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Tuna Noodle Casserole is Tasty? The Information Network of Recipes

Irina D. Mihalache

Abstract

This article engages with the topic of embodied information through the analysis of historic recipes, part of the *Chatelaine* magazine's annual contest "50 Favorite Family Recipes." The corporeal information embodied in culinary texts, when they are analyzed as records of information behavior, provides knowledge about their producers and users. More specifically, the information embedded in recipes fuels stories about women's tensed roles in the family at a time of change in Canadian culture, during the postwar years. This article proposes that a recipe read in its information environment, together with clues about its origins, functions, and consumption, indicate how users interact with the recipe, accepting, negotiating, or challenging it through cultural, political, and social gestures, while located in the everyday space of the private kitchen. The analysis is focused on a genre of dishes that is often associated with fifties and sixties forms of domesticity—the casserole—and discuss the incorporation of canned products in recipes at a time of rapid modernization through mass-produced foods.

Introduction

In January 1954, *Chatelaine*, the largest women's lifestyle Canadian magazine, announced the winner of the fourth edition of "50 Favorite Family Recipes":[1] Mrs. E. A (Eva) Phillips, from Belleville, Ontario, who sent in a recipe for Seven Layer Dinner. Why was this recipe selected? According to Marie Holmes (1954, 22), director of the Chatelaine Institute, "everyone thought this flavorful, nourishing dinner-in-a-dish was an excellent example of the kind of eating Canadians like. And when Jean Byers, of the Institute staff, and photographer Peter Croydon went to Belleville to

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talk to the prize winner and take pictures, we found Mr. and Mrs. Phillips were the kind of people everyone likes." The recipe asks for potatoes, onions, carrots, rice, peas from a tin, canned tomato soup, and pork sausages. Pickled crab apples or apple wedges are suggested as decorations after the dish baked in the oven for two hours. Phillips explained that she sent in this recipe "because the 'makings' are always at hand and because it invariably brings requests for seconds" (Holmes 1954, 22). From 1951 to 1968, "50 Favorite"[2] invited submissions of family-tested recipes from Canadian housewives and offered a glimpse of domestic cooking practices and trends from various regions in Canada. Mary Jukes, the director of the *Chatelaine* Consumer Council wrote in 1953 that "*Chatelaine*'s '50 Favorite Recipes' is becoming a Good Old Canadian Custom like the home-and-school cooking sale and the church supper. And for the same good reason. All three of the good-eating events feature family-tested dishes, from casseroles to pies and tarts" (26). Seen through this perspective, Phillips's Seven Layer Dinner is one of the many recipes that contributed to the formation of an annual tradition—the contest—which, in turn, mirrored and informed the complex Canadian culinary landscape in the 1950s and 1960s.

This article, through a close reading of the recipes featured by *Chatelaine* in "50 Favorite," explores the corporeal information embodied in culinary texts, arguing that recipes, when analyzed as records of information behavior—"the many ways in which human beings interact with information" (Bates 2010, 2381)—are ideal sites for gaining knowledge about their producers and users. More specifically, the information embedded in recipes fuels stories about women as housewives at a time of change in Canadian culture, in the postwar years. A recipe read in its information environment, together with clues about its origins, functions, and consumption, indicate how users interact with the recipe, accepting, negotiating, or challenging it through cultural, political and social gestures, while located in the everyday space of the private kitchen. In the case of the Seven Layer Dinner, the introduction to the winning recipe featured a photo of the Phillips family—parents Edwin and Eva, "blond, blue-eyed Lilian aged five, and her brother Teddy who is just three" (Holmes 1954, 22)—at the dinner table, eating together the meal cooked by Eva. Much can be deduced from the information present in the recipe alone: while it takes a long time to cook—two hours—it can be easily put together, freeing time in the housewife's schedule for other domestic duties; the ingredients are economical, staples in one's kitchen, and healthy at the same time; and the addition of canned soup and peas is a much needed shortcut offered by the new modern brands available to middle-class Canadians in the 1950s. Valerie J. Korinek ([2000] 2013, 107) points out the nationalistic tone of *Chatelaine*, which, "with its consistent refrain 'For the Canadian Woman' . . . staked its image on being Canadian." In doing so,

the magazine constructed as much as reflected the ideal image of the Canadian woman—housewife, mother, nurturer, nutritionist, patriot, party planner, and sometimes even full-time employee. The meals she put together for the family had to be tasty, nutritious, and balanced between modernity and tradition, as they nourish the bodies of the Canadians of which she was in charge.

The relation between the female recipe writer and the recipe itself is one full of tensions that reflect the negotiations underlying the role of women in Canadian society in the fifties and sixties, as well as changes to Canadian diets and culinary cultures. In this article, which articulates the special issue's call for greater attention to embodied information, I position the recipe as a powerful multisensorial artifact that is composed of an information infrastructure—the obvious ingredients and cooking guidelines; the less noticeable traces of cultural, political and social issues; and even more inconspicuous pointers toward the bodies of those producing and consuming the resulting dish. With this approach, while I agree with Andrew M. Cox, Brian Griffin, and Jenna Hartel's (2017, 387) argument that "the evolution of research in the specialty of information behavior has led to a focus on information in written texts," I propose that culinary texts, despite being written, are abundant in sensorial and corporeal information. To prove this claim, I engage in an in-depth analysis of recipes from *Chatelaine*'s successful "50 Favorite" and explore them as sites of knowledge production about the bodies (and their identities) who produced, circulated, and consumed them. Since the contest is presented as a display of Canada's favorite recipes, this article is primarily engaged with the notion of a Canadian cuisine as it is shaped by these collections of recipes. At the same time as a notion of Canadian cuisine is constructed through these recipes, the women's social role is negotiated, alongside the ideals for a proper Canadian body and taste.

