

Training Tastes

A Relational Approach to Food, Taste, and the Senses

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Abstract

This thesis explores the ways in which taste is mobilized as a sensory, cultural, and political force in contemporary Western societies. My explorations derive from a context in which there is a growing dissatisfaction with the quality of food and this is seen as severely impacting upon social and cultural structures and institutions and as altering people's health, habits and ways of life. This thesis investigates in what way taste and people's sensuous engagement with food offers insight into the nature of relations between people, food, and environs. It further examines how such relations tackle the transmogrification of food and the systems supporting it, how these surpass dichotomous views of fast and slow food, and how these redefine essential dimensions of what it is that constitutes food and eating. I show that taste, rather than being a static attribute which determines people's choices and status, is an active process of exploring, learning, and knowing.

The analysis of relations between people, food and the senses is grounded in ethnographic research pursued with the Slow Food Movement in Britain. This international organization, originating in Italy, advocates that the education of taste is imperative and people need to develop and deepen their knowledge about food by eating produce which is produced, sourced, sold and prepared in sustainable and equitable ways. The thesis discusses discursive and embodied ways of engaging with food and proposes approaching the formation and training of taste in terms of patterns of perceptual experience. In highlighting food tasting as a sensory practice, I introduce the notion of sensory pageantry and evaluate several tensions and contestations around speedier and slower modalities of experiencing taste. Thus, I demonstrate that training techniques of remembering, repeating, rebalancing and fine-tuning hone taste into a skill and mode of knowing. This thesis argues that taste is relational and multi-sensuous.

Methodologically, this thesis takes an interdisciplinary perspective and draws on arguments, concepts and theories from anthropology and sociology, cultural geography and ecological psychology. Furthermore, this thesis introduces storytelling as a way of 'capturing' the evanescent and fleeting character of taste.

Acknowledgments

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere

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Preface

For a long time now I have been intrigued by how food reveals people's relationship to eating in terms of distance or proximity to the body, the self, the objects of consumption, other people, and more largely to socio-natural environments. In this way, philosophical writings on the predicament of humans to engage with the world through dual modes of reflection and perception have impinged on my thoughts. Curtin and Heldke's edited volume on *Cooking, Eating, Thinking. Transformative Philosophies of Food* (1992) figured as an early trigger of my intellectual quest for approaching and grasping people's relationships with food. The authors evaluate how deep-seated patterns in the Western tradition of separating between mind and body, subject and object, have installed a range of hierarchies and oppositions that encouraged a view of food and eating as a rather insignificant domain compared to other more noble human intellectual pursuits of constructing meaning in and of the world.

But this thesis does not attempt to establish the worthiness of studying food or to bring food back into the mind. Traditional food and taste studies have contributed a lot in this respect. It has been shown that eating is part of the process of civilization (i.e. Mennell 1984) and that it can figure as an utmost symbol of aesthetic refinement (predominant here are elaborate descriptions of French cuisine of the 18th and 19th century) and further that status and hierarchies are kept in place through class-defined modes of eating (for instance Bourdieu 1984). But such accounts in my view are insufficient to account for current challenges posed to food systems in terms of addressing more sustainable ways of eating and living in the world. Discourses, practices, mobilities, and power relations of the most diverse kinds surpass classes and groups and act on scales which do alter the ways people eat and think with foods.

The challenge which this thesis engages with is not to overcome binary understandings, but rather to find new ways of addressing them and exploring what they *do* to people, and how they impinge upon discourses and practices. In this respect, the thesis engages with several relations and relationalities between concepts, categories and practices rather than assuming the rigidity of some such dualisms. This thesis offers a modest attempt to exemplify such a challenge and shows how discursive and material embodied forms of talking about, looking at, and tasting food and drink in more or less public tasting and dining situations complicate or dilute neat boundaries between categories of food and forms of engagement with food. It presents cases and instances which seem to suggest that people's multiple interests and pleasures with food denote more than simple displays of likes, knowledges, and group belonging. Attention to food initiates novel ways to re-engage bodies and selves with the vitality of food and in this way experience anew and more intensely the care involved in eating and growing food, the sociality of sharing foods, and the often idiosyncratic cycles of socio-natural environments.

The start of my PhD research was marked on a more personal level by a variety of encounters with food and people. A dozen of us coming from various corners of the world started the PhD programme in Lancaster a few years ago and we decided to meet every Sunday to share a meal together. Each one of us cooked traditional meals from our country of origins and these meetings provided us with a joy and intensity of living in our new place which in time created very strong bonds and friendships which outlasted all the subsequent years. It also got us more attached to the new place which was to be our home for several years and provided the imaginative and material nourishment for each of our different journeys and quests.

In light of the above encounters and the ethnographic research pursued in Britain with groups keen to know foods, tastes and people, this thesis asks the following questions: Why is it that taste, as a sensory and cultural faculty, has recently become mobilized by discourses and practices that aim to intervene in the way we eat, produce, trade, and talk about foods? In what way does the Slow Food Movement in particular articulate the politics of food? What is specific about the micro-practices of taste as enacted by the Movement and are they a reflection of more general eating patterns? To what extent can we talk about a process of training of taste and the senses that may ignite the formation of skills and knowledges?

Chapter 1 Introduction

There is something fascinating about the capacity of food and eating to enable and disclose a multitude of relationships with people, our own body and self, and the environment in which one lives. The senses are the mediators of these relationships as much as they are the catalysts of the experience of tasting and eating. In their role as mediators and catalysts, they not only connect but also separate, fragment, draw close and away. The taste of a certain food or dish evokes the memories of childhood, as Proust famously experienced while eating a Madeleine. The smells, colours, and textures of shared meals strengthen bonds among friends and family. But food can also estrange people. The taste of some foods fades or even turns into disgust when people find no psychological and/or cultural basis for engagement with foods. The different experiences with food shape the nature of the senses and the way they get formed and transformed in time. The thesis analyses the processes of sensuous engagements between people and food.

My thesis found inspiration in a broad and diverse range of approaches in anthropology and sociology which include but also go beyond the literature which is strictly focused on food, taste and the senses. Thus I deploy arguments from the fields of phenomenology and ecological psychology, material culture and cultural geography. In the Introduction I explain some of the reasons, advantages, as well as challenges of cutting across such a wide spectrum of research. I thus hope to shed light on people's relation to food by ways of tasting, eating, talking, thinking, and moving. I also aim to explore, through the lens of taste, the nature of food as a hologram, or, in other words, the capacity of foods to reveal wider cultural aspects

and patterns at the same time that cultural aspects and patterns are revealed in the taste of foods.

Why food taste and the senses?

My interest in food is closely connected to my personal and academic paths over the past years. Ever since I studied anthropology as a postgraduate student, I came to see food as a vital part of everyday living and to think of how the myriad of ways in which it is made, used and thought of, reflects infinite and complex dimensions of people's individual, social, cultural, economic, political, and material lives. But food is not simply a medium or index through which larger dimensions of life can be approached and understood. Food as a lived and sensuous experience also plays a role in the constitution and development of such dimensions. Equally, however, such dimensions can in their turn affect the way people live with foods. I am aware that with these few sentences I already touched upon major research streams which have marked anthropological and sociological thought for a long time. These regard issues of representation, experience, and discourse. Most certainly, such issues are extremely complex and ongoing matters of debate in social sciences. And, to be sure, it is beyond the scope and confines of a doctoral thesis to define their nature and the relation to one another. My aim in this chapter is to point to the fact that issues such as representation, experience, and discourse have traditionally tended to be researched separately from one another. This in my view is unsatisfactory because it undermines the inherently reflexive character of food: as an index of larger contexts and structures, as lived experience in itself, and as informed and shaped by contexts and structures. Below, I refer to some such streams of research (like symbolic,

material, sensory approaches) but in doing so, far from being exhaustive in my review, I selectively refer to research done in the areas not only of food but also, and more specifically, on taste and the senses. Thus I introduce a necessary and more promising link between the areas of food, taste, and the senses. The link between food-taste-senses informs my thesis and also reflects the particular nature of empirical investigation which I pursue.

In order to pursue the link between food taste and the senses, I find it necessary to reveal some aspects which shape and define such a link. One aspect is reflexivity. Reflexivity encompasses all possible interactions between people and food. To begin with, I first think of reflexivity in terms of various movements and changes which might act as a trigger for perception. These can range as broadly as changes in everyday ways of cooking, experiences of other ways of eating and cooking through travel, or through dining out, to various discourses on what and how to eat. In this sense, I see the tiniest variation or change in diet as having the potential to instantly or gradually trigger questions, judgments, emotions, and experiences. All these constitute and shape people's relations with their selves, with others, and with their surroundings. At the same time, eating as a regular and repetitive practice provides continuity, rhythm and support to the unfolding of people's lives. Thus, it is the conjunction between repetition and variation which provokes questions and puzzles and which at the same time provides incentives for gaining insights into the nature of people's various relations to food.

So, for me, moving home to study abroad and visiting many places in Europe were perhaps the biggest changes which made me reflect more about food. Thus, I came to see food, for instance, as a reminder of parental care, and also as an expression of freedom, as a sign of hospitality, or as a symbol of tradition, as a sign of

abundance or one of greed. This metonymical potential of food to point to meanings larger than the sum of the ingredients which went into its production and preparation is something which is experienced by most people and not only by me. It is also something which captured the imagination of many anthropologists who engaged with exploring the symbolic dimensions of food and eating. Before I refer to some of these streams of research I want to add that the range of changes and fluctuations and the cognitive and embodied experiences which accompany eating are virtually inexhaustible and differ with individuals, age, gender, life-stage, and historical epoch. Thus, as I will point out later in this section, for me it is the way variation or change in diet acts as catalyst of experiences rather than the content and nature of such variation and change that is stimulating.

It is at the intersection between issues of meaning, materiality, and change (perceived in their broadest sense) that many traditional anthropological and sociological works on food situate themselves. Classical anthropological approaches to food have a long tradition in studying the symbolic, material and evolutionary aspects of social groups. Prominent are Levi-Strauss' structural approach to food as a transformation process of nature into culture (1965), Douglas' symbolic approach to concepts of taboo and risk (1966), and Harris' cultural materialist and evolutionary perspective on rituals of eating (Harris 1987; Harris & Ross 1987). While these works were prominent in laying the grounds for food studies, they have been confined to the foci set by traditional anthropological research in non-western areas.

One groundbreaking work in mapping the complex entanglements between the Western and non-Western parts of the world is Mintz's monograph on the social, economic and political transformations brought about by the production and consumption of sugar (1986). Thus, he revealed the significance of changes in diet

across nations and their lasting imprints in time, throughout decades and even centuries. Such early work has brought to the surface the fact that, once the production and consumption of food becomes complicit (entangled) in larger structural societal changes, people's eating habits and the meanings attached to them undergo significant alterations. It is not only that food and habits change but also that these changes impact people's selves, identities and ways of lives. Sociological approaches engaged with examining the implications of such changes and addressed especially the extent to which these disrupt and alienate or by contrast re-connect aspects of people's lives (see Beardsworth and Keil 1997; Caplan 1997; Lupton 1996). Some of these works explore food in relation to major traditional themes in sociology concerning the effects of industrialization, globalization, and modernization (see Ritzer 2004).

With this cursory view over anthropological and sociological approaches to food my aim was, on the one hand, to point to the very broad and rich spectrum of issues which food uncovers. On the other hand, point that the resulting diversification of issues (such as identity, symbolism, or economy) highlighted through food encouraged the development of research into more and more separate (sub-)fields and this separation, in my view, acts as detrimental to grasping the nature of people's relation to food. Ironically, it is indicative of the very fragmentation of relations and experiences in late modernity that such approaches address and criticize. The embodied dimension of the practice of eating tends to disappear and this reinforces the very problems and/or dual understandings which newer anthropological and sociological research emerging in the past two decades tries to tackle.

While there are many reasons for the relative absence of the embodied and practised dimensions of food, the most obvious one is the separate study of food and

the senses, or food and taste, and consequently a lack of a theoretical conceptualization thereof.

A reflection and response to the absence of embodied and practiced dimensions of taste is mirrored in the classic work of Bourdieu on taste, *Distinction* (1984). Bourdieu's theoretical and empirical explorations of the relation between people and things are driven by a tension which lies at the very heart of the notion of taste. It lies between taste as an innate sensibility and as a set of cultural preferences and aesthetic judgments: "The dual meaning of the word 'taste' [...] must serve to remind us that taste in the sense of the 'faculty of immediately and intuitively judging aesthetic values' is inseparable from taste in the sense of the capacity to discern the flavours of the food" (Bourdieu 1984: 99). Thus, Bourdieu was among the first to signal the intertwining between the materiality of food, the human sensory abilities, and practices. But grasping the nature of this entangled relation proved difficult in view of this dual understanding of taste and did not result in a firm systematic theoretical structuring and conceptualization. However, reviewers of Bourdieu's work stress that what Bourdieu offers is a method: a way of looking at societies, a way of asking questions (Harker *et al.* 1990: 195). The implications of such a route are that the *processes* which stem from the entanglement between materiality, senses, and objects are those which need to be devoted attention.

That this tension in the very meaning of taste lies at the core of a whole set of explorations on taste and that it reaches beyond social sciences to the history of Western philosophical thought is demonstrated by Korsmeyer (1999; 2005). Philosopher Korsmeyer states that "among the paradoxes that surround taste, few loom larger than the fact that taste is supposed to be little more than a bodily sensation, yet at the same time it provides the metaphor for the finest cultivation of

perceptual experience” (2005: 6). In this way, Korsmeyer signals some pervading dualisms that have long plagued Western thought such as that between mind and body, sensation and perception, or thought and experience. Korsmeyer also points further to more puzzles: “tastes are subjective but measurable, relative to culture and to individual, yet shared; fleeting sensations that nonetheless endure over many years in memory; transient experiences freighted with the weight of history” (2005: 8). These puzzles are certainly intriguing as they are exciting for sociology and anthropology which are concerned, by force of their tradition, with the enduring and defining social, cultural, and historical aspects of people’s ways of knowing and being in the world rather than the individual psychology or the biological mechanisms involved therein.

Taste is however but one element of food and eating practices. While I regard it as important to establish and acknowledge the relation between food and taste, at the same time it is problematic to restrict the discussion to these two aspects. This is so because most human engagements with that which surrounds them involve many senses and consequently, the whole body. Therefore, eating is a multisensory practice, and so too is growing, buying, or even thinking about food. In this respect, there is a growing body of literature which calls for a closer examination of the senses and for a more sensuously informed research in the social sciences (see Howes 2003). Howes argues in favour of a sensuous turn in scholarship and explains that this is “partly a reaction against the incorporeality of conventional academic writing” and also “a challenge to what has been called the hegemony of vision in Western culture” (2003: XII). Because the senses are organized in different ways and ratios to one another depending on cultures, Howes also advocates “for the value of undertaking a *relational* study of the sensorium, rather than examining one sensory field in

isolation” (2003: 10, original emphasis). One important contribution brought by anthropological studies of the senses is in emphasizing the cultural basis of the senses and their variations across cultures (Classen 1993; Geurts 2002).

While such studies are invaluable for their fruitful expansion of the research of the senses, they have been criticized for having failed to go beyond the dualistic conceptualizations between the mind and the body. Ingold contends that such theories rest “on a fundamental distinction between physical and cultural dimensions of perception, the former having to do with the registration of sensations by the body and brain, the latter with the construction of representations in the mind” (2000: 283). He further explains that it is not the varieties of sensory experience, generated in the course of people’s practical, bodily engagement with the world around them, which is of concern for such theories, but rather with how this experience is ordered and made meaningful within the concepts and categories of their culture (2000: 283). My thesis does not deal directly with such issues but rather develops against this problematic background. I rather suggest two productive roots by which such problems can be addressed. First, I engage with some of the tensions at the root of the notion of taste and senses (referred to above). Second, in using theoretical tools from various fields in the social sciences, I suggest that exploring the senses from an interdisciplinary perspective can provide some ways to better tackle the limitations shown by the anthropology of the senses.

In this sense, sociology has advanced some ways in which the sensory relations can be fruitfully interwoven with larger theoretical issues, and with the discourses and practices of people. As such, Macnaghten and Urry demonstrate the role of the senses in embedding and embodying people’s responses to and ways of knowing nature (1998: chapter 4). Thus they reveal that there are a variety of ways to

engage with 'nature' and this has implications for the way human-nature relationships are conceptualized. Also, and more recently, Urry advocates that the sensing of objects and places should constitute a central concern of a sociology of mobility (2000: chapter 4).

Thus my aim in this thesis is to approach the relation between food, taste and the senses in such a way that these relations mirror larger social issues and, in turn, how such issues are mirrored in the embodied ways in which people experience food. Of particular interest in this sense, is the recent wave of what I call food advocacy (see Chapter 2) which implies more or less normative ways of guiding how people are to consume food. In relation to this I examine various forms of expertise which shape and mediate the ways in which people eat and taste (see Chapter 2, 4, and 5). In doing this, I illuminate the different forms of such expertise in relation to larger trends in society. Bauman (1989) for instance, has identified the rise of "interpreters" and the decline of "legislators" in postmodern culture, and further what Featherstone called the rise of "cultural intermediaries" (1991). Of concern is also the degree to which such expertise faces a rise of the role of craft as a material interaction and engagement with things (Sennett 2008).

Above all, it is my concern in this thesis to address the sensory modalities of people's forms of eating and tasting as ways of knowing and learning. In this quest then, the practices of people eating and tasting become as important as the discursive ways in which "experts" pursue their ways of recommending and showing. This search for learning, which is a pervasive trait of the Slow Food Movement where I undertook ethnographic research, corresponds to a larger characteristic of Western contemporary life of searching for meaning signalled by Bauman in *Liquid Modernity* (2000). And this is more generally paralleled in the rise and importance of reflexivity

in late modern societies. In this sense, more aspects of reflexivity than the ones referred to at the start of this introduction become relevant. Lash and Urry (1994) underline that it is not solely cognitive reflexivity, but also and pervasively, aesthetic reflexivity which permeates late modern life. For Lash and Urry aesthetic reflexivity involves *self-interpretation* and the interpretation of social background practices and is different from cognitive reflexivity which is a matter of ‘monitoring’ of the self, and of social-structural roles and resources (1994: 5). Lash and Urry capture a crucial shift in emphasis from the modern to the late modern experience of the world. It is a shift which includes something more than Bauman (1989) showed in the distinction between legislators and interpreters (see Chapter 5). It includes a detached sense of observation of the world and the self but one which is not founded on a separation between self and world, or an exclusive tracing of boundaries around what is unique and distinctive about a person. Lash and Urry emphasize further that “if cognitive reflexivity presupposes judgment, then aesthetic reflexivity, hermeneutically and with Gadamer is grounded in ‘pre-judgements’” and add that “if cognitive reflexivity assumes a subject-object relationship of the self to itself and the social world, then aesthetic and hermeneutic reflexivity assumes a self which is at the same time a being-in-the-world” (1994: 4f).

Why Slow Food?

In looking for a field where the relation between food taste and the senses can be addressed and explored I encountered the Slow Food Movement. Slow Food is a social movement which has its roots in Italy but spread across the globe during the twenty years since it was formed. It is concerned with protecting traditional foods,

food habits, food knowledges and practices of small farmers and producers. They advocate that education of taste is a primary means of ensuring that tastes do not become homogeneous or disappear altogether. In my thesis, I investigate some of the practices whereby the Movement seeks to induce awareness of the senses and the protection of tastes.

From what I could, at first, learn from its websites¹ and print magazines *Slow*², the organization seemed interesting for various reasons stemming from the broad spectrum of issues it aims to bring together. The organization aims to preserve local foods and traditions by supporting small-scale production and producers. It does so by calling upon consumers and political organizations to engage with the knowledge of food production and provenance while also minding social and equitable values thereof. In this sense, their activities comprise cataloguing of specific food products, guides to food and places, and the forming of groups or communities around foods or producers and geographical groups which are to steer independently and on a voluntary basis various food-related activities like taste workshops, food fairs, visit to farms, or dining events.

One particular characteristic which struck me from the very beginning is that the organization employs the notion of taste as a prime incentive and major objective of its activities, where taste means both the sensory features of foods as well as the contextual traits attached to its uses. In other words, economic, social, political, and cultural matters regarding food revolve around taste. This made me ask later on, and indeed became one of the questions to drive my further research, in what way taste is mobilized in the discourses and practices of the Movement. There are certainly many, organizations, NGOs, social movements, or consumer action groups which deal with

¹ See <http://www.slowfood.com/>, accessed 16/05/07

² See <http://editore.slowfood.com/editore/eng/slow.lasso>, accessed 04/06/2007

food issues on a local and global scale and they are characteristic for the late 20th and early 21st century which is faced with food and natural risks and hazards, poverty and hunger in the Global South, equitable distribution, obesity and many other food-related health issues, to name but a few. But, from what I know, none of them overtly names taste as a source of debate or exploration. This does not mean, however, that taste needs to be a discursive category in order for it to be approached and explored. It only means that the fact that it is addressed makes my exploration in the context of this particular organization more likely to yield data (but see more section on Methods in this chapter). Also, as I discuss later on, the fact that taste is such an evanescent and transient sense and perhaps less verbalized than other senses, such a context is more likely to provide the space for various articulations and negotiations to take place about homogenization processes and diversification strategies of taste.

Moreover, the organization is not only keen to engage with the protection of certain foods and the support of small-scale products, but also and equally important for them is to address culturally specific and often traditional ways of eating. In this sense, eco-gastronomy means for them not only caring for products and producers but also caring for those habits which make food enjoyable and memorable. The social and convivial aspects become thus a core fundament for the discourses and practices of the organization.

One of the main issues which fuelled the formation of the organization was a sense of alienation from food and place in the face of accelerated changes driven by globalization. Especially disruptive was the sweeping homogenization of markets and places propelled mostly through the growth of transnational corporations and the fast food industries. The implication of such perspectives is the ways in which changes of foods and their taste affects the embodied experience of people. It brings up questions

regarding the loss of tastes and consequently of the memories related to the consumption of specific foods. In this sense, I discuss and address some of the temporal dimensions of taste and tasting in Chapters 5 and 7.

Given that the Slow Food Movement addresses phenomena which affected not only Italy but most of the regions of the Western world, any such region seemed appropriate for conducting fieldwork research. Furthermore, and irrespective of political, economic, or historical specificities, taste and eating are processes which everyone experiences. It is an existential component of people's lives. However, the decision to focus my research in Britain resulted out of a mix of personal 'gut' feelings and curiosity and an intellectual baggage of academic literature concerned with human-nature relationships pursued by British social sciences (especially at Lancaster University) and often in relation to the specificities of Britain as a historical and geographical location. Food is a form of attachment which evolves in relation to the environment. This does not sound too far-fetched to me, especially because, as Allen Weiss contends, "cuisine is a function of the *genius loci*, the spirit of the place" (2004: 26, original emphasis). Later in this chapter, I explain that the relation food-taste-senses must acknowledge its wider reaching connections to the environment. Further, and broader, issues which contribute to my decision are the particular cultural and historical configurations of Britain such as the industrialization, modernization, colonial history, and more recently, several environmental crises, all of which impinge on people's relation with food. So, rather than one single aspect, it is more a configuration of aspects which together incite exploration. The roots are mainly historical: separation from the land, modernization in the aftermath of the World wars, and a colonial past. All these left marking imprints on food production and consumption and also gave rise to a diverse mix of various forms of eating and

cuisines. Further, and more recent, changes came in conjunction with environmental concerns.

Slow Food reviewed

In order to further stress the emphasis on the relational approach to food, taste and the senses proposed in this thesis, in the following I draw a critical overview of several academic stances regarding the Slow Food Movement. Thus this section refers back to and reinforces the importance of tracing links between food, taste and the senses, as well as points forward and underlines some of the advantages of using a relational approach for exploring such links. My aim is not solely to outline issues related to the Slow Food Movement, but also to highlight wider ranging implications for empirical and theoretical issues on food, taste and the senses more generally.

Among some of the early writings on the Slow Food Movement are several articles published in *Food, Culture, and Society* in 2004 and these mainly refer to the US context. Several of the concerns and critiques raised revolve around the underlying belief that the movement occupies an oppositional and defensive stance towards globalization (Gaytán 2004) and modernity (Laudan 2004). In this way, Gaytán aligns the Slow Food Movement with anti-globalization movements such as the one initiated in France by José Bové which posits itself in direct opposition to fast food. She further attempts to explore the Movement as manifestations of “new local imaginaries” of temporary collective conviviality (2004: 106) and concludes by describing the movement and its members as devoted to tradition and the past (2004: 109f). Laudan follows a similarly dualistic line of argument, focusing on the elite character of gastronomy. She argues that gastronomy is the preserve of rich, white,

middle class westerners and has, in fact, been relatively restricted phenomenon in world history (2004: 134). Slow Food for Laudan occupies a very uncomfortable position in conjunction with what she calls “culinary modernism” (2001, 2004). Laudan extols “culinary modernism” for having “brought to an end, at least in the West, a two-tier system of eating” where the “upper tier, the rich and powerful, had dined on meat and the more prestigious grains such as rice or wheat” and “the lower tier, [...] had survived on grains perceived as less desirable such as oats, millet, or maize with only the occasional bit of meat to liven up their meals” (2004: 135). So for Laudan, Slow Food is simply reproducing a dual system of eating that relies on cultural amnesia and disregard of the historical developments which increased food availability and also decreased food prices. In my view, Laudan relies on false assumptions by fully embracing ‘modern’ culinary ideologies which have propelled wheat and meat as the ultimate refined nutritional goods. Moreover, her categorization of the food items cited above, suggest a static view and symbolism of food. She disregards the fact that the meanings and uses of food change over time (see Appadurai 1986); and further the porosity of boundaries between groups and categories with the trickling-down and –up of goods and their meanings and uses. These processes alone dislocate and alter the stability or fixity of diets, concepts, and groups. As I will show, the wide selection of food items used within the Slow Food Movement already suggests that people interrogate and re-define the uses and meanings/ideologies of certain items. Such critical stances are present also in various food advocacy writings (see Chapter 2).

Gaytán and Laudan’s critiques might reflect very particular manifestations of the Movement in some parts of the US but, as I show in this thesis, cases from England demonstrate a different picture. Thus, I complement and to some extent

contest the authors above in arguing that discourses, narratives and brief observations of Slow Food events (which the authors above draw upon) render but one level of understanding out of many possible others. One of the most interesting aspects of the Slow Food Movement in England lies in the fact that concepts and projects are constantly and steadily being formed, developed and differentiated. This tends to destabilize any pre-existing notions of ‘modernity’, ‘gastronomy,’ or ‘tradition.’ Even in the early stages of my research this lead me to think about food, taste and the Slow Food Movement more in terms of process rather than the objectification thereof.

More inclined to embrace notions of process and change is Labelle’s *A Recipe for Connectedness* (2004) which approaches the goals of The Slow Food Movement in terms of attempts to bridge the spheres of consumption and production. She does not critique the Movement as a failed attempt to offer a solution for world food supply as Laudan does (a stance similar to the ‘modern’ concept of grand narratives and grand solutions). Instead, Labelle focuses on certain key aspects which may positively shape the future of food: knowledge and networks. Labelle connects the discourses of the Slow Food Movement to a developing tradition in social science which scrutinizes alternative food systems in conjunction with consumer knowledges (such as developed by Goodman and DuPuis 2002, Goodman 2003, Lockie 2002, or Marsden et al. 2000). Such approaches are important not only in that they ascertain the role of consumption as a key player in the transformation of food systems. They also bring to the surface the notion of agency and its distribution not only in economic but also, in cultural spheres of life, while also acknowledging the entanglements of these spheres. Political-economy approaches to the study of alternative food systems (such as for instance Guthman 2003) explore the changing configurations and formation of new differentiations between social groups and also point to how such segmentations of

the market often result in their co-option into mainstream knowledge and networks (see more Chapter 5).

My thesis draws on the importance of attending to embodied ways of knowing food and tastes where the concept of embodiment includes discursive, alongside the non-discursive, forms of relating to food. Slow Food practices in England seem to devote attention to *ways of eating and using specific foods and drinks* (which are not always organic or local, but sometimes mass-produced, and other times imported) rather than concerning themselves with prescriptive, fixed categories. They promote exploratory ways of getting to know tastes over normative stances to knowledge. By focusing on this epistemological search for grasping the multiple dimensions of choosing foods, tasting them, sharing pleasures and dislikes with others, or practicing eating and tasting in particular locales and times, I reveal various facets of the politics of food which the Slow Food Movement participates in. I thus seek to provide some answers to concerns raised by Chrzan over the fact that the Movement “lacks specific action plans to accomplish its goals, because much of the membership and leadership is amateur – very enthusiastic but often inexperienced in marketing, food policy and education” (2004: 127) or “that the structures that would allow individual members to take control of local and regional activities are not yet in place” (2004: 128). Embodied practices based on sensuous understandings of encounters with foods bring to light aspects which more structurally oriented critiques or approaches tend to miss. But structural and embodied approaches do not exclude one another and, as I briefly explain below, there exist several attempts which show how they complement each other or how they can be brought in creative tension to one another.

Attempts to address structural, symbolic and material aspects of taste are mirrored in one of the most famous oeuvres on taste that of Bourdieu (1984). Without

doubt, Bourdieu greatly advanced the ways in which the structuring mechanisms of taste classify the classifier in respect to specific consumption practices of particular social groups and class categories. His work has influenced analyses that focus on the relationship of eating practices to the formation of meanings and social identities. In this respect, Feuerbach's much circulated phrase "you are what you eat" resonates with Bourdieu's arguments. Bourdieu's explorations helped not only differentiate the various forms of (cultural, economic) capital involved in consumption practices but also to highlight the active role assumed by people, as consumers, in the development of consumption practices. In this sense, he encouraged many academic developments which came to revise earlier perspectives on conspicuous consumption (Veblen 1953) and he influenced accounts of the democratization of tastes and lifestyles (see for example Shields 1992, Fine and Leopold 1993).

However, Bourdieu emphasised consumption's function as a display of social status and placed less emphasis on the material, sensuous aspects of consumption. This limits the extent to which one can use his theories to grasp the ways in which embodied and sensuous relations brought about by taste make a difference to the actual formation *and* change of tastes. Moreover, his rather rigid conceptualization of habitus as containing weak chances of change, further constrains an analysis of food relations which surpass neat social categories.

Slow Food events, while preponderantly middle-class, do accommodate a mix of people with diverse backgrounds (see Chapters 3 and 7). Also the range of food items such events devote attention to is very broad, ranging from niche and artisanal products to local vegetables. There is further an interest in widening the spectrum of possible modalities of using and preparing such food items rather than in conforming to already existing modes and styles of cooking. For these reasons, Bourdieu's

perspectives did not lend themselves easily to the type of research I pursued with the Slow Food Movement. Class certainly remains an important conceptual category. Pietrykowski elaborates on slow food consumption practices and credits these as investing in the increase of social capital and regards this as supportive of environmentally conscious stances towards consumption (2004). Class is not only relevant to Britain or other countries in the West but also to China. Recent documents registering the upsurge in meat consumption among an increasingly wealthy middle class make a strong point in favour of a direct link between symbolic meanings of food and consumption patterns. However, until foods and practices attain their meanings, symbols and status, there are a panoply of processes which develop prior to such a level. Foods often move between categories and change their roles during and according to their use (as argued by Appadurai 1986). Such aspects are further highlighted for instance by Wilk (2006) who critically evaluates distinctions such as fast and slow food in the global food system. Thus the practices of the Slow Food Movement demand an approach that attends to the ways of engaging with, relating to, and knowing and learning foods. These are processes in which all people, irrespective of class, gender or age, are involved in. As I show in the thesis taste is a process of testing and contesting perspectives, habits, and meanings.

Recently research has begun to focus on the relational aspect of the Movement's practices and their embodied, aesthetic and sensuous dimension. Parkins and Craig's book on *Slow Living* (2006) investigates the Slow Food Movement focusing on time and place, pleasure and politics and analyses its ethics and practices in relation to wider manifestations of slower ways of living. A series of essays devoted to the discourses and practices of the Slow Cities Movement grounded in ethnographic research in Britain address corporeal and sensuous dimensions in

relation to the search for sustainable modes of acting and living in the world (see Pink 2007, 2008a, 2008b, and Knox 2005). These works show that people's interest in the quality of food is embedded in patterns and practices of living in certain time-spaces and where the sensuous dimensions of foods and environments shape people's material-imaginative ways of being-in-the world. My research focuses taste as a sensuous practice which informs and shapes the sensuous relations between people and food.

In what way a relational approach to food, taste and the senses?

Many authors have influenced how I conceive and approach the relation between food, taste and the senses. To a large extent, my approach is shaped by theories outside the immediate field of food studies. It is inspired by approaches developed in environmental anthropology, phenomenological approaches to perception, cultural geography, and the sociology of material culture, consumption, and mobilities.

The thesis uses the notions of food, taste and the senses as tools that facilitate the approach of people's relation with what nourishes and sustain their lives. Thus it does not privilege any of these tools above the others, but rather aims to 'carve' out some of the configurations (or patterns) which they form in several areas of discourse, practice, and in history. More generally speaking, I conceive of the relation between people and food as a relation and engagement between people and the environment which they are part of and which surrounds them. In this sense, I rely on Ingold's notion of environment elaborated in *The Perception of the Environment* (2000). Ingold builds his arguments from the point of view of humans and organisms as

always already part of an environment and where the relations among different entities are in an ongoing process of development. By following Gibson's ecological view of perception (1979), Ingold sees the relation 'organism plus environment' as an indivisible totality which is not a bounded entity but a *process* in real time and always taking on meaning in relation to the observer immersed in his/her environment (2000: 20, original emphasis). Throughout the thesis I engage with the implications of this argument by showing that the meanings of food and the senses are emergent properties rather than given or pre-organized. Ingold's conception of the environment shuns a dualistic view of humans as separate from nature and this has consequences for the way I tackle the critique of alienation and loss sounded not only by the Slow Food Movement but also by several and more pessimistic accounts in sociology in respect to the effects of modernization and globalization of food (as for instance Ritzer's *The McDonaldization of Society* 2004).

The thesis is concerned with defining some ways which make eating and tasting a situated sensory practice. This particular focus of the thesis is informed both by Ingold's argument that the environment is always "*my environment*" (2000: 20) and by Gibson's statement that perception always entails perceiving an object from a point of view in a specific context (1986). Following in this vein, I trace some of the historical, spatial, and temporal dimensions involved in the perception of taste and the practice of eating and tasting. In exploring how I approach these various dimensions, Rodaway's *Sensuous Geographies* (1994) is particularly useful for several reasons. It provided me with a firmer grasp of the fine differences in the terminology of the senses (such as the differences between perception, sensation, and representation). Rodaway deals with some of the tenets of Gibson's ecological view of perception and offers conceptualizations of the sensory forms of experience. Thus he reveals the

spatial and temporal character of the senses and also shows how the various concatenations between the senses are bound with forms of power.

Ingold uses the concept of dwelling in connection to the environment. He considers the environment in relation to the person inhabiting it and it always comes into being and takes on meaning around the inhabitant (see Chapter 1). Dwelling comprises the activities and regular patterns of life which unfold in, and constitute meaningful processes in relation to, a particular environment (2000: Chapter 10). He contrasts the dwelling perspective with the building perspective in order to underline that the emergence of meanings develops in the process of living and in relation to the environment and does not imply an imposition of pre-given meanings on an environment. Thus, on the one hand, he criticizes a social-constructivist perspective in anthropology. On the other hand, he develops and elaborates on the phenomenology of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. He argues that dwelling is embodied, temporal, and emerges through movement. Thus he conjugates phenomenology with the ecological approach of Gibson which regards perception as an activity of the being in the world. In this sense, Ingold asks the question of whether “to regain an appreciation of the human dwelling in the world it is necessary to rebalance the sensorium, giving greater weight to the ear, and less to eye, in the ratio of the sense?” (2000: 155). This thesis considers how the generative relationship between the senses and our surroundings in acts of eating contributes to the embodied, temporal and kinaesthetic dimensions of dwelling.

