



PREFACE

MANY YEARS AGO, my sister, Elisabeth, left Montréal to go study math and philosophy at university in Boston. On a visit home, she told us a joke she had heard, which appropriately enough merged the two subjects in which she was then immersed. It went something like this:

René Descartes walks into a bar. The bartender looks up at him and asks, “the usual, René?” The philosopher ponders the question for a moment, then announces, “I think not,” and promptly disappears.

I was thoroughly frustrated, at age fifteen, by this joke, never having encountered Descartes’ famous statement, *cogito ergo sum*, linking thought with being, and underpinning the scholarly humour my sister had started to appreciate. But I was also frustrated, and scared, by the emerging distance between Elisabeth and me that the joke reinforced. She had gone back to the city where we had both been born (though lived only briefly), perhaps refinding a more comfortable sense of belonging there, and leaving me alone to develop an anglo-montréalais identity of my own. She had become clever and witty in that place, and

though I would later adopt this joke as my own—including the significance of its bar setting—it highlighted the reality that a separation can grow between even the closest of siblings.

Today, some twenty-five years later, cocktails and identity and place have become major themes in my life. In September 2009, I began a project within the graduate design program at Concordia University, centered on these ideas. The Bar N+1 was an interactive installation, based on the notion that ordering and drinking a cocktail is a process of self-definition. By stripping away some of the cultural baggage around alcohol and brands and interior design and music and lighting, I wanted to understand how we might express our personality through a cocktail order. *I'm a martini drinker* or *I prefer it on the rocks, not too sweet* or simply, *the usual, please*. The bartender who mixes up your order creates an interpretation of your expressed desire—not an exact representation of it. It is filtered through the bartender's impression of you in that moment, as well as through his or her own personality. Finally, by consuming, you alter yourself, even if only a little bit, and only for a short time. You are what you drink.

Like my sister, I too went away from the city of my youth to study, but my travels and experiences brought me back to Montréal. My being needed to find its home base. I sampled (and made) many drinks along the way, adding bartender to my own identity mix, and becoming fascinated with how an individual, or a place, might be represented by a cocktail. This book, then, is the Bar N+1, plus one: the next iteration of my project on cocktails and identity. As Québec's food and drink culture grows—we're seeing more and more bars and restaurants offering the latest in

mixology—it's an appropriate time to think about where we have come from, gastronomically, and where we are going. How would a bartender interpret Québec if the province walked in, plunked itself down on a stool, and placed an order?

To M. Descartes' great statement, then, I offer a variant: *bibito ergo sum*. For it is perhaps by both thinking *and* drinking that we can say and enact who we truly are. At least until the next round.

—D.S.

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