing popularity of American coffeehouses and wine bars notwithstanding, which creates some dilemmas for the translator while resolving others. In his analysis of French propriety, Mayol treats the
café as a gender-marked space, claiming that men go to cafés and women to grocery stores. In the process, however, he uses a descriptive vocabulary of French cafés that does not correspond to any equivalent set of terms in American-English usage. For example, he speaks of the intimacy and camaraderie of a “neighborhood café” in contrast to the anonymity and plainness of a “passing-through café.” Although we may see a stateside parallel for the “passing-through café” in a truck stop, say, or a comparatively upscale establishment like Starbucks (even, more glaringly, in a fast-food drive-thru) — places where one tends to go simply for a caffeine jolt — “neighborhood cafés,” as Mayol describes them, would accord more readily with the neighborhood bars of most American cities. Starbucks supplies people on the go with a legal, low-grade stimulant, a pick-me-up such as a “shot” of espresso, in chain-style anonymity; the corner tavern “where everyone knows your name,” on the other hand, provides the needed social airlock between workplace and home space, along with whatever may be “on tap” locally. While this contrast underscores one important difference in American and French conviviality practices, another example from Mayol’s study suggests a possible resonance between them. In his discussion of Lyons café life, he identifies a practice observed in working-class cafés, where wine comes in (among other containers and quantities) a carafe peculiar to them. Mayol maintains that ordering a pot, which holds just under a pint of wine, signals one’s social belonging in the working-class circles of Lyons. Pot became “pitcher” in Living and Cooking — however unimaginable it would be to order a pitcher of wine in an American bar — because the practice of ordering beer by the pitcher sends the same sort of working-class signal in the U.S. context, so it seemed more resonant with the French one.

Interestingly, as Mayol notes in his update for the 1994 edition of Habiter, cuisiner, a certain terroir-ization of the Lyons pot occurred after his study had been completed and published in 1980: “Since then, the one-pint pot has gotten a promotion in Lyons restaurants. People sell them in antique and secondhand shops, and the owners of the bouchons [Lyons restaurants] downtown have put them back on their menus and their tables, as a witness to the place’s cultural identity.” Here, the pot stops resonating with the pitcher as French regional culture appropriates itself in this icon of its objectified identity.

In addition to the challenge of rendering the varied prose styles of its three main authors, translating Habiter, cuisiner also posed the challenge of
rendering in English the transcribed spoken French of the various people whom Giard or Mayol had interviewed for their respective studies. Mayol’s interviews with Mme Marie and Mme Marguerite are included in the book, while Giard employs the words of many interviewed women, although only the one interview, with Irène, is included in its entirety. The subtle and dense texture of these various voices might be considered yet another facet of the discursive terroir so prevalent in Living and Cooking, but here I will limit myself to one of the most striking categories of the volume’s spoken-language terroir—its slang. Such terms are always difficult to translate from one language to another, but Mayol’s monograph offers examples that would tend to puzzle even the average French person who was not from Lyons. Mayol did not hesitate to resort to Lyons slang when it enabled him to capture the unique vocal grain that makes its people and practices stand out. In his analysis of Lyons practice patterns for visitors coming to the house in afternoon stages, for example, the early-afternoon “coffee visit” gives way to a kind of visit called the mâchon later in the afternoon. This term refers to a light snack, almost a pré-apéritif, consisting of soft and hard drinks accompanied by cheeses, cured meats, and pastries. Translating mâchon as a “munch” played on the resonance between the French verb mâcher (to chew, chomp, or munch) and the English expression “munching on something”—eating, but only lightly. Using munch as a noun preserves the intent of the French while retaining the flavor of its regionalism, its strangeness. By no means redolent of the chic “grazing” practiced in yuppie circles, it denotes chewing, masticating, and digesting even as it steers clear of the chic grazer’s bovine “ruminating.”

This particular example of Lyons slang may be contrasted to other, virtually untranslatable terroirs, particularly those springing from Mayol’s interviews of Mme Marie and Mme Marguerite. The former offers a striking example of Lyons slang in her description of taking walks in the city. The verb used is lentibardanner, which would raise an eyebrow even among native French speakers, but its initial lent immediately suggests the slow pace of walking for its own sake, not to get somewhere but to take in the scenery along the way. My translation, “slowly sauntering along” captures the pace and idea but not the unique savor of the Lyons slang. Mme Marguerite’s stock of Lyons slang is equally rich, and two examples of it made for particular difficulty in translation. During her discussion with Mayol about the Guignol theater unique to Lyons, Marguerite enumerates some of the slang
once in use, such as the verb *pétafiner*, which apparently meant something akin to *tripoter*. Instead of simply treating the two terms as equivalent and translating *pétafiner* as “to grope,” I opted to bring up more of the verb’s grain with “to paw.” Marguerite’s other slang exemplar, “Voir pêter le loup sur la pierre de bois,” did not meet with as much success in translation. Mayol’s own gloss of this phrase explains that it alludes to a young woman having sexual relations before marriage. While it seems distantly related to *avoir vu le loup*, another euphemism for losing one’s virginity, such a translation would not cover the bizarre qualities of the Lyons expression. Since making the best of a bad match in this case seemed to entail the most literal translation possible, the reader of *Living and Cooking* must swallow “See the wolf farting on the wooden stone.”