The analysis of the relation between food, taste and the senses is based on three underlying thematic threads which are traced throughout the thesis. I first identify a tension between biological and cultural aspects of taste in the contemporary context of food advocacy of various food-related discourses and discursive practices.

In delineating such a tension I by no means want to reinforce a dichotomy between biology and culture. Rather, I use these overarching concepts to include aspects of food discourses which tend to, on the one hand, emphasise the physiological, material and sensory dimensions of food and, on the other hand, those which focus on practices, habits, manners and traditions of people. Thus I introduce a slightly different angle of approaching food, taste, and the senses than the one pursued by anthropologists and sociologists of food and the senses referred to earlier in this introduction.

Following on from this tension, I then discuss it further in conjunction with another tension, namely between slow and fast foods. But rather than seeing this latter as an opposition, I explore slow and fast as a matter of alternating sensory practices. This corresponds to an evaluation of perceptual patterns and of the concatenations between the senses. Having analysed some of the patterns which contribute to the formation of the sensorium, I then investigate how these patterns inform the experience of taste, or its performance, its appreciation, and its practice. In this sense, I introduce the notion of difference. I use difference as a broad category and tool which illuminates various levels of engagement with food, and accompanying them, the negotiations and articulations around food and taste among different actors. Moreover, I span multiple forms of such differences while I introduce a conversation with certain theoretical arguments from the phenomenology of perception, actor-network theory, and non-representational theory.

I conclude with showing how the gradual fine-tuning of the senses through repetition, perception of differences, remembering, moving and pausing transforms taste into a sensory practice and skill. Furthermore, I show how such practices engender the experience of multiple temporalities of taste.

Methods and challenges

The thesis explores some of the practices of the Slow Food Movement but is not confined to them. Early chapters explain the multiple connections between the organization's ethos to wider and larger contexts and practices. Thus I draw on information and examples sourced outside the organization. By, for instance, analysing concepts such as 'umami,' 'terroir,' and 'nouvelle cuisine,' I draw on contexts and layers of significance which go beyond their conceptualisation and use within the Slow Food Movement. I show that this mixing of different sources is a fruitful methodological tool in approaching the complex and process character of food, taste, and the senses.

The scale of the research for this thesis includes multi-sited ethnographic research, web research of websites, blogs, and discussion forums, reading of newspaper columns on food, magazines, fiction, and popular-scientific writings on food issues. The choice for these methods emerged in relation and in response to the contingencies of the field, to the relational character of the experience of taste, and to my own familiarization with, and experience of, foodscapes across Britain (with the histories of the places and spaces I visited and lived in, the foods and dishes I have eaten, and the people with whom I shared foods and befriended).

Over the course of two years I engaged in participant-observation for several subsequent days of a week repeatedly in various locations across Britain. I participated in Slow Food events such as food fairs, dinners, talks and tastings, and informally talked and interviewed their members and organizers. In the initial stages of the ethnographic research I established contact with local Slow Food groups and members, in Ludlow, Cumbria, Durham, North Yorkshire, and London. Through informal discussions with the organizing members of the local Slow Food groups, I

gained insight into the ways in which they organized events, how they came to get involved with the Slow Food Movement, what attracted them to volunteer in the organization, and how they related to the aims and the ethos of Slow Food. Some of them later introduced me to other members and participants in the group and agreed to take me along to some of the events which they organized.

Informal talks and interviews in the early stages were difficult at first but subsequent reflection and follow-up semi-structured interviews revealed the more positive and fruitful aspects. I had registered as a Slow Food member as soon as I started my research in order to facilitate access into the field as much as to show my sympathy and enthusiasm for the projects and goals of the Slow Food Movement. But the fact that I was a member did not seem to weigh as much as the fact that I was a PhD researcher on food in Sociology. This role, which I felt was necessary to state while making first contacts, opened doors for me, but sometimes was viewed by some organizers with suspicion and this made them less willing to talk about the organization. Some of the organizers seemed keen to know more about my research than to talk about them and their work, while others conceived of me as an investigator who questions their practices and discourses. Often, organizers reproduced the discourses of the Movement outlined by its founder Carlo Petrini and presented on the Movement's national and international websites and printed in the *Slow Food Companion* and, in abbreviated form, on membership leaflets. Other times, organizers described the goals of the Movement in Britain by relating them to moments in the recent British history which they regarded as significant milestones in the transformation of food cultures in Britain. In this sense, the School Dinner projects initiated by Jamie Oliver, the organic movement, and the upsurge in farmer's markets were dominant in their accounts. Only later during the research did I realize

that the loose articulation of Slow Food was to some extent due to the fact that most of the groups were very young (a few months to two or three years old) and in the process of defining and re-defining their views on Slow Food discourses and practice and how organizers and members envision their contribution. It certainly had to do also with me still figuring as an ‘outsider’ to the groups. However, discussions with organizers and members were all different from one another and shaped by each person’s profession, age, and degree of relatedness to food. And yet, much later in the project, did I realize that the defining and constructing of Slow Food is an ongoing process even when the sense of identity of people as part of a group and organization strengthens.

A further stage of my research involved the refining of interviewing techniques alongside with the familiarization with current and past food-related discourses, projects and organizations in Britain. The beginning of my PhD project represented also the beginning of a new experience of life in a culture which I knew little about except from the memories and images I had formed by reading English literature of the Romantic and Victorian era in high-school in Romania, my country of birth. At least in terms of interviewing and participating in discussions with Slow Food organizers, this proved of little help. Once I extended the knowledge of contemporary foodscapes in Britain, however, the discussions were more complex and acquired multiple layers. Moreover, in time, I discovered that asking about people’s life stories regarding their work and their love of food, proved most revealing for grasping the ways in which people related to food.

The multiple sites which I chose for my research were essential in that they allowed me to compare and contrast the types of activities pursued by the groups, and to single out some of their distinctive traits and commonalities. Moreover, most of the

local groups in England organize around four to seven events a year. It was difficult to engage in continuous intensive research over short time spans; and, as noted above, time was needed to first get familiar with the various members of the group. Another important phase of my research was the trip I undertook to Turin where I attended to the largest Slow Food Fair and gathering of food communities from around the world. There I experienced over a whole week and in a single location: the excitement of an immense food hall; the discourses of scientists and journalists, and of cooks and chefs at conferences; a range of issues and challenges presented by producers and/or group organizers at thematically and regionally organized workshops; cooking demonstrations and food and drink taste sessions; and book launches and film screenings. This experience prompted me to use speedy interviewing techniques of guests as they passed by the food stalls, to hang out with British producers and chat with them about their impressions as they were selling their products and engaging in short interactions with the buyers. I then used speedy interviewing also in Britain at taste workshops and dinner events. Written responses from participants in taste workshops were difficult to get. Rather listening and participating in the conversations unfolding during the event were revealing. Furthermore, once I became a regular presence in the group, conversations flowed more naturally. Even the fact that I was from another country proved of advantage. My physiognomy made them locate me in different parts of the world, and my Latin (Romanian) accent prompted them to start ruminating about their memories and experiences of places in places they visited and foods they ate in Italy or Spain and even Romania. Face-to-face interaction is thus crucial in eliciting 'talk' about taste and food. This thesis does not claim or assume, however, that taste is realized and accomplished through verbal expression alone.

All these experiences led me towards conceiving of taste and the relationship between food, taste and the senses in terms of different patterns of perception and where perception is prompted by contrasts and differences. This thesis analyses a range of such patterns involving speedier and slower patterns of taste. However, ‘capturing’ the experience of taste is a very difficult task. Taste is evanescent and fleeting despite its materialization in foods and drinks and through the act of ingesting and making these part of one’s body. Therefore, I introduce in later chapters ‘stories’ of the events as a method of rendering and evoking the moment and feel of such experiences. Biographies of people are another way of capturing the ways in which taste emerges and operates. Even in the one to two hours interviews which I did with producers and cooks or chefs, and therefore, with people who were engaged with food on a daily basis, taste often emerged indirectly, by asking about the stories of how they came to live and earn their living with foods.

As someone keen on theory, my encounters with the ‘field’ of taste, food, and eating brought the great challenge of how to integrate theory and the practices I observed. My first entrances into the field, as for instance the food fair in Ludlow, felt like a clash between what I was reading at that time, namely, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception ([1945] 2005), and watching people ‘just eating’ and having a good time. Was there a way to bridge the two? Is it worth doing? Or should I just cautiously and conscientiously let myself be lead by what I experience in the field? How does one ‘capture’ and render embodied ways of tasting and eating? These were some of the questions I posed myself. Furthermore, as a trained anthropologist, Geertz’ mantra of “thick description” (1973) was looming even larger in my thoughts and in my exploration of “doing ethnographies” (Cook and Crang 2007).

To some extent, these early stages of research constituted an instance of what it is to separate mind and body, theory and practice. Curtin and Heldke's book (1992) then came to find some kind of resonance with me in my role as researcher. My research felt like 'overcoming' this sense of separation and this feeling did not cease in the early stages of research. This is due, as suggested before, partly to certain ways of asking about food and taste occurring throughout the whole period of fieldwork which tend to end up reproducing boundaries and enforcing the status quo of both people and foods. Asking about people's motivation to join the activities of Slow Food as well as directly inquiring about why people choose particular foods often hinders any possibility of acquiring a sense for the processes which antedate the reflected, reasoned, and verbalized expressions of preferences. In the last few years there emerged some attempts to bring forth more "visceral understandings" which specify the "link between the materialities of food and the ideologies of food and eating" (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2008: 461). The authors engage "governed eating and material geographies [...] with poststructural feminism in order to move towards a non-dualistic, visceral understanding of (everyday) socio-political life" (2008: 461). Thus they follow in the critical steps set forth by Probyn (2001) and Roe (2006) which reject notions that food concerns are solely the domain of an elite. My research is different from the above authors in that it teases out some of the tensions revealed through taste in-between these various levels and follows the formation of taste as a testing and learning process without aiming to reconcile the ideologies and practices. It rather brings them into a conversation with each other.

The progression of my empirical and theoretical research unfolded in ways which eased my own anxieties produced by initial challenges to bridge divides or find a holistic way to account for the experience of food and taste. They configured into

multiple shapes. But let me explain this in more detail. Approaching taste became more an issue of locating and situating where it is that dualisms come to matter, and exploring how these acquire more weight in some circumstances rather than others. In this way, I came to follow the links and traces along which taste is distributed. Furthermore, and as important, this process was joined by my own positioning(s) in the field and by my own process of experiencing, learning, and acquiring a taste for slow foods. My encounters with food had a gradual (but not linear) character in that they sometimes required the sequential use of the senses and/or the rapid accumulation of impressions. For instance the food fairs demanded at first the visual ability to rapidly scan the products while walking among various stalls and these were interspersed with brief chats with producers and visitors which allowed for impressions to form. The flow of such experiences became more complex as the range of activities of taste diversified. Cooking and tasting demonstrations re-shaped the nature of the stream of previously accumulated experiences by stretching the time involved in appreciating food and drink, such that the use of the different senses became more pertinent and brought about a heightened awareness of the processes of tasting and experiencing taste.

The aim of the research on these Slow Food activities was not solely to produce a purely descriptive account of the formation of taste. By relying on autobiographical notes from the field (and following a methodological technique encouraged by authors such as Cook and Crang 2007, Spry 2001, and Wall 2006) the thesis first aims to evoke the character of Slow Food activities, to allow the space for the multiple voices of actors to be rendered and also to engage the reader in navigating the richness of presented materials. However, such aims can be met only

partially, not least due to the impossibility of reproducing the experiential nature of taste and tasting as a practice. But I will come back to this issue shortly.

Secondly, my personal trajectory of learning about slow foods afforded the structural template proposed in this thesis (see section below). Rather than providing a more classical format which first reviews literature and then delves into the empirical material, this thesis engages directly with discourses encountered in the field. It still maintains a certain chronology which develops from discourses towards practices but does not neatly separate the two because both are mutually shaped and both require and rely upon sensuous embodied knowledge. Thus the thesis proposes following taste along various patterns of its formation and experience. The alternation, clash, or coalescence between food advocacies and eating practices, between materialities and imaginaries of taste (more generally referred throughout the thesis as biological and cultural aspects of taste – but see further chapters), between slow and speedy modes of perception, and thus between various temporalities involved in tasting, give rise to certain tensions and configurations of taste which are analysed from different points of view and in multiple sites in each of the following chapters. These methodological steps emerged through comparing and contrasting patterns and sites of taste. Like the initiation of perception through contrasts, this prompted me to make use of the concept of difference as a leitmotif of taste perception and experience. This allows the use of concepts (such as *terroir* or *nouvelle cuisine*) in analytically purposeful ways and thus displaces these out of rigid and bounded systems of signification. The thesis will show how these concepts operate in ways which illuminate the processual character of taste.

And thirdly, the structural innovation presented in this thesis, which relies on the simultaneous exploration of concepts, experiences, and theoretical references,

reflects further the non-linear process of my research. Rather than dividing the stages of research between fieldwork and theoretical explorations, the nature of empirical data encountered along with my own becoming trained in tasting, required me to move between engagements with theory and engagements with the field. This process enriched both sides of research gradually.

The tensions inherent in the research process and addressed from various points of view throughout the thesis also relate to some fundamental stages of the development of ethnography as a method of research over the past decades (see Clifford and Marcus 1986) as well as to the more recent and renewed interest in the senses in social sciences (see for instance Pink 2009 and Crang 2003). The writing culture debate (Clifford and Marcus 1986) has propelled a reflexive turn in the way academic texts and knowledge is produced. It also has redefined the value of ethnographic research especially in the way it shapes the production of knowledge by bringing to light a set of new questions and positions which other methods (such as those solely focused on discursive textual representation of knowledge) tend to efface. Reflexivity in ethnographic accounts calls for acknowledging and making transparent the researcher's own embodied presence in the field in order to be able to address the situated and partial nature of knowledge (see Clifford 1986; for a detailed account of various modes of reflexivity see Rose 1997). This is however not an easy task and more recent debates underline anew the need to further explore the entanglements between forms of reflexivity, embodied knowledge and the always situated and partial character of research.

In this sense, Crang (2003) criticises the fact that focusing too much on self-reflexive and auto-biographical accounts from the field may end up in doing nothing more than an examination of the Self and a stylistic representation of the Other for the

sake of academic jargon. He comments that “certainly the bodily presence of the researcher is now acknowledged, so, instead of the God-trick of the invisible, omnipresent narrator, we often have the researcher as a copresent interlocutor,” but adds that “the body quite often ends up as providing a sort of inescapable positioning of the researcher – through race, disability or gender – but less often is it *the instrument of research*” (Crang 2003: 499, emphasis added). Crang here advocates for an exploration of what he calls “haptic knowledges” which stem from “the actual processes of learning through our bodies’ responses and situations” (2003: 499).

Crang’s arguments resonate with those of many scholars of the senses. Early notable examples are Stoller’s call for a *Sensuous Scholarship* (1997) following his monograph *The Taste of Ethnographic Things* (1989) or Seremetakis’ *The Senses Still* (1994). More recently Pink poignantly argues that “sensory ethnography” is not only about accounting for each of the bodily senses and the multisensory nature of experience and knowledge (2009). It is about taking the multisensoriality of experience, perception, knowing and practice as a starting point in the *process* of doing ethnography (2009: 1, emphasis added).

To take the multisensoriality of experience as the starting point of research carries a range of implications in the way taste is approached in this thesis. On the one hand, it implies that accounting for bodily aspects of taste does not represent a closure, a final target of research, or a holistic way of joining practices of taste with representations of taste. On the other hand, it means recognizing the limitations inherent in the expression, communication and experience of taste through the medium of language. Not to do so, would reinforce the academic bias that everything is, or must be, translatable into words. My research with the Slow Food Movement made me realize that ‘the body’ is rarely verbalized or transformed into discourses.

But this fact represents, as already suggested earlier, the challenge which taste brings to the researcher and is also, paradoxically, the opening point towards grasping what taste ‘does.’ Crang is right to underline that “the question becomes one of what is *done* rather than what is *represented*, through proliferating operations and practices rather than an operation of a hidden structure” (2003: 499). This thesis engages with taste as a heterogeneous aspect and expression of a bodily practice. What I call the challenge and/or paradox of taste plays a key role in the process of doing ethnographic research. The challenge/paradox revolves around the fact that taste always points to something more than the sum of its parts, engaging people in a chain of events, memories, and future horizons which make it impossible to conceive of food as mere fuel. This is important. Moreover, such a drive towards experimenting and experiencing various modalities and temporalities of perception seems to be present with the participants of the Slow Food Movement. As I will show, it is sociality which plays a fundamental role in this respect.

This drive to experience through taste something more than merely satisfying hunger or having a pleasurable or interesting experience while ingesting foods and drinks equals or is analogous to a transcendent and/or transparent search for knowing. This is what makes acquiring and performing an interest in food extremely exciting and relevant in a context where the Western world experiences on a daily basis food that most of the times has travelled many physical/imaginative miles until they reached the plate. However, what this thesis aims to do is unpack such a search for knowledge by situating various modes of talking, thinking, and performing taste along various tensions that arise from within ideologies and practices of taste.

At this point, I would like to come back to the issue of reflexivity which I referred to from various perspectives in this chapter. As I conceive of it, reflexivity is

often triggered through the practice of tasting (and following it, in the practice of eating) and includes both tacit and verbalized, discursive elements. Reflexivity is for me a process which is ignited by the moment of tasting (whether one knows beforehand about the produce's quality or not) and which makes me interrogate what has changed once I have tasted that produce: what it did to my bodily awareness, to my relatedness with other tasters and with my surrounding. Such interrogative aspects of taste are followed in the thesis along particular configurations and tensions of taste. To point out once more, such an approach does not look for or claim to achieve transparency but, to the contrary, to allow situate the process of taste along certain relations and routes and, in doing this, to reveal taste as partial.

Structure of thesis

Chapters 2 and 3 contextualize contemporary ways in which the relation to food, taste and the senses is conceived. Chapters 4 and 5 identify some key concepts and processes that illuminate the formation of taste. Chapter 6 and 7 engage with Slow Food practices of eating and tasting.

Chapter 2 – To Eat or Not To Eat: Popular Discourses of Food and Taste - introduces popular discourses of food and taste through the lens of food journalism and investigates them in relation to anthropological and sociological approaches to food and taste. Thereby I identify a shift in perspectives on food and eating which reorders categories of 'good' food according to sensory and cultural criteria. I suggest that this reordering process creates tensions and address their nature in relation to the degree of normativity of food advocacies.

Chapter 3 - Slow Food - exemplifies the above mentioned tension by looking at 'slow' foods as enacted by the Slow Food Movement as a fluid process which unsettles boundaries between different food categories. I show how this boundary-breaking process is analogous to an attempt to place taste and food in a myriad of connections.

Chapter 4 - Taste Formations: Displaced and Emplaced Tastes - discusses the formation of tastes as an entangled process between speedy and slow sensory practices. I introduce the notion of sensory pageantry as one such process that highlights the ways in which taste is enmeshed in a political, economic and technological nexus. I proceed by showing how this nexus interferes in metabolic relations such that it renders bodies, senses and tastes vulnerable but which at the same time opens them up towards more reflexive engagements with food. I further discuss the notion of sensory pageantry in relation to ethnographic data from food fairs organized by the Slow Food Movement.

Chapter 5 – Contesting Vision: Cooks and Cooking - delves further into patterns which emerge as tastes are crafted and honed. It explores how cooks envision the relations that are established between foods in preparing dishes and investigates how differences are ignited through talking, writing, demonstrating, or cooking and performed through ways of looking. The aim will be to compare and contrast various historical and contemporary modes of enacting taste as a relational configuration that is constantly twisted and turned such that it gradually fine-tunes the different agents involved in cooking.

Chapter 6 - Training Taste: Slow Food Taste Workshops - deals with the various levels of engagement with foods and circumscribes a whole area of modalities of training taste and the senses. It explores how it is that tastes are transformed into

skills. Further I explore the ways in which taste as an emergent property brings the taster/eater in relation to himself/herself as much as to his/her companions.

Chapter 7 - Tasting Sociality: Slow Food Dinner Events - invites the reader to the table and analyzes the ways in which tasting and sociality mutually train the eater in engaging with foods. I suggest that such forms of engagement rely on particular temporalities embedded in certain spaces and these may induce altered states of perception in the experience of taste.

Chapter 8 synthesizes the arguments of this thesis and draws on the implications of this research for theoretical, conceptual and practical understandings of taste.

Chapter 2 To eat or not to eat: Popular discourses of food in the West

Introduction

This chapter identifies a shift in perspectives on food and eating in the West in recent years: the continuous expansion of mediated relations between people and food over the last decade has carried forward a latent sense of authority/ normativity that suggests what one should eat as various food systems and patterns are being investigated and interrogated. I describe this shift as mediated food advocacy. I use the word mediation to refer, on the one hand, to the fields of journalism and popular science writing regarding food issues and to the spaces where discourses are publicly performed, such as food fairs, and public, academic or political workshops and conferences. I show that these fields communicate to and interpenetrate each other, and this represents a process of mediation. On the other hand, I use the word mediation to refer to the processes and attempts to communicate not only information, knowledge, and values of certain aspects of food in respect to its production and consumption, but also, and more specifically, beliefs concerning the sensory dimensions of food and taste. Thus, mediation includes also another dimension, namely, that of perception and process thereof (see Chapter 1).

In this sense, mediated food advocacy has a number of characteristics which are particularly pertinent for the discussions raised in this thesis. Food advocacy shows a concerted effort towards a comprehensive definition of the status and nature of foods. But this process has weak degrees of coercion and normativity. This weak

normativity informs and shapes the formation of the senses of taste and, more specifically, the taste *for* and *of* 'slow' foods. Moreover, there are two further aspects which are quite particular for current forms of food advocacy, namely, that taste is mobilized as a variable that shapes these processes and, that it maintains a tension between sensory / biological and cultural factors.

One focal point of this shift is located within an emerging spectrum of popular food discourses that are preponderantly formed in the mass media through journalism. This journalistic genre, half-way between academic/scientific and mass/popular, in its endeavour to denounce and deconstruct capitalist Western food systems, proposes and frames ways of eating and a range of foods that are deemed to subvert the very system they expose. As such, they suggest opting for whole, local, seasonal, organic food rather than the processed industrialized versions, to eat more greens and less meat, to cook more or even plant a garden. Thereby they substantiate a new node³ in an ingrained advisory nexus of dietary guidance which explicitly invokes the health - 'right' food link such as those coming from governments, medical professions and, last but not least, the food industries. These different modalities of advice take various approaches to food. One of the distinctive traits of this popular journalistic genre is the way in which it elevates taste as a sensory force as well as a way of eating/consuming, hence a cultural force, above the more prescriptive and directed emphasis on specific food items and ratios, which are rather more characteristic of governmental and medical guidelines. This makes them more akin to the marketing strategies of the food industries, which emphasise sensory pleasure and health benefits in a less prescriptive manner. Another feature of this popular journalistic genre is the rather apparent political stance in the way taste is mobilized to support, interrogate

³ I use the word node in order to emphasize the fact that this journalistic genre bears manifold relations on the one hand to other advisory fields, as for instance the dieting/weight-loss literature, and, on the other hand, to several foodscapes, such as festivals, campaigns and mass media debates.

and denounce particular capitalist / corporate mechanisms interfering in food systems. This chapter does not seek to create radical boundaries between the different nodes but rather acknowledges certain continuities, especially historical ones, between them. However, I suggest that this journalistic advisory node creates its own networks and alliances through which it circulates.

This popular journalistic genre is not a clearly delineated one, as it is informed by academic discourses from both the social as well as the natural sciences. The particularity of this journalistic writing lies not only in its boundary breaking tendency or in its sheer quantitative growth in recent years. It also lies in its mode of circulation through different public and private/-ized spheres and in the way in which it penetrates and shapes these spheres and their discourses. More specifically, such discourses inform the ways in which social movements such as Slow Food shape understandings of what they call 'good, clean and fair' food.

Sketching the field of food advocacy

Food advocacy is visible in many spheres ranging from diet books, newspaper supplements and magazines, government diet programs and advertising, consumer and producer-lead campaigns, social movements, celebrity chefs and celebrity writers, specialist shops, and festivals. Below I will briefly sketch some characteristics of this advocacy trend and subsequently I will focus on analysing these minutely through the lens of popular journalistic food writing. Albeit very different in scope and motivation, it could be said that what a common pattern of operation of all these spheres is on the one hand the fact that they steadily expand the range of 'correct' food sorts (food taxonomies). On the other hand, they restrict the range according to

their mode of production, or their mode of preparation and consumption. This dialectical process is one which reshapes notions of 'good,' 'real,' 'slow' foods, and reconnects these ones with ideas of good taste while also redirecting the attention to less processed foods by critically engaging with mass produced, industrialized, anonymous foods.

It should be also mentioned that this growing journalistic field is thought of as gathering momentum in relation to other phenomena and processes. For instance, one can think of dietetics as registering peaks of popularity in a time of economic boom that created the conditions for training perfect and perfectly working bodies and the need to monitor one's body in an age of abundance such as the Atkins diet (see more Featherstone 1991 and Turner 1991); of government programs during and after the wars that controlled the uneven inflow of food through rationing, or, more recently, of the government plans triggered by the rise in obesity and cardio-vascular diseases ('Five a day' or 'Change for life'); of festivals and magazines in relation to a general rise of the interest in foods in conjunction with tourism and increased mobility of people and foods; of celebrity chefs and writers in the context of ever-growing mediatisation of everyday life; and last but not least, of campaigns as indicative of the environmental and ethical implications and outcomes of food production and consumption, like the organic or fair-trade schemes or the debates around the distance food travels within the food system (see Lang and Heasman 2004).

Popular food writers feature as guest speakers at many food festivals organized today in Britain, mainland Europe and the US (like for example, Michael Pollan, Colin Tudge, Eric Schlosser, Vandana Shiva, Joanna Blythman, etc.). Food festivals dedicated to green, small and middle range-produced foods and speciality products, are one of the spheres which indicate this shift. One can think of the Real

Food Festival (London), the Green Weeks (Germany), Salone del Gusto (Italy), and many, many more. They too are increasingly mediated and depend on mediated relations. In Britain, other countries in Europe, as well as the United States, food festivals and markets have registered ever growing expansion and popularity. Britain, for instance, hosts the Real Food Festival in London (400 producers)⁴ or the Food Festival in Ludlow (20,000 visitors)⁵ or the Good Food Show in various cities around the UK. Germany holds the International Green Week (400,000 visitors)⁶. Italy's biennial international Hall of Taste (attracted in 170,000 visitors in 2006)⁷ is organized by the Slow Food Movement along with several other smaller festivals like 'Slow Fish' in Genoa⁸ or 'Slow Cheese' in Bra⁹. In the United States, especially the San Francisco area, 'Slow Food Nation' gathered 85,000 visitors in 2008¹⁰. These, far from only figuring as sale points and exhibitors of foods, represent hubs where producers, cooks and chefs, journalists and campaigners meet and perform their views on a changing food culture.

Food festivals and markets, which combine the selling of selected produce with the advocacy for 'good' food and the celebration of what organizers, participants, and media often refer to as the renaissance of food culture, inhere a sense of change and need for change in the way people eat and produce food. This sense of changing food cultures, which transpires also in many of the food writings I am going to engage with below, largely addresses a field of constant negotiations between 'modern' (i.e. processed, mass-produced) and 'traditional' (i.e. small-scale, dedicated

⁴ <http://www.realfoodfestival.co.uk/>, accessed 03/09/09

⁵ <http://www.foodfestival.co.uk/>, accessed 03/09/09

⁶ http://www1.messeberlin.de/vip8_1/website/Internet/Internet/www.gruenewoche/englisch/index.html, accessed 18/09/09

⁷ <http://www.salonedelgusto.it/>, accessed 05/09/09

⁸ http://www.slowfish.it/welcome_eng.lasso, accessed 05/09/09

⁹ http://www.cheese.slowfood.com/welcome_eng.lasso, accessed 06/09/09

¹⁰ <http://slowfoodnation.org/>, accessed 24/08/09

foods) foods. Often, one finds a polarization between artisanal, rare, and small-scale products, deemed traditional, and industrial, mass-produced and highly processed foods. Modern and traditional are, however, not opposite as such, but rather are part of contested processes of modernization, by which localized forms of knowledge are commodified, re-invented, and co-opted into globalized arenas. Food festivals represent, metonymically, one such symbolic site of these processes. Here, various (apparently) marginal or marginalized groups (such as farmers) perform and stage their craft against the ghost of a political and economic ‘other’ (e.g. corporations) that is constraining and succumbing crafts, practices and knowledges. As such, farmers and artisans are celebrated as ‘rock stars’ or ‘intellectuals of the land’¹¹ and joined by cooks and chefs as their allies, food writers and food journalists are revered and scholars are called upon to draw the ‘bigger picture’ of ‘food ethics.’¹² Such global arenas become the stages where a variety of discourses come to be mirrored against one other: health (mainly informing American discourses), tradition, heritage (mainly informing European discourses), and increasingly environment, ‘localness,’ ‘nature,’ and ‘seasonality.’ These issues will be devoted more attention in Chapter 3.

In the following, I concentrate on some such popular authors from both the US and Britain and sketch the various food trajectories they propose. I use the word trajectory to refer to the way these authors chose to build their cases and arguments, like for instance, when they start off with an interrogation of industrial foods and end up with introducing techniques which have been practiced long before the advent of industrialization. I bring these views into a conversation with sociological and anthropological stances and conclude by highlighting wherein their ‘sensory

¹¹ The term was coined by American writer and farmer Wendell Berry. Berry featured as a speaker and advisor for the Slow Food Movement.

¹² Peter Singer’s views on the applied ethics are often drawn upon by the Slow Food Movement. He is a philosopher and professor of Bioethics at Princeton University.

expertise' consists in regard to the underlying tension between biological and cultural taste. I devote attention especially to two authors: one is Michael Pollan a bestselling American author; the other is Colin Tudge, a less well known British author. I focus on them for three reasons. Firstly, they both featured as guest speakers at Slow Food events (at Salone del Gusto in Turin 2004 and 2006). Secondly, they provide some contrasts that highlight distinctive representations of the American and British contexts (such that, the American author tends towards highlighting the corporatization and medicalization of food, while the British author tends sometimes towards adopting a less denunciatory and more mediating stance). And thirdly, both rely on natural science as one source of their argumentation, yet, their propositions offer distinctive nuances which invoke the indivisibility of cultural and biological factors concerning the relationship between food, people, and environment. The latter is the crucial point regarding the training of tastes as invoked by the Slow Food Movement which I am going to explore further in subsequent chapters.

In 2006 Michael Pollan, author and Knight Professor of Science and Environmental Journalism at UC Berkeley, was invited to one of Italy's largest and most renowned food festivals, upon publishing "The Omnivore's Dilemma. A Natural History of Four Meals," a book which keeps getting him wide acclaim both in America and Europe. The book was ranked among the ten best books of the year by both the New York Times and the Washington Post. It also won the California Book Award, the Northern California Book Award, the James Beard Award for best food writing, and was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award¹³. Upon this success, he became a sought-after speaker (and media presence) at food themed events: he was a guest speaker at the 2006 'Hall of Taste' in Turin organized by the

¹³ See <http://www.michaelpollan.com/about.php>

Slow Food Movement, he speaks regularly at numerous events in the San Francisco area, many of them being organized by Slow Food groups where he speaks alongside other renowned food advocates such as Vandana Shiva¹⁴, Eric Schlosser¹⁵, and Carlo Petrini¹⁶. Many of his lectures are cast via internet sites such as Fora TV, or the web channel of the University of California Television. His name and book attract around 860.000 Google hits¹⁷.

Radical breaks and gastro-anomie

Pollan belongs to a significant circle of authors, journalists, and scholars undertaking the dissection of food systems (in the broadest sense) and scrutinizing major disjunctures which ultimately disrupt what used to be a taken for granted knowledge of food, taste and bodies. One of the theses around which he develops his analysis is the fact that our eating patterns have registered a radical change with the advent of “the industrial revolution of the food chain, dating to the close of World War II” (2006: 7). Pollan contends that the production, processing and marketing of food ever since, have radically altered our diets and this relatively rapid change has disturbed the ways our bodies work and has ultimately fuelled the increase in diabetes, obesity, and many other diseases. By bringing diet and health in such close a relation he aligns himself with a dominant and much mediated perspective (orthodoxy) of today. Many other analysts ground the necessity of speaking and researching food related issues in such a context (e.g. Blythman 2006, Lawrence

¹⁴ Vandana Shiva is a physicist, environmental activist and eco-feminist and author of several books. She featured in several movies on ecological issues.

¹⁵ Eric Schlosser is an award-winning investigative journalist who became well know especially since the publishing of the book “Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of All American Meal” in 2002.

¹⁶ Carlo Petrini is the founder of the Slow Food Movement.

¹⁷ Googled on 25/05/09. By contrast, Eric Schlosser reaches 300.000 hits and Vandana Shiva 400.000, while Carlo Petrini gets also around 800.000 hits.

2004). This perspective is, however, closely interlinked with a critique of capitalist agricultural practices and corporatist marketing strategies in free market economies (e.g. Schlosser 2002, Blythman 2005, and Tudge 2007). Yet few address the sense of taste as a site whereupon such contested processes get inscribed or, on the contrary, effaced. Before engaging more closely with these issues, it is necessary to trace in what way Pollan constructs his arguments in order to be able to relate to sensory and cultural taste.

Pollan's investigation is driven by the question of where our food comes from. To some extent, this is a 'counter-orthodox' question which seems to gain ground as contradictions of food economies are revealed. As such, Pollan (2006) starts to search for the roots of mass-marketed processed foods and ends to his surprise every one of his journeys in a field. He stalks what he finds out to be the most pervasive ingredient of most of the foods: corn. Corn, as he persuasively describes, is one of the most successful American plants which, given its robust nature, was transformed into a highly lucrative commodity. Corn becomes the binding element of what Pollan calls the industrial food chain. As he explains, the high adaptability of this plant, along with the economic and political and scientific factors that supported it, resulted in it being overproduced so that ever since the middle of the twentieth century the surplus of grain came to be processed and transformed into a "value-added consumer product – a denser and more durable package of calories" (2006: 103). While at the beginning of the nineteenth it was processed into either fodder or alcohol,

today there are hundreds of things a processor can do with corn: they can use it to make everything from chicken nuggets and Big Macs to emulsifiers and nutraceuticals [...] and since the human desire for sweetness surpasses even

our desire for intoxication, the cleverest thing to do with a bushel of corn is to refine it into thirty-three pounds of high-fructose corn syrup (Pollan 2006: 103).

It is interesting to note some striking parallels (or analogies) between Pollan's analysis and the work of the anthropologist Sidney Mintz (1985). Both take up 'sweetness' as a metabolic component of industrialized capitalist societies and highlight how physical and social relations between food and people are deeply interwoven. Mintz refers, however, to the British context and includes early colonial relations in his analysis (cf. Sheller 2003). He describes how sugar was the first exotic luxury to be transformed into a proletarian necessity and was among the first imports to take on a new and different political and military importance for the broadening capitalist classes in the metropolis in Britain (Mintz 1985: 180). He demonstrates how over centuries and decades it transformed the eating habits and patterns of the proletariat: "the heightened consumption of goods like sucrose was the direct consequence of deep alterations in the lives of working people, which made new forms of foods and eating conceivable and "natural," alongside with new schedules of work, new sorts of labor, and new conditions of daily life" (1985: 181). While Pollan does only occasionally deal with the social implications of sugar consumption when he mentions for instance that 19% of meals in America are eaten in cars (2006: 181), he in many ways continues Mintz' research in showing how there has been a steady rise in sugar consumption up to now due to the invention of high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) in America which became the leading source of sweetness in our diet in 1980. He says:

In 1985 an American's annual consumption of HFCS has gone from forty-five pounds to sixty-six pounds. [...] During the same period our consumption of refined sugar actually went up by five pounds. [...] In fact, since 1985 our consumption of all added sugars – cane, beet, HFCS, glucose, honey, maple syrup, whatever – has climbed from 128 pounds to 158 pounds per person” (Pollan 2006: 104).