The construction of a taste—defined as culturally constructed preference for specific ingredients and dishes—in the fifties and sixties for certain recipes is tied to home cooking, which achieves visibility through magazines such as *Chatelaine*. What was considered tasty, palatable, and edible decades ago might not agree with contemporary palates and eating ideologies. In fact, one of the main challenges identified by historians of taste is the difficulty in knowing what food tasted like to past eaters (Smith, *Sensing*, 2008). This article tackles this conundrum by using the recipe (Leonardi 1989; Claflin 2013) as a historic document that provides access to information about how food tasted, why it became popular, and how it changed through use. Recipes go in and out of fashion (Lovegren 2005), but they leave "traces" of their production and consumption when analyzed in their information context. For example, modifications to a recipe, motivated by lack of access to an ingredient, ideological beliefs, cultural customs, trends, personal preference for spice or salt level, or desire to

improvise (or not follow the recipe) are records of information behavior. A recipe and the communications about it indicate how users interact with the recipe, accepting, negotiating, or challenging it through cultural, political, and social gestures. These are all elements that could elucidate questions about taste in the past and the initiatives taken to preserve or change it, intentionally or not, by the Canadian housewives submitting recipes to the "50 Favorite" contest.

The interdisciplinary nature of this inquiry requires a melange of multiple fields of study: information behavior, food studies, sensory studies, Canadian food history, and women's and gender studies. The conceptual framework crafted in this article is intended to add to "types of research conducted in order to understand the human relationship to information" (Bates 2010, 2381) by zooming in specifically on what Carol L. Barry (1994) identifies as "situational factors" of experiencing information, such as background, knowledge level, and beliefs. In the case of recipes submitted to *Chatelaine*, these "situational factors" concern women's motivations for recipe selection, which, in a larger sense, decide household diets, with an impact on Canadian culinary culture as a whole. To observe recipes in their information networks, this article first explores the recipe as corporal information that shapes taste at a national level. It continues with an overview of *Chatelaine*'s role in building the image of the Canadian woman as housewife and contributing to Canada's culinary identity. The analysis of recipes from "50 Favorites" and contextualizing narratives could lead a researcher in multiple thematic directions. In this article, I focus on a genre of dishes that is often associated with fifties and sixties forms of domesticity—the casserole—and discuss the incorporation of canned products in recipes at a time of rapid modernization through mass-produced foods. The analysis in this article is based on a close reading of recipes from all annual special features of the contest's winners and selected dishes. The first tier of recipes is composed of those that include *casserole* in the recipe title. A second tier is composed of recipes that resemble a casserole in terms of ingredients (primarily canned cream soups) and cooking techniques (baked in the oven in one single pot) but are labeled differently (e.g., Curried Rice and Oysters, Steak and Mushroom Dinner, or Scalloped Fish).

The Recipe as Corporeal Information: Negotiating Health and Taste

One of the recent critiques of the field of information studies comes from scholars who reposition the body as central to the information experience. Annemarree Lloyd (2014, 86) points out that "in the information literacy field to date, and in the broader arena of information studies, the corporeal experience has been uncoupled from the cognitive experience." Along the same lines, Cox, Griffin, and Hartel (2017, 387) write that "the

centrality of the embodied experience to all aspects of human life makes the relative neglect of the body in information behaviour studies surprising and potentially problematic." In another recent study, Christopher P. Lueg (2015, 2705) further nuances the concept of embodiment and argues that "it is the physicality of our bodies that scaffolds how we perceive the world in which we are situated, how we think about that world, and how we engage with that world." The idea that information can be experienced and produced through the body is an important component of information behavior yet remains unexplored and underresearched. Furthermore, Lueg (2015) identifies three fallacies—"every body is the same," "the world looks the same," and "your world is the same as mine" (2705–6)—that "show that the boundary between physiological aspects and what historically is seen as situational factors is blurry" (2706).

The very comprehensive overview by Cox, Griffin, and Hartel (2017) of theories of information behavior that engage with or neglect the body provides a clear map of existing literature and its gaps when it comes to taking the body and its complexity seriously. The authors conclude that "studies in information behavior have tended to ignore embodied information" due to "a privileging of encoded, symbolic information sources, a focus on work, especially knowledge work . . . and the use of computers as the domain of study," and "a methodological choice to use questionnaires and interviews (399)." In this framework, the cultural construction of sensorial information, the distinctions between different regimes of sensory making, and the constant negotiations taking place at the level of the body are missing, leading the authors to determine that "there is a lot more work to be done in recognising the way that different ways of sensing, within which the concept of information is constructed, help to produce different social orders" (401).

In defining the recipe as corporeal information, I take my cue from Cox, Griffin, and Hartel (2017, 399), who explain that *embodied information* refers to "how we receive information from the senses and the way the body as sign can be read by others." In addition, I find useful Lloyd's (2014, 86) view of the body "as an ever present site of embodied and experiential knowledge which is referenced against a backdrop of sociocultural, material, economic and historical horizons from which meaning is co-constructed in relation to others." Where my argument differs slightly from those of the information behavior scholars I have cited so far is in my perception of the written text. Cox, Griffin, and Hartel (2017, 386) are skeptical of the possibility that a written text can be rich in sensorial cues and embodied information, as they state that "a focus on written sources reflects the origins of information studies in the provision of information through libraries and digital repositories." The recipe, which is a written text, is one of the richest artifacts in terms of sensorial information and clues as to its impact on the bodies of its creators and consumers. Since

information behavior, according to Bates (2010, 2381), defines information as "all instances where people interact with their environment in any such way that leaves some impression on them—that is, adds or changes their knowledge"—material culture produced in the context of everyday life, such as recipes, should be central to studies concerned with embodiment. In addition, information seeking—accessing material to look for information—should be accompanied by studies of information production, especially since producers and consumer communities and their bodies overlap.