Faced with such examples of an almost “exotic” spoken language, it seems only appropriate to invoke the translation of another exotic language on which Certeau partly based his own conception of translation. In *The Writing of History*, he analyzes “ethnography” in the context of Jean de Léry’s 1578 *Histoire d’un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil*. As part of this voyage, Léry traveled from Geneva to Brazil and wandered among the Tupis for three months before returning to Geneva. Certeau suggests that this circular voyage marked a self-realization for Léry, a return to himself through the mediation of the other, the Tupis. However, something did not make the return voyage with Léry, so has not survived that crossing: the Tupis’ speech. Near the end of Léry’s *Histoire*, in chapter 20, appears a sort of French and Tupi dictionary. This translating tool within the text marks the narrative transition from Léry’s presence in Brazil to the beginning of his return to the Western world. At this point, for Certeau, the Tupis’ foreign language becomes a way of upholding the discourse of European knowledge and also a fable, “a speech which is unaware of what it expresses before decipherment can provide it with meaning and practical usage.” He then argues that, for Léry, the economy of translation orders the analysis of living beings and therein becomes specific. In effect, plants and animals are classified according to the modulations of a constant distinction between what is seen (appearance) and what is eaten (edible substance). Exteriority captivates the eye, it astonishes or horrifies, but this theater is often a lie and a fiction in respect to edibility, which measures the utility, or the essence, of fruits and animals.
The double diagnostic of taste corrects seductions or repulsions of the eye: is it healthy or not to eat, raw or cooked? The same holds for exotic fables, the enchanting but often deceptive voice: the interpreter discriminates in terms of utility when, first creating a distance between what it says and what it does not say, he translates what it does not say in forms of truth that are good to hear back in France. An intellectual edibility is the essence that has to be distinguished from ravishments of the ear.

In this rich passage, which smacks of Lévi-Strauss, translation enacts a vacillation between exteriority and interiority, between what is seen or heard and what is eaten or assimilated. Certeau thus argues that translation risks the captivation of the eye or the ravishment of the ear by remaining a passive activity that stays on the surface of language, as in bilingual dictionaries, which make the seductive claim of one-to-one ratios between words from two different languages. To counteract this seduction, Certeau enlists a corrective in the guise of what he calls intellectual edibility. This facet of translation is not passive, but rather an active assimilation. Addressing this type of assimilation elsewhere (in the context of his metaphor of reading as poaching) and reacting to the presumed passivity of the public, of consumers molded by imposed products, Certeau asserts that such a conception fails to account for the activity of consumption: “This misunderstanding assumes that ‘assimilating’ necessarily means ‘becoming similar to’ what one absorbs, and not ‘making something similar’ to what one is, making it one’s own, appropriating or reappropriating it.” The reappropriative activity par excellence for Certeau is reading, or poaching on the words of an author.

In fleshing out his analysis of this activity, Certeau invokes an implicit understanding of terroir in terms of reader/author interaction: “The reader takes neither the position of the author nor an author’s position. He invents in texts something different from what they ‘intended.’ He detaches them from their (lost or accessory) origin. He combines their fragments and creates something un-known in the space organized by their capacity for allowing an indefinite plurality of meanings.” The formulation of reading as an act of detaching something from its origin plays on the issues of terroir discussed here. By extension, translating lends language a mobility that, far from obscuring understanding, actually makes it possible. The tang of terroir in Certeau’s analysis is brought out most clearly perhaps at the end of his
chapter on reading as poaching, to the point of creating a savory *reduction* of the greater argument in volume 1. With respect to the act of silent reading, Certeau argues that the body withdraws itself from the text. Given this distanced rapport with the printed page, “the geographical configuration of the text organizes the activity of the reader less and less. Reading frees itself from the soil that determined it. It detaches itself from that soil.”

Certeau’s metaphor of the reader poaching on the author’s terrain to the extent of being freed from the very constraints imposed by that author seems equally appropriate for the act of translation. In his preface to *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Certeau writes:

> In translation, analyses that an author would fain believe universal are traced back to nothing more than the expression of local or—as it almost begins to seem—exotic experience. And yet in highlighting that which is specifically French in the daily practices that are the basis and the object of this study, publication in English only reinforces my thesis. . . . And hence it seems to me that this analysis, as its bond to another culture is rendered more explicit, will only be assisted in leading readers to uncover for themselves, in their own situation, their own tactics, their own creations, and their own initiatives.