He exemplifies this by pointing out the fact that companies like Coca-Cola and Pepsi had switched entirely from sugar to HFCS by 1984. Today however, there is a slight turn towards using sugar again. Coca-Cola sells the ‘healthier’ option which is a mix of HFCS and sugar.

There exists a further convergence between Pollan's journalistic analysis of food and various anthropological perspectives written as early as the 1980s. This fact points to an emergent tendency whereby academic knowledge and research start to permeate the public mind through the voice of journalists and, as I will show later on, starts to infiltrate lay attitudes towards food cultures. While such a process cannot be conceived of as unidirectional and linear, the fact that certain views come to be explicitly articulated by lay groups is meaningful in itself. This aspect will be dealt with more minutely in Chapter 4 which discusses the notion of expertise in relation to cultural intermediaries. Several explorations of the changes in food habits have started off based on the prerequisite that by and large humans tend to eat what is good for them, which meant that palatability and edibility, desirability and nutrition were overlapping to a great extent (Harris 1985, Leach 1964, Sahlins 1976, Goody 1982, Mintz 1992, 1994). Mintz, for instance, depicts basic patterns of consumption that were dominant for centuries all over the world. He refers to these patterns of

consumption of food stuffs as - *core, fringe, legume* – and they include complex carbohydrates, flavour-giving foods, and protein-carrying plants. But he contends that these patterns started to rapidly disintegrate with the advent of the industrial revolution when fats and sugars spread widely. Like Mintz, Pollan too situates the metabolic disruption with the advent of the Industrial Age and refers to a second stage when it registered a further intensification after the World Wars.

Nutritional sociologist Claude Fischler famously coined the result of such ruptures as ‘gastro-anomie’ (1980: 948). This phenomenon has been questioned and contested so that Mintz (1992, 1994) and Douglas (1984) lament the decline of family meals, and the resulting de-socialization describing them as symptomatic of alienation. By contrast, sociologists like Murcott (1983) demonstrate that the meal remains an important template in most households and Warde (1997) shows how structural anxieties over food consumption are dialectically negotiated. In this sense, Warde explores the interrelationship between processes of economic production and patterns of consumption and evaluates how “antinomies of taste” (like, novelty and tradition, health and indulgence, economy and extravagance, or convenience and care) legitimate choices between foodstuffs (1997: 2).

Today popular food journalists like, for instance, Joanna Blythman laments in her book *Bad Food Britain* (2006) the disappearing of dinner tables and as such claims a similar sense of loss that anthropologists had warned about some thirty years ago. Blythman’s book reveals several stereotypes which infiltrate the public imagination in Britain today. It seems that often the motivation behind several events and actions of the Slow Food Movement are driven or justified in terms of, figuratively and literally, ‘correcting’ these stereotypes (see chapters 3 and 6 for an analysis of how such stereotypes operate).

Historical roots of food advice

Western food advice, sometimes referred to as dietetics, has been famously documented by Foucault (1976) and rooted, as far as the Western World is concerned, in ancient Greece. I choose for the purpose of this chapter only certain, more recent instances of advisory nodes due to the special connection, even subsumption, to mediated networks of food advocacy.

As such, it is worth noting that during the 1980s there was a rise in various diets and dieting methods, which represented a coping mechanism in times of economic change. These have registered several waves of popularity and sometimes developed into heavily mediated and branded campaigns. Most famous among them is the Atkins diet. With Atkins, who published his first book *Dr. Atkins' Diet Revolution* in 1972, one can notice how pervasive the belief was that carbohydrates, particularly sugar, flour, and HFCS, are conducive to obesity was as early as the 1970s. According to Pollan, the same strong convictions have remained engrained for the coming forty years. The Atkins Diet involves restriction of carbohydrates so that the body's metabolism can switch from burning glucose as fuel to burning stored body fat. So, as Mintz noted, the changing of eating patterns is obvious in the case of this diet. The diet, in restricting carbohydrates, favours proteins and thus meat consumption, actually gains its followers by showing what is allowed rather than what is not. Governmental dieting guidelines which encouraged protein consumption came to support such eating prescriptions and had become engrained in the public imagination ever since the world wars and the period following it. This happened both in America as well as in Britain, although uneven temporally and in terms of scale.

In this sense, restriction, a substantiation of the sense of anomie and alienation, made way for several food 'gurus.' These are not only people like Atkins,

who designed a system of dieting but also scientists or amateur researchers of the most various kinds, who came to proselytise for specific food items as holding the clues to longevity and good health like Weston Price, Maximilian Bircher-Benner, John Harvey Kellogg, Sylvester Graham, William Banting and many others. Most of them developed their discoveries into lucrative businesses thus propagating to various extents Manichean beliefs of food. Melanie du Puis (2007) reminds us however that this interest in finding the perfect diet has a longer history, regarding the American context in which in the eighteenth century puritanical and moral belief system provides such prescriptions and rules. Historical examinations of the imbrications of, and mutual shaping of, ideologies of modernization and practices of eating are to be found in the works of Shapiro (1986), what the US is concerned, and Hardyment (1995) regarding the aftermath of the World Wars in the UK.

Sensory expertise

There is one aspect of the rationalization of eating and food which authors like Pollan (2006, 2008) but also professor of nutrition Marion Nestle in *Food Politics* (2002) and *What to Eat* (2006) eagerly critique. It is what they refer to as “nutritionism”¹⁸. Pollan engages with the clashes between nutrition science and industries, and traces back the way they have shifted understandings of food or how they have restructured the way we think about food. Pollan sees these shifts as a result of the co-optation of nutritional discoveries by the food industries, whereby ‘macronutrients’ (e.g. carbohydrates) and ‘micronutrients’ (e.g. vitamins) came to be foregrounded in the marketing of foods. He contends that it was in the 1980s that food

¹⁸ The term was coined by Gyorgy Scrinis a researcher in the sociology of food, science, technology, and ecology (see Scrinis 2008).

began disappearing from the American supermarket, gradually to be replaced by “nutrients,” which is not the same thing (Pollan 2008: 19). He adds that what preceded this move was the increase in chronic diseases linked to diet throughout the 1970s the incidence of these steadily soaring ever since World War II. This led to the formulation of certain dietary goals by the US government which encouraged people to cut down on red meat and dairy products. These goals were based on perceptions of traditional diets based largely on plants holding strikingly low rates of chronic disease as well as the observation of rationed diets during the war years as having led to the temporary decline of heart disease. However, the dietary advice failed as meat industries reacted to it and forced its replacement with laxer advice which did not target directly certain types of meat and their slogan was: “Choose meats, poultry and fish that will reduce saturated-fat intake” (Pollan 2008: 23).

The ideologies that stemmed from the entanglement of nutrition science with food industries, or as Pollan says, the emergence of ‘nutritionism’, relocated eating as an embodied (natural) act to a rationalized way of fuelling the body which now had to rely on expert systems: “To enter a world in which you dine on unseen nutrients, you need lots of expert help” (Pollan 2008: 80). The rise of expert systems encouraged a polarization of food taxonomies and, with it, the proliferation ‘healthy’ vs. ‘unhealthy’ foods. The existence of such divides was, however, sustained only by leaving out cultural and social aspects of eating. As such, people’s habits which did not necessarily cohere with such models were explained in terms of contradictions. Pollan exemplifies this with what many refer to as the ‘French paradox’. Here, the model of health/unhealthy food is seen as dissonant with cultures such as the French one which provides foods with high calorific and fat content but on the whole have lower levels of diet related diseases. But there is problem with the use of the concept

of “French paradox” and also, more generally, with comparing different cultures, habits, that are uneven spatially and temporally, because it runs the danger of collapsing a whole set of differences into a unitary, monolithic, and static model of diet.

In order to counteract this mindset, Pollan refers to the human body as the result of complex evolutionary patterns. Thereby he destabilizes the view of food as a measure of fuelling the body and emphasizes that certain populations developed particular metabolic relations with some foods and as a consequence can digest some foods better than others. Classic examples are the evolution of lactose tolerance and the Mediterranean high olive oil consumption.

Another fallacy, as he contends, is the displacement of foods and nutrients from their relation to other foods: “We also eat foods in combinations and in orders that can affect how they’re absorbed. Drink coffee with your steak, and your body won’t be able to fully absorb the iron in the meat” (Pollan 2007). Here resides a correlation with Tudge’s advocacy for cooking as an essential re-connection to the way people engage their bodies with food.

A slightly different view from Pollan is taken by Colin Tudge, a British biologist and science writer¹⁹, who advocates a future of “science-assisted craft” cooking included:

the approach is not to replace traditional ways of life and know-how with government-backed, industrialised high tech, buoyed by battalions of salaried experts and intellectuals, but to build upon the traditional crafts: get to know

¹⁹ <http://www.colintudge.com/>

them and understand them; help them along with science of a truly appropriate kind” (Tudge 2007: 3).

Tudge draws a close link between the prevailing agricultural methods and our food habits - such as high meat consumption and more generally nutrition centred diets – one the one hand, and to the dietary discourses developed in the 1950s in the UK, on the other. As he explains, at that time, protein was seen as one of the most important and necessary components in human diet and was best obtained from meat, eggs, and dairy (Tudge 2007: 48). He relates the dominance of this view to the subsequent intensification of breeding and farming systems, such as, battery cages for chickens, or pig factory farms. By the 1970s there was a shift in the nutritional discourse which came to state more or less an opposite view, namely that animal proteins were not essential to human diet and that the necessary amount of protein could be gained from cereals and pulses. This shift, however, failed to affect what by then had become a lucrative meat industry. Meat had established itself as part of a staple diet and was incorporated into a symbolic regime which denoted the values of power, wealth and progress dominant in that era. Tudge’s analysis does not deal so much with the cultural processes which accompanied these shifts or with the faddism scientific discoveries keep propelling and the latter’s commodification by the industries. But his explorations are valuable in that they depict systemic interpenetrations between agriculture, diets and science and the fallacies that can result when human diets are restrictively built around one such scientific model.

Tudge’s argument is interesting in that, while tracing systemic and evolutionary patterns in human diet, he deduces ‘universal’ laws that could be applied to guide human – food - environment relations. He sums it up as “plenty of plants, not

much meat, and maximum variety” (Tudge 2007: 71) and contends it perfectly matches modern nutritional science. Like Pollan, Tudge invokes the thesis of psychologist Paul Rozin who states that humans are ‘omnivores’ and their successful evolution depends on a wide variety of foods.

Tudge tries to sketch the contested terrain between science and the adaptation of food advice into daily practices. In this sense, he regards the ‘goodness’ of foods as a disconnected relation because it is governed by science and not necessarily by people’s bodies or the interaction between bodies, environments and food. However, he later invokes instances where there existed compatibility between nutritional laws and people’s diets. He says that ever since the 1970s nutritional laws did not so much diverge from ‘traditional’ patterns of cooking. He explains that ‘traditional’ cooking is governed by the same pattern “plenty of plants, not much meat, and maximum variety” (2007: 71). ‘Traditional’ cooking is however not an imagined past model or a desirable present one should aspire to. Rather, it is a model which persists through the ‘cuisines’ of the great chefs of our times. Tudge emphasizes that “all the greatest cooking, as all the truly great chefs acknowledge, is rooted in peasant cooking” (2007: 71). Tudge’s intention is not to laud ‘haute cuisine’ at the expense of daily cooking but rather to assert a necessary continuity between ‘the gourmet’ and ‘the peasant.’ This view slightly weakens Pollan’s view of a ‘radical break’ in diet which tends to configure a linear sense of history. Tudge points to this uneven and nonlinear development of ways of eating.

The imbalances and disturbances in the relationships between food and people are in Tudge’s account due to the fact that the economy and the modern livestock industry do not cohere with the principles advocated either by nutritional science or by traditional methods of cooking, or various (traditionally informed) cuisines. In

addition to that, supermarkets are acknowledged as major players which now (especially in Britain) “control the flow of information as well as the food supply itself, they can ensure that the cheap cuts that have launched some of the world’s finest recipes are written out of the act” (Tudge 2007: 108). Tudge points out how the memory of certain foods is indeed a process underlying power relations. He says:

Cooking is the ultimate anarchic act. You do need good ingredients but in general [...] the simpler the ingredients, the better. If we could all cook – or if a critical mass of us rediscovered the joys of it – then, I reckon, the whole sorry superstructure of the present corporate-government-bureaucrat-technologist food supply chain would begin to fall apart. It relies upon ignorance, and the general sense of disempowerment. Cooking is not generally taught in schools these days, and apartments are built without kitchens and in many major city you can walk from one end to the other and never catch sight of a good loaf of bread or fresh vegetable – nothing but pizzas and burgers and fried chicken (Tudge 2007: 152).

Tudge brings eating into relations which surpass nutritional and health paradigms by pointing out that eating is part of a nexus of practices. His favoured aspect is that found with the cooking profession. Cooking in this respect is a practice which does not freeze norms into dishes but rather continuously elaborates them and situates them in time and space (see more Chapter 4). For Tudge, cooking is but one, yet crucial, node in an elaborate system of communications which bind us to the food chain. Pollan deploys the term food chain in order to point to an inherent interdependency

between species and the soil and the fact that there is an ongoing process of co-evolution:

A gradual process of mutual adaptation transforms something like an apple or a squash into a nutritious and tasty food for a hungry animal. Over time and through trial and error, the plant becomes tastier (and often more conspicuous) in order to gratify the animal's needs and desires, while the animal gradually acquires whatever digestive tools (enzymes, etc.) are needed to make optimal use of the plant. (Pollan 2007, but see also 2008: 103)

In this way, Pollan opens up an interesting discussion regarding the role of the senses in this co-evolutionary process. From this perspective, foods are not nutritious or tasty per se, but they become nutritious and tasty in the course of a mutual and interdependent process of adaptation between humans and foods. In other words, humans co-evolve with other species and develop in time the ability to recognize what certain foods 'afford.' Some revealing cases, one referring to an earlier stage of evolution, the other to a more recent phenomenon, include cow's milk and fast foods containing high-fructose corn syrup. Pollan argues "cow's milk did not start out as a nutritious food for humans; in fact, it made them sick until humans who lived around cows evolved the ability to digest lactose as adults. This development "proved much to the advantage of both milk drinkers and the cows" (cf. Pollan 2008: 100). Interdependent relationships between humans, foods, animals gave rise to certain genetic landscapes, such that, as in the case of milk, most populations of the world have adapted to milk consumption, while others, such as Asian populations, including the Chinese, are intolerant to lactose. Pollan links the high rates of obesity to the use

of high-fructose corn syrup in fast foods (which was introduced in fast foods in order to replace the traditional corn syrup which was more expensive to produce but to which humans have a longstanding and sustainable relation) and our relatively novel relation to such foods and contends that we as yet have not fully developed the capacity to cope with it. He says that for the moment the consumption of fast foods leads to health problems but in time humans might develop a relationship, “as people evolve superhuman insulin systems to cope with regular floods of fructose and glucose” (2008: 112).

What makes Pollan’s hypothesis interesting is not necessarily the fact that it ‘accepts’ fast foods (processed foods) as part of our culture up to the point where it almost tends to ‘naturalize’ them. It is more the fact that it invokes the inherent ambiguity of all foods and thereby deconstructs the division between processed/unprocessed, healthy/unhealthy foods which had been initially reinforced by denouncing the capitalist economic practices. All foods are potentially poisonous or bad. Their incorporation and ‘domestication’ involve multiple practices of appropriation. One of them is cooking. Later on I will draw on sociality as a further core feature (Chapters 6 and 7). The senses play a vital part in these processes of appropriation. Pollan expresses this as follows:

In many cases, long familiarity between foods and their eaters leads to elaborate systems of communications up and down the food chain, so that a creature’s senses come to recognize foods as suitable by taste and smell and color, and our bodies learn what to do with these foods after they pass the test of the senses, producing in anticipation the chemicals necessary to break them down. Health depends on knowing how to read these biological signals: this

smells spoiled; this looks ripe; that's one good-looking cow. This is easier to do when a creature has long experience of a food, and much harder when a food has been designed expressly to deceive its senses — with artificial flavors, say, or synthetic sweeteners. (Pollan 2008: 103)

Taste, smell and vision are granted an important status in recognizing foods and in knowing how to distinguish them. The bodily senses are evolving in spatial and temporal frames and play an essential role in guiding our bodies along these relationships (see Chapters 6 and 7). This is not a stable process, but one of ongoing transformations.

Pollan offers a double-edged interpretation of the senses. He contends that the senses mediate ecological relationships between eaters and whole foods, not nutrients. But he states, however, that the role of the senses seems suspended when they are incorporated in the view of a longstanding process of 'adaptation' to high-fructose corn syrup which at the moment "makes us sick" and adds that "our bodies have a longstanding and sustainable relationship to corn that we do not have to high-fructose syrup" (2007). Pollan raises an issue which pertains to a clash between culturally and biologically shaped relations between food and people that are mediated by the senses.

He therefore elaborates a range of suggestions which advocate eating "wholesome" foods and avoiding highly processed ones. In many ways they evoke a sense of returning to a pre-industrial age. He says: 1. Eat food. Don't eat anything your great-great-grandmother wouldn't recognize as food; 2. Avoid even those food products that come bearing health claims; 3. Especially avoid food products containing ingredients that are a) unfamiliar b) unpronounceable c) more than five in

number; 4. Get out of the supermarket whenever possible; 5. Pay more, eat less; 6. Eat mostly plants, especially leaves; 7. Eat more like the French. Or the Japanese. Or the Italians. Or the Greeks. Pay attention to how a culture eats, as well as what it eats; 7. Cook. And if you can, plant a garden; 9. Eat like an omnivore. These rules also appeared in an expanded version in *Food Rules* (Pollan 2010).

The practices which are implied here expand the relation between body and food (which nutrition science and the industries that commodify their advice into added values would heed) into one which incorporates the larger web of environmental relations that partake in the food chain. This shift is best represented by the gradual spread of organic foods from niche to mainstream market. “Goodness” and wholesomeness conjures reciprocal relations between body and environment through food. Goodness is oriented both towards the outside and the inside.

While Pollan directs one strand of his argument towards a long term development of the senses in relation to food and its environment, he does not further delve into the processes of sensory transformations in relation to what he terms a radical shift in our diets. He solely remarks upon the disjuncture between cultural and biological formations of the senses in relation to eating patterns and habits. In doing so, he actually elevates the speed of cultural developments as the core factor that feeds into this disjuncture. Pollan locates such disparities mainly in the sphere of production. It needs to be said however that this perceived disjuncture has been exacerbated also in the consumption sphere through the accelerated aestheticisation of the market and that this allowed for a steady instrumentalisation of the senses. Authors such as Pine and Gilmore (1999) have drawn attention to the customization of sensory experience tailored on the specialized wants of consumers as a pervasive trend in economic activities. With respect to food economies, Nestle (2006) draws on

the coercive powers that marketing strategies exert by targeting specific sensory modalities (like for instance the strategic placing of certain products at eye-level on aisles or the infusion of commercial spaces with smells and sounds). While analyses such as Nestle's exemplify the ways in which the senses are instrumentalised, they remain largely causal and functionalistic and as such render the senses and consumers passive. Similarly, anthropologist of the senses Howes (2005) argues that late capitalist societies provide hyperaesthetic experiences. He regards the human sensorium as over-flooded by continuous streams of stimuli.

In this sense then, the speeding up of social (economic) metabolic relations, which Pollan refers to, runs parallel with a speeding up of sensory stimulation. This excess of external stimuli is seen by the food advocates referred to in this chapter as actually adversely impacting the sensuous engagement present in the eating experience by disrupting it (but see Chapter 4).

Following this logic, Pollan's and Tudge's advice direct the attention towards ways of eating which require a different perceptual engagement than the ones in which we have become habituated in the patterns and structures encouraged by mass production and consumption (i.e. the supermarket model). Various practices reflect this turn and are seen as modalities of 'slowing down' perception: growing one's own food; farmer's markets; and many of the activities organized by the Slow Food Movement (see Adam 198: 160). All these practices conjure up a view that the senses need to be cultivated, trained, and educated.

This attention to sensory formations of the senses which the above mentioned authors draw out marks thus a shift in perspectives in our engagement with food. As food advocacy discourses highlight the ongoing acceleration in sensory and cultural stimulation of the senses in the past half of decade, they place the perceptual,

sensuous, embodied processes of food and taste into focus. Hence the advocacy for what and how to eat does not target so much specific foods and ways of eating, but more the particular processes which shape the taste (biological as well as cultural) of foods. Therefore, this journalistic genre maintains a weak sense of coercion and persuasion, and as such allows for spaces of inquiry which include the ways people come to know and practice taste. Hence, the next Chapter considers another example of such advocacy: Slow Food.

From yet a another point of view this chapter highlights the tendency to locate taste in either biological or cultural domains and underlines how such a tendency is destabilized in certain food advocacy discourses. This trend signals a wider attitude towards embracing relational aspects of taste in ways which accentuate and encourage the mobilization *and* mobility of tastes among groups and in-between discourses, and in-between imaginative and geographical places. This further highlights that dissonances between discursive forms of taste and embodied ways of knowing taste grow weaker. Notwithstanding the weak normativity of such discourses, the translation of taste into written 'rules' (such as Pollan's) exposes itself to possible co-optations by industries, institutions, or groups and this then hampers the multiplicity of forms of taste which such discourses in fact adhere to.

Chapter 3 Slow Food

Introduction

Chapter 2 identified a climate in the West increasingly dominated by various forms of advice and suggestions on what to eat. This climate makes food and eating problematic and no longer taken for granted. I specifically focused on food advocacy in popular-scientific literature which has much increased in the last decade. While this literature treats a wide and varied range of perspectives on food, what unites them is an underlying tension between biological and cultural elements that are seen as undermining and potentially threatening the relations which people have with foods. The present chapter complements the previous by exemplifying one way in which these tensions are carried out through the formation of organizations and projects which try to tackle these problematic incongruities. Such an incongruity is expressed on many levels which are united on the metaphorical plane in terms of an antagonism between ‘blandness’ (in terms of the sensory or organoleptic traits of foods and also in a lack of enjoyment of eating environments), ‘speed’ (in the way that food products are produced and consumed), and taste. This antagonism is most starkly expressed with the Slow Food organization (see for example Petrini 2001) which I deal with in this chapter.

Parallel to the rise in ‘food advocacy’ popular-scientific literature, one can notice a steady rise in food movements that intend to change both attitudes towards food and the structures that support the circulation of food, through designing informational, educational, or policy-oriented programs. Food movements can take the form of consumer organizations, non-profit organizations, or social movements.

They gain momentum in conjunction with the emergence of ‘alternative’ forms of production and consumption such as organic, fair-trade or ‘local’ foods as well as in conjunction with more recent concerns over climate change, and the economic recession of 2008 which involve food in ongoing debates. These trends and movements influence each other and attest to a general climate in which food is featuring as an important area of concern that is impinging not only at an institutional level but on an everyday level, such that matters of lifestyle and identity become the foundation of cultural politics.

This social movement is one which takes taste as a central motive around which various food matters are allowed to unfold. Indeed, the Slow Food Movement may be the only social movement to take taste as the core point for political mobilization. While it has its origins in an Italian gastronomic association it evolved in the course of two decades into an international social movement. The discussion of its projects, philosophy and process of formation and its worldwide dissemination that will form the main part of this chapter will not only be descriptive. It also highlights some underlying contradictions and ambiguities that arise around taste and food and which are even made problematic by the movement itself. This has relevance on the one hand for the conceptualization of taste (see Chapter 4), and on the other for the conceptualization of Slow Food as an organization: firstly, the contradictions and ambiguities enrol taste in a complex field of forces which unpack and deconstruct the status of taste; and secondly, (and inversely), they reveal, on the one hand, some subversive intentions of the movement, and on the other hand, can also undermine the very status of the movement. In other words, I show that the political mobilization of taste implies that the organization defines its own understanding of taste at the same time as it distances itself from traditional notions of taste. As such, the organization

advocates for a democratic and educational approach to taste while it also grapples with long established distinctions of taste based on class exclusivity, generational differences, or certain situated imprints of history. In this way, the organization opens itself up to a multitude of perspectives and processes, such that matters of taste are allowed to be reflected upon and negotiated by taking into account ingrained distinctions (such as age and class), *and* global processes (such as global inequalities or climate change).

More concretely, it could be said that one core tension which the Slow Food Movement addresses and tries to tackle is that between the embodied experience of taste and the ‘politicization’ of food in its broadest sense. This tension is framed by the organization as one between ‘slow’ and ‘fast’ processes, and this is overtly stated in its official manifesto (quoted below). For the movement, slowness is related to a particular embodied experience of taste, and speed, and to processes which alter or interfere with these experiences. As such, processes brought about by institutional politics, by commodification, or globalization are seen as conducive to an alienated confrontation with food as soon as it clashes with the more wholesome and unifying relations brought about by ‘slow’ foods. It is particularly the political and economic structures and processes which create tensions with the daily practices of small-scale farmers and of consumers in the global North as well as the global South. This tension has a twofold reflection for the movement, having both an outer and an inner manifestation. In other words, by way of its structure, projects and philosophy, the movement is oriented towards altering the ‘political aura’ of food, but, by being itself a political organization, it holds within itself the very tensions it wants to dissolve. The discourses of the organization are emphasizing the importance of networks and democratic functioning of its projects at the same time as they are aware of the

difficulty of achieving such goals. Thus, struggles and contradictions are not hidden aspects that need to be uncovered by 'external analysts' but they are overtly assumed by the movement itself and its discourses. This double-fold tension contributes to an ongoing transformation of the organization itself such that any clear-cut categorizations of its status will be difficult to make.

One way in which the organization expresses this sense of an altered embodied experience of food is by emphasizing the fact that the sensory and cultural qualities of foods and drinks are disappearing (see Petrini 2001). In the northern parts of Italy in the 1980s, in the region and the time where the organization was being formed, local ways of producing food were seen as under threat of vanishing, at the same time as imported mass produced foods were permeating the Italian market. Metaphorically, the experience of food is conceived by the organization as an antagonistic relation between 'slow' and 'fast' processes. Thus, this social movement seeks to act against the detrimental effects produced by speed.

I will show, however, that while the organization might appear at first to oppose fast food, it actually seeks more to lessen the slow/fast tensions by intervening in the processes, which perform these tensions on a daily basis, through eating and drinking. The core modality which enacts and accompanies eating and drinking is taste. The 'education of taste' through a gradual refinement, extension, and negotiation of sensory and cultural information and knowledge is regarded by the organization as vital. It is a crucial element in forging, mediating, and balancing complex relationships between humans and environments. The complexity of these relationships is reflected in the organization, activities, and programmes of the Movement as well as in the progressive development and transformation of its agenda over time. It is perhaps its original manifesto which best gives a flavour of these

tensions. Written by one of its founding members, the poet Falco Portinari, it was endorsed in 1989 when the organization officially sealed its formation. It states:

The Slow Food Manifesto

Our century, which began and has developed under the insignia of industrial civilization, first invented the machine and then took it as its life model.

We are enslaved by speed and have all succumbed to the same insidious virus: *Fast Life*, which disrupts our habits, pervades the privacy of our homes and forces us to eat Fast Foods.

To be worthy of the name, *Homo Sapiens* should rid himself of speed before it reduces him to a species in danger of extinction.

A firm defense of quiet material pleasure is the only way to oppose the universal folly of *Fast Life*.

May suitable doses of guaranteed sensual pleasure and slow, long-lasting enjoyment preserve us from the contagion of the multitude who mistake frenzy for efficiency.

Our defense should begin at the table with *Slow Food*.

In the name of productivity, *Fast Life* has changed our way of being and

threatens our environment and our landscapes. So *Slow Food* is now the only truly progressive answer.

That is what real culture is all about: developing taste rather than demeaning it. And what better way to set about this than an international exchange of experiences, knowledge, projects?

Slow Food guarantees a better future²⁰.

Thus, the manifesto marks the formation of the movement in response to processes of capitalism and globalization that enhanced the speed of life on the one hand, and on the other, homogenized food. However, the formation of the movement and its manifesto has to be also regarded from the point of view of a distinct Italian political context where the enjoyment and pleasure of food were valued in idiosyncratic ways. The current chapter outlines the formation of the Movement by analysing its project of the education of the senses. The education of taste is perceived by the movement as an enduring way, and a sine-qua-non condition, of preserving existing food cultures, forging a sense of continuity as well as diversity of eating habits, and ultimately, shaping the market. This ethos persists today. In the 2008 edition of the *Slow Food Almanac*, John Irving, British writer and contributor to Slow Food publications, explains that:

For the neo-gastronome, eating isn't only a biological necessity but also a convivial pleasure to be shared with others and a form of responsible

²⁰ See http://www.slowfood.com/about_us/eng/manifesto.lasso, accessed 03/03/06

consumption that exerts a direct effect on the market, hence on food production. And teaching the senses, all five of them, to understand and appreciate food and all it represents is a way of sharpening our awareness of the world around us (Irving 2008: 26).

The outline is largely based on the Movement's own representations of its aims by devoting attention to some of its main publications, including three books written by its founder (*Slow Food. A Case For Taste* (2001), *Slow Food Revolution* (2006) and *Slow Food Nation* (2007), articles of its members and organizers published in magazines (e.g. the quarterly *Slow*, and the yearly *Slow Food Almanac*), and information on their daily updated main web pages. My approach is intended to pinpoint some of the dilemmas and contestations around food and taste as they arise from within the organization and as such highlight the reflective and self-critical stances that keep emerging at its core. The relevance of this aspect, as I will show later on, is not only in showing a characteristic of the movement itself but in pointing to a wider-spread *emergent* attitude in Western societies ever since the late 1980s.

This introduction has set out the parameters along which I situate the organization. It emphasized the fact that the discourses of the organization are a contested terrain where taste and food emerge as central means of reflection, auto-reflection, and action. The following three sections will outline the formation of the organization, its structures and projects, its transformation in time, and will engage with some of its core concepts.

The Beginnings of Slow Food

The ideas of the Slow Food Movement were shaped in the late 1980s by a group of leftist intellectuals who united in the so-called Arcigola association. Arcigola was formed in 1987 as an oeno-gastronomic league that aimed at providing information about local and regional foods and wines (cf. Petrini 2001: 4 and 2006: 45ff). Its defining approach was to relate the qualities of food and drinks to larger cultural understandings and also to a particular way of appreciation through enjoyment and conviviality. In three years, its founders noticed a growth in membership from 500 to 8,000 (cf. Petrini 2001: 7). This success was partly driven by several years of publishing activity before the actual foundation of the association and it is also related to some shifts in the Italian cultural and political arenas. In this sense then, the emphasis on enjoyment as well as the cultivation of awareness of food culture as an effort to conserve distinctive local food products permeating this association should be understood and situated within a distinct Italian cultural-political context.

The field of debates concerning certain foods and drinks particularly strongly affected by variously and rapidly changing economic, political and cultural configurations gained momentum in the second half of the 1980s and culminated in the formation of the gastronomic association in 1987. In his book *Slow Food Revolution* (2006), Petrini gives a sense of these configurations by referring to particular examples. He focuses on certain, production-oriented, agricultural contexts in the 1980s and refers to various scandals related to the adulteration of wine. He explains that weak regulations as well as substandard production methods were a cause of the relatively mediocre quality of wine prevalent in Italy at that time (2006: 48). He also discusses debates concerning the pollution of rivers and drinking water

due to use of pesticides in agriculture (2006: 49). He also notes that natural hazards, such as hail, had also greatly impacted upon especially wine production in certain regions in the northern parts of Italy.

It needs to be said however, that debates around food had been opened up many years before the escalation of such scandals and risks which led to the formation of the Arcigola association in 1987. These arose in relation to political contexts in Italy. Italy had faced in the decades following the World War II several political tensions and constant reorganizations of the left political parties. This gave rise to factions who were committed to a strong moral stance as much as to Catholic ideals (see Parasecoli 2003). Some of these factions tried to imbue a more positive, that is, pleasure-driven attitude in social and cultural affairs, while they at the same time attempted to widen the spectrum of debate beyond the strict confines set by traditional politics. These attempts emerged from within already existing structures and arenas. Italy had ever since the 1960s established a tradition of involving youth in cultural, recreational, and political affairs through a national network of associations called “Archi” which were acting on local and regional levels (see Petrini 2006: 3ff). These associations widened and rejuvenated the political field with issues such as environmental protection, women’s rights, and freedom of information, circulating at that time throughout Europe and America (cf. Petrini 2006: 46). At the same time, they undermined the centralized and ideological system of political functioning. Petrini, the founder of the later Movement, was one of its active members. Alongside the above mentioned issues, Petrini set to change the attitudes of the Left towards food which, as he describes, were “halfway between an abstemiousness worthy of Franciscan friar and an eager commercialism that was illustrated by the Communist

Party's annual Feste dell'Unità" which were popular banquets that attracted thirty million participants (Petrini 2006: 57).

As a first step, Petrini and his friends started to publish a monthly supplement on food issues as part of the newspaper *manifesto* and called it *Gambero Rosso*. Literally meaning "red shrimp," it referred both to a tavern that used to hold gatherings of these leftist groups and ironically alluded, as Parasecoli reminds us, to the "supposed dangers of the "red menace" and the fact that the pleasure-allergic Left was losing ground in the political scene [...] and aimed to change the frequently gloomy and sullen image of leftist initiatives"²¹ (2003: 33). They proved to be quite successful. After the first issue the sales increased by thirty percent. *Gambero Rosso* developed into *Vini d'Italia*, a wine Guide, in 1988. Its initial printing of ten thousand copies sold out, and within a few years it had become so established that it now determines the Italian wine market (Parasecoli 2003: 33). It even became an internationally authoritative wine guide (Kummer 2002: 20). It is important to note that these guidebooks adopted a different mode of reviewing wines than other guides by using a more informal style, and, most importantly, by letting "the locals speak for themselves and be the judges of their own wines" (Petrini 2001: 47). Petrini underlines that by publishing *Vini d'Italia*,

²¹ Parasecoli reproduces a quote from an article of Petrini in the 16 December 1986 issue of *Gambero Rosso* which captures very well the motivation behind his actions: "In this part of our country, close to the Alps, we are used to talking and arguing about good wine, about the typical dishes from our tradition, about the alimentary liberation from our ancient misery ... I have been lucky enough to be involved in that part of the intelligent Left which gathered around *manifesto* and PDUP. Well, one day I was talking to a famous comrade and, while we were ruminating about gastronomy, I was abruptly interrupted by the assertion: 'You people from Langhe, you are always talking about food, you sound like country priests.' Later I learned that the illustrious comrade used to spend his vacations in France, and systematically visited the restaurants on the other side of the Alps: he loved their cuisine, their service, their extraordinary selection of wine. I still remember this detail because it clearly exemplifies the strange relationship between the Italian Left and gastronomy. A private, almost secret approach to the little pleasures of a good table and, generally speaking, distance and lack of interest toward a sector of civil life that, extended to agro-alimentary production and its commercialization, involves more than a quarter of our population." (Petrini cited in Parasecoli 2003: 39)

we went out on a limb by giving space in the book to some relatively unknown labels, by telling the stories of the winegrowers and of the people working alongside them in the wine cellar, and by giving awards to innovators who were experimenting with winemaking techniques that had been used before in Napa Valley and in Burgundy, but not here in Italy (Petrini 2006: 61).