In the specific case of culinary artifacts such as historic recipes, their close relation to women's domestic histories makes them even more valuable to studies of information behavior. Little information is known about how women cooked in their private kitchens and how they organized culinary knowledge produced in the private domain; such information can be sometimes captured in community cookbooks (Bower 1997); popular texts, such as magazines (Damon-Moore 1994; Korinek [2000] 2013); and other culinary ephemera, such as cookbooklets and company recipe brochures (Cooke 2009; Driver 2009a). About such artifacts, Anne Bower (1997, 5–6) writes, "part of what we're coming to see about these varying texts, once considered decorative and/or private or trivial, is how they have served the communication needs of women . . . although women were often limited in access to recognized status-bearing discourse forms, they expressed themselves through other print and non-print materials." Therefore, they are rich in information about the bodies of those who produced and cooked them, as much as they reveal information about the bodies of those destined to eat the dishes. Several scholars have critiqued the lack of attention to cooking done by women (Curtin and Heldke 1992; Bower 1997; Driver 2009a)—a task often deemed "manual, practical, and [not requiring] particular thought" (Bower 1997, 7). Bower's perspective relies on Lisa M. Heldke's (1992, 205) work, which contextualizes cooking as "thoughtful practice," arguing that "cooking is a kind of theorizing" that requires both mental and manual dimensions.

If cooking is a "thoughtful practice," the recipes represent the most important information texts that can allow scholars access to this practice and to those who produce, negotiate, sustain, challenge, and reinforce it. Alan Warde (2016) observes that eating escapes the traditional modes of institutionalization due to the fact that much of eating and cooking takes place in private. Domestic acts and decisions informing cooking in private kitchens are difficult to access through written texts; however, recipes contain traces of the bodies involved in their production and consumption. These "traces" are partly visible in what Susan Leonardi (1989, 340) calls the "embedded discourse" of the recipe, which implies that "like a story, a recipe needs a recommendation, a context, a point, a reason to be." Further, the recipe is shaped by the exchange itself, as it is passed down from

mother to daughter, neighbor to neighbor, or Canadian to Canadian, as is the case of the recipes from *Chatelaine*'s "50 Family Favorite." Building on this perspective, Janet Floyd and Laurel Forster (2010, 2) define the recipe as "a narrative which can engage the reader or cook in a 'conversation' about culture and history in which recipe and its context provide part of the text and the reader imagines (or even eats) the rest." By sharing recipes, typically used to prepare family meals, the cooks placed in circulation private documents, which entered the public phase of their biographies by entering larger conversations with other recipes shared by women with similar stories. Leonardi (1989) might consider this a form of exchange, despite the fact that the act of sharing does not guarantee the cooking of the recipe. However, the exchange of recipes within the public domain of *Chatelaine* represents a contribution to Canadian culinary culture, as it is possible to map out trends and preferences for certain ingredients over others, and therefore to imagine the regimes of taste constructed in the fifties and sixties by home cooks while feeding their families.

In the making and circulation of recipes, the body is shaped not only by the recipe's content but also by the "backdrop of sociocultural, material, economic and historical horizons from which meaning is co-constructed in relation to others" (Lloyd 2014, 86). The preference for certain ingredients and dishes is the result of many forces and factors, such as nutrition standards (e.g., what is considered to be a healthy body), availability of ingredients (e.g., certain products enter a nation's cuisine through colonial routes), politics of food (e.g., food companies' work to introduce new products as modern and innovative), and gender relations (e.g., women are tasked with feeding their family). All these are important in constructing not only eating ideologies at different moments in time—for example, the 1960s is described as the "gourmet" decade in North America (Ferguson and Fraser 1992; Strauss 2011)—but also the taste for specific foods. The tensions that result from these intersecting contexts are visible at the level of recipes. Taste of the past, in particular, is a tricky sense for the contemporary scholar to decipher due to the lack of records that map how people experienced and enjoyed food in certain circumstances. According to Carolyn Korsmeyer (1999, 2), "we cannot fully understand the character and importance of the sense of taste unless we also consider what is tasted and the circumstances that surround the exercise of this sense." Recipes submitted by Canadian housewives to *Chatelaine*, which before becoming public circulated in private kitchens, were passed down from mothers and grandmothers, or brought by migrant women to Canada, abound in sensorial clues that point out the different taste regimes coexisting in the fifties and sixties.

Taste—the sensation produced when ingesting food—is the most evocative sense (Korsmeyer 2005), subjective yet shared (Wessell and Jones 2011), culturally produced and negotiated (Parkhurst Ferguson 2004),

and wrongly relegated to the lower end of a hierarchy of senses (Ackerman 1991; Korsmeyer 1999; Howes 2005). Korsmeyer (2005, 5) explained that taste's lower positioning in relation to sight and hearing is due to "the presumption that taste is relatively inarticulate, that foods and flavors do not convey meaning." As several scholars have shown, taste—sweet, salty, spicy, etc.—is not only meaningful as signifier of specific cultural norms (Mintz 1985; Schivelbusch 1992; Czara 2009) but is a major player in the formation of regional (Mintz 1996), national (Gabaccia 1998; Pilcher 1998; Inness 2001a) and global identities and communities (Heldke 2003; Inglis and Gimlin 2010). Donna Gabaccia (1998, 8) nicely sums up the numerous roles food and its taste have in a global society:

> Humans cling tenaciously to familiar foods because they become associated with nearly every dimension of human social and cultural life. Whether in New Guinea or New Bedford, humans share particular foods with families and friends; they pursue good health through unique diets; they pass on food lore, and create stories and myths about food's meaning and taste; they celebrate rites of passages and religious beliefs with distinctive dishes. Food thus entwines intimately with much that makes a culture unique, binding taste and satiety to group loyalties. Eating habits both symbolize and mark the boundaries of cultures.