In a sense, Certeau seems to be suggesting that his work, or at least this particular work of his, demands translation as a way of enacting the practice of his theory. The paradoxical mobility of *terroirs* in *Habiter, cuisiner* is the condition of possibility for *Living and Cooking*. By not remaining firmly fixed on the surface, the discursive *terroirs* examined earlier foreground the intellectual edibility central to Certeau’s conception of translation. The interpolations throughout, involving a certain descriptive anthropology of French and American culture, reflect the degree to which *Living and Cooking* has been assimilated and translated. In certain instances, a little bad taste served as a spice to make the translation of a *terroir* rich and savory.

In the final remarks of his preface, Certeau adds that the translation of the volume “may symbolize the object of my study: within the bounds imposed by another language and another culture, the art of translation smuggles in a thousand inventions which, before the author’s dazzled eyes, transforms his book into a new creation.”

To the examples of discursive *terroir* in *Living and Cooking* can be added the undoubtedly thousands of inventions, thousands of “minuscule repressions,” scattered throughout the text, those
microresistances displayed over and over along the way that have since disappeared within the English. As the proverb says, a translation is always a betrayal. In my efforts to minimize the shock of uprooting so many practices to facilitate their transplantation on a different soil, in a different culture, the tang of many others has certainly been altered and served up in a different sauce.

If my translation, *Living and Cooking*, is indeed a poaching of Certeau’s, Giard’s, and Mayol’s texts, it can only be hoped that it makes possible a multitude of successive poachings by readers of English. Poaching in English after all smuggles in the sense of culinary transformation, of making something digestible, just as Certeau’s poaching metaphor signifies the practice of making something readable. To end on a succulent note, we might recall those two erotic lumps that crown each piece of the chocolate-and-coconut bar called Almond Joy. The poached specialty par excellence, eggs Benedict, served with incomparable delight at places like Al’s Breakfast in Dinkytown (Minneapolis, MN) or The Pig & Whistle in Brighton (Boston, MA), consists of two eggs poached and covered with ersatz, greasy-spoon hollandaise sauce—a delight that, at Al’s and The Pig & Whistle, cannot be translated into French. The reader of these pages is invited to sample this dish that would send most cholesterol-fearing Americans through the rafters but not so, the good-eating Norman or Périgordian.

Notes

Many thanks to Ian Buchanan and Tom Conley for their strong support and invaluable suggestions on this article.


Certeau, Practice of Everyday Life, xi–xii.


Le trésor de la langue française (Paris, 1994) provides a telling enumeration of various phrases used with terroir: “goût, saveur, odeur, parfum, senteur de terroir; esprit de terroir; avoir l’accent du terroir; chants, contes, coutumes, dictons, légendes, proverbes du terroir; artiste, peintre, poète de/du terroir” (my emphases).

I owe my understanding of this aspect of terroir to Philip and Mary Hyman, culinary historians of France and researchers for the CNAC (Conseil National des Arts Culinaires), who are also working on the Inventaire du patrimoine culinaire de la France.


Ibid., 159.

Poulain, “Goût du terroir,” 22; my translation.

Certeau, Practice of Everyday Life, 174.

See Gilles Deleuze, Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure (Paris, 1975); and Cinéma 2: L’image-temps (Paris, 1985), 283–89.

Michel de Certeau, “Ghosts in the City,” in Living and Cooking, 143.

See, for example, Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, Paris as Revolution (Berkeley, 1995), in which she documents a process of renaming that changes a familiar place into a foreign one. See also Richard Terdiman, Present Past (Ithaca, 1993), which documents the breakup of familiar spaces in nineteenth-century poetry, art, and city planning.

Luce Giard, “Plat du Jour,” in Living and Cooking, 177–78.


Not having consulted Rendall at the time of my translation, I erroneously attributed the title to him in a note to Living and Cooking. As he has since informed me, generously, his original title was “Making Do: The Invention of Everyday Life.”

Certeau, Practice of Everyday Life, ix–x. I am indebted to Steven Rendall for alerting me to the fact that Certeau wrote his preface in English.

See Certeau, Giard, and Mayol, Living and Cooking, 217.

Ibid., 228.
31 Tom Conley fed me this tidbit of gastronomic information.
33 Giard, “Plat du Jour,” in ibid., 187.
35 Ibid., 271 n. 4.
36 Ibid., 273 n. 15.
37 Ibid., 122.
39 Ibid., 224.
40 Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 166.
41 Ibid., 169, 176.
42 Ibid., ix.
43 Ibid., x.