Thus Petrini indirectly positions such guides against dominant forms of expertise legitimized by exclusivity and/or insularity. At the same time his statement invokes a plural view on taste which includes the many practices that contribute to its making and formation. Petrini also emphasizes that “a guidebook for us is a relationship, maintained year after year between readers and authors, and its judgments are not absolute and beyond appeal but subjective and so debatable, and always expressed with a critical spirit and absolute honesty” (2001: 48). Actually it set up a pattern of writing about wine that will become very popular worldwide. Although in Britain, Elisabeth David, the famous food writer, had used the subjective impressionistic style since the 1950s (David 1951). David lured people into reading and using her books by telling stories of the people and places she visited as she was collecting recipes, and by creating a dialogic way of addressing her readers’ assumptions and know-how. This vivid and evocative manner complemented the precision necessary for the making of recipes.

The reviews compiled in the guides were not restricted to wine. Any foods and drinks that were somehow charged with symbolic roots in the cultural landscape of northern Italy could figure as a catalyst for both debate and celebration. Often, these foods could be found in particular traditional eating places. Arcigola started to identify places where local foods and drinks were appreciated and sought to protect

and promote them, like for instance the *osterie* or *trattatorie* (cf. Petrini 2001: 51). These are traditional, simple eating places in Italy which serve local, seasonal foods, are mostly run by families and use to host a diverse clientele, ranging from workers and peasants to lawyers and entrepreneurs. They served as a place of sociality in communities. While unique to Italy, many European countries may have similar establishments which incorporate the above mentioned concepts, like for instance in Britain the pub, or in France, in the Lyon area, the *bouchon* (traditional Lyonnais restaurant). Petrini makes the following remark:

Slow Food sees the *osteria* as the symbolic locus of traditional cuisine, run as a family business, with simple service, a welcoming atmosphere, good-quality wine, and moderate prices. We are not museum curators, and it is not our intention to bring a dying breed of business tied to the rural society of the past (or the urban one, before consumerism) back to life. Rather we want to give new visibility to a realm overlooked by literature and by the guidebook writers (Petrini 2001: 52).

So far several aspects are clear. Slow Food locates its activities in certain key areas which traditionally feature as markers and makers of taste: magazines and guides, and public eating places. It might have maintained a lower, more local profile had it not been for the acceleration of the process of world globalisation which forced its way in its most apparent form of Fast Food chains to the hearth of traditional western civilization, Italy and Rome. However, these decisions for particular area come also with a claim of being different from conventional understandings of taste, as the above mentioned quote by Petrini exemplifies. And, they also seem to invoke a

need of being differentiated and at the same time justified against ‘other’ tastes. Petrini’s emphasis on the simple and mundane indirectly marks out other aspects of tastes associated with high-end eating, exclusivity and rarity. This sense of distinction and justification is invoked in relation to ruling political as well as cultural establishments in Italy at that time (such as some parts of the political Left, and the conservative Italian Food Academy). The intentions of the movement are precisely to challenge assumptions that “interest in good quality food and wine was a bourgeois affectation and it argued that progressive political thought needed to give legitimacy to pleasure and aesthetics” (Parkins and Craig 2006: 20). These attitudes and intentions, however, did not remain confined to national concerns and came to be directed more and more towards transnational spheres. The spread of McDonalds, seen as the quintessence of globalization, speed and homogeneity, prompted further actions.

Thus, in 1989 the proposed opening of a McDonald’s restaurant in the Piazza di Spagna close to the Spanish steps in Rome caused intense reaction. Petrini and his friends organized a luncheon where they would publicly eat bowls of pasta sitting at a long table covered with white tablecloth placed right in front of the proposed fast food outlet. It is in this context that one of his friends, the poet Falco Portinari, coined the name Slow Food. This public demonstration marked the members’ “critical reactions to the symptoms of incipient globalization” (Petrini 2001: 8).

By using an English name, the organization oriented itself towards international horizons. A few months after this public event delegates from fifteen countries met in Paris at the Opéra-Comique to officially sign the protocol of the organization, ratify its *Manifesto* and seal it with the movement’s symbol, a snail, which Kummer, one of America’s leading food commentators, refers to as a “small,

cosmopolitan, and prudent” creature and an “amulet against speed” (2002: 22). The English name, thus, signals a globalizing strategy of the movement itself and discourages any attempts to perceive it as against globalization. Petrini emphasizes in his later public speeches that the organization embraces a “virtuous globalization” and their reaction against McDonalds is therefore more directed against corporate transnational power than globalization per se.

Without doubt the meeting of the panel outside Italy had political motives. Examining them helps to better understand the specifically Italian, i.e. local, background of a movement that has significantly spread worldwide, but has done so in an effort to protect the local. The motivations behind the meeting in Paris come out in Petrini’s first overview of the Movement, *Slow Food. The Case for Taste* (2001). There, Petrini refers to the fact that Italy did certainly have an established tradition of gastronomic institutions but these figured as “incarnations of the provincial spirit, fidelity to tradition, and a desire to bring back the rituals and feasts of the past,” (2001: 9) or in other words everything that was suppressed during the fascist period. He discusses the Academia Italiana della Cucina (Italian Culinary Society) but there the problem was that this one “was for VIPs and their substitutes, welcoming people of the right sort and putting on show appetites of people who had never been hungry in their lives. Though it was not overtly political by the very nature of its membership it belonged on the conservative side of the political spectrum” (Petrini 2001: 10). Petrini’s organization wanted, by contrast, to encourage membership of mixed classes, and the Opéra-Comique had always represented, (as opposed to *the Opéra*), a welcoming open place for the middle classes. The venue thus supported and symbolically underlined the Movement’s cultural, democratic and international orientation. So, Slow Food seems to be as much a reaction to the parochialism and

mediocrity of Italian political and cultural establishments as it is a response to an influx of phenomena arriving in Italy through processes that have been circumscribed by the term 'globalization'.

Before examining further stages in the development of the movement, it is worth noting that 'slow' figures as a constant metaphor, uniting the most varied range of the Movement's ideas and actions under an overarching concept. 'Slow', for instance, is included in the Movement's own publishing house "Slow Food Editore" whose publications of guides, periodicals, and magazines are aimed at reflecting and supporting the core philosophy of the organization: from the extolment of pleasure, to the development of taste, to the protection of biodiversity, Slow Food wants to raise the profile of quality food and wine production, to safeguard endangered artisan specialties, vegetable species and animal breeds, to inform and educate consumers and to promote clean, sustainable agriculture and a new idea of gastronomy.²² Slow Food Editore's most circulated publications include *Vini d'Italia* and *Osterie d'Italia*, and they sell over 100,000 copies annually. Its quarterly journal *Slow* is now published in six languages and it serves to communicate its values to its most diverse and disparate members. Its comprehensive website (<http://slowfood.com/>) is updated daily and can be accessed in nine languages.

Structure and projects of Slow Food

The principles and aims of the movement are reflected in the structure and organization of its projects, where establishing relations to producers, consumers or

²² See http://editore.slowfood.com/editore/welcome_eng.lasso, accessed 07/08/09

‘co-producers’²³, institutions, and localities, remains a key endeavour. The movement operates through local groups or chapters known as *convivia*. Twenty years after the formation of Slow Food, there are 1000 *convivia* with more than 100,000 members²⁴ in 132 countries²⁵ from all over the world. The *convivia* are meant to be the local expressions of the Slow Food philosophy. As such, they build relationships with producers, campaign to protect traditional foods, organize tastings and seminars, encourage chefs to source locally, nominate producers to participate in international events, and work towards bringing taste education into schools. Most importantly, as emphasized on the organization’s website, these local chapters cultivate the appreciation of pleasure and quality in daily life. In many ways, the *convivia* follow the pattern of the early meetings of the Arcigola group where the conception of projects and aims emerged in restaurants and cafes. They stress the importance of enjoyment, the conviviality of ‘shared tables’ through dining events which represent the value of investing time in hospitality and commensality. The guidelines for starting a convivium particularly emphasize that it should be inclusive and based on equal opportunity, welcoming anyone and everyone to participate in their events and activities. Often its activities are not limited to its members only so that the democratic ideal of the organization can be pursued. The convivium should also reflect a distinct region in order that characteristic contours for the identity of each group are traced²⁶. While Slow Food places considerable emphasis on actions pursued

²³ Petrini uses this term in his writings, interviews and public speeches.

²⁴ The sheer number of members does not on its own reflect the popularity of the movement. It is also the large number of participating countries from all the corners of the world which substantiates the fact that ‘slow food’ can appeal to a large spectrum of issues which in turn are specific for each area. Moreover, as with other organizations, there are more followers than there are actually members. For instance, the UK has currently almost 3000 members but most of its projects and activities are open and host probably as many non-members. In the rest of this chapter, and the later chapters, the close relationships to other models, such as organic, fair-trade and local, will become more apparent, and will in fact explain that membership numbers are not crucially relevant.

²⁵ See <http://www.slowfood.com/>, accessed 01/09/09

²⁶ This site contains guidelines for starting a convivium:

at local level, by forming local groups, the head office mainly runs the task of coordinating larger-scale transnational projects. The head office is located in Bra, a small town in the Piedmont region of Italy, and the hometown of Carlo Petrini.

The larger projects of the organization are meant to reflect the aims pursued at the local level by the *convivia*. At the same time, they also feed back into the aims of the *convivia*. It is the larger projects that create more visibility for the organization and reflect on a wider scale the commitment of the organization to incorporate food in a broader political and ecological agenda. Larger projects have started to emerge in the last ten years and these mark significant transformations that the organization has been undergoing over two decades. From a gastronomic organization Slow Food evolved into an ‘eco-gastronomic’ one. While connections between the enjoyment of food and ecology had been emphasized from its very inception (as all early editions of the periodical *Slow* demonstrate) it has been only in the past years that a new focus on biodiversity and sustainable systems of agriculture has gained priority. Petrini’s vision for a ‘new gastronomy’ is summed up in his latest book *Slow Food Nation* (2007). He emphasizes that, for him, gastronomy is part of many fields and any attempt to define it cannot be pursued unless these fields are considered: botany, genetics and the other natural sciences, physics and chemistry, agriculture, zootechnics, and agronomy, ecology, anthropology, sociology, geopolitics, political economy, trade, technology, industry, cooking, physiology, medicine, epistemology (see Petrini 2007: 55ff).

One major aspect of this broad understanding of gastronomy involves attention and care to products which are specific of a region, those products which are less known but distinctive of a place, or those which are in danger of going extinct. Thus, in 1996 Slow Food formed the Foundation for Biodiversity which operates

projects such as the ‘Ark of Taste,’ which represents a kind of catalogue or database of rare, endangered or unique products from around the world. Such projects figure as a response to what the movement perceives as an increasing homogenization of tastes due to industrial standardization, hygiene laws, the regulations of large-scale distribution, and a decline in biodiversity (see Petrini 2001). The ‘Ark’ operates through so-called ‘Presidia’ which were created to protect small producers and to preserve the quality of artisan products. There are 300 Presidia around the world and the focus is increasingly devoted to products from the Global South, “from Tibetan cheese makers producing yak milk cheese at 4500 meters of altitude to nomadic fishermen on the Banc d'Arguin in Mauritania, from small farmers in Bronte, Sicily who pick pistachio nuts by hand on the slopes of Etna, to curadoras de semillas in Chile who still preserve the ancient breed of the blue egg chicken”²⁷. With the ‘Earth Markets’ project, kindred in spirit with the ‘Ark of Taste’, the Foundation supports the development, diffusion and enforcement of the relationships between the farmers’ markets of the world. In doing so, they aim to reduce the number of intermediaries between producers and distributors, and also the distance food travels from field to table.

There are several implications of these projects. They invoke an urgency of rethinking relations between production and consumption, and a necessity to realize the intricate material and immaterial connectivities that the circulation of food in both these spheres manifest (not least through the people involved in the making and movement of food). Indeed, further projects have been initiated to enhance these relationships. Two of the largest events are the food festival ‘Salone del Gusto’ (Hall of Taste) and the international gathering of food communities ‘Terra Madre.’ Both

²⁷ See http://www.slowfoodfoundation.com/eng/cosa_facciamo.lasso

take place biannually in Turin. The former was started in 1996 and the latter runs parallel to it since 2004. 'Salone del Gusto' attracts a large number of visitors and is a highly mediated event. The second edition of the Hall of Taste in 1998 hosted 120,000 visitors and ten years later the number increased to nearly 200,000 with a noticeable percentage of foreign visitors²⁸. The prime intention behind the creation of the Hall of Taste is to provide a space for small producers to exhibit and sell their produce. The organizers allow, however, also the participation of merchants and intermediary suppliers. But small producers represent about 75% of the total number of participants. But while it is international, Italian produce predominates, such that the project becomes an attempt to construct a national food 'heritage.' The 'Ark of Taste' and 'Earth Market' produce are allocated a special place within the fair. Terra Madre complements the festival by creating a space where producers can meet and communicate. It figures as a forum for the most diverse actors involved in food production, catering, supply and its promotion. The largest group of participants are the 5000 farmers, or as Petrini likes to call them, "earth-intellectuals" (2006: 164), and small producers from around the world who are brought together to share and exchange their experiences and everyday knowledges. Due to the numbers of farmers present, Terra Madre is sometimes called the "peasant United Nations" (Dickie 2007: 308). Alongside farmers, there are convivia leaders and members, 500 academics, 1,000 cooks, members from 'The Youth Food Movement', 800 volunteers, and 2,300 observers and guests. All participate in workshops and conferences which have a regional focus, or concern particular products, or more widely shared food issues, such as GMOs and seed diversity, or food crises in conjunction to climate change or the fossil fuel production.

²⁸ See <http://www.salonedelgusto.com/eng/>, accessed 06/08/09

Inspired by these events, several other smaller festivals and gatherings sprang up in Italy, the rest of Europe, the US, and increasingly throughout the rest of the world, for instance in Mexico, Brazil, Lebanon, Japan or Australia. They operate according to the same principles as the Hall of Taste and the Terra Madre - the emphasis on distinctive and artisanal produce in local food economies and communities. Italy hosts 'Slow Fish' in Genoa, 'Slow Cheese' in Bra, 'Slow Food on Film' in Bologna. Outside Italy there are events such as 'Euro Gusto' in Tours, France, 'Algusto' in Bilbao, Spain, 'Markt des guten Geschmacks' in Stuttgart, Germany, 'Grandmother's Day' in Ireland, etc. Further, there are many events that are organized in partnership with other festivals and fairs and emphasize the intentions of Slow Food to liaise with like-minded groups and associations.

A further hub that facilitates the circulation of food knowledge is the University of Gastronomic Sciences founded by Slow Food in 2004. This private university is perhaps unique as it wants to serve as an interdisciplinary research centre for studies in gastronomy, oenology, tourism, communication, hospitality and agriculture, by offering degree programmes as well as short training courses. This curricular intervention is not only pursued at the undergraduate and postgraduate level but also in schools through school garden projects. School garden projects are meant to facilitate children's engagement with the process of growing foods. So, while the university makes a significant contribution to the international profile of the movement, the school garden projects once again testify to the movement's commitment to local campaigns and 'grassroots' initiatives. Very strong support of such projects has come with the growth of Slow Food USA which has implemented this educational programme nationally with initiatives such as: after-school farmer's markets, farmer visits to the classroom, parent and child cooking classes, tracing

foods from seed to plate by growing, harvesting, preparing and eating.²⁹ These initiatives were very much inspired by Alice Waters, a renowned restaurateur from California and currently vice-president of the international Slow Food Movement. Similarly, in Britain, children's education is a particular focus and has been gaining momentum in conjunction with school dinners projects mediated and promoted through the campaigns of popular cook Jamie Oliver.

The success of the Movement and its relatively rapid spread around the world, especially in the past decade, was supported also by a parallel autonomous organization called "Cittàslow" or Slow Cities created in 1999. Closely linked with Slow Food, this organization further enforces the fact that the Slow Food philosophy extends the ethics involved in food production and consumption to a whole way of living, including not only eating and producing food but also the spaces and places where people live. To achieve Cittàslow accreditation a town must meet specified criteria and implement policies concerning its environment and infrastructure, the quality of its urban fabric (including technology, business and public health), its encouragement of local produce, its hospitality and community, all of which contribute to the creation of Cittàslow awareness. Usually, participating towns do not exceed a population of 50,000 inhabitants and can reach as low as 1500 inhabitants. There are around 70 in Italy and many of them are located in the regions of Tuscany and Umbria but slow cities are growing worldwide³⁰. For instance, towns in Germany (e.g. Waldkirch, Ueberlingen), Norway (Levanger and Sokndal), and the United Kingdom (e.g. Ludlow, Diss, Aylsham, Cockermouth) are now calling themselves Slow Cities.

²⁹ See more http://www.slowfoodusa.org/index.php/programs/details/in_schools/, accessed 10/08/09

³⁰ See <http://cittaslow.blogspot.com/2008/10/cittaslow-list.html>, accessed 10/08/09

Cittàslow does not involve a radical change of the places. Many of the cities are well known tourist destinations but some are smaller market towns, which manage to sustain a slow way of living. In this sense, Mayer and Knox rightly remark that “such a process of course favors those applicants that already have a well-developed repertoire of programs and policies that fit with the Slow City criteria [...] to become a Slow City, towns must already have a well-defined alternative agenda” (2006: 327). Slow Cities embrace the Slow Food philosophy by focusing on sensory qualities of places, and skill transference in more locally based economies and thus avoidance of big-corporate businesses. These partake in the formation of slow knowledges of people, produce and places. For Petrini, slow living means:

to be able to sit on the terrace of a café without being poisoned by the exhaust fumes of automobiles; to visit historical cities at a gentle pedestrian pace; to stay in tourist attractions that haven't been ravaged by speculative overbuilding; to eat choice foods produced by local craftspeople (Petrini 2001: 25).

What holds together all these projects is the allure of ‘slowness.’ Initially conceived as a reaction to fast food, during the course of two decades it came to incorporate a larger range of aspects as has been shown above. The organizational structure of the movement which emphasizes networks has its counterpart in the movement's understanding of gastronomy as dependent on and co-created through relations. Thus Slowness emerges as a relational concept that is meant to open up manifold possibilities of learning about food, taste, and life.

Relational concepts and their openness

Taste becomes entangled in a variety of discourses and practices and this is supported by what I call ‘relational concepts’ which the Movement deploys. Some of them are referred to in this section. But I use the notion of relational concept to foreground my own conceptualizations of taste pursued in subsequent chapters. Thus I underpin the view of taste as relational.

The many projects created and enacted by Slow Food place food in a multitude of relationships at the same time as they emphasize that food is a vital way of relating to others. After all, the above mentioned festivals and gatherings such as Terra Madre, also called by its founder the world gathering of ‘food communities,’ place their participants at the centre of attention. These meetings are a form of commensality where people share food in a kindred spirit, and, “suggest that eating is a great reminder of our common humanity,” as British historian John Dickie beautifully puts it (2007: 345).

There are certain key concepts that its founding members draw upon as they shape their projects and aims, and these further enhance the importance which the movement places on connections. Some which stand out are ‘food communities’, ‘terroir’ in relation to the land, and ‘co-producers’ as a way to emphasize the co-participation of the consumers in the act of production of the food.

Terroir is a notion that was originally used in France in order to describe the particular taste of a wine which retained the characteristics of the soil, the variety of the grapes, as well as the specific social and cultural traits and techniques which were applied in the production of those wines. In this sense, the concept helps to reveal inherent connections between food, taste, people and place. Imported from France into the philosophy of the organization it came to be used not only for wines but also

to denominate a whole range of food and drinks, such that it acquired an affinity with the metaphor of slowness. Petrini reflects: “Food is most important to me as a way of relating to others. Even when I happen to eat by myself in a restaurant, which is rare, I feel I am sharing my meal with the environment that surrounds me” (2006: 179). Terroir also came to emphasize the origins of food and with it, the importance of knowing where the food comes from. Understood as a “more integrated production, marketing, and distribution system” (Petrini 2006: 62), terroir foregrounds the search of the movement for more ‘transparency’ in the food chain. Terroir, as a strategy and concept strongly invokes notions of ‘tradition’ and ‘authenticity’. Its harmonious allure does not however remain uncontested. While a more detailed account of its many facets will follow in chapter 4, at this point an example will be used in order to point out that Slow Food publications articulate these contestations, and to point to the way in which terroir unleashes broader meanings which move beyond its original use in France and thus further enhancing the relational nature.

An article written by Brian Halweil, a senior researcher with the Worldwatch Institute, published in the magazine *Slow* in 2007 clearly exemplifies this aspect. He quotes Barber’s reflections on slow food. Dan Barber is one of America’s renowned chefs and he has a strong leaning towards the principles practiced by the Slow Food organization.

I don’t want to be about saving rare breeds and rare veggies and I don’t want to be about cooking so simply that I’m only *invoking the soil*. I very much want to push things forward. I want technology and innovation to permeate all of it (Barber, quoted by Halweil 2007: 50) (emphasis added).

Halweil goes on to describe a dinner menu and further comments following Barber's own words, "the meal in some ways is anti-Slow Food, said Barber, whose farmstead cuisine at five-star prices sometimes seems to walk the tight rope of contradiction" and adds that this makes this dinner "a perfect metaphor for Slow Food itself, which was born of contradiction and continues to feed on it" (Halweil 2007: 50). Barber's comments represent reflections characteristic of the Slow Food Movement in regard to what exactly it is that defines its ethos and practice: does it include high-end and gastronomy or does it prefer the more traditional and close to the land cuisines of peasants?; Is it open to change and innovation or does it adhere to purist conceptions of history and tradition?

Further accounts reveal a more complex picture and attenuate the logic of such critical views. Also, in order to refer back to the many levels which terroir may inhere, a further account about Barber written in a recent edition of *Time* magazine by Ferran Adrià, the renowned Spanish chef, deserves to be mentioned here:

One of the ways humans communicate is by way of the kitchen, and this is what Barber, 39, does through his dishes. But he is something more than just a chef. His ethics — conservation, the use of vegetables and animals that are grown and raised within the Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture — are a model for all chefs and all those who love good food. Everything he does in the organic world is authentic and truthful. There is no pretense. When he offers you an appetizer composed of simple vegetables dewy with liquid salt, he is saying something to you. He converses with one of the things that I love in gastronomy: the essence of the produce. These are culinary preparations that retain the soul of the food. You discover and decipher the workings of that

language — sometimes simple, sometimes complex — during the meal. It is a playful dialogue because we enjoy eating it.³¹ (Adrià 2009)

Dialogue and connections are also emphasized with the term ‘co-producer’ which Petrini deploys in order to accentuate that by ingesting food one is carrying part of the responsibility for the way it is produced and consumed. Therefore knowing food through tasting, seeing, and hearing about it, and also by sharing its knowledge becomes tantamount for the movement³². The members and organizers of Slow Food events are either small producers and thus hold an intricate knowledge about the processes which went into the creation of their produce, or they are food writers and journalists, cooks or chefs, or simply people who acquired a love of food through their travels in many places. In this sense then, Parkins and Craig poignantly refer to the fact that Slow Food projects represent an instance of “ethical cosmopolitanism” which they argue, is increasingly shaping people’s decisions and consumption in everyday life (2006: 25). Cosmopolitanism has its analogue counterpart in the interdisciplinary and international character of the workshops and conferences organized by the movement (whether as parts of festivals and fairs or as independent events) that bring together analysts and scholars from the most diverse fields (e.g. evolutionary biology, sociology, food policy, nutrition, marketing, tourism, etc.).

The diversity of its aims and projects gives Slow Food an affinity with a large range of social groups and organizations. For instance, Slow Food is affiliated with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and collaborates closely

³¹See

http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1894410_1893209_1893460,00.html, accessed 06/05/2009

³² Knowledge implies a sense of normativity which will be analysed in later chapters. For the present discussion knowledge is referred to only by acknowledging that it is brought in relation with producers and consumers, and that it is used as a tool to ignite and spread projects and events.

with the Association of the Future of Seeds founded in India by Vandana Shiva. Also, on a more local level, many of the events and projects are run in partnership with organic or fair-trade associations. These alliances speak for the common aims of these organizations and reflect (and refract) once more the intentions of the Slow Food Movement to be inclusive at as many levels as possible. Petrini emphasizes in a special report on Slow Food in an issues of *The Ecologist* of 2004 that:

I do not like to talk about Slow Food as something that stands in opposition to other things. We go calmly along our own path, convinced that efforts to create a better world begin with how one grows one's food and end with how one consumes it. (Petrini: 2004)

While creating their own agenda, and given the overlaps with other food actions and programs, the organization clearly tries to mark out some of the aspects which are not in line with their ethos. Slow Food distinguishes itself from the direct actions of the so called 'anti-globalization' protesters, such as the French famer and activist, José Bové. In exploiting the global communicative potentials to promote food and cultural differences (through their online and print presence) and fostering networks of support and cooperation across national borders (through Terra Madre or Presidia projects), Slow Food aims to foster a more positive approach to globalization. Petrini encapsulates these aims in the notion of "virtuous globalization" and elaborates them in his book *Slow Food Nation* (2007) which also formulates the program for a 'new gastronomy' that is to operate according to "good, clean, and fair" principles. These, more recent reformulations of the Slow Food ethos in favour of "good, clean, and fair" foods are not so much a strict guideline of criteria as they are more an outline of

reflections that reveal once again the critical and questioning attitude inherent in the Slow Food agendas. More generally they also seem to reflect a disappointment with already established systems of 'organic,' 'fair trade' and 'local' production.

In an article published in an Italian newspaper and later extended in his *Slow Food Nation* (2007) Petrini muses:

Is food that is fair and supportive necessarily a quality product? It respects the work of small farmers and often enjoys organic certification, but is it always good? I can assure you that I have eaten products that were fair and supportive but which were truly awful and inedible. Fair and clean does not always mean good.

Does being organic equal quality? Clean and good maybe, but if you look at California for example, they'll sell you peppers that are by no means miracles of nature at horrific prices. Plus, there are thousands of Mexicans slaving in the fields for a pittance. In short, a certain kind of organic is often not fair.

Is top wine always quality wine? There are some incredible wines produced in Italy and producers are also able to make good profits, but is it right to disfigure some of the most attractive areas with an invasive monoculture, even planting vines facing north, instead of leaving woods and meadows which would be more appropriate? In this case the wine is good and fair but not clean.³³

³³ Published on <http://www.slowfoodlondon.com/>, accessed 20.09.2006. First published in *La Stampa* 20/02/05

Petrini's reflections hint at the ambiguities of established denominations such as organic and fair-trade. Organic produce now often rely on the monoculture systems that conventional agriculture is using and may travel as many miles as any other mass-market produce. Organic food is part of the same retail and distribution logic as any mainstream model would use. Fair-trade products have more and more been incorporated into mainstream agendas. While they support some producers they exclude others. In the same vein, while they may enhance the fair functioning of some production practices, especially in the global south, they can efface equity issues occurring with products in the global north. In this sense, then, Petrini's advocacy for 'good, clean and fair' food is meant to draw attention to these contradictions and, to ignite the reformation of these models. It also shows the inherent overlaps with other models at the same time as it represents an attempt to demarcate itself from them. His formula, however, remains loose and justifies itself as a reflective pattern of thought that is intended to drive the actions and plans of the organizers and members of the movement. Last but not least, it is hoped this model will spread more widely. Paolo di Croce, general secretary of Terra Madre, explains 'good, clean and fair' is a "slogan [that] contains a message for everyone: it was our *passe-partout* wherever we went (di Croce, cited by Rosati 2007: 84).

'Good, clean and fair' is as loose a definition as is 'slow food.' This looseness defies the search for a unitary model of action. It rather shows that, as Chrzan points out, "members use the phrase 'slow food' to mean all that is positive to people, societies, and the globe – ecologically and spiritually" (2004: 121). The Slow Food Movement represents a search for meaningful relations, open in its concepts and programmatic in its projects. The projects, structure and agenda of the organization discussed in this chapter shows the diversity of the movement's foci, the multitude of

its alliances with other organizations and actors, and points to the manifold influences it attracts as well as the ongoing transformations which it undergoes. As projects and programmes unfold, the organization reveals that taste and food are fundamental anchoring and connecting tools to material and immaterial aspects of life.

The next Chapter investigates modes of connecting people and food through the lens of concepts of taste such as ‘umami’ and ‘terroir’ and thus provides an analysis of sensuous formations of the perception and experience of taste. My own encounters with the Slow Food Movement prompted me to point out once more the emphasis placed on relations, networks and dialogue, and on such concepts as terroir. These occur in the written and verbal official discourses of the Movement but deserve renewed attention because they are lived, performed and further shaped in the practices and events of the Movement. My participation in these events made these aspects stand out against the more structural and organizational concerns of the Movement. Meeting people from many places and with many different concerns and occupations brought out the fact that their prime incentives and motivations were to first share their enthusiasms with like-minded people and through new connections open up to new possibilities of approaching foods, organizing working groups and events and raising interest in food as a matter of political civic concern.

Chapter 4 Taste Formations: Displaced and Emplaced Tastes

The world full of possibilities is like a buffet table set with mouth-watering dishes, too numerous for the keenest of eaters to hope to taste them all. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (2000: 63)

As Neo³⁴ must learn he is a fake before he can be real, so too as tasters we must also learn how taste is, and has been, constructed before we might benefit from re-engagement with the chains of forces and processes which link taste to a living and organic reality.

Roger Haden, *Taste in an Age of Convenience* (2005: 356)

Introduction

This chapter builds upon two central themes set out in chapters 2 and 3 - the *connectivities* of taste and the *tensions* of taste – and explores them further, in the light of an explanatory inquiry into the ways in which the processes of training of the senses emerge and manifest themselves. The chapter weaves such an enquiry around the concepts of ‘Umami’ and ‘Terroir.’ These concepts form part of the discourses and practices of the Slow Food Movement but also play a wide role in many food-related domains ranging from industries to niche markets. The concepts shed light on some of the processes that take part in the formation of taste and the senses.

³⁴ Haden refers here to the movie ‘Matrix’ directed by Andy and Larry Wachowsky (1999).

In fact, this chapter engages with several perspectives that grapple with the need advocated by the Slow Food Movement to connect food with humans and their lives (continuing the work of chapter 3). It unravels some of the tensions between biological and cultural aspects of taste, more concretely, the tensions between ‘slow’ and ‘fast’ experiences of taste (continuing the work of chapters 2 and 3) and asks in what way they contribute to and shape the process of formation and training of taste and the senses.

As noted in Chapter 1, there are several levels of engagement with food. Drawing on ethnographic research, I explain that levels of engagement comprise experiences that derive both from food practices such as eating out, or doing comparative tasting sessions. Food practices rely on various sensory practices which include the differential input of the senses when eating, such as for instance when certain senses are predominant (see more Chapter 5). These levels of engagement may trigger processes of learning or may themselves represent ways of knowing. The existence of tensions and connectivities at different levels (or between them) represents, I claim, a source of *multiple* ways in which taste, food, and culture are interrelated in the human experience. Bearing in mind that the globalization of food systems and food cultures in modern and postmodern phases of capitalist societies have greatly affected and transformed our experiences of food and taste, I aim to show that taste and speed have become closely interlinked. Haden’s quote referring to the famous Sci-fi film Matrix stated at the beginning of this chapter is meant to pinpoint this aspect.

I address the formation of tastes through the concept of what I call *sensory pageantry* and regard it as one mode of engagement with food. By sensory pageantry I mean a pattern of sensuous perceptual activity which lends the relation between

people and food an agentive character through heightened forms of stimulation. I explore its various ways of operation in the context of food fairs and analyse it further in relation to arguments advanced by Gibson (1986) and Rodaway (1994).

Thus, I advance a different view from the one proposed in the early programmatic discourses of the Slow Food Movement whereby taste and speed are diametrically opposed to each other. In other words, taste and speed can be viewed as dynamically related to each other. I use the term speed in a broad sense and to refer to a particular way of consuming and experiencing food. I regard these as ‘feeding back’ upon the ways in which we view the techniques of production and supply that go into the making of foods. The discursive framings of the Slow Food Movement justify the alleged categorical antagonism between taste and speed in contemporary western societies by invoking the historical processes by which globalization and industrialization have sped up the experience of taste and eating. The consequences of globalization and industrialization are salient at every level of human life – they amount to what has been labelled as ‘time-space compression’ (Harvey 1989), as much as to homogenization, or placelessness (Augé 1995, Relph 1976) and rationalization (Ritzer 2004). Such processes came to be felt as having negative effects upon people’s relation to food. In this sense, the Slow Food Movement regarded them as leading to a loss of tastes as well as of regional and national foods and cuisines, and to a sense of alienation and disengagement from food and the places where they are produced and consumed. This chapter thus investigates some aspects that are meant to unpack these seemingly inescapable predicaments.

First, I suggest that some projects of the Slow Food Movement actually demand a speedy engagement with foods while others are enjoyed at a slower pace. The examples drawn from my research at a Slow Food fair in Italy pinpoint speedy

modalities of engagement with foods. Subsequent chapters (5, 6, and 7) will analyse slower paced tasting modalities and draw the connections between these two modes.

Second, and more importantly, I switch from the discursively oriented views of Slow Food Movement towards an analysis more informed by practice. I focus on taste as knowledge; this is a view of taste as a *sensory practice*.

A focus on sensory practice widens the perspective which sees knowledge of food and taste as solely reliant on propositional knowledge, by adding bodily ways of knowing as essential dimensions. Bodily sensory practices disclose aspects which the amount of information delivered through discursive and propositional contents may not. Indeed, the very connection between the present chapters and the previous chapter could accordingly be recast. While chapter 2 and 3 have dealt with discursive ways of relating to food and taste, the present (and following) chapter(s) considers some of the material processes by which people come to engage with and know food and taste. In the present chapter, sensory practice refers to the embedded and embodied ways in which people experience food and taste. People's encounters with food necessarily have an embodied character. However, I focus on encounters which have greatly impacted upon our relation to food and, as a consequence, produced new understandings and ways of approaching food. I thereby indicate that taste and speed resemble more a tug of war of competing and contesting sensory practices.

In order to illustrate this relationship I draw upon two concepts which inform some of the ways people engage with food. One of them is umami, the other one is terroir. Both concepts capture the intertwining of biological and cultural dimensions that take part in the crafting of taste. They sensitize us to the fact that taste should be regarded in both its dimensions, and further, that one dimension should not be emphasized at the expense of the other. Using these two concepts as a preliminary

step to analyze data from my ethnographic research will inform a view of sensory practices as a dynamic system of perceptual shifts that affect thresholds of sensibility. These shifts in the sensorium will designate fluctuations in the degrees of sensory stimulation from high to low or from depth to surface. In this way, sensory experiences will stretch in-between two poles where at one end we have hyperstimulation and at the other the slowing down of perception.

As noted in Chapter 1, these concerns, questions and concepts emerged not only from engagement with discourses of food and taste but also from the fieldwork undertaken for this project. They originate in a particular experience of foods, places, people and tastes, at the time when I undertook one of my first field trips in 2006 to Turin where a large Slow Food meeting took place over the period of five days early in October. The sheer scale of the food fair, the ubiquity of foods, as well as the large number of participants from all over the world inevitably brought up questions regarding the specificity and significance of such an event. What interested me back then (and remained a matter of concern throughout my research) was not only to listen to the messages and aims transmitted in the form of briefings, conferences and workshops but also to attend to some of the ways in which aspects of knowledge about food were staged and negotiated between guests and producers at the food fair. I hoped thereby to identify some possible patterns of tasting and communicating which could provide clues for the ways in which human beings learn and know taste while being distant from an immediate connection to the physical territory and place where food was grown and produced. Most of these patterns emerged in later stages of my research. But the immediacy of experience prompted questions which, combined with subsequent reflection, created connections that ultimately point to the non-linear and process character of both research and taste as a mode of knowing.