Thinking of recipes as forms of corporeal information provides an opportunity to connect the types of information visible in the recipe—ingredients, cooking guidelines, tips and notes on the author—with the several ways in which food and taste act upon the cultural and social fabric in specific historical contexts. The following sections of the article will put to test the recipes' relation with information behavior by focusing on the making of Canadian culinary culture in *Chatelaine* in the fifties and sixties. The negotiation of a Canadian taste through the recipes submitted to "50 Favorite" happened at the same time as women's bodies were being constructed and redefined in the context of national projects, such as wartime economics, workplace reform, and development food guides, which impacted gender roles (Iacovetta, Draper and Ventresca 1998; Campbell 2009; McPherson, Morgan, and Forestell 1999) and the bodies of those women were tasked to feed—children and husbands.

Chatelaine and Canadian Culture: Of Being a Woman

In March 1928, Canadian women were invited to read advice columns, fiction, reflections on current politics, and articles on fashion, beauty, home décor, and food in the pages of a new magazine that "served as a forum for women's discourse, provided a guide for navigating the tricky path between individualism and collectivism, and constituted a primer for an emerging national aesthetic" (Grove 2011, 167). *Chatelaine* was launched by MacLean Publishing Company as a Canadian counterpart to United States' *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Better Homes and Gardens.* Quickly,

Chatelaine became Canada's main women's lifestyle magazine, sharing the market with a few other smaller publications targeting women, such as the *Canadian Home Journal*. The readings of *Chatelaine* done by scholars position the magazine at the tensed intersection between domesticity and feminism, highlighting its role in acting as a site of negotiation for what middle-class womanhood ought to look like. From the late twenties until the sixties, which is the period from the magazine's history most extensively studied, *Chatelaine*'s editorial team, writers, and readers "worked" together to define and redefine the Canadian woman's identity and roles in a changing national context. Likewise, the magazine's articles, graphics, and advertisements constructed and challenged ideals of beauty, suggesting techniques and recommending products for improving the body. However, as McIntosh (2014, 15) uncovered in her research on health information in *Chatelaine*, "this magazine's willingness to publish content about pressing women's issues related to health expressed the polysemic nature of this popular text, demonstrating its ability to produce multiple meanings throughout its existence." Narratives about healthy bodies were interwoven with requests for patriotic gestures incorporated in the domestic realm.

The magazine witnessed important political, cultural, and social moments in Canada's history—the Depression era, World War II, the booming fifties, and the rise of feminism in the sixties. All these contexts underlined the conversations about women's rapport with the nation and its smallest unit, the family (Korinek [2000] 2013). Seen as integral part of the communication network that helped forge a sense of nationhood in Canada (Korinek [2000] 2013; Grove 2011; Smith, "Fiction," 2014), *Chatelaine* called upon women to take on different roles, depending on the needs of the time. Jaleen Grove (2011) observed that the early years of the magazine relied upon a visual rhetoric anchored in "maternal feminism" (167) paired with "traditional feminine decency" (180). The tension between emancipation and traditional forms of domestic femininity manifested itself through a melange of articles that provided housekeeping and relationship advice for housewives and, at the same time, reflection pieces on the difficulty of being a woman in a changing yet still patriarchal society. Valerie Korinek ([2000] 2013, 5) advocates for the revaluation of Canadian women in the fifties and sixties, noting the "instances of rebellion and resistance to the circumscribed roles of suburban women, as wives and mothers." *Chatelaine* represents an ideal site to engage with the complexity of women's experiences as it displays the uncertainty that women felt toward their role to build a modern Canada (Strong-Boag 1991). The plurality of voices and perspectives expressed in the magazine suggests that "unlike any other publication at the time (particularly in the US), *Chatelaine* avoided presenting the uncritical portrait of domestic bliss so often found in postwar mass media" (Mendes 2010, 517). The joys and

challenges of womanhood were addressed in their complexity, often connected with broader notions of Canadian identity and nationalism.

The unconventional and progressive, for its time, take on women's issues was due to *Chatelaine*'s interactive and dialogic approach to engaging its readers. Korinek's ([2000] 2013, 8) work on *Chatelaine* uncovered an active community of readers, in whose hands "the text underwent a process of interpretation, revision, critique, and debate that put another layer of meaning on the product created by editors, writers, and advertisers." Readers were constantly asked for feedback, opinions, and recipes, which were taken into consideration by the editorial team, who engaged in conversations with the reader communities. Grove (2011, 171) notes that "readers' political acumen was purposely honed through debates on provocative issues in which readers could participate, and the role of the magazine as a forum was further supported by its visuals." The dialogic ethos of the magazine resulted in numerous exchanges between readers and text, providing another record of women's ambivalence toward their gender positioning, which also included aspects of their bodies. The domestic body is often at the center of the negotiations that take place in the pages of *Chatelaine*, as women are often invited to take better care of their hands, follow diets, and stay healthy. McIntosh (2014, 7) explores the presentation of women's health issues in the magazine, starting from the premise that "related to questions of biological determinism, reproductive rights, bodily integrity, beauty, and fashion (to name a few), the female body is considered to be a highly sought after commodity within political, economic and social spheres." The food sections in the magazine connect aspects of health, nutrition, and taste with a broader vision for a Canadian culinary culture.