Historicized Palates: the case of MSG/Umami

The history of monosodium glutamate, as described by Sand (2005), starts at the beginning of the 20th century with the desire of the Japanese chemist Ikeda Kikunae to develop a cheap and mass-manufactured source of nutrition. Trained in Germany, he followed in the footsteps of his colleague Justus von Liebig, renowned for his beef extract which fed German armies. He isolated the ingredient in sea kelp that gave flavour to the popular Japanese broth konbu dashi and designed in his laboratory the product which later became known as monosodium glutamate and proposed calling it ‘umami’ which in Japanese meant ‘tasty.’ He then set off to promote it in Japan and used the claims of a Japanese doctor according to which flavour facilitates digestion. But relegating taste to health did not suffice to turn the production of MSG into a lucrative business. At a time when Japan was developing its industries in an effort to pursue the Western goals of modernization and rationalization, the ‘white powder’ came to be marketed as a product which offered “predictability, efficiency, and convenience” (Rubinfien, cited in Sand 2005: 38). As such, umami soon became a symbol of modern lifestyle. Branded as the ‘essence of taste,’ the white powder promised to ‘enhance’ the flavor of all dishes in a predictable, efficient, convenient, and above all hygienic and nutritious way. However, Sand (2005) emphasizes that its way into the market was not straightforward. Ikeda needed to design and promote a model which placed diet and the use of MSG at the intersection of chemical science and nineteenth-century progressive concerns regarding the health of the Japanese nation.

In the course of forty years MSG managed to become dominant in most Japanese households and even the most resistant to it, like chefs who held onto their artisan’s pride, came to use it in order to meet the desires of their customers. Sand

points out that by 1939 MSG had “become a necessity; since people used it in everything at home their taste buds had become so accustomed to the seasoning they didn’t enjoy dishes without it” (2005: 41). Ikeda’s civilizing project met its targets of convenience and efficiency but also brought about a lowering of the standards of cooking and a leveling of all dishes to one flavor (Sand 2005: 43). Once the domestic market was saturated, Ikeda’s company expanded into China, Taiwan, and the US.

US citizens discovered a taste for Chinese restaurants and Chinatowns and umami came to stimulate American palates. This was but one channel through which MSG made its way into America. Sand mentions also the less visible channels: factory processed foods and the US military complex (Sand 2005: 43). However, with consumer trust in the food industry breaking down in the 1960s, MSG was one more risk factor along with other chemicals in the food system, liable to cause numbness and palpitations or the so-called “Chinese Restaurant Syndrome” and even brain damage. Umami had to be rebranded. Ikeda proposed that umami was a fifth basic taste, and supported this claim by introducing images of ‘nature’ and ‘naturalness’ in its advertising program and design of bottles.

While brief, this account points to the multiple and complex relations and extent of lasting influences which a single item had on the food market. Whereas ideological and cultural messages prompted and spread its success on the market, the habituation of the palates of its consumers ensured its ubiquity and demanded that it is used in more and more products. Initially intended to enhance the flavor of foods, especially processed foods, its ubiquitous use brought about the opposite effect.

Once its status was torn apart by health and safety concerns, umami acquired an ambivalent status. It pointed to risks which resonate with those exposed in the path breaking *Silent Spring* (1962) by Rachel Carson where she describes the devastating

consequences of the use of pesticides on marine life. Chapter one has pointed out that investigative journalism on food risks has become widespread in the last years (i.e. Pollan 2007, Schlosser 2002).

More recently, attention was drawn on the fact that umami is a naturally occurring physiological process of taste in humans. Some scientists have called it the fifth but its status continues to be disputed. Umami today is used to refer either to the fifth sense of taste which can be perceived by eating certain foods, or to a flavor which is chemically produced and added to foods and drinks to enhance their flavor. Umami (whose closest synonym is savory) can be achieved both from monosodium glutamate as a food additive and from mixing and cooking together foods which are rich in amino acids, like tomatoes, cheese, meat, and mushrooms. Today it is used as an experimental tool to innovate and even renovate established and/or common sense notions about taste.



Fig. 1. Picture taken in front of a Thai Restaurant in Heidelberg, Germany.

It specifies that their cuisine does not use glutamate.

Hyperpalatability and Speed: Food as Fun, Fuel, and Fetish

The history of the food additive umami captures in many ways the history of the twentieth century in its transformations from capitalist production of material commodities to postindustrial capitalist production of images and affect (see chapter 5). It shows at the same time that taste buds have been historically shaped (Sand 2005: 47).

Last but not least, the history of MSG shows how flavour and taste has been delegated to the flavour industries which play a large part in the concoction of ever new and ‘larger-than-life’ flavours (Classen et al. 2005: 341). From there flavours travel a long and winding road on their way into the market. Expert systems, nutritionists, marketing managers, or designers play their part in producing and reproducing flavours and foods.

This search for larger-than-life flavours has its analogous counterpart in the search for ‘larger-than-life’ taste experiences and the ever new production of such experiences (cf. Pine and Gilmore 1999). MSG and other ingredients such as salt, sugar and fat seem to occupy an essential role in engineering such experiences. In this sense, it can be said that the ‘making’ of foods and flavours has been specialized and commissioned by different and separate agents, i.e. industries. Slow Food, as I will point out later in the chapter, is trying to address this sensory fragmentation by shortening wherever possible the communication and exchange channels between food items, producers/creators, and eaters. Before addressing such forms of interventions it is necessary to explain to further detail some of the wider implications which MSG reveals. These will bring to light some ways in which various foods have come to be experienced over much of the second half of the last century.

Despite controversies, MSG is currently one of the most widely used food additives globally and can be traced in many industrially produced foods and drinks. Some of the issues which this brief history of umami brought up continue to be discussed today also in relation to other ingredients. Salt, sugar, and fat seem to have taken the place of MSG in the panoply of scapegoats responsible for the dire straits in which current (Western and Asian / globalized) food cultures seem to find themselves. Like MSG, salt and sugar are used ubiquitously in mass-produced foods. Like MSG, they are condemned to have raised the sensory thresholds of taste up to the point of desensitizing it. We are facing a paradoxical situation wherein the enhancement of flavour produces the opposite effect of blandness: for instance, “all sugar and no real flavour” (Lawrence 2007³⁵).

This situation raised debates about the perils of ‘hyperpalatable’ foods (Kessler 2009: 14). Former American FDA Commissioner, David Kessler argues that hyperpalatable foods stimulate the brain to such high degrees that they annul the natural responses of the body thus creating a spiral of wanting that asks continuously to fill a void. Such effects are expressed for instance in numbing the senses. What was coined as “Chinese Restaurant Syndrome” referred to physical sensations of numbness and palpitations (Sand 2005: 44). The chain of causal explanations reaches even further, with linking hyperactivity and attention deficit disorder in children to the exaggerate intake of such substances. The epidemic of obesity is fervently discussed especially in the US in relation to such ‘overburdened’ foods. There exists considerable contestation over the connections between physical and psychological effects of such foods. But the existence of such debates in the mass media, however,

³⁵ The quote is from the article ‘Sugar Rush’ which can be found online at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2007/feb/15/foodanddrink.ethicalfood>

brings to attention the extent to which the material and emotional (or physiological and psychological) dimension of foods have come to permeate the public imagination.

These arguments retain strong leanings towards biological determinism especially in their tendency to narrow down the panoply of possible factors to a one-dimensional chain. But they do, however, exercise an important influence on all those who argue in favour of the traceability and transparency of foods in the food chain and those who act to re-sensitize palates through tasting programs which are meant to attune the eater to finer and finer differences.

A further example, namely sugar, brings a more complex perspective. It shows that while biological factors retain a key explanatory force in the formation of tastes, they are closely tied to economic, technological, and political factors.

Investigative journalist Felicity Lawrence³⁶ brings several arguments that demonstrate the way in which several generations have been weaned on sugar. Her explanations rely on the view shared by a majority of scientists that humans have an innate disposition to sweetness and this was essential to our evolution: “We are born with an attraction to sweetness, taking our first gulps of it in the womb, when we swallow amniotic fluid. The evolutionary explanation is that this is how we learned to distinguish foods that are generally safe - since there is nothing in nature that is sweet and poisonous - from bitter edibles that may contain toxins” (Lawrence 2007). Her analysis uncovers the fact that food industries have been capitalizing on this disposition whenever they introduced new foods on the market. Quoting industry-related research bodies, she states that sugar helps make new foods more palatable and this is especially the case in early age when tastes are formed and developed. The taste for sweet foods is brought in relation to the increased consumption of processed

³⁶ All references to Lawrence made in this chapter refer to her article “Sugar Rush” which can be found online at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2007/feb/15/foodanddrink.ethicalfood>

baby foods since the 1970s. She explains that although sugar is not necessarily added to the majority of products, the long processing and sterilizing mechanisms that go into the production of such foods caramelizes the vegetables and fruits to such degrees that it gives them a higher sugar content than home cooked foods: “The high temperature achieves the desired sterilisation of the food but also changes the taste, texture and colour; it caramelises the sugars in fruit and vegetables. Babies acquire a taste for that caramelised flavour. Home-cooked food is different, it has a graininess and a mix of flavours even when pureed that manufactured food does not” (Lawrence 2007).

The chain of explanations extends beyond such examples. They reach to the expansion of a whole range of ‘light,’ ‘mild’ and ‘low-fat’ foods which grew more ubiquitous and thus capitalized further on the link between health and nutrition. Over the past decade watchdogs and regulatory bodies have tried to minimize the use of salts, sugars and fats in foods and this situation resulted in contradictory facts:

The watchdog is focusing on both sugar and fat because they are closely linked in food manufacturing: reduce one and the other has a tendency to go up. The health-conscious have been reducing their fat consumption for a while, but if they've been doing it by eating more reduced-fat products, such as low-fat yoghurts, or "lite" mayonnaise, or reduced-fat biscuits, then they will be eating more sugars instead (Lawrence 2007).

The development of such specialized industries attests not only to the economic dimension of taste but also to its political dimension. Lawrence underlines the fact that global standards of food are set by the international Codex Alimentarius

Commission and these, for example, are increasingly used as benchmarks in World Trade Organization (WTO) meetings. She refers to the meeting of Codex in November 2006 where the Thai government introduced a proposal to reduce the levels of sugars in baby foods from the existing maximum of 30% to 10%, as part of the global fight against obesity. The proposal was blocked by the US and the EU. Such examples show the degree to which taste is highly enmeshed with and distributed along economic and political networks on a global level.

It is also interesting to see how sweetness as a determining and defining factor of taste is to be found also in cheese, beers or ales.³⁷ In respect to ales, Lawrence points out that “learning to like the bitter taste of ale is no longer an adult rite of passage” and she quotes a research manager from Campaign for Real Ale: “Industrial global beer brands are being dumbed down. They are not necessarily sweeter but they are less bitter and blander. Manufacturers use fewer hops and rather than using malt, bulk them out with brewing sugars” (2007). It is interesting to note that the extent to which foods have been transformed reaches not only processed foods but vegetables and fruits alike. Lawrence refers to apples and strawberries that have been bred to taste sweeter by greatly reducing their acid levels, and adds that the problem is that if acidity is too low, the fruit is left with little flavour at all - just sweetness. Often, supermarket chains accept or reject vegetables and fruits if they meet or not the sweetness scores given by scientific measurement standards³⁸. These measure sweetness levels but disregard the balance of taste produced through a combination of sour and tangy notes. Suppliers tend to deploy hierarchies of criteria in order to meet specific standards. So, they might look for apples which have ‘bite’ and are ‘crisp’

³⁷ Lawrence says: “Look at the nutritional label on a traditionally-made cheese and the line for sugars will read zero. Pick up a cheese spread or processed children's cheese and you can find it contains 6% sugars, thanks to the milk sugars in the skimmed milks powders from which it is manufactured” (2007).

³⁸ Here Lawrence refers to the Brix scale

and exclude the softer ones even if their flavour meets their standards. Variability in taste is narrowed down to standards determined by technology. As such, political, economic, and technological factors are all playing their part in creating and transmogrifying tastes.

The adulteration of food is probably as old as mercantilism and it appears in different forms and intensities in the industrial and post-industrial age. The examples provided above point however towards something more than mere adulteration. They show that the global political, economic, and technological nexus in which food circulates renders human bodies vulnerable and expose it to risks which seem to have become uncontrollable and invisible. Vulnerability and risks reach further peaks in conjunction with more recent debates over genetically modified foods and the production of biofuels (Pfeiffer 2006, Roberts 2008).

Wholeness, a characteristic of 'natural' foods, has been fragmented through mass-production in such ways that taste became unilaterally focused on one modality at the expense of another. Sweetness debased sourness and bitterness, while saltiness effaced flavours altogether. This seems to have remodelled the metabolic processes of the body. To recall Lawrence (2007), whole foods act on metabolism at much slower pace than do highly processed ones: "The blood sugar curves are quite different with whole foods. They give you a feeling of satiety and fullness and are metabolised slowly so that energy is released steadily over a longer period [...] But as you expose yourself to sugar, your liking for it increases, and your taste threshold changes. You start needing more. Manufacturers have exploited that."³⁹

The force of such biologically/neurologically shaped arguments is also visible in recurring debates led by industries and food agencies over labelling and the

³⁹ Lawrence quotes here Aubrey Sheiham, emeritus professor of public health at University College London. See more <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2007/feb/15/foodanddrink.ethicalfood>

implementation of recommended daily allowance measures. What such governing and regulatory manoeuvres show is not solely a political-economic trend of the industries and the agencies towards creating more knowledge and transparency in the food chains, and which are ultimately meant to support the sovereignty of the consumer. They also intensify a mentalist perspective on food predicated on measures and calculations, thus lengthening the divide between bodily and mental engagements with foods. Even restaurants and fast-food chains are urged to list the ingredients that go into the dishes and display their calorific content. The emphasis placed on calories indirectly shapes the image of the human body as a container which needs to be fuelled with nutrients in order to be sustained. Food becomes fuel. The body becomes the object of control and monitoring. Foods and bodies are both entangled in measurement and monitoring mechanisms. Thus, the trends to create knowledge and transparency in the food chain meant to create a deeper connection between eaters/consumers, the foods they eat, *and* their bodies, turn to conspire against the very ends they pursue.

In *The End of Overeating* Kessler (2009) brings further salient aspects dominant in the food industry for the past decades, namely food as entertainment. Here a different kind of sensory pageantry is deemed to overload the sensorium both from a physiological and a socio-psychological standpoint. Kessler's analysis targets the very materiality of food and depicts the eating experience as a highly engineered one. His examples are derived from certain eateries in the US. He, for instance, says: For example, Chili's deep-fry the tortillas and this "drives down its water content from 40 percent to 5 percent and replaces the rest with fat" (2009: 68). He quotes an industry executive referring to cheese fries as "take a high-fat food and put more fat on top of it" and then Kessler adds: "The potato base is a simple carbohydrate, which

quickly breaks down to sugar in the body. Once it's fried and layered with cheese, we're eating salt on fat on fat on sugar" (2009: 19). He also quotes from a conversation with a taste designer for the marketplace: "When you eat a Snickers bar, the chocolate, the caramel, the nougat, and the peanuts all disappear at the same time. You're not getting all this build-up of stuff in your mouth" (2009: 91). He further refers to a restaurant concept designer saying that processing creates a kind of "adult baby food," with the fibre and gristle removed for easier chewing and swallowing; This food is "light, it's white and it's very easy to swallow," and foods thus lose their "innate ability to satisfy" (Kessler 2009: 95).

The quotes above suggest an incongruity between pleasure and satisfaction and also tend to envision the consumer as a passive recipient of tastes. This tendency to regard the consumer as passive is echoed in analyses of social scientists. Haden, for instance, comments that: "conjured up in the space between product-design and consumer consciousness, 'tastes' themselves – like sweetness, creaminess or the 'crisp' – act as representations: pre-digested in the senses that they are already the products of conditioned consumer responses" (Haden 2005: 348). In a similar vein, anthropologist of the senses David Howes points out that in consumer society our senses are "massaged" and we live in a culture of "hyperesthesia," a culture of constant stimulation of the senses where senses are branded and progressively privatized (2005: 281; see also Pine and Gilmore 1999: 104).

Before analysing these processes in more depth I devote attention to the notion of terroir and following it, I introduce the Turin food fair as a frame which provides clues about these processes. The notion of terroir will help emphasize the fact that the taste of 'slow foods' is closely linked to the place and locale of the production of foods.

I show that in this Babel tower of sensory overload the Slow Food Movement seeks to shift and realign the sensorium by devoting attention to products rather than to the production of experiences. As many of the organizers of tasting events in the UK pointed out, comparative food tastings are aimed at de-conditioning our sense of taste. This is attempted, for instance, through blind tastings, a modality of tasting where the taster does not know the brand, label and range of food or drinks he/she tastes. In this sense, when the London group organizes a blind tasting in a school they have children taste mass produced cheddar alongside various samples of artisan cheddar from farms in Somerset. They would not tell them which one they consider tastes better, but hope that such a comparative tasting would ignite the recognition of the difference in flavours of similar produce. When I asked them to tell me more about those cheeses they told me that the mass produced cheddar is not bad per se. But it has a certain degree of blandness, however, as the milk used to produce it comes from three different sources from two continents, and its texture is chewy and dense. With the artisan cheddars, it is different; the producers tell you that they bear the taste of the respective farms! Therefore, the relations between body, mind, and environment acquire an essential significance for the formation of sensory practices and skills.

Emplacing Taste: The case of ‘terroir’

One concept which strongly builds on the idea that the taste and quality of food stem from the locale of its production is that of ‘terroir’. Terroir is not limited to an understanding of place as physical territory, but reaches further to social and cultural meanings, to such extent that it discloses the complex meanings of ‘place’

itself. 'Terroir' in French means soil, but also ground, locality, place, or part of the country. It is often used in the idiom 'goût du terroir'⁴⁰ when something has a particular flavour that can be attributed to the soil, or the typical tastes and habits that come from a region or rural area. The taste of a particular food is thus seen to be the accomplishment of both physical as well as socio-cultural factors. It depends on the quality of the soil, the climate, the topography, the mode of production, the know-how of its producers (see Trubek 2008). In this light, 'terroir' reveals a relational understanding of food and taste, people and place. It has the potential of framing and explaining people's sensual, practical and habitual relationship with the land. Yet, while 'terroir' is a 'charismatic' concept which more recently came to be adopted beyond the French borders, it is nevertheless fraught with problems. In order to reveal these, it is necessary to have a closer look at its history and influence upon the food-system.

Its use can be traced to around the end of the 18th century and beginning of the 19th century⁴¹ in treatises on French cuisine primarily concerned with the production of wine but also of cheese. These highlight the physical attributes of places as shaping unique tastes that in their turn boost the gastronomic renown of those places. What is interesting, though, is that these treatises resulted in the publication of maps of France charted with agricultural products unique and distinct for each region. They were appropriated in the late 19th and beginning of the 20th century for the promotion of the emerging leisure activity of travelling to the countryside⁴². In the course of this process terroir came to be associated not only with the attributes of the natural

⁴⁰ One possible translation is 'tang of soil'.

⁴¹ Amy B. Trubek's cites some sources which are vaguely timed in a span as wide as 1600 and 1800 (2005: 271).

⁴² In many regards, Slow Food follows similar practices. For example the Movement publishes regularly catalogues of the wines of Italy, such as Gambero Rosso, of the traditional eating places in Italy, such as Osteria d'Italia, and, more recently, a catalogue of 'endangered' foods from around the world, such as the Terra Madre.

environment but also with the practices and knowledge of the inhabitants of those regions. Trubek refers to an influential gastronomic writer named Curnorsky who created encyclopaedias, guides, and atlases dedicated to advertising and codifying that knowledge (2005: 264). Such strategies were then co-opted as instruments for nation-building and resulted in the institutionalisation of labels of origin, known as geographical indications (GI), ‘*appellation d’origine contrôlée*’ (AOC). This strategy came to seal the connection between taste, locale, and quality under an official mark. While countries such as Spain or Italy also used such strategies, more recently, projects from the European Union have attempted to promulgate such systems at the European level and, by working together with the World Trade Organization, also at a global level. In this shift between micro- and macro-level, the system of labelling became more finely nuanced⁴³ and underwent different implementations according to the particularities of the different countries.

Notions of ‘*terroir*’ and geographical indications strongly enforce the idea that tastes and foods have an identity by being linked to the place where they have been grown. And, as Barham (2003: 129) rightly underlines, they represent a form of intellectual property related to place and territory, and also a type of collective property. At the same time however, they inevitably give off a sense of authenticity and essence. In this way, a label will then designate one product, with one production mode, and one locale which will then represent the essence of that food and place. Barham notes that ‘defining the exact boundaries and definition of an AOC (Denomination of origin) can be controversial among producers’ (2003: 129) as it can result in the exclusion of other producers who follow slightly different methods.

⁴³ The labels can refer to the territory it was produced or include both the territory and the production site or name of the producers.

Furthermore, concerning the nostalgic search for 'roots' that such a notion incorporates, Trubek comments:

the foodview based on terroir and goût du terroir initially elaborated a century ago as a means of protecting, preserving, and promoting artisan practices and regional identities allows the French, now primarily living in cities and towns, to flirt with a lifestyle more representative of the past than the present (2005: 268).

This system is often believed to be a way of supporting diversity. The activities of the Slow Food Movement started twenty years ago of recording and cataloguing wines, at first, and later foods (such as Gambero Rosso, and more recently Terra Madre catalogue of food communities) seem in many ways similar to past and present French practices.

Interestingly, terroir is not used anymore solely for wines but for foods as well, particularly cheese, chocolate, olive oil, or meat. It indicates that foods and their tastes are increasingly regarded by the Slow Food Movement as bearing an essential connection to place. It follows also that foods are raised to the same rank of importance as wines. This has implications for the relatively recent emphasis on local foods and more localized forms of consumption. More generally, it contributes to a conceptualization of the formation of tastes as distributed among a complex chain of locations, practices, and techniques. In this sense then, taste does not depend on one-way communication between the food and eater and neither on a view of taste as inherent in the product itself.



Fig. 2. People watching a presentation about Parmesan Cheese
'Salone del Gusto' in Turin, Italy 2006

Sensory Pageantry and Food Tastings

Food fairs such as the Hall of Taste in Turin are places where products bearing the traces and tastes of terroir abound. Goods from all over the world from mostly small-scale and artisan farms and businesses are brought under a single roof to be tasted, talked about and gazed at biannually by nearly 200,000 thousand visitors (see chapter 3). This section represents an inquiry into the nature of sensory ubiquity and the specificity it acquires through the emphasis placed upon the links between senses, foods, and place.

Food fairs are spaces where 'food tasting' as a practice was invented and staged over and over again. So, whereas terroir was first used only for wines it is now imported to describe foods from all over the world. Food festivals offer the world on a plate and attempt to lure visitors into experiencing the convergence of different times and spaces under one roof. At the same time, Turin's fair is also a bricolage of 'displaced' foods which signal multiple border crossings and intersections. The fair bears resemblance with markets that, as Duruz points out, "may be transformed by our collective gaze into evocative sites of visual/sensory culture, repositories of the

romance of community and belonging, theatres for acts of consumer cannibalism” (2004: 428).

The festival features three main pavilions, the largest one is dedicated Italian produce, the second features international stalls from Europe and America, while the third presents Presidia produce (endangered foods) from all the corners of the world. One can taste cheeses, cured meats, rice, breads, sweets, fish, coffee, vanilla, cacao, tropical fruit, vegetables, and so on. The ‘Ark of Taste’ project brings together producers from Africa, like Imraguen women with the botargo (fish roe) of Banc d’Arguin (Mauritania) and the Madagascan producers of red rice and vanilla, from Latin America, for instance, Andean farmers of Peru bring chips made from colourful potatoes and chuno blanco (an ancient preparation obtained by freezing the potatoes and then drying them in the open air), or Venezuelan producers with Barlavento cacao, Brazil with less known varieties of fruit (fresh and dried), from Asia, the Sarikey pepper harvesters joined by the monks from the Tibetan plateau with their Yak cheese; from Europe, there are producers from most of the countries, like Norwegians with stockfish, Cypriots with ‘tsamarella’ (cured goat’s meat), Portugese with ‘queso de Serpa’ (a pecorino cheese made with cardoon rennet), Romanians with ‘branza de burduf’ cheese (wrapped in pine bark). Last but not least, there are countless novelties from Italy: from Castelmagno cheese from mountain pastures to ‘papacella’ (pepper) from Naples, from white Monreale plums to the white cow of Modena.



Fig. 3. Food communities from around the world display region- or country-specific products
'Terra Madre' in Turin, Italy 2006

Most of these foods are stripped of packaging and other carefully concocted advertising sound bites. They are 'solely' linked to a place, a country, a region, and the producer which stands behind the stall, curious and eager to see who might come and try their produce. Will he/she ask about it, just taste and move on, perhaps even buy. Often enough, for those producers who arrived from outside of Italy, this fair may offer a unique experience. There they will be confronted with a mix of different consumers, and most probably, also fellow producers from different parts of the world who make similar foods and so they have a chance to exchange opinions, techniques, and discuss difficulties they face. One of the main intentions of such a fair is to incite all those present to get to know and compare different foods. Food tasting as a practice of comparing and discriminating between often very similar products does not have perhaps the long tradition which wine tasting has. In the context of such fairs, what gets to be promoted and stimulated a sensory-cognitive reservoir of knowledge imagined as the common legacy of human kind. Apart from stalls there are 'food labs,' a 'theatre of taste,' 'food islands,' which perform various demonstrations of cooking and tasting techniques.

The question which such a Fair raises and which I approach in this chapter (and continue to address in the subsequent chapters), is whether this cornucopia of foods and overload of visual, gustatory, olfactory and haptic landscapes can capture the origins and histories that accompany foods in their taste. Does it become possible to connect through taste to the place and production processes and histories of Herefordshire Perry or Collonata cured pork fat from the Carrara region of Italy? Is this sensory ubiquity catalysing what one may call a de-conditioning of the senses? Can it revitalize the sensory and cultural scapes of antiseptic environments where smell is suppressed and visual aesthetics adorn foods in transparent plastic packages and of environments where seasonality has disappeared and natural inconsistencies of food have been wiped out?

The situation which we seem to be confronted with is one where the displacement of foods through processes of globalization has created the need for the emplacement of foods to their origins. Equally important is a search for knowledge about foods as a way to respond to the overburdening of foods with ingredients and additives that tend to remain hidden in the complex language codes of labels, industries, and laboratories. Cook and Crang (1996) provide a fascinating discussion regarding the mobility of foods and the transformation of ‘geographical knowledges’ through processes of commodity fetishism. They argue for a view of “food not only as placed cultural artefacts, but also as dis-placed, inhabiting many times and spaces which, far from being neatly bounded, bleed into and mutually constitute each other” (1996: 132f). This means that the staging of foods in the context of the Turin food fair does not reinforce a bounded view of the place of origin of foods from various parts of the world, and consequently, neither of their authenticity or exotic nature. Cook and Crang propose an understanding whereby “processes of food consumption are

cast as local, in the sense of contextual; but where those contexts are recognized as being opened up by and constituted through connections into any number of networks, which extend beyond delimiting boundaries of particular places” (1996: 138). They add further that imagined and performed representations about ‘origins’, ‘destinations’ and forms of ‘travel’ *surround* these networks’ various flows (1996: 138, my emphasis). Also important, as they suggest, is the social and cultural positioning of consumers in terms of their entanglements with these flows and representations.

These points are relevant issues to the Turin food fair. The Slow Food discourses around ‘good, clean, and fair’ foods are meant to initiate in the context of such a fair the realization that each and every one of the participants *and* visitors is entangled in the flows and representations of food. The sensory aspects of looking, tasting, and buying are supposed to contribute to this realization and to the constitution of (new) forms of knowledge. To some extent the sensuous engagement with food becomes part of the flows and representations of food. What I imply herewith, is that visitors and participants are not passive recipients of sensory stimuli but are actively engaged in the formation of their experiences. Below I outline some of the ways in which such sensory experiences are formed.

Food fairs are spaces which seek to create transparency through the consumption of foods. The search for ‘real’ and ‘slow’ foods in the space of food festivals seems to react and respond to what Rodaway has described as hyper-real experiences:

In hyper-real geographies, the senses are experienced in the transformed state of hyper-senses. Each sense is reduced to a limited array of features and these

are heightened, or exploited, in the generation of an experience more realistic than ever an original experience could be – ‘confused’ by its range and features, evident and implicative, and the multisensuality of experience. Often, the sensuous experience seems to be dominantly ‘orchestrated’ by one sense, such as vision, and the experience has great immediate clarity and vividness. This sense is more real than the real is a kind of excess of reality (1994: 177).

At first glance, the cornucopia of produce at food fairs does not immediately differentiate itself from other spaces dedicated to food, for instance supermarkets or malls, except by their sheer size. For the untrained eye, both spaces may equally provoke a sweeping, blending, even hyper-real experience. The inflow of so many visual stimuli can be overwhelming. I remember my own experience in Turin in 2006. There were 432 stands, of which 97 were international and they covered an area of 17.557sq m. Almost the same amount of space was dedicated to educational activities (in total there were around 400 meetings and events; e.g. taste workshops, film screenings, conferences, etc.). By visual criteria alone it is a challenge to even memorize a small range of produce and keep them apart. If it had not been for my notebook, the talks I had with producers, and the photographs I took, there would be but a handful of produce that I could have remembered. Some of the many tastes stayed with me, some I had known before, some were new. Irene, a UK Presidia farmer had convinced me to taste the Fal oysters she was selling, for her they tasted of the sea. And there were three Montgomery cheddar producers who tricked tasters into believing they tasted three different cheeses whereas their different tastes were to be traced to the different neighbouring farms they were produced at. I was yet another taster not to pass their test. And, certainly, I do remember my tired feet after just few

hours of passing by the lanes of cheese, chocolate, or olive oil, and my aching stomach following few bits and bites here and there. After five days I started to think of the lightness of a plain and simple home cooked dish. This mix of stimuli and experiences, the jumps from stunning images to confusing, surprising, and evanescent tastes, from scattered sounds to an altered sense of one's own movement and wellbeing, or the sense of proprioception and kinaesthesia, represents a rich experience full of excitement.

To some extent, the experience of the fair resembles what Simmel referred to as the over-stimulation of the senses in metropolitan life ([1903] 1950). For Simmel the stimulation of the senses had a degree of violence which stirred up people's emotions to such extent that it triggered certain, adverse and alienating mechanisms of defense and control in people. Simmel argues that the reaction to such stimuli was to provoke an inward closure of people's emotional lives, a halo-like robe which separated and protected them from the continuous streams emitted by the buzzing cities. But the fair in Turin tells a slightly different story. Sensory pageantry provokes curiosity, comparisons, questions, and dialogue in relation to oneself and others despite of (or even due to) the physical discomfort of hungry or full stomachs. However, apart from this emergent and effervescent creativity, the mechanisms of sensory stimulation do not fully penetrate into the deepest and most hidden corners of past or present histories of the processes of food production. Sensory pageantry rather ignites a mix of different senses and imaginaries.

The experience of such a fair triggers the thoughts of a present where foods are abundant in 'Italy.' The festival early in October stages a rich autumnal harvest of the Piedmont region, and tells the story of an effervescent sensory dialogue between different regions of Europe and of the world which unfolds in Italy's hospitable

culinary northern centre Turin. But at the same time, certain histories will remain hidden: wiped away are the periods in history where Italy suffered food shortages as are the radical attempts of some Futurists to abolish traditions and regions and reinvent the national gastronomy. Neither are the hardships of a Tibetan Yak cheese producer immediately visible, nor the struggles of an Eastern European raw cheese producer facing regulations of the European Union. Less visible dimensions such as these may get more numerous and complex with each food item present there. Each and every one of them has a different story. There is not one single homogenous story. The hyper-reality of such sights and flavours conjures up imaginaries of bountiful places but at the same time effaces relations and histories of those places by suppressing their temporal dimension. Fast and slow foods may both remain under the veil of hyper-reality (though fast foods to a larger extent than slow ones). The Slow Food Movement is trying to remove that veil by linking foods to their places and their producers. Ultimately, it is hoped, a trained palate will sense those constituting relations, and taste will become constitutive of ‘clean, fair, and good’ foods.



Fig. 4. Local foods from various regions in Italy. Pictures of Italian farmers on the walls

‘Earth-Market’ pavilion at ‘Salone del Gusto’ in Turin, Italy 2006

As the picture shows, in the Earth Market pavilion, pictures of producers are exposed on the walls. This trend to connect foods to provenance and producer through visual means is being adopted more and more widely. Marketing strategies like these are applied in restaurants and supermarket food alike. Gilmore and Pine (2007) have picked upon such trends and coined 'authenticity' as the new business imperative which capitalizes on the polar signs of 'fake' and 'real'. They identify this trend as a continuation of the 'experience economy' (1999). These trends are part of a larger shift in late capitalist societies towards service cultures, as Lash and Urry argue in *Economies of Sign and Space* (1994; see also Urry 1995).

But the space of the food fair heralds the taste of produce above the 'added value' of marketed production of signs and representations. Foods invite the producers and visitors to engage in a competition of sensory expertise not in the form of dominance but of dialogue. It is a dialogue that is supposed to counteract the sensory fragmentation and the division and specialization of the senses conducive to the raising of sensory thresholds of one of the senses at the expense of others. The examples of MSG, salt, and sugar referred to in the first part of this chapter have highlighted how such mechanisms of sensory specialization open up the way to various reductionist views of foods, tastes and bodies as well as to fetishized relations between these. These vicarious processes gradually impede and even bar the door to ways of knowing and learning tastes that move beyond the surface of things.

The food fair in Turin allows for different sensory practices to be exercised. By mingling different forms of sensory expertise which would otherwise rarely meet under one arch, the fair creates an out of the ordinary or disorderly situation that is intended to shift attention towards a different spectrum of sensory realities. A Perry producer who had reinvented his craft perhaps less than a decade ago coexists

alongside winemakers whose craft had been perfected over decades or even centuries. Hierarchies of expertise may be challenged or even turned upside down through such encounters. They may unsettle cultural economies of taste that came to be engulfed by powerful expert systems and taste makers. Perhaps the best exemplification for such transformation is offered by the documentary *Mondovino* by director Jonathan Nossiter (2004). The film depicts the globalization of wine markets and the clashes it produces between ‘old’ and ‘new’ winemakers. Once the tastes are appropriated by an influential handful of critics and consultants, wine production tends to get modified according to the standards of such taste-makers up to the point where entire economies of production and knowledges that developed throughout centuries undergo an overall transformation.



Fig. 5. Stall of the Romanian Presidia selling ‘Burduf’ cheese
‘Salone del Gusto’ in Turin, Italy 2006

Different sensory realities emerge also through the co-mingling of ‘peripheries’ and ‘centres,’ where, for instance, Eastern European small producers mix with larger, and more globalized central European companies. For instance, a particular Romanian cheese (‘Burduf’) which is hardly known outside the village where it is produced and sold probably within a 30 mile radius, meets the consort of parmesan (Parmiggiano-

Reggiano) makers which nowadays distribute Parmesan cheese on a global scale. The co-mingling of different sets of taste knowledge will produce common aims as much as it will open up space for dissent and dispute.



Fig. 6. Italian Presidia stall selling 'Lardo di Collonata' lard. 'Salone del Gusto' in Turin, Italy 2006

The story of cured pork fat or lard from the Collonata region in Italy as depicted by Leitch (2003) poignantly represents the career of a food item that has been entangled in disputes. Interestingly, Leitch weaves the political dimensions of cured fat with the sensory dimensions of its taste. Lardo di Collonata was one of the many thousand produce at the food fair in Turin in 2006. In the mid 1990s local producers of cured pork fat faced health regulators delegated by the European Union who insisted that traditional curing methods made the product unhygienic. Different methods were to be enforced if its production were to be continued. This regulation was to be a clear route to its standardization and sterilization and implied a drastic rupture in the historic tradition and memory of its existence. This conjuncture offered a perfect opportunity for the Slow Food Movement to intervene and declare cured lard as an 'endangered' product. A community of producers formed an association which managed to obtain a DOP (Denomination of Origin) protective trademark and thus a legal copyright to the name 'lardo di Collonata.' Leitch points out that "though they

own the legal title, not all members of this group actually produce pork fat, while others outside this original group are no longer technically entitled to sell the product with the name *lardo di Collonata*” (2003: 447). She adds that a battle between this group and butcheries that have formed a rival group still persists and various research committees have been established to provide reports and scientific investigations.

What is equally interesting is the way Leitch portrays the transformations of the meanings of this product up to its commodification. Originally, ‘lardo’ was a source of calorific energy for impoverished quarry workers. “Like sugar and coffee, *lardo* was a ‘proletarian hunger killer’ (Mintz 1979)” (Leitch 2003: 443). Throughout its history it acquired medicinal properties for curing various aches and used to be appreciated for its coolness on hot summer days; these stories persist in oral history even if lardo ceased to be consumed on an everyday basis (Leitch 2003: 443). Even more interesting, however, is the organic analogy between fat and marble which Leitch identifies. She explains that fat is traditionally cured in marble trays and these are particularly suited for such a process as these ones allow the fat to breathe and properties of marble get transferred onto the fat:

Just like marble workers who have suggested [...] that marble dust is actually beneficial to the body because it is ‘pure calcium,’ *lardo* makers say that the chemical composition of marble, calcium carbonate, is a purificatory medium which extracts harmful substances from pork fat, including cholesterol. (Leitch 2003: 444)

The metamorphic properties of both ‘lardo’ and marble in this reciprocal process suggest a very deep-reaching dimension of taste formation. Properties of terroir –

quarries, marble workers, marble curing trays, and curing process, skills of producers – encapsulate complex traces of information that would not emerge least marble curing trays are used. A trained and skilled taster would most likely detect some of the tastes which became imbued in the fat through such a process.

Indeed, my observations and explorations of Slow Food events convey that what counts more in the process of taste formation is that people are drawn to identify particular ways that foods carry information, and particular ways in which this information is encoded and shaped. Gibson (1986) uses the term information as different from stimuli. Information refers to the specification of qualities of objects. He argues that perception does not involve the reception of stimuli and the subsequent formation of sensations and then the organization of such sensations into mental representations. Thus he shatters a linear view of perception which sees the perceiver as a passive observer of the environment. Instead he proposes a theory of “information pick-up” to suggest that perception entails an activity “registering both persistence and change in the flow of structured information” (1986: 238f). For Gibson, “perception is an achievement of the individual, not an appearance in the theatre of his consciousness; [...] it is an experience of things rather than a having of experiences” (1986: 239). Perception is then an activity of looking, listening, touching, tasting, or sniffing.

In this sense, the sensory pageantry of the Turin food fair is the experience of such a structured flow of information including the alternation between persistence and change. This alternation in the flow of information unfolds at the intersection of displaced and emplaced foods and tastes. Persistence and change occurs for both displaced and emplaced tastes, as the cases of umami and terroir show. Thus, sensory pageantry is rather different from what Howes called hyperesthesia or a constant and

indefinite stimulation of the senses acting upon a passive consumer, which I referred to earlier in this chapter.

The view of perception as an activity has not only implications for the conceptualization of the consumer but also for the formation of sensuous processes. In this sense, Rodaway (1994) proposes a perspective whereby the senses undergo transformation and not atrophy. He draws on Gibson's ecological approach to perception (1979) and expands upon it in several ways. Rodaway embraces a broader frame for analysing the nature of sensory relations by viewing bodies *and* environments in a unitary system rather than thinking them as separate entities. His fascinating theoretical investigation into the nature of sensuous geographies complements Gibson's approach by saying that the senses are stimulated through both direct and indirect encounters. Thus Rodaway suggests that to speak of atrophy of the senses is an oversimplification and that what we rather face is a transformation of the senses through processes of symbolization, association, abstraction and re-assignment (1994: 146).

In this chapter I proposed a way to conceptualize taste through the notion of sensory pageantry. I introduced the cases of umami and terroir in order to highlight the multitude of dimensions that participate in the formation of taste. These dimensions are historical, geographical, political and sensorial. I presented sensorial aspects of taste, such as hyperpalatability or over-stimulation, and showed they bear multiple and diverse links *and* ruptures in respect to cultural, political, and economic determinants of taste.

The sensory pageantry of the food fair in Turin eases tensions between slowness and speed and between biological and cultural aspects of taste. I showed that sensory pageantry becomes in the space of the food fair a dynamic sensory activity.

This sensory activity is geared around the alternating flows of displaced and emplaced tastes.

The next chapter explores how perception is guided and prompted by contrasts and differences. It evaluates how a sensory pageantry enters a process of structuring not only through alternation of displaced and emplaced tastes, but through the stretching of times involved in the sensuous appreciation of foods through the practice of cooking. This is an essential stage which helps explain the fact that sensory pageantry is not simply a matter of ubiquity, but one which orients tasters towards grasping the tastes of foods from multiple perspectives that involve interrogating one's own. My participation and observation of the fairs and feasts in Turin and England (described in this chapter) brought up the question of how to navigate them. As already suggested, the vast range of items and impressions was of a very different kind than one usually experiences in the space of for instance supermarkets. Slow Food fairs and feasts required comparing and contrasting items which were very similar to each other and also involved a set of other evaluation criteria which went beyond qualities of freshness, brand identification, or personal preferences following organoleptic criteria alone.

Chapter 5 Contesting Vision: Cooks and Cooking

It is [...] a fact, [...] that gastronomical pleasure can really be experienced to the fullest only if a variety, a contrast, and hence a multiplicity of dishes and wines is offered.

Jean-Francois Revel, *Culture and Cuisine* (1992: 150)

Cooking is a form of flattery....a mischievous, deceitful, mean and ignoble activity, which cheats us by shapes and colors, by smoothing and draping.

Plato⁴⁴

Introduction

So far, I argued that the formation of taste is entangled in discourses which emphasize biological⁴⁵ and cultural dimensions of taste. In Chapter 3 I suggested that the Slow Food Movement represents a significant attempt to create a new balance between these dimensions and added in Chapter 4 that the search for such balance is contested. I have shown that several contradictions and tensions arise, once one such dimension predominates the other. Thus, a common feature of food advocacy literature (Chapter 2) and of food industries (Chapter 4) is the tendency to emphasise the biological aspects of taste. My critical perspective was that the elevation of one

⁴⁴ Cited by Mark Kurlansky (2002). *Choice Cuts*. New York: Ballantine Books (p.16); see <http://www.foodreference.com/html/qcooking.html>, accessed 07/01/10.

⁴⁵ Chapter 1 has enumerated a range of variables which form the larger category which I refer to as the biological dimension of taste. Some such variables are the materiality of food, aesthetics, flavour, sensory stimuli, texture, temperature, bio-chemical components, etc.

dimension in favour of the other results in the fragmentation of sensory experience and this hinders the ‘direct perception’ of tastes as aimed for by the Slow Food Movement. I have, however, shown that when multiple aspects are brought together irrespective of their seeming contradictions, complex connections arise and it is these which ignite and feed the formation of taste. What I see as the underlying aims of the Slow Food Movement is precisely to educate taste by exploiting these complex connections and seeming contradictions. I illuminated some of these processes, contradictions, and aims by exploring the concepts of ‘umami’ and ‘terroir.’

In the present chapter I revisit the *biological* perspective on taste by engaging in analysis of the culinary field. I discuss significant moments of cooking and dining in the history of gastronomy in the West and then bring them into relation with contemporary forms of Slow Food cooking demonstrations. The culinary field stands in an interesting relation to the areas referred to in the previous three chapters and also posits an interesting and rewarding challenge to the line of argumentation pursued so far because it is loaded with a complex and weighty baggage of *cultural* significations. Cuisines are domains which derive their appeal and distinction precisely from the symbolic associations they carry with them. Furthermore, cooking and cuisine are domains conducive to the expression of judgements, appreciations, likes and dislikes, as much as they are the domains *par excellence* where techniques, skills, and tastes are formed and refined. This intersection between various elements of food practice represents a hub where experts of the most diverse kinds meet. It makes cooks, chefs, food critics, and ‘foodies’ alike prone to enact and display forms of sensory expertise. The sensory expertise of cooks and chefs represents a pertinent case of analysis due to the fact that cooks and chefs have a close and sustained relationship to foods but this relationship unfolds and develops away from the

immediate sites of food production (in most cases). I illustrate my analysis with examples from my observations of street market cooking demonstrations. However, I explain that before doing such an analysis it is necessary to provide some of the historical dimensions that enter into the formation of cuisines and dishes. In this way I introduce some patterns which inform the making of dishes and underline at the same time perception as a historicized process.

What I argue in this chapter is that the formation of tastes (in general and with the Slow Food Movement in particular) requires the perception of contrasts and differences and this often presupposes various acts of mediation. Such acts of mediation include, for instance, the crafting of dishes by cooks and chefs such that intentionality becomes perceivable through the combination of ingredients, visual aesthetics, and modes of preparations. Thus, while the previous chapters identified some elements of taste, this chapter explores how these elements are mediated and at the same time revealed, explored, and situated in their difference. I use the term mediation to refer to the acts, moments, and practices when ‘subjective’ tastes are deployed and circulated in collective registers. In this sense, cooking can be regarded as a practice which turns individual taste into collective and shared tastes. This, of course, also happens in reverse. The dish, for example, is the creation of a cook and is (partly) derived from the cook’s ‘subjective’ sense of taste, skills and experience. The dish is the realisation or manifestation of the cook’s taste.

However, this is not immediately visible and perceivable because there are a myriad of other layers which cover and accompany a dish (its ordinariness, or, by contrast, utter novelty; the expectations of the eater and his/her previous experiences).

I follow Latour’s definition of mediation as an “act of translation” whereby mediators (in this case cooks and chefs) redefine, redeploy and even betray their craft

(Latour 1993: 81). In this sense then, cooks do not transmit their 'subjective' tastes but translate their experience, skills and knowledge into formats whereby people can gain access into how taste comes into being. Acts of mediation occur also at the level of historical formation of cuisines by way of placing taste into cultural registers. Thus, I point out the fact that taste as a subjective and individual experience is irreproducible and therefore every attempt of communicating it is bound to be mediated and translated. Furthermore, I stress that taste enters into a chain of skills, gestures, and images and any attempt to approach it is by way of addressing these chains of relations.

Several fragments from the domain of gastronomy are particularly relevant to my analysis. By drawing on some stages from the emergence of gastronomy as a cultural field in history I demonstrate that they draw their appeal, momentum, and continuity out of an underlying drive to transcend the biological and material aspects of food by elevating and displacing taste in other cultural registers such as art, tradition, home, etc. Thus, I show that this drive is an act of mediation of the perception of taste. In drawing on taste as a cultural phenomenon, gastronomy indirectly emphasises the value of food (in its material, physiological aspects) anew. The aim of this chapter is to carve out some of the ways in which this process takes place and then revise and reconsider these processes in light of some events conducted by the Slow Food Movement which I observed in Britain.

In this way, we can see how cultural aspects of taste disclose the biological characteristics of food. In analysing aspects of mediation I point to their impact on the senses and the concatenations between them. The multiple modulations of the sensorium provide access to the sensory agencies of food as well as to the cultural sensitivities standing behind (and being interwoven with) them. By sensory agency of

food I mean those qualities of food that emerge as they are transformed into dishes and the ways in which the combination of different elements that went into the dish prompt the eater/perceiver to grasp its meanings and qualities. In this sense, I follow Gibson's (1986) notion of affordance and demonstrate that the relation between eater and the attributes of food is established through embodied ways of seeing.

From this point of view, the two quotes from the beginning are illustrative. They capture some ways in which people come to experience food and taste. Revel, a French gastronome and philosopher, suggests that a more accurate perception and experience of taste can only be achieved through contrasts and variety. Plato's quote, by contrast, appears somehow denigrating. But it also signals that there might be something behind the façade and visual aesthetic appeal of food that may hold deeper significance, provided one can decipher and circumvent the tricks and clues which are encoded in the aesthetic composition of a particular dish. In this sense, the two quotes are similar. Modalities of deceiving the eye may represent and produce those sorts of contrasts that ignite for Revel the experience of taste. The quotes also point to deep-seated hierarchical understandings of taste: whereas Revel attributes superiority to gastronomy and gastronomic judgment, Plato debases food and cooking. The current chapter argues that it is exactly these contradictions and hierarchies which make a difference to the training of the senses and the process of learning more generally.

Patterns of Cuisine in France

The defining stage for the crystallisation of what today we call modern/haute cuisine, or what is referred to by Mennell (1985: 134) as 'grand cuisine', is associated with the celebrated chef Antoine Carême (1784–1833) and the period following the

French Revolution of 1789 (see Mennell 1985, Trubek 2000, Mintz and Du Bois 2002). Mennell explains that “the Revolution is a culinary landmark because of the transformation which it permitted or precipitated in the cooking profession and its theatre of operation” (1985: 134). He adds further that “parallel to the emergence of a cookery profession catering for a dining *public*, there also emerged the bourgeois gastronome – not himself a cook, but an expert in the art of eating and a leader of public opinion in matters of taste” (Mennell 1985: 134). Thus, Mennell signals that the importance of cuisine since the French Revolution lies not only in its formalisation and professionalisation but in that these two factors contributed to the diffusion of gastronomy to a wider public and to the democratisation of tastes. Carême states: “My book is not written for great houses alone. On the contrary, I want it to have a general utility. ...I would like every citizen in our beautiful France to be able to eat delicious food” (cited in Ferguson 2004: 52f).

In respect to historical, anthropological and sociological accounts which recognise the changes in the culinary field in nineteenth century France as defining for the crystallisation of modern cuisine, Ferguson (1998) brings a particularly convincing argument regarding the wider reaching implications and meanings of these changes. She proposes an analysis of gastronomy in nineteenth century France from the point of view of an emerging cultural field. She relies on Bourdieu’s notion of “field” ([1966] 1969) as it

designates the state of a cultural enterprise when the relevant productive and consumption activities achieve a certain (always relative) degree of independence from direct external constraints (i.e., those of the state and church for the arts in premodern Europe) (Ferguson 1998: 597).

She argues that a spectrum of gastronomic writings (journalism, cookbooks, proto-sociological essays, political philosophy, and literary works) formed an expansive and nationalising culinary discourse. It was this discourse that secured the autonomy of the field, determined its operative features, and was largely responsible for the distinctive position of the cultural field (Ferguson 1998: 597). As she argues, such an approach allows a view of the culinary field as a complex and dynamic configuration in which “all participants are at once producers and consumers caught in the complex web of social, political, economic, and cultural relations that they themselves have in part woven and continue to weave” (1998: 598). This precludes “unilinear, univocal approaches that focus on discrete structures, historical incident, or individual producers and products” (Ferguson 1998: 598).

I find Ferguson’s conceptualisation of gastronomy as a configuration of elements and actors useful in that it enables me to focus on taste as a relation between various and unfolding entities. It thus captures its mediated and processual character along with its historical dimension. Including various entities in a single frame also facilitates a discussion of taste as the achievement of a collective. She emphasises that “gastronomic texts were key agents in the socialization of individual desire and the redefinition of appetite in collective terms [...] such writings extended the gastronomic public or ‘taste community’ well beyond immediate producers and consumers” (Ferguson 1998: 600). But acknowledging such a configuration does not mean conflating the agency of each of the entities. I devote special attention in this chapter to cooks and chefs in their role as cultural entrepreneurs and analyse some of the ways they mediate taste to the public.

Mennell (1985), a prominent figure in the analysis of food patterns over long historical periods, emphasises that food habits show continuity with the past rather

than radical breaks from it. The brief description of historic stages in French cuisine which I provide below shows that there is indeed some continuity but casts a critical eye on Mennell's insistence on uniformity and continuity by highlighting various stages of transformation of cuisine in France. I show how stages and processes of transformation, as envisioned by cooks/chefs in particular, mediate *differences*. In particular, I focus on the emergence of *nouvelle cuisine* in the nineteenth century as a response to *and* reaction against the *Ancien Régime* and its elite forms and structures of preparation and dining in aristocratic circles. Nouvelle cuisine⁴⁶ as a gastronomic process greatly influenced subsequent culinary formations at the beginning of the twentieth century and also later during the 1970s and up until today. Later in the chapter I provide an interesting example from Alice Waters, a prominent cook who imported principles of this cuisine to California and who also became a central figure in the Slow Food Movement in the late 1980s.

Mennell's work offers rich descriptive material about various foods and the way they were conceived by chefs and appreciated by diners in particular periods in history in France and England. The richness of detail provides insight into how cooks and chefs thought about and assembled food in ways which deployed and structured the various senses in particular configurations. While Mennell constructs a broader argument about the civilisation process of manners and appetites, his analysis is important for my study in that it allows one to grasp the historicity of the senses. Moreover, the stages in French cuisine, engaged with below, point out how the formation of the senses is deeply interwoven with changes in the structure and composition of the meal. In this way, I weave discussions of the social and cultural

⁴⁶ I use *nouvelle cuisine* as a heuristic concept to show how the sensory agencies of food and dishes and their mediation by the chefs come into being. As I will show later, the actual uses and particular historical contexts of *nouvelle cuisine* came to be very diverse and resulted in many contradictory ways according to which taste as a sensory and cultural category was meant to operate.

implications of the discourses of cuisines, one lead by Mennell and another by Ferguson, both sociologists of food, into an analysis of the imprints they had on the formation of sensory sensibilities.

Marie Antoine Carême (1784–1833) is considered a landmark reformer of food preparation and techniques of display and was one of the chefs to impregnate principles in cooking that were to be woven through many (European) cuisines throughout the subsequent centuries. He is called the founder of classic French cuisine since he codified and ordered its principles and thus enabled their adoption and implementation across France and beyond. Before proceeding it is necessary to clarify the notion of French cuisine. While Ferguson classifies it as a gastronomic field, as noted above, Mennell comments that “the nineteenth century also saw the full establishment of a French international culinary hegemony, not merely in England but over much of the rest of Europe and, by the end of the century, North America too” (1985: 134). But he emphasises that “French hegemony meant in particular hegemony within the cooking profession” (1985: 135). Trubek, however, points out that “although France was its [haute cuisine] homeland, from the beginning professional cuisine depended on international patronage and sites across the globe to survive and flourish” (2000: 8). The points made by Trubek and Mennell draw attention to the fact that the imaginaries associated with ‘Frenchness’ are by no means to be equated with the geographic space of France and further that French hegemony refers only to the strict category of professional haute cuisine consumed by the elites in Europe and North America⁴⁷.

⁴⁷ Ferguson emphasises that French gastronomy always needs to be regarded as drawing on a nexus of particular situated social, economic, and cultural conditions (1998: 603). The model translates into: “first, abundant, various, and readily available foodstuffs; second, a cadre of experienced producers (chefs) in a culturally specific site (the restaurant), both of which are supported by knowledgeable, affluent consumers (diners); and third, a secular cultural (culinary) tradition” (1998: 603). These points are relevant when referring to other cuisines such as for instance Italian, English and Chinese. While

To the extent that the crystallisation of modern gastronomy (and as I later show with *nouvelle cuisine* in particular) presents similarities to the debates unfolding in France between the *Ancients* and the *Moderns* (see Spang 2000: 43f), there is one sense especially which tends to assert itself above the others: vision. Sight is related in a particular way with the creation of standards of preparation and styles of presentation (both of dishes as well as cookbooks) and resonates with the rational, materialist, and scientific *Weltanschauung* emerging since the Enlightenment period. Vision has also been discussed in broader terms by the arts and social sciences as standing in a tense but close relation with a variety of hegemonic practices and discourses of modernity (see for instance Levin 1993).

What regards the culinary realm, food often functions as a feast for the eye especially at Europe's royal courts and those periods and places throughout the centuries that were dominated by various forms of political, cultural or economic power, for instance the Tudor era in England or Louis XIV in France (see Wilson 1991). Most of the time, courtly dining events and the display of food mimicked the pomp, precision, and pageantry of architectural styles of the times (see Onfray 1993). Vision has been attributed a multitude of meanings in these various contexts and I do not wish to engage further with dissecting these in relation to food. Instead I intend to point out that it was deployed as an important register for activating the formation of taste in ways that were supposed to make use of as many intellectual and bodily human capacities as possible. In this sense, vision is intended to act more like a facilitator for the other senses than a sovereign ruler over them.

One relation through which sight gained in importance was that between architecture and food. The feasts that stand out most starkly and seal a relation

similar processes affected the latter as well, Italian and English cuisine did not withdraw the systematisation of gastronomic principles from aristocratic traditions, and Chinese cuisine was strongly linked to the clerical elites (see Mennell 1984 and Ferguson 2004).

between architecture and food are the bombastic displays of Antoine Carême at the beginning of the nineteenth century at the French court (cf. Mennell 1984: 145). Carême, the founder and architect of French haute cuisine, not only influenced whole generations but also imposed a particular way of perceiving and approaching food and foodways. Carême reformed and systematised the French cuisine and could be seen as the first ‘celebrity chef’ of the modern era. With Carême, styles of cooking came not only to relate food to the architecture and the cultural conceptions attached to it at a certain time in history (see more Onfray 1993: chapter 6). They also brought about innovations that were to mark and reflect transitions and transformations in cultures. Innovation stood for the ‘modernisation’ of cuisines such that it wanted to convey a certain break from the past up to the point where they gave the impression of radical and utterly new ways of cooking. The ‘grand cuisine’ of Carême is interesting in that it stands somewhere in between haute and nouvelle cuisine. Carême’s preoccupation with form was both indicative of the systematisation of the heavy haute cuisine of the late eighteenth century and also of the still prevailing excess in terms of the multiple dishes composing a meal of the nouvelle cuisine proposed by La Chapelle, Menon and Marin. While he was a fervent proponent of simplification, many of his creations demanded arduous work and the final results were quite sophisticated and costly too. In the same vein, while nouvelle cuisine wanted to assert itself in opposition to the haute cuisine of the Ancien Regime it carried forward many of its traits. The degrees of difference which Carême’s reforms brought seem to be more pertinent when brought in conjunction with styles of cooking reaching to the Middle Ages. Both Mennell (1984: 147) and Onfray (1993: 122) interpret Carême’s search for clarity of form and composition as a reaction to the profligacy of ingredients in one single dish and the profusion of aromas and smells dominant in the Middle Ages, and these were

seen as overburdening the sensorium and even detrimental to the emergence of taste. Thus, vision was meant to confront smell by creating distance to its luring and seductive powers. Thus, the search for simplification of dishes was assigned and entrusted to vision.

The shift in emphasis on the eye provoked and imposed new ways of perceiving, approaching, and, most of all, appreciating foods. Carême liked to spend time in the libraries of Paris where he loved looking at engravings and gradually acquired a taste for architecture which made him start sketching pictures of buildings (Metzner 1998: 63). He used these as models for his *pièces montées*. These elaborate constructions largely made out of sugar were displayed in the window of the patisserie where Carême spent his apprenticeship years. Carême's love of form was both nourished by his master who taught him the art of pastry as well as by his own studies in the Parisian libraries where he acquired a taste for engravings which made him start sketching pictures of buildings and finally the models for his confections and later for his cooking in general. Mennell remarks that "Carême claimed that his art supplied food for mind and heart" and refers to critical voices uttered in reaction to his style by Beauvilliers, one of his contemporaries, "the cook's job was not to please the eye but the palate" (1985: 145). So in this sense, there is no actual opposition between the so-called superior sense of vision and the lower sense of smell. According to Mennell, Carême used to count as the leader of the 'romantics' in cookery and Beauvilliers as the leader of the 'classical' school of thought (1985: 147). Many of his *pièces montées* were made of fat or sugar challenging the very idea of their edibility and therefore imposed for the viewer a 'detached' attitude towards them. Cookery and taste emulated in this sense the Kantian idea of sublime beauty and detached admiration (for a detailed analysis of the relation between taste and art,

see Korsmeyer 1999). Carême's pièces montées thus intellectualised and spiritualised taste (see Chapter 1 on the discussion on hierarchical understandings of taste).



Fig. 7. Examples of Carême's pièce montées⁴⁸

Such elaborate constructions blurred on the one hand the boundaries between art and taste, and signalled, on the other hand, tensions and contradictions regarding the very nature of taste. Carême's pièces montées were not only displayed in the Parisian patisseries' windows but they were also part of pompous banquet dinners of famous diplomats, bankers, and kings such as Talleyrand, Napoleon, George IV, Tsar Alexander I, or James Mayer Rothschild. These banquets of 'edible architecture' followed a particular system of display where neither servants nor service were in sight. The service *a la française* brought a profusion of dishes simultaneously on the table. It followed a fashion established since the end of the seventeenth century and is also known as 'ambigu' and could transform the whole dining room into a theatre:

⁴⁸ See <http://imagecache2.allposters.com/images/pic/BRGPOD/164276~Designs-For-Food-Decoration-Le-Cuisinier-Parisien-by-Antoine-Careme-Plate-21-Published-1842-Posters>, accessed 06/11/08

This manner of serving is strictly speaking, the combination of a supper and a light meal is generally served at the day's end; and instead of dividing a meal into several courses, all is set out together from the start, but arranged and ordered in a highly specific way that is agreeable and pleasurable to the senses and that brings appetite even to the most fastidious.

(L'Art de bien traiter (1674), cited in el-Khoury 1997:57)

However, the profusion of these dishes primarily intended as a feast for the eye were at the same time an unveiling of the flavours of the dishes themselves. Herein one can find a twofold aspect which Carême conferred to optic taste: “simplicity, elegance and sumptuousness” (Carême, cited in Trubek 2000: 7). Paradoxical as it may seem, Carême worked as much on elaborate constructions as he looked for the elimination of the redundant, for a simplification of dishes. This latter consisted principally, as Mennell remarks (1985: 147) in a codification of procedures, the pursuit of ideal blends of flavours rather than the harsh juxtaposition of contrasts. These are most evident in his principles of garnishing meat with meat, and fish with fish, and his advocacy for three basic sauces: espagnole, velouté and béchamel. Most telling are the words of a guest at one of Baron de Rothschild's dinners, referenced by Mennell:

Its character [of a dinner], however, was that it was in season, - that it was up to its time, [...] that there was no perruque in its composition, no trace of the wisdom of our ancestors in a single dish – no high-spiced sauces, no dark-brown gravies, no flavour of cayenne and allspice, [...] Every meat presented its own natural aroma – every vegetable its one shade of verdure (1985: 147).

This play of masking and unmasking of dishes is a feature that also recurs in further stages of culinary developments. Carême's work marks not only a transition between culinary traditions but also, a tension that arises in the process of 'taste-making' between looking at and eating a spectacle. El-Khoury refers to a tension of taste and spectacle as one between optic taste and haptic desire: "In the scopic regime of this culinary 'appareil', the haptic character of food is entirely undermined: to eat an 'ambigu', to taste it, is to consume a spectacle modelled after painting, decoration, and architecture, laid out in a particular formal style and with bon goût" (1997: 59f). While non-visual modes of tasting are involved in the appropriation of foods (the multi-modal workings of taste have been emphasised in Chapter 1), el-Khoury points out that "they however conform to the logic of the spectacle and do not challenge the supremacy of sight – the privileged perceptual apparatus in the projection of desire" (1997: 60). This visual regime has not only incorporated tensions between different sensory modalities, but it also opened up relations between flavours, thus adding new dimensions to the processes of taste. In this sense, Revel points out:

With Carême, grande cuisine is not, as it is too often thought to be and as it is frequently caricatured, a barbarous accumulation of ill-sorted ingredients, but rather a matter of preserving the dominant flavour into the final preparation. Carême introduced into cookery what in painting are called 'values' – that is to say, he made it understood for the first time that flavours and aromas must be judged not in isolation, but in their mutual relations (Revel, cited in Mennell 1985: 148).

Carême's edible architecture was significant for several reasons. It elevated the role of the visual in appreciating food, while at the same time it linked appreciation to the aesthetic value afforded by architecture. With this double-twist his intention was to create a strong statement in favour of a close relationship between food and art. The importance of form and structure seems to have left behind centuries of food cultures that were, ever since the Middle Ages, dominated by smell (Onfray 1993: 122). Throughout the Middle Ages spices were important ingredients that all too often disguised the taste of foods or indeed their signs of putrefaction. While it propelled vision over smell, Carême's edible architecture kept playing with the art of disguising food, of presenting it as if it were something else, which dominated the courtly feasts of previous periods. Nevertheless the intentions were different. Courtly feasts in previous times tended to disguise the foods by covering them in the fur of the animal thus creating the illusion of living animals (cf. Attar 1991: 123ff; Wilson 1991: 13). Thereby, they were creating a baroque hyper-reality that wanted to subtly remind the eaters of the organic, natural, indeed beastly origin of their food.

But Carême's fame is not only derived from his edible constructions, it is also related to changes in preparation techniques which, along with their simplification, came to codify what counts today as French cuisine. The two innovations are interrelated. Form and structure organised not only the appearance of foods in their final outcome but also their process of becoming. Vision therefore entered a new configuration; codification and classification were attributes of the distancing, detached, rational, knowledge-yielding eye.

So far, the brief description of historical formations of cooking practices through the lens of 'haute cuisine' (over several decades in the eighteenth century in France) showed that one common trait in the formation of tastes used theatrical

modalities of deception, irony, dissimulation, and ostentation. However, I suggest that the creation of illusions allowed for different forms of embodied relations between food and people. One period (before Carême) reminded the eaters of the organic and beastly origin of food, and the other related food to the aesthetics of form/ architecture and art, thus pointing to food's 'cultural' propensity to transcend its 'natural' bounds and reach the realms of the mind. In spite of the seeming opposition between these two modes of perceiving foods, they did not sever the relation between food and people but rather sealed a relation through attesting to the embodied nature of taste and the tactility of vision. The visual sense, as explored above, not only allows for different forms of embodied taste, it also mediates between the form and structure of the dishes.

Further Developments and Reforms: A Fresh Aesthetic Emphasis

The end of the nineteenth century was to see a continuation and a further elaboration of the principles introduced by Carême and marked a new stage in the spectacle of cooking and dining in many cultural centres of Europe, including London, Paris and Rome (cf. Mennell 1984: 157). It was an era where great international hotels and spas sprang up, and where the railway offered increased mobility (see Urry 2002). While still exclusive, hotels and spas were no longer private "in the sense that one did not have to be resident in order to avail oneself of many of their facilities, and most importantly, their public dining rooms were fashionable venues" (Mennell 1985: 158). These transformations in the public sphere provided chefs with new opportunities. Auguste Escoffier (1847–1935) was one of the chefs to be working in some of the most renowned hotels of those times, such as hotels on the

French Riviera, numerous Ritz hotels, the Savoy in London, the Carlton, or the Grand Hotel in Rome.

Escoffier is accredited with bringing about landmark changes in cooking techniques, the sequence of menus and in service. These changes facilitate new modes of perception supported by the presence of fewer dishes presented individually and in a clear pre-set order. In many ways he laid the foundations for the ‘modern’ restaurant techniques used today. He further promoted principles of cooking that came to be labelled by Gault and Millau in the late twentieth century as “nouvelle cuisine” (Gault and Millau 1973, 1976). It represented a further move towards the simplification of dishes and menus along with their display.

Escoffier reorganised the division of labour inside kitchens and introduced the ‘brigade de cuisine system’ which made operations more productive, thus setting an early step for a Taylorist type of production (see more Mennell 1985: 159). Whereas before him each cook was responsible for a category of dishes thus working independently of each other, his kitchen was organised into five different sections which worked interdependently and where each party was not so much responsible for a dish but for a particular type of operation. Also, he introduced the ‘service à la russe’ which implied serving each dish in the order presented on the menu, rather than having all dishes at once on the table. This system needed waiters. In his *Le Guide Culinaire* of 1903 Escoffier comments on:

The light and frivolous atmosphere of the restaurants [...] was in fact, ill-suited to the brisk waiters, and their customers who only had eyes for each other. ... It is eminently suited to State dinners, which are in sooth veritable ceremonies, possessing their ritual, traditions, and – one might even say – their

high priests; but it is a mere hindrance to the modern, rapid service. The complicated and sometimes heavy menus would be unwelcome to the hypercritical appetites so common nowadays; hence the need of a radical change not only in the culinary preparations themselves, but in the arrangements of the menus, and the service (Escoffier, cited in Mennell 1985: 160).

The shift in the presentation of a meal from banquet to single and sequencing dishes triggered a new focus and emphasis on the singularity and value of a single dish. Thus Escoffier modernised once more the “grand cuisine” created by Carême. He transformed the elaborate splendour of Carême into a simpler and leaner splendour and set a further stage in the development of *nouvelle cuisine*. This latter, far from being oblivious of form and structure, brought a fresh aesthetic emphasis to the ways of preparing and serving dishes. Mennell states that “it is perhaps not too far fetched to see in cookery, a transition in style parallel to that in architecture, from the classic baroque of France under Louis XIV to the rococo of the age of Louis XV, the elimination of excess and the cultivation of delicacy” and adds that “this transition could be seen both in the mode of service and in the recipes themselves” (1985: 80). It is important to note that culinary styles do not emerge in a linear fashion succeeding each other in time. Rather, they intersect and converge, and announce themselves long before they take a firm hold with elite, exquisite styles. They get diffused through the various economic and social strata of society and trickle up and down from elite to popular styles and vice versa.

It was not until the 1970s when two critics officially declared *nouvelle cuisine* a gastronomic style of cookery, at a time when gastronomy was facing a renewed

interest in simplifying and purifying cooking techniques. Gault and Millau, two restaurant critics and founders of a reputed restaurant guide, observed the “haute cuisine” of chefs such as Bocuse, Troisgros, Guérard or Vergé, and found that despite their individual dishes there were 10 principles which spoke for all and gave them the name *nouvelle cuisine*. The 10 commandments stated by Gault and Millau in 1973 were (see Barr and Levi 1984: 62):

1. You shall not overcook.
2. You shall utilise fresh, high-quality ingredients.
3. You shall lighten your menu.
4. You shall not be inflexibly modernist.
5. You shall nevertheless explore new techniques.
6. You shall avoid marinades, the hanging of games, and fermentation.
7. You shall eliminate traditional brown and white sauces.
8. You shall not ignore nutrition.
9. You shall not gussy up your presentations.
10. You shall be inventive.

This programmatic chart may leave the impression of a firmly established and formalised cuisine. Gault’s and Millau’s intention, however, was not to establish a new haute cuisine but to identify a pattern according to which a variety of cooking styles were producing ‘goodness’ and taste equally. Nouvelle cuisine exists today as a form of haute cuisine but its principles spread throughout many and more popular forms of public dining. As Wood (2004: 90) points out, it is especially the democratic uplifting of people’s taste that makes nouvelle cuisine interesting (see also Murcott

1988). In this sense, Wood criticises Menell's position in that it disengages fully the social and nutritional dimensions of Gault and Millau's '10-point plan' (2004: 81). He says that the 10 characteristics of nouvelle cuisine do not simply embody principles of culinary philosophy and technique but reflect a range of social values and concerns, which he describes in terms of social construction, social production and social consumption of nouvelle cuisine (Wood 2004: 81).