Chatelaine and Culinary Culture in Canada

As several scholars (Richman Kenneally 2008; Richman Kenneally and Sloan 2010; Wilmshurst 2013) point out, Canada in the fifties and sixties was actively engaged in a project of defining a national cuisine, through spectacular celebrations such as Expo 67, revised food guides, and a wealth of cookbooks, many with a regional focus. Additionally, "Canadians' interest in food has been bolstered since the mid-twentieth century by the ever greater diversity of food cultures that we can sample" (Iacovetta, Korinek and Epp 2012, 5). Canadian print culture, especially cookbooks, have been studied as evidence of the negotiations leading toward a Canadian cuisine. Rhona Richman Kenneally (2009, 171) points out that Canadian culinary heritage resulted "out of conditions precisely contrary to those conventionally underscoring a national food history—that is, out of the hodge-podge of diverse eating traditions from numerous regions of the world, brought to Canada through decades of immigration." This "hodge-podge" of the Canadian culinary culture is accentuated by the regional

aspects of the various provinces, which created the interest in regionality. However, Elizabeth Driver (2009b, 209–10) cautions against a blind acceptance of regional difference as the overarching trait of Canadian cuisine, as "regional variations in food are exciting to experience and may be reason for celebration, but to appreciate them fully, it is also necessary to recognize that which we have in common." Another important source that reveals these negotiations and contributes to the making of culinary culture in Canada is *Chatelaine*.

A major component of the magazine's content was housekeeping, which included several articles dedicated to food. Each issue would typically contain a feature article on various themes, such as "Famous Recipes for Famous Brands" (October 1956), "How to Save with Planned-Over Meals" (March 1957), or "Make All These Sandwiches (125) from Just One Loaf" (August 1963). In addition, a one-pager with "Meals of the Month" that included daily menus for every meal of the day was a fixture until the mid-1960s. Other shorter articles might be included, with advice or shopping tips. Each year, since 1951 until 1968, *Chatelaine* featured the winning recipes of the popular "50 Favorite" contest. In addition, a wealth of advertisements for food products was spread throughout each issue. *Chatelaine*'s food content adhered to the same narratives about Canadian housewives, who were tasked with shopping, cooking, and entertaining, in the context of the overall duty of caring for and nurturing the family. The trust that readers often expressed toward recipes and advice included in the pages of *Chatelaine* was primarily due to the rigorous process of testing recipes and trying out various products conducted by the director and staff of the Chatelaine Institute. According to Korinek ([2000] 2013, 187), "they were the bourgeois experts to whom the novice and experienced housewives could turn to for advice, and many readers seemed to have relied on their services extensively. The middle-class ethos that ran throughout the material produced in the institute always stressed planning, budgets, schedules, and routines—in a word, efficiency."

If efficiency was the ethos of the food sections, the ideological undertone was the preservation of a healthy Canadian body through the merging of nutrition and taste, under the guidance of women. The family unit, presented as the subset of a healthy nation, was the duty, which during wartime acquired a strong patriotic tone (Keshen 2004), of the housewife. To keep the family healthy, women had to be well versed in knowledge about health and nutrition, as well as information on new, modern ingredients available on the market. *Chatelaine* played a very important role in "educating" the Canadian woman in balancing a healthy diet with a tasty meal. Therefore, "whether profiling food that men liked to eat, planning meals for the calorie conscious, or encouraging picky children to tuck into well-balanced meals, the *Chatelaine* Institute tried to respond to the many demands placed on the fifties' kitchen and the resident housewife

short-order cook, chef, baker, and dietitian" (Korinek [2000] 2013, 191). However, *Chatelaine* also advocated for economizing strategies, aiming to decrease the burdens of budgeting. Annual features included tips for budgeting that came directly from Canadian mothers and wives who had found shortcuts to nutritious and economic meals. In the sixties, as Korinek ([2000] 2013, 194) noted, "affordable meals . . . were slightly more glamorous than their fifties counterparts," which was due primarily to the popularity of gourmet cooking (Ferguson and Fraser 1992). In the process of providing the housewife with information and tools to run a proper kitchen, *Chatelaine*'s editorial team engaged her in conversations, asking for feedback and for contributions to the knowledge created by the magazine. These "conversations," which brought into the public space of the magazine domestic culinary expertise, contributed to the broader project of crafting a Canadian culinary culture.

The annual feature "50 Favorite," which became a contest open to all Canadians in 1954, gave an overview of the culinary landscape of private Canadian kitchens. The recipes submitted and featured in *Chatelaine* are records of information behavior that would greatly benefit from a read within their information environment to further demonstrate the gap between expectations and realities when it came to women's desired roles within the family and society at large. This tension further problematizes the myth of a coherent Canadian culinary culture, neatly overlapping with the geography of the country. In the following section, one case study, building on recipes submitted for "50 Favorite" by Canadian women and some men from rural areas, small towns, and large cities, will demonstrate that recipes read in conversation with each other and in their information environments—which consists of any contextual information provided in the magazine about the recipe itself, ingredients, author, and the contest itself—open up new interpretive avenues for the circulation of culinary knowledge and the formation of a national cuisine.

"Fifty Favorite Recipes": Reading Recipes as Information Artifacts

Home Cooks Build a (Canadian) Community: The Information Environment of Recipes

Chatelaine launched "50 Favorite Recipes from Chatelaine Councillors" in January 1951 with the following preface: "Whether it's Love, Marriage, Insurance, Home Ownership . . . Chatelaine goes to its Councillors for their opinions and experiences. . . .This month it's their favorite food" (Jukes 1951, 25). In its first iteration, "50 Favorite" was not a contest but a collection of recipes provided by the magazine's councillors—a group of about two thousands readers composing the Consumer Council and "selected to mirror the geographic and income levels of the readership

and were the 'life line' for editors" (Korinek [2000] 2013, 87). The call for recipes resulted in almost 1,500 submissions, which had to be tested and reduced to a list of fifty. Some of the highlights from this first article were "tasty supper dishes such as barbecued spare ribs, economical ham and egg pie and an Italian spaghetti with a particularly piquant sauce; cakes with imaginative icing treatments; four bread-roll recipes chosen for their unusualness" (Jukes 1951, 25). The rationale for selecting the recipes, as explained by the Consumer Council's editor, Mary Jukes (1951, 25), was family approval, the "test of repetition" and reducing women's labor in the kitchen by "coast[ing] along for a few months on someone else's discoveries."