Wood explores these three themes in terms of 'goodness' as constructed around boundaries imposed by concepts of purity/impurity and where the quality of ingredients is as important as the general well-being of those consuming food; in terms of innovation and experimentation and these features place chefs as producer and entrepreneurs and where individuality and risk reframe the organisation of the restaurant business (see also Gillespie 1994: 19); and in terms of defining its public around middle-class values. Wood makes the point that nouvelle cuisine "has seemingly neither become institutionalized as the successor to, or next stage of development in, conventional *haute cuisine*, nor been wholly rejected" (1991: 328). For this reason, Wood regards nouvelle cuisine as a ground for analysing processes of *change* in cuisine and society more generally. Indeed, sociologists Rao, Monin and Durand correlate movements in cuisine with larger societal changes: "These 10 commandments reflect four values, which also characterized the protests of May 1968: truth, lightness, simplicity, and imagination" (2003: 22). These values, as I will show later on in this chapter, resonate with 'slow' food principles of 'good' food and cooking.

While Wood illuminates the cultural rather than the culinary basis of this style of cookery (2004: 81), Menell's keen sense for detail in terms of the implications of nouvelle cuisine principles for cooking techniques and skills should be equally

attended to. The apparent discrepancy between these two authors is not actually a clash of contrasting views. It is rather indicative of the fluidity of taste attributes ('goodness') and their dynamic fluctuations in cultural *and* biological realms. So, as Mennell underlines the cultural dimensions of taste, such as the historic traces of tastes, the circularity of taste-making, and the correspondences between taste and art, he simultaneously identifies 'goodness,' or simplicity, in the case of nouvelle cuisine, as the result of material relations between food items as well as of the skill and craft of the chef. Mennell says: "the aim of achieving a perfect balance between a few well-chosen flavours is simply a development from Carême's understanding that 'flavours and aromas must be judged not in isolation, but in their mutual relation,' compared by Revel to the notion of 'values' in painting" (1985: 164). Furthermore, he points to the fact that:

the achievements of each successive 'revolution' [...] sound remarkably similar: each of these so-called 'revolutions' involves (amongst other things) the pursuit of simplicity, the using of fewer ingredients with more discrimination, moving towards enhancing the 'natural' flavour of principal ingredients, and in the process the production of a wider range of dishes more differentiated in flavour because less masked by the use of a common cocktail of spices, or the same basic sauces (Mennell 1985: 164f).

Histories of eating throughout decades, generations, and centuries appear as a constant dialectic between orthodox and heterodox practices and culturally shaped tastes. My accounts of these brief fragments of the history of French cuisine show that the proliferation of culinary styles is deeply interwoven with periods of contestation

and even refutations within the institution of gastronomy where chefs define and legitimise their roles and practices by reframing the boundaries of their profession. However, within such a dynamic, haute cuisine and nouvelle cuisine have a rather ambiguous status. These two defining but interpenetrating stages in French gastronomy are part of a to and fro movement or a tug-of-war between tradition and novelty, the refined and the rustic, the extravagant and the simple, the conventional and the experimental.

While the invention or re-invention of cuisines and restaurants cannot be causally traced to a 'mythic' point of origin marked and sealed by the figures of Carême or Escoffier, a focus on their legacy provides insight into the formation of food and taste cultures. Carême's and Escoffier's fame emerged in conjunction with the publishing of cookbooks and food review magazines not only for professional chefs but for the wider public as well. As Ferguson reminds us, in early nineteenth century France a culinary discourse emerged not only through the culinary treatises of Carême, but also the gastronomic journalism of Grimod de la Reynière (1755–1838) and the cultural commentary and protosociology of Brillat-Savarin (1755–1826) (Ferguson 1998: 611). These had larger social impact and brought about extra-professional participation and non-instrumental writings. Ferguson refers here especially to the political philosophy of Charles Fourier (1772–1837) and the novels of Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850) (Ferguson 1998: 612). France is but one example of a phenomenon which occurred equally (but temporally unevenly) in other countries, such as Italy, or England for instance. But France stands out for its "particular configuration of culinary discourse, the multiplication of culinary genres, and the sheer volume of apposite writing" (Ferguson 1998: 611).

The importance of the culinary discourses rests in the configuration of taste as a concept. Metzner argues that “taste, a concept fundamental to Western art since the second half of the seventeenth century, has its origin in haute cuisine”⁴⁹ (1998: 57). Discourses and practices transformed taste in a contested matter and sometimes polarised its very meaning as either a bodily innate ability or as a purely intellectual and trained capacity of the mind. In this sense, Spang (2000) offers a relevant analysis of taste in relation to what she refers to as the invention of the restaurant in the Enlightenment era in France. Interestingly, she observes that the restaurant was designed to restore a range of physical and psychosomatic conditions regarded as conspicuous among a wide range of social groups, and not to counter debilitating pangs of urban hunger, as many culinary historians assumed, and neither to enable lavish dining, as it is often assumed today (Spang 2000: 34f): “The restaurant catered not to the hungry, but to the enervated who had lost their appetites and suffered from jaded appetites and weak chests.” In the late eighteenth century, nouvelle cuisine restaurants advertised for ‘simplicity’ of taste, for simplicity was thought to restore health. However, it was a simplicity which used the latest scientific discoveries and technologies such that it “refines away the coarse qualities in food and rids them of their earthy essences [...], thereby perfecting, filtering, and, in a way, spiritualizing them” (Foncemagne, cited in Spang 2004: 41). So, from this brief historical snapshot, we can see how taste promised, on the one hand, to liberate humans from their bodies, and, on the other hand, to elevate them from the forces of nature. Spang explains that “nature needed to be cleansed in order to be fit for human consumption; cookery, by civilizing the raw materials of human diet, could propel humanity further from its

⁴⁹ He points out that “before the mid-seventeenth century, the equivalents “taste,” *gusto* (Italian), *Geschmack* (German), and *goût* (French) referred only to the flavour of food. The first known use of the word *goût* in the sense of connoisseurship, the ability to make fine distinctions in quality, occurred in Nicolas de Bonnefons’s *Les Délices de la Campagne* (Country Delicacies, 1654), one of the founding texts of haute cuisine” (Metzner 1998: 57) (on the etymology of taste, see Chapter 6).

brutish origins” (2004: 41). While the different parties involved in the debate were unanimous in their drive to transcend the biological limits of taste, food, and the body, they remained split in terms of how they defined ‘simplicity’ of taste in terms of preparing dishes.

Nowadays, nouvelle cuisine principles have penetrated a variety of cooking styles and cuisines, and have also spread to more popular forms of dining, and, to domestic dining (2004: 79). Taste, and its meanings and forms and differences need therefore to be examined in the specific situated contexts where they are honed and elaborated. Before attending to particular circumstances and configurations, a few more observations should be made.

What is interesting is that although “nouvelle cuisine” established itself as a term in France in the 1970s with the 10 point principles outlined by the food writers Gault and Millau, reforms of “old cuisines” had been under way ever since the first half of the eighteenth century by chefs as La Chapelle, Marin and Menon. Marin wrote *Les Dons de Comus* (The Blessings of Comus, 1739), a book designed “for the use of people who are desirous of knowing how to give dinners ... according to the seasons, and in the very latest taste” (Marin cited in Metzner 1998: 59). Marin distinguished between ‘old cuisine’ and ‘modern cuisine:’

old cuisine is that which the French made fashionable all over Europe and which was generally practiced not even 20 years ago. Modern cuisine, built on the foundations of the old, but with less awkwardness and less apparatus, and with as much variety, is simpler, cleaner, and perhaps even more scientific (Marin cited in Metzner 1998: 59).

The analysis of the circular development of cuisines over long periods of time brought Mennell to the conclusion that the changes in cuisine reflect a diminishing of contrasts and an increase in variety (1985: 317). By diminishing contrasts Mennell means that boundaries between hierarchies (such as haute cuisine/cuisine bourgeois/country cookery, and upper/lower classes) have become less sharp, and the mingling of high cuisine with the cuisine bourgeois has brought about an increase in the variety of modes of cooking and dining. Indeed, this is in many ways what can be noticed in contemporary food consumption patterns. The communication between different cuisines, as for instance in what is called fusion cooking, constantly fuels the creation of sensory contrasts. The experience ignited through the powerful smells of Indian cuisine for instance, the visual aesthetic simplicity of Japanese cuisine and the lightness of nouvelle cuisine styles of cooking co-exist and contribute to the proliferation of sensory differences.

As Wood points out, the drive to experimentation and innovation is a powerful catalyst for the proliferation of nouvelle cuisine in the 1970s through multiple culinary styles (2004: 78). This allows nouvelle cuisine to keep permeable boundaries and incorporate elements from other cuisines, such as Chinese or Japanese. The elaboration of these various elements and styles often leads to the exacerbation of one such element in favour of another. In fusion cooking, for instance, novelty and exoticism prevails over seasonality. In nouvelle cuisine, as an elite form of dining, the visual aesthetic elements come to dominate over nutrition. The apotheosis of these forms and styles is to be found with molecular gastronomy, where innovation and visual aesthetics reign. If their styles differ, their mode of operation is fuelled by the common aim of triggering the attention of the eater with sensory differences. So for instance, when Heston Blumenthal offers a fish dish on a transparent plate under

which the eater can see sand whilst simultaneously hearing the sound of the sea, he is aiming to fire not only attention but multiple connections between food, place, memories and sensations.

The principles and processes of nouvelle cuisine show similarities to those of Slow Food. While similar, Slow Food seeks to assert above all the value of the 'local' and to strike a balance between elements of nouvelle cuisine and elements of cuisines of 'terroir.' I now turn to explore some of the ways in which Slow Food creates differences through the mediation of cooks and chefs. In Chapter 7 I relate the present analysis to the experience of Slow Food dinners in restaurants.

Cooks and Chefs: From Legislators to Interpreters

Before analysing some of the Slow Food events where cooks were given a leading role, I draw an analogy between cooks and chefs and what Bauman referred to as legislators and interpreters (1989, 1992). As noted in Chapter 1, Bauman uses the terms to analyse two different intellectual praxes of approaching and representing societal narratives. As such, the praxis of legislators imposes an ideological, coercive, rigid and detached attitude over the world. By contrast, the interpreter has a more 'organic' attitude in that it allows for a more open-ended and ever changing diversity of worldviews and where education and learning is a reciprocal and embedded process. With these terms Bauman captured a shift in orientation from the modern to the post-modern view of the world, namely, a shift from an authoritative towards a more plural and interpretative sensitivity to culture.

The stages in French cuisine show chefs adopting both roles. Carême and Escoffier systematised and formalised haute and nouvelle French cuisine and

legislated the patterns according to which many of their followers operated in the culinary institution. As I argued, their writings provide insight not only into the formation of the culinary field and the transposition of taste into aesthetic, philosophical, cultural registers but also into their keen interest in transmitting to the public that, for them, these shifts were actually meant to unleash the materiality and vitality of foods and dishes. It is this configuration which makes their status so distinctive. They are simultaneously legislators of their profession and mediators and interpreters of taste beyond the boundaries of their institution in the way they sought to articulate taste to the public. The examples on which I draw below show a more marked orientation towards the role of chefs and cooks as interpreters.

However, such roles are not necessarily assumed by every trained chef and cook. While historical records present notable exceptions, for decades, at least where the West is concerned, the chef and cook were mostly marginal and remained invisible to the public gaze. Moreover, it is not in such roles that people experience the relation between what they are eating and the cook who prepared the dish. One cook from Cumbria and organiser of the Slow Food group of this area recalls how in the late 1970s she used to be the only one in the region to run cooking classes, tasting workshops and food tours to local producers and restaurants. Nowadays, she says that there are many who follow in her footsteps and ask her advice. Indicative of the changing roles of cooks over the last decade is also that she received an OBE in 2009 and thus joined the list of other more well known cooks and chefs like Delia Smith or Gordon Ramsay. It is with the mediatisation of cooks and cooking especially through television programmes that their roles as mediators and interpreters received a fresh impetus. But as these roles are asserted, the legislator role often overlaps and

intermingles with the role of interpreters. Thus the two roles have to be regarded as a dynamic play of forces which are often problematic and ambiguous.

Alice Waters, the vice-president of Slow Food International and restaurateur at Chez Pannisse in Berkeley, California, is hailed as one of the prime founders of 'Californian Cuisine,' one of the first to introduce nouvelle cuisine to the US, and a chef who trained many other chefs who opened their own restaurants and became 'celebrity chefs' in their own right (Guthman 2003: 48f). She transfers the principles of her cooking into campaigns for sustainable food in schools through projects such as the Edible Schoolyard (see Chapter 4).

McNamee captures some of the defining aspects of Waters' model of cuisine in a biography of her work. He refers back to the late 1970s when:

For eight years now, Chez Pannisse in Berkeley has been turning out a different menu each night. That's in a neighbourhood of 3000 new dishes, and they keep doing it. What is so remarkable is that food is always exciting, very rarely poor, occasionally merely good, and usually superb. ...The palette of food is so varied and complex that you usually taste something you have never tasted before (McNamee 2007: 151).

He refers to a style, which at the time it was introduced in the early 1970s, was rather new to the place: it was based on seasonality, local produce, and quality of ingredients, most of which were organic. In order for it to succeed, Waters incorporated these elements into a model of constant and rapid circulation of 'newness,' and thus distracted people's attention from the habitude and repetition that are also part of local- and seasonal-dependant modes of eating. But, as Guthman

remarks, this model was fuelled by the counter-cultural milieu in the Bay Area, “a centre for personal innovation and indulgence, and cultural non-conformity,” and populated increasingly during the 1980s by the ‘yuppie’ generation of young urban professionals (2003: 48). She juxtaposes these processes to the rising fast food culture which brought a “downward spiral of dietary expectations and food quality” (2003: 48). Guthman’s analysis is important because it highlights the role of the restaurant as an agent in a wider nexus of cultural-economic fields. Her case study of a particular product/dish, the ‘organic salad mix,’ reveals the articulation of Waters’ model of cuisine as French, nouvelle cuisine, traditional regional country cooking, and local. Guthman points out that such cuisine encouraged small farmers to grow organic produce, and as the sector grew this also led to a considerable reduction in pesticide use. On the other hand, as salad turned out to be a lucrative crop, it came to contribute increasingly to the logic of intensification and mono-culture, and ironically, it also became one of the best marketed convenience foods, “packaged with a packet of salad dressing” (Guthman 2003: 54). Guthman does not trace a direct causal link between Waters’ practices and the evolution of one niche crop into a mass market one. Instead she uses one commodity to deconstruct strong oppositions between fast and slow products and to show how a whole nexus of social, cultural and economic process comes to mediate consumer sensibilities.

However, there are several distinctions to be made regarding the types of mediation that lead to the creation of sensory differences. These differences reveal themselves more readily when cooks or chefs explicitly assume the role of mediators in particular events and performances. I provide below some snapshots from some events organised by the Slow Food Movement in Britain which I attended. The aim of the Movement is to instil in cooks and chefs the readiness to communicate their craft,

or to at least draw attention to some distinctive aspects of their cooking. It is not necessarily an articulation of models and types of cuisine as delineated and bounded which is aimed for, but rather the extraction of those elements which could, in their view, affect people's sensory repertoire and their sensitivities. Such an is not a common practice and usually only takes place in designated spaces such as food festivals and fairs. It is a rare occurrence at markets (i.e. farmers' markets) or restaurants.

Slow Food Differences: Synergy, Synecdoche, and Seizure

I start with a snapshot of an event at the Slow Food Market in London in September 2008. Over the course of the weekend the market offered not only foods at various stalls but also involved several cooking demonstrations and book launches. There was a cooking demonstration by the French chef Stéphane Reynaud and he promoted his cookbook on traditional French cooking. Another demonstration, which I explore below, was performed by the British chef, Arthur Potts-Dawson, who owns a restaurant in London. Two further books were presented. One of them, written by a British historian John Dickie, told the history of the Italians' love of food throughout the centuries. Another one, written by a British journalist, told the story of her year-long research on multiple ways of raising chickens around the world, and mass production was given an emphatic critical focus. There was also a presentation of research done by a group regarding the disappearance of bee colonies in the UK and various other places in Europe and the US.

One invited chef was Arthur Potts-Dawson. He runs the Acorn House in London, a restaurant acclaimed for its rigorous eco-friendly model. After his

demonstration he signed his newly published cookbook with seasonal recipes he crafts at his restaurant and also ones he likes to share at home with his family. The whole event had several striking features which reveal some clues as to how chefs envision 'slow' foods, and how the meaning of 'slow' always reverberates with issues and contexts which reach beyond the actual dish. Last but not least, it provides insight into the nature and character of Slow Food practices. As I show below, the heightened reflectivity of the chef illuminates aspects of taste which usually do not receive much attention, because they exist in a realm which Polanyi referred to as tacit knowing ([1958] 1974, [1966] 2009).

In this sense, 'slow' appears as a process of unveiling of multiple forms of experiencing taste as much as of negotiations between what comes to be considered 'good' taste. This process of negotiations often transforms into a process of subversion and demystification of established rules. One of the reasons for this transformation derives from the fact that looking for the 'slow and good' very often implies a dialectical attitude towards 'other' forms of taste like fast foods and mass-produced foods. Of interest for the current chapter is that the circularity of these processes reveals the multiple sensorial agencies of the materiality of foods and dishes. I understand sensorial agency in conjunction with what Gibson referred to as 'affordances' of particular objects, materials, environments (1979). Affordances imply the perception of a particular element *in relation* between perceiver and perceived (see Chapter 6). The orchestration of information pick-up unfolds in such a way that it affords and initiates the perception of *difference*.



Fig. 8. Slow Food Market London 2008

Arthur Potts-Dawson and his trainee cook a chicken

Potts-Dawson spent his apprenticeship years with the Michelin-starred Roux brothers and worked in several restaurants in cities around the world. He returned to England to the River Café where he became friends with Jamie Oliver, and later took up the management of one of Oliver's 'Fifteen' restaurants. He currently owns Acorn House. Given the cosmopolitan and high-end trajectory of his training, his demonstration juggled the expectations of his viewers. It came as a surprise for many people in the audience (as I later learned from some of the participants) that he should improvise a dish with foods he had just bought from the Slow Food Market and start off his demonstration with actually showing how one is supposed to cut and debone a chicken, rather than present one of his famous dishes and have everything planned in advance. Thus, he switched the level of attention towards the more practical and pragmatic 'knowing how' rather than more propositional 'knowing that' level of learning.

He decided to cook a 'simple' dish with 'locally' grown broccoli and free-range chickens from farms a few miles outside London. He had brought two of his trainees with him and kept a close eye on their movements and gestures as they were

helping him to complete the dish in just 40 minutes. Watching his trainees cut the chicken, he pointed that one has to use the left hand more than the right one, and also lead the knife in such a way as to do the cleaning job, or the separation of the meat from the bones, and not so much use it to cut. This is a craft that good butchers know, he said. He explained how it is often more economical to buy a whole chicken and make use of it as a whole, rather than buy pre-cut and pre-packaged parts. Such a configuration brings insight into how the knowledge of 'local', slow, and sustainable foods is closely linked with the sensory knowledge of cooking, looking and eating. Conversely, immediate sensory knowledge is linked to further reaching sensibilities regarding the environment, and the contexts and situations where food is prepared and eaten. He points out that the shape of the chicken's legs and the colour of a chicken, when bought as a whole, can give you clues as to how it has been raised and fed. As if intertwined, the tacit skills of appreciating and judging the quality of a product as well as mastering its preparation cooperate and communicate with propositional knowledge condensed in terms such as 'sustainable' or 'organic.'

Potts-Dawson explicitly points out that chefs should not only know techniques of cutting and cooking food but also know where the food comes from. This sense of accountability and responsibility had been heralded in 2006 at the gathering of food communities from around the world to which 1000 cooks and chefs were invited. He said there is now a new generation of chefs who are working with this ethos. They also are keen to learn and gather information about foods which are local and British, and about rare and heritage varieties which came to be forgotten. He further proudly underlined the fact that their restaurant is recycling all its waste and also that they ask suppliers what they have available rather than demanding conformity with a preset range of products.

Potts-Dawson seems to seek to weave his stories into the physical gestures and movements he undertakes and intends thereby to show his audience that “we are not just consuming, but are all part of a bigger picture.” As he cuts and chops, steams and fries, he seamlessly directs people’s attention to the craft of cooking and points how, “Chefs have to express themselves” and “let their personality come through the food.”

It is as if the taste of the food itself was transformed into a *relation* between cook and food rather than being presented as a property of the food and/or dish itself. But this does not mean that food items are pushed into the background. Every food, as Potts-Dawson emphasises, has its ‘individuality’ and chefs too have their own individuality. The process of cooking is then supposed to forge this immediate and close relation between person and food. Experimentation, as he says, is what should encourage this creative process and at the same time avoid endless replication. However, he underlines that his cooking style is still classical because they do not break any rules. The relation between chef and food is as important for him as that between restaurant team, dishes, and guests. Their restaurant has an open kitchen where diners can catch glimpses of a craft which most of the time unfolds beyond the public gaze. He cares about cooking as a learning process and recalls the generation gap between his grandmother and his mother. He learned basic skills from his grandmother and not from his mother. The temporal dimension he weaves into his presentation is concerned with social processes and changes that point beyond his personal story to Britain more generally. It also encompasses reflective attitudes of Britain in relation to France. He says “we are a bit nervous about cooking because we think we have to prove ourselves to the French.” Thus he destabilises assumptions and expectations about cooking styles.

As opposed to the practice of tasting at festivals, it can be said that the practice of cooking demands and requires a different pace of ‘acting upon’ foods and dishes for the cook as well for the viewer/eater. Also, it involves an extended set of tasks that goes into making a dish and involves know-how in appreciating the dish. The complex configurations of gestures, talk, images, meanings, and accumulated layers of experience play their role in the formation of perceptual patterns. Images, memories and skills are entangled in one another and, as they unfold, they slow down the pace at which the cooking activity is perceived. The viewers do taste a bite of Potts-Dawson’s dish at the end but this merely rewards their patience and curiosity. The sense of taste however, permeates and intermingles with all the other senses: the aural, the haptic, and certainly, the visual.

The visual sense in the case of this event unifies and holds together all the impressions gathered by the other senses and creates continuity as people move from one image and/or impression to the other. Many people rushed after the demonstration to buy Potts-Dawson’s cookbook but others were more lured into buying Reynaud’s French cookbook. Both were “so beautiful!” and “irresistible!” as many standing in the queue exclaimed. But the two books show different similarities in the way they elaborate the notion of ‘slow’ and ‘simple’ foods. While the latter is full of pictures the former has not a single one. Yet both found their place at the Slow Food Market. Even if they are different in their approach, their styles complement each other. One is heralding above anything else ‘visual aesthetic simplicity’ and use few, but good, ingredients for cooking, and the other promotes ‘traditional’ home cooking and illustrates it with lush pictures⁵⁰. Thus, the visual sense comes to function as a gate-

⁵⁰ Some of the dishes Potts-Dawson (2008) recommends for spring, for instance, are stinging nettle and potato risotto, watercress soup, but also a brochette of prawns and scallops with seakale, spring carrot and spinach salad. For the latter, he adds comments on the fact that if sustainable prawns are not

opener to the other senses. Below is an example of how one person discusses the French cookbook on their blog. It suggests that vision has the potential to permeate through the densities and layers of food:

‘Ripailles’ by chef Stéphane Reynaud is a ‘*guinguette*’⁵¹ in book form. A hefty piece of work, worthy of pride of place on the bookshelf, it has typical French brasserie recipes, witty drawings and evocative food photography presented on enamel plates, earthenware, cast iron pans, heavy spoons, the kind of French tableware I lust over in ‘*vide-greniers*’⁵². The memories of France this book evokes are textural, tangible.⁵³

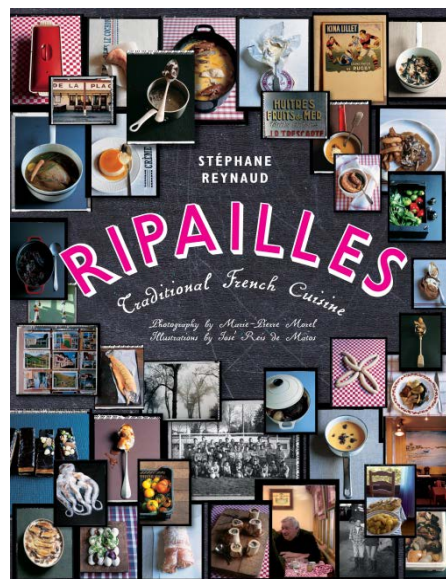


Fig. 9. Front cover of Reynaud’s *Ripailles*

By contrast, the *Acorn House Cookbook* has a very minimal design and plays with pale green, red, and white graphics that evoke the Arts and Crafts architectural style

available, one can replace the with button mushrooms (2008: 25). Reynaud’s recipes (2008) include for instance: beef tongue in Madeira sauce, pork head salad, roast beef pure and simple, pot-au-feu, etc.

⁵¹ The blogger refers here to popular eating and drinking establishments in the suburbs of Paris.

⁵² Engl. flea market

⁵³ <http://theenglishcaneat.blogspot.com/2009/05/ripailles-by-stephane-reynaud.html>, accessed 01/06/09

of the beginning of the twentieth century and/or the cooking style known as *nouvelle cuisine* which spread during the 1970s.

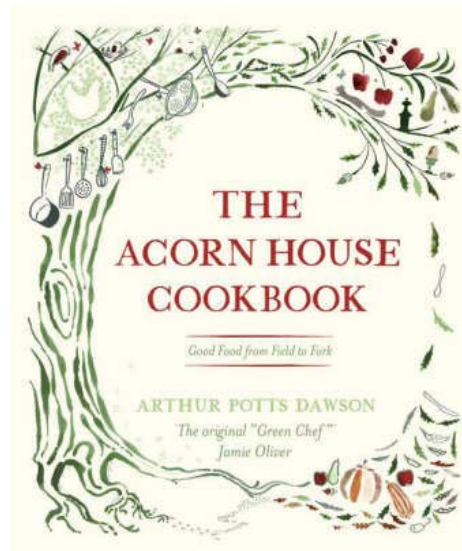


Fig. 10. Front cover of Potts-Dawson's *The Acorn House Cookbook*

Whereas one is lush, the other is austere. And yet, both tell stories about the pleasure of eating. Potts-Dawson explains in the introduction of his cookbook:

I am cooking exactly what I like to eat, but I differ radically from other restaurant chefs in that, rather than jostle for culinary accolades and stars, I'm trying to lead in another direction, a green and sustainable one. This has only come about by combining my personal life with my professional one. [...] It's a form of green blueprint, which will help you – without the aid of glossy pictures – to design and create your own version of a dish or meal (Potts-Dawson 2008: 11).

The process of communication with an audience involves a demarcation from 'other' chefs. It also presupposes a conscious 'stepping down' from the individual and

personality-centred status of himself as a chef to that of the ‘interpreter’ who cooperates with his audience and mediates his personal/professional experiences.

Potts-Dawson’s ‘jumps’ in(-between) different roles are mediated also through the creation of visual *differences*. The explicit remark on the fact that pictures were intentionally omitted alludes to a different facet of the visual. It is not the connective, immersive capacity of vision but rather its obscuring and objectifying side. When there exists a seizure between vision and the other senses, when the relations between the sensuality of eating are severed, vision tends to encourage a passive gaze. I believe Potts-Dawson hints with such a gesture at the fact that visual aesthetics should not figure as an end in itself but as a means to an end. In *A History of Cooks and Cooking*, Symons quotes a Chinese poet: “*Don’t eat with your eyes!* By this I mean do not cover the table with innumerable dishes and multiply courses indefinitely. For this is to eat with the eyes, not with the mouth” (2004: 48).

This is a paradox. Cooks and chefs know that we always eat with our eyes first. For instance, Annette, a Cumbrian cook and organiser of the Slow Food Cumbria group, always remembers this and conveys it to her audience when she cooks. Annette had been invited to cater for a community event in Whitehaven where town officials and guests were having afternoon tea and commemorating 200 years since the abolition of slavery. Annette explained to me how she took care to provide a wide range of different textures (smooth, creamy, soft, and crisp) and different colours as opposed to having only fried or baked dishes and canapés. Colour combination is as important for her as is ensuring that her dishes are nutritious. She believes foods that are in season have better flavour and are higher in nutrient content, and because they did not travel so far they should be in better condition than foods which travelled many miles. She says that not many chefs nowadays were taught to have this kind and

degree of consistency and coherence as an essential pattern of every dish and meal they design. She thinks this is wrong.



Fig. 11. Annette describes the range of foods she chose for the event. Whitehaven 2007

These few snapshots into the world of cooks and chefs bring up a multitude of issues and themes. The cooks and chefs deploy their skills in ways which are intended to structure the experience of taste. The decisions of cooks about certain ingredients and certain combinations aim to channel the attention of the viewer/eater in particular ways. Annette always considers who is attending the event, she thinks of their age, and tells me, older people like traditional food (for instance salmon and cucumber sandwiches), and younger people like perhaps different foods and textures as well (for instance cheese sandwiches or Damson jelly). The signals perceived through the senses function as vectors in the configuration and structure of experience. Annette finished the afternoon teatime with damson and apple juice jelly. Guests came to her after the event to say they liked the food and they especially enjoyed the jelly because it was a nice way to finish after all those cakes. Indeed she was pleased and amused to find that certain children did not know what it was and tried to drink it. Confusion aside, visual perception acts as a vector in the process of eating and tasting. These

signals are prompted by the arrangement of foods, flavours, textures and colours in a system of meaningful differences. Attending to the way these differences emerge, illuminates the process through which taste and the senses are transformed and cultivated into skills and modes of knowing.

It needs to be emphasised that cooks and chefs intimately link vision with an array of skills and strategies. The foremost aim of the chefs is to point watchers and tasters to some tools and techniques which they can deploy when cooking and/or eating and thus become more refined analysts and explorers of foods and dishes. The training of the viewer in such performances as explored above turns out to be exploratory rather than prescriptive. Their foremost aim is to train sensorial skills rather than provide ready-made judgements as to the worth of one dish in favour of another. Thus Potts-Dawson's decision not to use images in his cookbook is indicative of his intention to keep the exploratory and imaginative horizons of people open. But this aim is not easy to achieve because skills and tools themselves exist and arise against a historical/temporal dimension and are deeply entangled with cultural images and representations of taste and food (as has been demonstrated also by the analyses of historical patterns of cuisine in the first part of this chapter). The act of mediation becomes a process (non-linear and including multiple temporalities), a process of picking up differences which emerge out of complex imbrications of practical, factual, and sensorial elements *with* layers of cultural, historic and temporal elements.

Exploring these modalities of knowing as arising out of relational configurations uncovers the complexities of the senses as “perceptual systems” (Gibson 1979). But the processes involved in cooking are, however, contested. They depend on the nature of contrasting relations involved in carving out differences.

Cooking as a practice, and also as a process of training (as used by the Slow Food Movement) is paved with various expectations and historical experiences which the cook, chef and viewer/eater work with rather than discard. This shows that the training of taste cannot be seen as emerging in a vacuum, separated from historical patterns and representations.

Cooking and eating cooked dishes involves the use of a sensorial repertoire and the way this repertoire is used differs from person to person and from the tasks and activities which one pursues. It involves using the senses sequentially, hierarchically, or cooperatively. Indeed, the colourful cookbook by Reynaud involves the visual sense as a means of evoking memories by also connecting it with the haptic sense. In contrast, the Acorn House prefers to dispense with images to focalise attention on *ways of cooking* rather than on the final products. These two examples point towards broader imaginaries of ways in which ‘good’ taste is understood. One evokes French cooking as a model to which Britain tends to aspire and admire, as echoed by Potts-Dawson. The other promotes British modes of cooking but does so by demarcating itself from the abundance of images of food predominant in magazines and television shows. All of these are processes where many different boundaries become blurred (such as French/British cuisine, cook/chef, high/ordinary cooking, old/new experiences, skills, knowledge).

In this chapter I have argued that it is out of such contestation of boundaries and hierarchies that meaningful elements of information are created. These make a difference to the training of the senses and the process of learning more generally. Differences are produced through various ways in which cooks and chefs assemble foods, knowledge and skills in configurations that aim to structure the experience of taste of the people who watch and/or eat. Chapters 6 and 7 will investigate further

how differences among similar types of foods or drinks are deployed as tools and techniques to propel the training process of the senses among groups of tasters.

This chapter has shown that acquiring the ability to perceive the minute differences between the elements which constitute a dish is a multi-layered process where participants experience taste at a pace which gradually includes gestures, images, stories, stops and movements. Sensory difference, as a perceptual pattern operates at a different, slower, pace than sensory overload. In Chapter 4 I have shown that when speed and ubiquity dominate, sensory overload activates the sensorium instantaneously but operates on the surface and in a more linear manner. Sensory difference, by contrast unveils richer textures and configurations of taste. Through the stretching of time involved in showing how to prepare dishes, sensory differences become perceivable. In the cases presented in this chapter the stretching of time emerges out of the comingling of elements of terroir with elements of nouvelle cuisine. In this way, such concepts are transformed into processes of taste making and removed from their usual circuits of circulation (i.e. wines and terroir, or nouvelle cuisine practiced in specific restaurants).

The next chapter analyses another modality of searching for taste which the Slow Food Movement deploys through attending to foods in their least elaborate forms and then gradually following the stages whereby they become increasingly complex. This process brings to light in what way material aspects come to matter by including the perspectives and acts of those who taste.

Chapter 6 Training Taste: Slow Food Taste Workshops

This sense, this ability to discriminate in our food, has produced in every known language the metaphor that expresses, by the word “taste,” the feeling for beauty and deficiency in all the arts. It is a power of discernment that operates as rapidly as those of the tongue and the palate and that, like them, precedes reflection; like them, it is sensitive and voluptuous regarding the good; like them, it rejects the bad with disgust; like them, it is often uncertain or mistaken.

Montesquieu⁵⁴

Tasting is a kind of attention.

James Gibson⁵⁵

Introduction

The thesis has explored a range of contemporary contexts in the West where taste has become a domain of contestation (Chapter 2) and political mobilisation (Chapter 3), and sketched some fields of forces which characterise the process, formation, and experience of taste (Chapter 4 and 5). I refer to these fields as tensions between biological and cultural taste; as drives towards normativity; as a sensory-cultural search for and exploration of differences; and as a dynamic, layered, and even circular play between slow and fast foods. Using examples of activities pursued by

⁵⁴ Montesquieu was asked to write the article “Goût” for the *Encyclopédie*, but he died before completing it; his long fragment became an appendix to the short article by Voltaire (cited in Metzner 1998: 81).

⁵⁵ *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems*, (Gibson 1966: 139).

the Slow Food Movement as well as examples related to it but reaching beyond it, I argued that taste is a multi-sited relational process (as shown through the concepts of *umami* and *terroir*) and that its experience is shaped to a great extent by various acts of mediation (for instance, cooking; Chapter 5).

Taste, however, is not reducible to mediated sways between slow and fast ways of experience, and biological and cultural leanings of taste formations. The process character of taste and the multiplicity of its foci make taste a changing and fluid entity which attracts the tasting subjects in a repeated search of its 'body'. In this search, taste is used as a tool, as technique, as perception, as attunement, in such a way that it becomes performative and generative of its own meaningful field. In order to grasp this dimension, this chapter will focus on the activity and practice of tasting. I follow what happens when people taste and compare foods and drinks. Tasting sessions represent a situation where people get to know tastes and where they *acquire* tastes. It is in this respect that I use the word performative and I see it as different from an activity where people display what they already know or, as Hennion puts it, taste "amounts to more than the actualization of a taste 'already there', for they are redefined during the action, with a result that is partly uncertain" (2001: 1). The tasting session elevates the unknown above the known. These two dimensions are certainly intertwined but as I follow the negotiations which unfold among the participants of such tasting workshops, it will emerge that taste as a modality of knowing rather than one of display is reinforced. In a tasting session there are participants and there is a guide or 'trainer' and the ways in which he/she leads the workshop and engages the tasters with the different foods and drinks often transforms the tasting situation into one where people come to 'learn how to know' tastes. The fact that tastes are negotiated among participants opens up several dimensions which

other types of engagement with food tend to hide. These dimensions are best understood as particular types of relations which create embodied ways of ‘fine-tuning’ taste to one’s body, to the taste of fellow tasters and to the environment.