The popularity of "50 Favorite" motivated the magazine to open up the contest to all Canadians, women and men. In 1954, The Seven Layer Dinner was the first grand winner of the one-hundred-dollar prize, while the other forty-nine dishes brought their authors five dollars each and a copy of *Chatelaine*'s cookbook, *363 Home Tested Recipes* (Holmes 1954, 22). Submissions were accepted for the following categories: Supper Dishes, Meat and Fish, Desserts, Cakes and Cookies, and Bread. A Miscellaneous category was included with the article, with recipes that were worthy of publication but did not fit the contests' established categories. These categories were reconfigured over time, reflecting changes in the broader culinary landscape and showing examples of experimentation and adaptation. For example, in 1959, the Supper Dishes section became Supper Dishes and Casseroles, and a new section, TV and Party Dinners, was added. Both of these new additions were removed in 1960, when the contest dropped "Fifty" from its title, reducing the number of featured recipes. In 1963, Casseroles were attributed their own section. In 1964, an All-Canadian section was added, followed by Regional Canadian and International Favorites in 1965. The last edition of the contest featured recipes in the following categories: Party Dish, Yeast and Quick Breads, Quick and Easy, Supper Recipes, Casseroles, and Soups. From fifty recipes in the 1951 issue, the number of featured recipes had been reduced to twelve recipes by 1968, with the grand winner awarded a five-hundred-dollar prize. According to Korinek ([2000] 2013, 190), the contest was abandoned because it was too successful—for example, from approximately 2000 recipes received in the mid-1950s, by the 1960s, the Institute was receiving more than 7000 recipes—and it became too time consuming to read, evaluate, and test all the submissions.

Contextualizing information for each issue of the contest offers clues as to the labor of women in the domestic kitchens. The first four editions of "50 Favorite" included visual representations of the *Chatelaine* housewife whose recipe was selected as a top choice. Each woman was depicted in her kitchen, surrounded by her children, and, in one instance, by her husband. In January 1951, "Mrs. J. F. Hart, of Brighton, Ont., one

of Chatelaine's bright young councillors, bakes her sons' favorite cake—chocolate" (Jukes 1951, 25). In January 1952, another young mother and wife was featured: Mrs. L. Todd, from Fort Erie, Ontario, in the process of labelling a jar of Winter Salad Pickle, which "has a salad like quality and is guaranteed to bring cheers of approval from the family when added to your dish" (Jukes 1952, 28). In the image, her son was depicted next to her, excited about his mother's work. The visual information available with the recipe solidifies a traditional image of the domestic cook who is validated in her cooking solely by her family rather than by the broader culinary standards against which male chefs would have been measured. Likewise, the pleasure involved in cooking comes from the act of nurturing the family rather than the joy of cooking for one's own satisfaction. Mrs. T. M. Miller's winning Cherry-Filled Coffee Cake, featured on the cover of the January 1953 issue, generated great enthusiasm primarily due to the family's excitement for the dessert: "Mrs. Miller . . . admits she seldom goes to the trouble of dressing up her cake with the icing and pecans as shown on the cover. Her husband and the boys just won't wait that long to eat it" (Jukes 1953, 27). One has to wonder if the maker of the cake got a chance to actually taste it, opening broader questions about the relation between the body of the producer and the food produced to feed the other bodies in the household. Post-1954, the photos depicting home cooks in their domestic environments were replaced with images of the winning dishes, some accompanied by small portrait-like photos of their authors. In the absence of visual depictions of the women's labor, the cooked dishes remained witnesses to the production of the family meal.

A survey of the introductory statements for each article featuring contest recipes included reflections on trends in Canadian cooking observed from the recipes submitted to *Chatelaine*. As the contests received thousands of "kitchen treasures" from "*Chatelaine* readers across the nation," the Institute team had a considerable sample of culinary texts to observe what "foods Canada likes best" (Chatelaine Institute 1957, 23). Trends were identified in terms of ingredients (especially those labelled as "adventurous" or "exotic"), types of dishes (e.g., supper dishes, casseroles, desserts), and novelty items. All these trends were identified in relation to a larger Canadian culinary framework made up of "star turns from the family recipe files of housewives all across Canada" (Holmes 1956, 22). In 1956, for example, an increased preference for "Canada's native products" is observed, while "this year's desserts featured the pudding with the 'built-in' sauce" (Holmes 1956, 22). In the few following years, "adventure was the keyword for Canadian cooks and their families. Spices and cooking wines were tossed in as easily as those old familiar—salt, pepper and mustard. Dishes from as far away as Jamaica and Nigeria were handily transported by roving Canadians" (Holmes 1958, 61). As Canadian home cooks entered into the sixties, more and more "far off" ingredients were

brought into "all-Canadian dishes" as "some cook travelers found their food inspiration in a far off country and translated it from memory in Canadian terms" (Collett 1964, 31). Only one year later, "Chinese food seems to be the most popular foreign dish with Italian recipes coming a close second" ("What's New" 1964, 2). The addition of a section of "regional Canadian and international favorites" showed consideration for thinking that Canadian cuisine was not homogenous, either geographically or culturally.

Cans in Casseroles: Modernity, Domesticity and the Bodies of Women
A condensed cream of mushroom soup might not sound too appealing to contemporary palates, especially when combined with cream of chicken soup, milk, and grated cheese, as is the case of the Green Rice Casserole, submitted by Miss Ruth Simmons, from Summerside, Prince Edward Island, for the 1956 "50 Favorite." Her recipe, which won first prize in the Supper Dishes category, was one of the many casseroles (and variations of) featured in the contest throughout the years. Carol Ferguson and Margaret Fraser (1992, 131) name the Tuna Noodle Casserole "the quintessential '50s dish," nodding toward a trend with a much longer history, going back to 1860s United States, when French Canadian immigrant Elmire Jolicoeur popularized the dish to her American fellows in Berlin, New Hampshire ("History of Berlinite Women" n.d.; Nolan 2012). Before 1870, writes John Ayto (1993, 66), the casserole was a "dish of cooked rice moulded into the shape of a casserole cooking pot and then filled with a savory mixture, such as chicken and sweetbreads." However, cookbooks and women's magazines in the second half of the nineteenth century slowly shifted the recipe toward a dish of meat, vegetables, and stock, cooked slowly in liquid in a closed pot. This version of the dish proved to be very useful during wartime and the Great Depression, when food rationing obliged women to reduce the meat content in dishes while adding more of other available ingredients, such as carrots, potatoes, and peas. Likewise, the canning industry offered convenient and economic substitutions, such as canned fish and soups, which made their way into casseroles. Mary Drake McFeely writes (2000, 57) that Campbell's twenty-one varieties of canned soups "were a boon to women whose time was scarce," especially working wives who could open a can of cream of mushroom soup, mix it with a few other, possibly canned, ingredients, and have a quick meal ready for the family. The fact that famous cookbook authors, home economists, and women's magazines promoted canned soups and provided various recipes for casseroles kept this dish alive and popular well into the 1960s.

A casserole embodies the tensed and often changing relation between women and domesticity, as they were pulled in different directions by different messages: home economists advocated for the use of canned goods as substitutes to reduce labor in the kitchen, while, at the same

time, emphasizing the nutritional benefits of fresh vegetables and fruits, especially from Canada. Canadian cookbook authors and culinary experts such as Kate Aitken were also brand ambassadors for new food products, advocating shortcuts and time-saving, economic strategies. *Chatelaine*, overall, cultivated a sense of comfort for home cooks using canned goods, while promoting care for presentation and overall taste. The many recipes for casseroles submitted for "50 Favorite" embodied these tensions and also the changing discourses about healthy bodies that women all over Canada worked to feed and sustain. A 1951 recipe for Bean Casserole submitted by Mrs. N. G. Aitken, from Dauphin, Manitoba, asked for carrots, onion, dried beans, and leftover meats, all bound together with canned tomatoes. According to the recipe's author, the dish was a favorite with her children, and, "served with a green salad, makes a very economical supper dish" (1951,[3] 26). The same contest featured a Supper Casserole from Mrs. A. Leacock, from Easton's Corners, Ontario, which relied more on meat (ground beef) and canned vegetables (tomatoes and peas). The peas, informed the recipe, could be substituted with cooked macaroni (27). Mary Jukes (1951, 27) highlighted a recipe for Bacon and Mushroom Casserole in the 1951 edition of the contest: "A Manitoban housewife and councillor, Mrs. C. Seaby, of Dauphin, gives you some idea of the appetite-rousing qualities of her Bacon-Mushroom Casserole: 'I retested my recipe today and three of us cleaned up the dish meant for six.'" A look at the recipe might explain why; for a 1950s palate, this dish would seem irresistible, as the recipe asked for bacon (and its drippings), a can cream of mushroom soup (there are no "real" mushrooms in the dish), one cup of grated cheese, and four eggs. However, it is important to note that the Bacon-Mushroom Casserole is very different, primarily in terms of ingredients, than the Beans and Supper Casseroles included in the previous year's contest.

If there is something that can be said of casseroles, it is that they are up for great interpretation by their creators, as recipes imagined and labelled as casserole dishes do not have more in common than the fact that they are cooked in the oven in one large container, typically a Pyrex casserole dish. And even the baking differs, depending on whether the dish has cheese or not. Inness (2001b, 149) referred to the casserole as "an infinitely elastic recipe, yet could be prepared with the simplest of ingredients—potato chips, canned salmon or tuna, cream of mushroom soup, canned onions—items that any woman would have in her pantry." As a middle-class dish, the casserole afforded the application of economizing strategies, such as the use of canned soups and vegetables, the reduction of the meat content, and the inclusion of leftovers. Several recipes submitted for the contest fit this process. Festive Casserole (Mrs. E. A. Sheehan, Clairmont, Alberta; 1952, 33) is the simplest recipe, as it only asks for rice, apples, celery, onion, and green pepper. Casserole Dinner

(Mrs. R. B. Gray, Edmonton; 1953, 30) requires a total of six ingredients: noodles, canned corned beef, onion, and condensed cream of chicken soup, milk, and buttered crumbs. The recipe specified that "canned pork luncheon meat may be substituted for the corned beef and macaroni for the noodles. Use any cream soup and add cubed cheese if you wish" (30). Mrs. Annie A. Bake's (Windsor; 1955, 18) recipe for Eggs and Chips Casserole would probably raise most contemporary eyebrows as it asks for "18 unbroken potato chips, 6 hard-cooked eggs, 2 cans cream of mushroom soup, 2 cups milk, 2 cups crumbled potato chips, ¼ cup chopped, canned pimento, salt, pepper to taste, ½ green pepper." In 1968, in the last edition of the contest, the two winning recipes from the Quick and Easy category are both casseroles: Tuna-Chip Casserole (Mrs. Delores Wickstrom, Fort Frances, Ontario; 1968, 68) and Quick Economy Casserole (Mrs. D. Harley, Calgary; 1968, 68).

However, a casserole also allowed for the exercise of gourmet sensibilities, especially in the sixties, manifested through the integration of multiple types of seafood, experimentation with new ingredients, and use of copious amounts of cheese. Barbecued Pork Chops Casserole (Mrs. H. A. Hanson, Fredericton, New Brunswick; 1952, 33) required that the barbecue sauce be made at home, using ketchup, fat, Worcestershire sauce, vinegar, water, and salt; four pork chops required browning before being baked together with lima beans (canned or cooked) and cream-style canned corn. Recipes that brought fish into casseroles, such as Scalloped Fish (Mrs. R. A. Schaefer, Bolton, Ontario; 1953, 30), which asked for cooked fish rather than canned, and Tuna Scallop (Mrs. C. Thompson, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island; 1952, 30), which required the making of a French-inspired white sauce and also fresh parsley, demanded more care for ingredients and preparation than a quick casserole. Other cooks, including a few men, brought the casserole to a whole new level by nodding to culinary skills identified with French gastronomy. Salmon Casserole au Gratin (Mr. John Quail, Oakville, Ontario; 1959, 50) was quite an involved dish, requiring a long list of ingredients, including Madeira wine, fresh sockeye salmon (with bones removed), fresh tomatoes (peeled), and old Canadian Cheddar cheese. Crusty Corned-Beef Casserole introduced a crust made out of biscuit mix and included fresh asparagus, if available (Mrs. A. E. Lepage, Halifax; 1959, 50). The Hot Pot Clam Casserole (Mrs. I. M. Goulter, Carmacks, Yukon; 1961, 68) incorporated chili pepper, celery seeds, and fresh parsley into a chowder-like baked dish.

A survey of recipes for casseroles from the various issues of the contest suggests that oftentimes the casserole acted as a canvas for combining ingredients in a myriad of creative ways, while serving the requirement for healthy and tasty food cooked for the family. While many rules for what constituted proper nutrition and care for one's family diets circulated in the fifties and sixties, the recipes for casseroles incorporated tensions

rather than homogeneity. In certain cases, recipes were unapologetically unhealthy, while one could assume they tasted quite good—for example, the Crusty Corned-Beef Casserole and the Bacon-Mushroom Casserole. Sherries Innes, writing about American women in the postwar period, argues that their reintegration to the domestic sphere after spending time in the workforce during the war was done, partially, through the cookbook and food industry. According to Inness (2001b, 142),

> cooking literature conveyed three important lessons. First, women should develop their creativity in the kitchen. This was easy to do by concocting a simple dish—the casserole—that allowed for tremendous variation. Second, women should recognize that the kitchen was no longer the stodgy, old-fashioned place it had been in their mothers' time. . . . Third, women did not have to spend all day in the kitchen. Utilizing modern foodstuffs . . . they could prepare meals and still have time for their personal activities.

Inness (2001b, p. 154) observes that cooking literature, including women's magazines, contributed to the Happy Housewife image, heavily critiqued by Betty Friedan (1963) in *The Feminine Mystique*. While Inness accounts for the fact that women's realities were stereotyped under this ideological trope, she fails to see that women were not static receivers of their social duties. An analysis of the recipes sent in by home cooks from all over Canada to *Chatelaine* demonstrate that women not only spoke back to media messages but actively contributed to the shaping of their own identities through the ingredients they selected to feature in recipes. Valerie Korinek ([2000] 2013) advocates for a nuanced view of audiences as active and participatory, arguing for the interactive and conversational tone of the magazine. The agency of Canadian housewives was very much visible in the recipes they authored, which situated them in positions of power vis-à-vis the bodies that composed their families, and also their own. The popularity of casseroles dishes in the fifties and sixties was not a sign of conformity to social norms and expectations but was a way to take back the kitchen as a space for creativity and efficiency.

Conclusions: Bodies, Recipes, and Information

This article contributes to the information behavior literature by suggesting one way in which historical archival sources can be utilized to access information about sensorial matters. The recipe, when read in context and in conversation with other similar culinary texts, is a multisensorial information-rich text that connects information visible in the recipe—ingredients, cooking guidelines, tips and author's biography—with the many ways in which food acts upon the cultural and social fabric in specific historical contexts. The focus of this article, which tackles recipe submissions from Canadian housewives to the popular "Fifty Favorite Family Recipes" contest run by *Chatelaine* magazine from 1951 until 1968, is on the relation

between recipes and the social and cultural conditions of women's lives in the fifties and sixties. An overview of recipes for casseroles suggests conclusions contrary to many academic studies that look at housewives as lacking agency when confronted with their prescribed social roles (Inness 2001b). Even the work of Laura Shapiro (2004), while discovering that the realities of women's lives in the fifties and sixties were much more tensed and complex than the images left in media discourse, does not account for the fact that housewives and home cooks were not spectators to their own lives but participated in the creation of culinary culture by making informed decisions as to what ingredients went into a dish, creating trends, and contributing to the formation of Canadian culinary culture.

Notes

1. I will refer to the contest throughout the article as "50 Favorite."
2. The title of the special annual feature, which became a contest in 1954, changed as follows: 1951, "Fifty Favorite Recipes from Chatelaine Councillors"; 1952 – 1953, "Fifty Favorite Recipes"; 1954–1959, "Fifty Favorite Family Recipes"; 1960–1968, "Family Favorites Recipe Contest."
3. All references to the year of publication of contest recipes refer to the January issue of the stated year.

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Irina D. Mihalache studies what people eat in museums, which opens up several research routes. First, the research problematizes the absence of the museum restaurant in museum studies literature. Second, focusing on the archives of the Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto) and the Seattle Art Museum, it examines the role of the women's committees in transforming museums into relevant social spaces through culinary programming. Finally, Prof. Mihalache's work is concerned with the inequalities evident in the history of producing culinary knowledge and culture by paying attention to migrant food cultures in relation to the formation of a mainstream Canadian cuisine.