Slow Food tasting sessions highlight the fact that taste is a mode of knowing and a sensory practice. I discuss examples from my own participant observation of Slow Food events. By analysing wine tasting sessions, I highlight the fact that attending to the types and qualities of relationships that taste establishes creates degrees of attachment to the objects of taste. I further show that degrees of attachment are relevant for taste as a mode of knowing and as a sensory practice.

In order to pursue this investigation I rely upon authors whose insights illuminate some of the distinctive aspects and elements which constitute tasting as a practice and as a mode of knowing. I draw especially on Hennion’s relational understanding of taste (2004, 2007) and Latour’s alternative understanding of the body (2004). I further draw a parallel between Gibson (1966) and Ingold’s (2000) notion of “education of attention” and the education of taste.

I show in this chapter that tasting sessions represent a context where biological and cultural dimensions of taste overlap. This convergence unleashes differences, reduces normativity, and allows the rhythmic succession of slow and fast tastes. Crucially, sociality proliferates taste and multiplies forms of engagement with and attachment to food and drink.

Tasting Wine with David



Fig. 12. “An A-Z of Lesser-Known Grape Varieties #1” Wine tasting run by David

The range of tastings run by the Slow Food Movement is very broad and includes cheese, charcuterie, chocolate, rice, milk, jams, juices, beers, ales, wines. Usually, the sessions involve a comparison of three to six products of the same range.

A rough, initial distinction is between tastings where participants are provided with a whole baggage of information about the products (such as stories of producers, technical data about their making, data about the flavour characteristics of the products, and/or personal stories related to the way the respective presenter of the products got to know about it) and sessions where information is minimal and where participants are encouraged to gradually discover more and more aspects of the products.

A further set of tasting sessions are more elaborate in that they pair different food products (for instance, cheeses or meats) or small dishes (for instance, desserts) with a range of different wines or beers, and the session thus analyses the degree of compatibility of such pairings and does not solely focus on one product. These

distinctions make a difference to the way in which taste is explored and expressed. The different modalities of engagement which they require trigger particular ways of knowing and types of knowledge.



Fig. 13. Shropshire Charcuterie Tasting⁵⁶

The aim of such tastings is first of all to open up a horizon of possibilities where tasters are made aware of the variety of differences which one type of product reveals. It is an occasion which aims to stimulate the tasters to be sensitive to differences which in other circumstances are inert. Situations where, for instance, several types of goat cheese are tasted in the frame of a single activity are rare in the everyday eating habits of people. In this sense, it can be said that tasting sessions provide a break in everyday eating routines. Thus, they also provide an occasion for things to differ. The ultimate aim of the Slow Food Movement is to encourage a search for varieties that is meant not only to raise reflectivity about people's purchases but also, and more importantly, to sensitise people to the fact that relying on a narrow range of products indirectly supports the standardisation and homogenisation of the market. Conversely,

⁵⁶ <http://www.slowfoodludlow.org.uk/events.html>, accessed 17/09/07

however, this does not mean that the Movement necessarily supports the diversification ethos which is a common trait of marketing strategies. In stating this, I do not aim to prove the veracity, causality, or functionality of such tasting activities and practices. I am to show that within such relations (like those between the general public and the environmental, cultural, and economic concerns around food) a wider and deeper spectrum of facets unfolds that points to the embodied dimensions of taste, and ultimately to the role of taste in forming subjectivities (see Mol 2008)⁵⁷. In the following I concentrate on one wine-tasting workshop organised by the London Slow Food group in 2007.⁵⁸

The image shows a screenshot of a website announcement for a wine-tasting workshop. The text is as follows:

21 August 2007

An A-Z of lesser known grape varieties #1: ABC

Tuesday 21 August 7:00 - 9:00 pm
Flâneur Food Hall and Restaurant, 41 Farringdon Road, EC1M 3JB
 (Nearest Tube: [Farringdon](#))

£10 Members £15 Guests

Ever been intrigued by the legend on a wine label, and then reached for something more familiar instead? I'm sure you have. Yet if the wine world's more abstruse treasures aren't inexorably all going to be grubbed up and replaced by something more obviously international, then we need to send a signal of support to the poor, beleaguered producers who still maintain the old traditional varieties, and buy a good few more of their bottles. So this is Slow Food London's humble attempt to ensure we at least try some of the world's lesser known wine grape varieties in the hope that we might all cultivate a taste for a few of them and put them on our shopping lists and, furthermore, spread the word about them.

Every six weeks or thereabouts we'll work our way through a section of the alphabet, and taste what is available - red, white, pink, dry, sweet, sparkling, still - up to a dozen or so wines. Once in a while we'll rather what prove to be the favourites to partner a

Fig. 14. Slow Food London website announcing the wine-tasting workshop⁵⁹

⁵⁷ See Mol (2008) for a philosophical discussion on food and subjectivity.

⁵⁸ Basic information for the events run by the Slow Food London group can be found on their website and blog at <http://slowfoodlondon.blogs.com/2007/07/21-august-an-a-html>, accessed 20/07/07

⁵⁹ See fn. 5

This particular workshop is part of a whole year's series of wine tastings run by David. David is a school teacher and has a passion for food and wine. He and his wife had been members for more than a decade of the International Wine and Food Society but in the late 1990s he withdrew as he was dissatisfied with the lack of interest the Society showed with respect to environmental, political, and cultural issues around wine and food, and its unilateral concentration on pleasure. He heard about Slow Food and decided to become a member, and currently he is one of the most actively involved volunteer event organisers. For this event he chose twelve wines which are less well-known (as the title says) and mostly come from small vineyards in Europe; as he says, “a melting pot” of wines from Portugal, Greece, Spain and Italy. He bought them from various retailers like Oddbins, Liberty Wines, and Waitrose. Prior to this workshop he ran some introductory training sessions on what he calls the chemistry of food and wine where he invited people to taste wines which were probably more familiar to the general public and also more widely available in supermarkets. This time, he chose “anything but” Cabernet or Chardonnay (the wine types with which most of those present are more familiar with) and made a statement (see Fig. 14) in favour of “cultivating” a taste for these less-well-known types and “spreading the word about them”.

This session was only the second wine-tasting session I have ever attended. I gleaned the general format of such tastings in Turin at the ‘Hall of Taste’ in 2006 when I was lucky to be offered a spare ticket by one of the British Slow Food members.⁶⁰ Without having had previous experience of wine-tasting events, I found that the one in Turin offered fairly predictable impressions. It was led by a professional oenologist and had a very structured and expert-based character, and

⁶⁰ Slow Food Members usually pay between 15 to 25 pounds for a workshop. These prices are considerably lower than professional tasting workshops which start from around 70 pounds.

tasters were talked through step-by-step from one wine to the next and their attention drawn to the organoleptic traits of each wine, their place and year of making. By contrast, the first impressions I gathered from the London wine tasting in 2007 were more striking in their (apparent) randomness regarding the choice of wines, a “melting pot,” and in the open and experimental flair it gave off. These impressions, however, are certainly partial. All the other participants apart from me had embarked with David on a learning trajectory a couple of months before. In previous sessions they acquired a basic vocabulary and knowledge about the world of wine.

Before proceeding further, I draw attention to the etymology and meaning of the word taste. In its Latin roots, taste is identical with knowledge and wisdom: ‘sapientia,’ ‘sapor’ (taste) and ‘sapire’ (have taste/ know). There is more to taste, however, than an arbitrary coalescence of meanings. Diaconu reminds us that in old German, the verb ‘gaumen’ (mouth/eating) meant observe, mind, notice, perceive, see, take care (beobachten, wahrnehmen, sehen, acht haben) and referred more generally to the taking care of and minding the way one lives in the world (2005: 314).

What participants in the wine-tasting workshops do is indeed learn to notice several characteristics of the wines by paying close attention to them, but in order for them to become skilled in picking up the tastes of wines, they are provided with a whole set of ‘tools’ to facilitate their perception. This reminds us of Williams’ comment that “we learn to see a thing by learning to describe it” (1965: 39). This is already a step that goes further than simply verbalising likes or dislikes. In the introductory sessions, people learn how to describe a wine by paying attention to its ‘mouth-feel’ characteristics. This element includes ‘astringency,’ ‘heat,’ and ‘weight’ and these can be sensed in certain areas of the mouth more than in others, namely,

tongue, gums and teeth. The first element has the purpose of identifying the tannins of the wine, the second the level of alcohol, and the third the ‘glycerol,’ or, as David explains on the leaflet he gave to the participants, that which can be perceived as a sort of pseudo-sweetness in a persistent band across the tongue behind the tip. He also provided them with a scheme of the tongue with the four elements of taste (salty, sweet, bitter, and sour) and pointed to the area where each of them tends to be more persistent, but added that this is a very simplified version and is often contested. David chose for the introductory session five wines made from five grape types commonly consumed: Pinot Grigio, Chardonnay, Riesling, Gamay (Beaujolais), and Syrah. Thus, participants start the tasting and have a leaflet where they can write down their sensations according to four criteria: acidity, sweetness, tannin, weight, and a further space for personal notes. The wines thus acquire a profile and a structure; the basic criteria of judgement given by David along with the inherent familiarity factor which these commonly consumed wines have provide a basis for a certain ‘predictability’. These tools and techniques help people to discover and ‘do’ taste, and the tastes of wines gradually reveal themselves to the tasters.

From the steps described so far, what emerges is the performative and situated character of tasting, such that taste unfolds as “activity,” as Hennion poignantly argues in relation to practices of “amateurs,” such as listening to music, climbing a rock or drinking wine (2007: 101; 2004: 133). In declaring taste as an activity, Hennion distances himself from a view of taste as a property, as an attribute of a thing, or a taste that is “already there” (2007: 101). To some extent, Hennion’s view resonates with the one proposed by Ingold (2000) with regard to the ways and process of getting to know ‘nature.’ I therefore draw an analogy between the “activity” of tasting and what Ingold, following Gibson (1986: 254), refers to as the “education of

attention” (2000: 22). Remembering how his father took him on walks in the woods when he was a child and pointed to plants and trees around him, Ingold contends that we develop a capacity to know by “having things shown to us” (2000: 21). Those pieces of information become meaningful and knowledgeable, however, because they are situated in a “context of a direct perceptual engagement with our environment” (2000: 21). Tasters develop a “perceptual awareness” by being instructed what to look out for, and having their attention drawn to subtle clues that they otherwise might fail to notice (see. Ingold 2000: 37). So, Ingold complements Hennion in that he underlines the role of the guide or trainer in such an activity, but common to both authors is a shared purpose of uncovering modalities and processes of knowing.

I suggest that, in the case of Slow Food tasting workshops, the trainer does indeed hold a crucial position but the distinctiveness of such a position emerges in the unfolding of the event itself and is derived from certain ways of doing the tasting as much as it is from the ‘what’ or content of tasting. Taste workshops resemble a learning situation. It is not necessarily a classic one between ‘teacher’ and ‘apprentices’, however. Neither is it one of an expert-lay relationship in the strict sense. One is rather confronted with a variety of nuances, with various competencies, which exist between those ideal poles. The notion of expert or lay, teacher and apprentice, accumulate different meanings according to the way people relate to situations, to fellow tasters and presenters, and to the objects of taste in specific contexts.

After giving some basic coordinates along which tasters can develop their skills in appreciating wines, David introduces sessions where less well-known wines and grape varieties are tasted. Thus he increases the anticipation of the tasters, increasing the surprise factor of the session, and triggers anew their attention and

curiosity. David runs what could be called a quasi-blind comparative tasting of twelve different wines. At first, he does not tell the tasters the name of the wines, their origin, the grape variety of which they were made, their price, or place where they were bought. He lets them smell and taste them and encourages them to write down what smells and flavours they perceive, the intensity of the tastes and smells, and to imagine where they could come from and what occasions might be suitable for their consumption; e.g. having them with food, and what kind of food, or having them on their own. In such a way, he withdraws his authority and leaves the tasters musing over the drinks. The way he introduced the workshop was also a sign by which he withdrew his authority: “it is pretty much a buyers’ experience, so we all pretty much are sharing the risk”. He is not the connoisseur but the amateur wine lover who is open to new experiences.

David invites the tasters to take a sniff and “see what the wine seems to be promising” them. This signals a state of uncertainty that characterises the beginning of the tasting and also prompts a more direct engagement with and attention towards the wines. Moreover, taste is turned into a reflexive act. Hennion argues that “this reflexive nature of taste is almost a definition, a founding act, that of attention, suspension, a pause in what is happening” (2004: 134). This deliberate act intensifies the presence of the wines. The result and felicity of such a significant moment manifested themselves in prompt and playful responses, opinions, and guesses from the participants. They described it as “fairly light ... clean ... fragrant ... delicate ... a good mouth-feel ... fresh ... not very complex ... palate refresher ... lovely in summer”. I wrote down these numerous characteristics, or rather, descriptors, as quickly as I could. For me, the speed of such responses was overwhelming, given that this was my first attendance at such an event. There was not enough time for me to

think about what I tasted. Clearly, the participants showed a fair amount of familiarity and were comfortable with the format of such a tasting by having previously attended David's introductory sessions. As a participant *and* observer, my attention was drawn towards David, towards my companions, towards talking to my neighbours and, lastly, towards the wine. I did not want to miss a word and everything seemed to be important. I wanted to learn, too, and find out how to reach the level of articulation mastered by the other participants. The range of words I could find, however, was limited in spite of the fact that I did like the wine. Yet the words of fellow tasters seemed to capture so well the sensations and impressions I had. The degree of resonance impressed me.

More surprises followed. Once I began to forget about my slight unease at not being so knowledgeable about wines, the very informal and playful atmosphere of the whole event became more apparent. It occurred to me that David took every occasion he had to make a joke and that this increased the incentive of participants to improvise and exchange their opinions. They too seemed to hesitate every now and then and to linger longer on one wine than another. (Where did the image of the 'serious' taster, of the etiquette of spitting and strict rituals of tasting go, I wondered!) As soon as everyone had had a sniff and a sip, David began to weave the tips and clues of how to taste with comments about the wine's provenance and with occasional anecdotes. He says, for instance, that "the colour of the wine does not necessarily tell you very much," and a small sample "gets vaporised in your mouth and you are able to taste it without really getting too much alcohol," and adds "if you are sensible you spit into the white glasses" (from what I saw, no one really spat). When we tasted the fourth wine, David commented "on the nose not a lot, reasonable body, not enormous

character ... we were talking about the wine!” and then he laughed. A little later he draws a comparison:

I quite like the third one ... whistle clean and again it's saying to me I want something with it and I will clean the palate ... I am not looking for the central stage, I am prepared for the supporting role, which is not something you can say of this wine. It is screaming: look at me, look at my price!

David also comments that one of the biggest problems in the wine world today is that everybody is used nowadays to have a bottle of wine on its own and that has changed a great deal in terms of what we expected from a wine; traditionally nobody even thought of having white wine without food. Some of the white wines come from coastal areas in Greece or Portugal and this makes the participants ruminate about places they used to visit and some suggest particular types of fish one can eat there.

There is a fervent exchange of opinions among the tasters. Nick, for instance, talking to Bill, says he likes wine number five, an Albarino from Galicia; “what you were saying earlier, it is grapy and this is what is nice about it and not something else”. A little later, David complements their thoughts by adding that “[...] it is very nosable. Our wine-making traditions have changed a lot, we don't really get the flavour of the grapes in the world of wine today ... it is rather how much I can afford to pay for the wine”. As the conversation becomes livelier, the tasting of wines turns into an active process of negotiation. It reaches its peak in situations that lift the tasters' imagination up to a point where situations transform into highly humorous debates. The sixth wine, Arneis Nebiolo, reveals its “elusive flavour”; it is “hiding,” offering “nothing predictable”:

David: There is not much on the nose. Certainly, I do not find it very appealing ... strange sort of palate to me.

Mary: Yes. It is very elusive.

Bill: No, I find it challenging.

Ian: You mean challenging to find it. (laughs)

Bill: It's a bit like playing a game.

David: null point.

The tasting of the wine unfolds gradually from moments of attention, uncertainty, imitation, discrimination, and, finally, to moments of deliberation, negotiation and appreciation. Interspersed with familiarity, strangeness, irony and enjoyment, these stages shape a collective conduit. Hennion stresses that “There is no taste as long as one is alone, facing objects; no amateur knows from the outset how to appreciate good things, or simply what she/he likes. Taste starts with the comparison with others’ tastes (2004: 135). It is this collective process that allows for a variety of relationships and “attachments” (Hennion 2004, 2007) to emerge. They include the wine, the fellow tasters, one’s own tastes and one’s own bodies. In the following I draw on the relevance of such relationships. I suggest that it is not only the fact that relationships are established which is important but it is equally important to investigate the nature of such relationships. As they emerge, they acquire particular qualities, layers, depths and widths.

Embodied and Emergent Tastes

In the introduction to this chapter I pointed out that tasting sessions allow for the exploration of the unknown rather than what one already knows even if tasters use their acquired know-how for evaluating the wines. The analysis of the tasting conducted by David shows that the focused attention on one wine and the subsequent comparison with a range of wines sensitises the tasters towards discovering more and more differences. These differences are, in some way, of another kind than that which the demonstration and preparation of a dish offer (see Chapter 5). They are minute and condensed and reveal a subtler and deeper level of attunement to the elements involved in the tasting. The wine as ‘product’ and the grape variety tend to occupy a background position as the sensory differences of each of the wines’ flavours and aromas are given a prominent role. This means that what is of primary importance is not accumulating a range of differences in order then to attribute and match them to specific products but rather to become aware of the wide spectrum of differences which a trained taster is able to unleash and multiply. Thus they enrich and intensify the experience of taste.

The orientation which such a tasting practice affords is significant in the way it reveals things which are otherwise inert. This corresponds to a more general stance according to which things and meanings take shape as they are discovered in an environment by an observer. There are a number of approaches in social science which share such a view, such as phenomenology, non-representational theory, practice theory, and actor-network theories. These theories aim to distance themselves from a range of views adopted by social-constructivist and symbolic approaches as well as from those which reify dualistic worldviews and according to which meanings are imposed by the mind on the world (for more, see Chapter 1). For the purpose of

this chapter, I single out the views of some authors and explain why these are relevant to the notion of tasting as a learning activity, and do not draw extensively on the vast theoretical background which informs their positions. Earlier I made reference to Ingold's and Hennion's similar views on knowledge as a process of education of attention, as one of picking up of clues and information from the environment, and as a shared, collective endeavour. In the following, I draw on some interesting issues raised by Latour which contribute to a better understanding of the nature of such a process in ways which illuminate the relationships the senses establish with bodies that are made to sense.

In the course of the tasters' engagement with the wines, the wines acquire a 'body' and communicate with the bodies of the tasters. Hennion suggests that tasting is a "corporated" activity (2004: 136). The examples referred to above attest to the vitality of this relationship, such that the wines 'speak' to the tasters (as shown for instance in David's "see what the wine promises you" or "the wine tells me"). The metaphorical language involved in the description of the wines (for instance, "aggressive" wine, "courtesan" wine) is a further marker of this vitality (see more on embodied imagination and taste in Chapter 7).

Such articulations are, however, not given. And the sense not only of taste but that of smell equally demonstrates this. Indeed, that which people taste is largely the contribution of the sense of smell. A case study where a group of people engaged in a systematic training of their sense of smell by sniffing samples of odours inspired Latour to investigate the process which their bodies undergo in this process. He thus recognised that such an interaction actually challenges the capacities of the body in complex ways. For Latour this is an opportunity to question assumptions of 'naturally given' bodies and objects and he uses this questioning to tackle the implications they

carry for the way science is made. Latour tackles the issue of “How to talk about the body” (2004) by seeing the body as an entity which lives in a world of multiple possibilities to which it learns to open itself up. In learning to be affected, “effectuated”, moved, put into motion by other entities, humans or non-humans, the body progressively comes to register more and more differences which make up the world (2004: 205). Thus Latour advocates a dynamic understanding of the body that allows perpetual shaping and intervention and one that gradually embraces a richer world. This process thinking is one of inclusion and not one of elimination of occurring aspects, one of mobilisation of questions, differences and meanings and not of stabilisation.

More specifically, Latour’s model is not one where body and world are two separated entities which are connected together by other entities acting like intermediaries, say, language or material or technical devices. Neither is it one which privileges one of these entities over the others. In this manner, body, taste, and ‘objects’ are not given categories and neither are the preferences, signs and symbols associated with them.

So, when Teil and Hennion mobilise four main definitions of taste: taste as a property of the thing tasted; taste as a collective process; taste as a result of a device; and taste as an attribute (*caractère propre*) of a taster (2004: 30), they do not aim at an essentialised or dualistic definition of taste. They simply sketch the coordinates along which taste is activated, performed, made and re-made, refined and redefined.

Tasting wines then is not a matter of unveiling and discovering the ‘essential’ properties of the wines’ chemical structure that can be achieved through repeated and guided training. Preferences for one wine over another are not determined by the capacity to perceive those characteristics. Furthermore, as the tasting above suggests,

tasters are not looking for consensus among themselves as they undergo recurrent and progressive training. Such a search would undoubtedly reach the conclusion *de gustibus non est disputandum* (there is no disputing about taste). Indeed, the aspect which is immediately noticeable while tasters exchange opinions during the tasting, or while they vote for the wines they like after the session, or while answering my questionnaires is that often tasters do not endorse the presenter's opinion or those of their fellow companions.

In drawing extensively on Teil's case study of a group of pupils who 'train their noses' with an odour kit systematically arranged by a chemist (1998), Latour brings it to our attention that one does not ask how accurate the perception by the nose of the odours registered in the kit is (2004: 208). The case of wine and perfume odours is similar in that they both imply sniffing and smelling a range of fragrances. Asking about the accuracy of perception in the case of wine tastings would mean that one searches for the correspondences and discrepancies between the chemical composition of the wine and the flavour perception of the tasters. This line of thought would make one create a range of different flavours as perceived by different actors (taster, presenter, producer, chemist, industry, etc., or a scale between 'lay' taster and 'experts') and various measurement tools (e.g. chromatographs). Consequently one would end up dividing smells and flavours into those that reside in the world, that is, as they are perceived by tools and science, and those perceived by the more or less trained human apparatus. Following Latour further, one would end up with "a world made up of a substrate of *primary qualities* – what science sees but that the average human misses – on top of which subjects have simply added mere *secondary qualities* that exist only in our minds, imaginations and cultural accounts," a world where "*the*

interesting body will have disappeared” (2004: 208, original emphasis).⁶¹ Such an avenue would constrain taste into closed categories and statements whereby tastes are subjective and differ with individuals.

Latour wants to provide alternative paths which explain what it is to ‘talk’ of a dynamic definition of the body. This alternative path means in the case of tasting events looking at how taste operates, what it ‘does’, how it ‘knows’ and how it is performed. In this way taste appears as a process of knowing and not as a display of preferences and judgements, of something which is ‘already there’. Latour develops his argumentation by following Despret and James’s understanding whereby “to have a body *is to learn to be affected*, meaning ‘effectuated’, moved, put into motion by other entities, humans or non-humans” (2004: 205). This standpoint allows Latour to elicit a view of the body as “*an interface that becomes more and more describable as it learns to be affected by more and more elements*” (2004: 206, original emphasis).

But one learns to become affected through contrasts and differences. The tasting session pursued by David does not include New World wines, but this triggered applause from some participants. Bill was very happy that there were no “all too powerful over-oaked” Australian wines, which he “hates” because of the instantaneous sensation they give and nothing more. To return to Latour’s infinite differences, however, inevitably the question arises as to how much people, bodies, and senses can perceive. If the purpose of gradual sensitisation is to cement and deepen our relationships with that which surrounds us, it means first that there are layers and stages of engagement, and second that there is an implicit purpose in pursuing such a path. Such questions, however, insinuate a quantitative and linear

⁶¹ Latour continues: “either it will be the nature in us, the physiological body, that is, the chemistry of the nose receptors connecting directly with the tertiary structures of the pheromones and the aerosols, or it will thrive on the lived-in impressions provided by something ‘more’ than chemistry on our nose. No matter how alive we make this supplement of attention, it will always refer only to the depth of our subjection to ourselves, no longer to what the world is really like” (2004: 208).

temporal character of perception and possible answers cannot therefore be given in a direct manner.

The differences between Latour's and Hennion's views actually hold some clues as to the nature of taste and perception. Whereas Hennion stresses the collective nature of taste, or rather taste-making, Latour emphasises differences as the marking trait for the training of the sensorium. The slight puzzle which these two views present is that they tend to dismiss the importance of *individual* differences by collapsing the process of taste or smell into *a* collective body. This is so, because tasters at the workshop do not solely discover differences of the wines. What they experience is what the wine affords. Affordances are according to Gibson (1986; see Chapter 5) the perceived characteristics of material objects which emerge in relation between an observer and perceived object. Affordances take meaning not only in relation to the object but also in relation to the self because the senses initiate, as Gibson underlines, proprioception and exteroception (1986: 115f). This intertwining between self and world, the affordances of wines acquire a certain persistence which surpasses the transient succession of infinite differences. Moreover, it is the repeated attendance of such sessions along with the rhythm and sequencing of each of the session which further lend persistency to affordances. This does not mean, however, that the collective character is undermined. Repeated tasting sessions transform taste into a skill and this is a collective process. In *The Craftsman*, Sennett (2008) emphasizes that community is central for the formation and development of skills and crafts. I further dwell on this aspect in relation to producers' views later in this chapter.

Before, however, I underline that I go further than Latour and Hennion and suggest that it is the social and collective character of taste and smell that actually

allows the formation and proliferation of individual likes and dislikes. Ultimately, then, what the training of the senses encourages is the emergence of more and more individual preferences which stem from the unique attunement between the body that tastes and the tasted object in a situated spatial and temporal context. As there is no intention to reach agreement and consensus, tastes are allowed to retain the individual character of each of the participants present at the tasting. One participant jokingly remarks: “If all liked the same wines they would all marry the same woman”.

To come back to the individual aspect of taste does not reduce the meaning of the tasting process in any way. Latour’s differentiation between propositions and statements makes the layers of the tasting process itself knowable. The wine tasters along with their guide do not ‘judge’ the wine according to positive or negative characteristics; they do not make statements such as ‘this is good’ and ‘this is bad’. Neither do they stay neutral with regard to their flavours and smells. Tastings can be described as acts of mediation, which Gomart and Hennion refer to as “a turn towards what emerges, what is shaped and composed, what cannot be reduced to an interaction of causal objects and intentional persons” (1998: 226). In this sense then, the wine does not have a specific taste because David described it to the tasters or because the label discloses its properties or because the taster is able to detect it. Through tasting, the tasters do not unveil the wines’ taste and state their subjective preference or dislike for them. Gomart and Hennion argue that “taste is neither the affirmation of a free subject nor the action of a determinism. Instead, it is a concrete activity whose modes, dispositifs and practices can be described” (1998: 208).

As such, taste unfolds as a leap from indifference towards difference which is marked by David’s skill in creating suspense and surprise. Teil and Hennion emphasise that:

taste is precisely about managing this creative uncertainty: it is not about liking something from what we already know, but about changing our ability to like from the contact with a new thing, most often pre-presented by other amateurs who serve as mediators of one's taste (2004: 32).

What Teil and Hennion point to is the relational character of the process of taste, and it requires a particular attitude or state of awareness from the tasters. Anthony, one of the tasters, said "I enjoy my food and wine, but know precious little about what really makes the difference between good and *indifferent* food around the world" (emphasis added). Indeed, comparing wines lets the taster be 'affected' by differences. Training and testing of one's nose and palate is a movement away from a state of 'indifference' towards one of difference. Like the sniffing of odours so the sniffing and tasting of wine flavours becomes "a matter of discriminating between more and more subtle differences and [being] able to tell them apart from one another" (Latour 2004: 207).

In other words, tasters come to know what they like. In order to achieve this, they perform taste in a spatial, temporal, and social situation which allows it to be formed. Taste necessitates attention and repetitive action and is 'felicitous' when tasters share and negotiate their perceptions with other tasters. This process is echoed by the producers who guide the tasting sessions. In the following I present some of their articulations about the products they craft. These further reinforce the notion of taste as an acquired skill and that, as my case studies show, a sustained and close relationship with foods and drinks cements multiple forms of attachment to them. Last but not least, the acquisition of taste knowledge is achieved not only through decades or generations of involvement but in much shorter periods of time. It also becomes

possible therefore to trace a parallel between producers' taste knowledge and the enthusiast wine-tasters referred to above.

The Vitality of Foods: Producers' Views

This chapter traces various correspondences between sensing and knowing. This close link is especially apparent in activities which involve the acquisition of skills and practical knowledge among producers and/or suppliers. The range of activities is certainly extremely wide and stretches for instance from farming, to making milk or meat products and baking, to selling and/or making dedicated and/or artisanal products such as coffee or chocolate, to those who are trained wine-tasters and cooks. These activities include people who grow food and raise animals, and who process their food, people who craft products without being involved in the growing or raising processes and those who sell them to the public. These groups of people are distinguished by the types of skills they possess and the segment of the food chain of which they are part. They share the fact, however, that they are directly and intimately involved in the making of foods and drinks over sustained periods of time. They are thus different from those groups of the public who are only buying and preparing products for their consumption and are not necessarily confronted on a daily basis with one and the same product or product range. They are, however, similar to those groups who are involved in repetitive tasting activities. These distinctions are important because they point to different modalities and degrees of articulating and expressing taste.

In this context, my fieldwork led me to particularly interesting cases. It is, of course, obvious that a food practice implies and relies on a package of skills and

experience in order to succeed. Of the many food producers and small-business owners I met, talked to, and interviewed, I learnt that a majority of them were relatively new to the trade. Their skills and degree of articulation about the characteristics of their practice *and* the taste of their products were very broad and differentiated, and equalled (or even excelled) those of people who had been involved all their life in growing, raising, and producing food.

Ian, for example, bought a tea and coffee shop in Lancaster in 2004 having previously worked in the animation industry. He had no knowledge of coffee and hoped that the handover period would last for at least two weeks and that the previous owners could teach him about the craft of roasting coffee and everything about how to manage the whole business. The owners, however, had only two days to pass on information and tips to him. To his surprise he started roasting on his own coffee, took a training weekend course with professional roasters, and then began through trial and error to get to know his coffees. He showed me how the raw beans are each different in terms of colour and how they become “alive” once he roasts them, acquiring particular colours, smells and tastes. Today he can distinguish between 70 coffees and 150 teas. He kept a roasting diary and told me that within a few weeks knowledge “becomes self-perpetuating the more you learn everyday ... it is like hunger” (Ian Steele, personal interview 21/03/07).

Similarly, Tom started to make cider and perry about ten years ago and revived a craft which his grandfather had given up after the Second World War. Asked what kind of perry he produces, Tom said: “Probably I stopped doing carbonated perry because I want to do everything on the farm, so do only bottle conditioned perries where you slow the fermentation down and let the fermentation finish in the bottle, so it looks like a champagne bottle and its younger, slightly lower

alcohol, the taste will be simple taste, a little sediment”. He adds: “My personal view is that the best way to taste cider is as a still drink, not too cold, but that is where the general public will disagree, it is part of the battle to get people to taste without having to buy” and adds:

There are always two things at play: there is what the average consumer would like and there is the expert and what he thinks is good. Those are two different things. The general public ... if I was being pushed ... I would say, does not want to be challenged, likes a degree of sweetness, does not like too much complexity, it likes a fairly simple, an approachable pleasant sweetish drink, ... he probably likes it reasonably balanced but he probably would not know necessarily what balance really meant, so he could have a drink that has got a lot of sugar in it and maybe not much acidity and tannin as far as cider and perry is concerned and probably be not so much put off by it, whereas a so-called expert would want to see a relatively high level of acidity and fair amount of tannin to give you some lengths and aftertaste ... the general public does not like that much tannin and when you go to America they really do not like tannin (Tom, perry producer).

Steve, a former teacher, knew he was going to lose his job because of cuts in the area he was working in, and was hooked by a brewery management programme on television. He learnt to brew and now runs a brewery. He says “when I started I tried to copy beers which you could buy. All you’ve got to do is take the risk and try to sell it and gradually over time find out what goes well I mean there are lots of problems: cleanliness and hygiene, lots and lots of details. It takes a long time to get it

done properly, probably about a year. Once you've done a good beer you have the routine". Then he compares his craft with the big brewers: "Big brewers make what I call king beer: king beer is processed beer, filtered, pasteurised, force-carbonated, then it goes into a sealed container, it is dead". He is proud that: "Mine is alive, it's got yeast in it, [...] because we do not filter ... we do not kill the flavour". He comments:

People are not very sophisticated today, I can pick up lots of faults in it, most people cannot taste it. I actually spent a lot of time reading and I've got a library at home. I just apply the knowledge ... but it is all done just by study and trial out. I have not had a formal training (Steve, brewer).

The opinions of these producers echo a desire to involve people in acquiring interest and knowledge about particular products through tasting. Very often, producers lament about the fact that people are not used to taste and hail events such as the Turin food fair where people of all ages enthusiastically try out their products. The aim is indeed to get groups of people formed around different enthusiasms. In London, there are groups which meet regularly to taste wine, and others who prefer to participate in cheese tastings. Fine-tuning oneself to certain foods and drinks implies copying and imitation as much as trying out new things and dispensing with old habits of liking only one type of drinks or foods.

The engagement and dedication of producers and the outspoken intention to involve the consumers of their products in the process of taste making reinforces the collective aura of skills and crafts. Sennett argues that the pursuit of quality, aspects of which are the dedication to products and the engagement of the tasters I presented

in this section, is also a matter of agency, the craftsman's driving motive (2008: 97). In this respect, Sennett makes a particularly pertinent argument. For him, craft involves higher stages of skill and these are characterised by an effervescent interplay between self-consciousness, explicit knowledge, and tacit knowledge: "In the higher stages of skill, there is a constant interplay between tacit knowledge and self-conscious awareness serving as a critique and corrective. Craft quality emerges from this higher stage, in judgements made on tacit habits and suppositions" (2008: 50). It is precisely this higher stage of skill which is aimed for by both producers and tasters. The training of tasters makes possible the perfection of taste to a higher stage of skill and thus tasters achieve a common level of communication with the producers. It is at these higher stages of skill that affordances come to be revealed *and* shared.

Socialising Taste

These producers are trained to perceive what the particular products afford. This is to some extent what tasters in the training session learn. Being involved over time in attending to the affordances of particular products transforms taste into a perceptual tool for the forming of relations and attachments. They aim to intensify and enrich the experience of taste by making the body responsive and receptive to emergent differences. This is different from what I referred to in Chapter 4 about a particular range of products that aim at achieving a simultaneous experience of taste and whose success depends precisely on the effect it has on the consumer in the first seconds of a sip or bite. I drew an analogy between this particular creation of a taste sensation and the 'experience economy' where an overload of sensations attracts

consumers' attention instantaneously. This stimulation is even more enhanced when products are packed with sugar, glutamate and salt.

By contrast, what the wine-tasting session reveals is taste as an active, deliberate movement picking up a variety of relevant information. Ingold focuses particularly on two vital elements of his theory, namely on 'affordance,' or the particular characteristics of objects, and the 'education of attention' which is needed to train and 'fine-tune' the perceiver in picking up these affordances. For Gibson, sensations do not per se constitute the data for perception (1986: 55), as Ingold suggests. Rather, what the perceiver looks for are constancies underlying the continuous modulations of the sensory array as one moves from place to place (Ingold 2000: 166). The role of perception then is to extract those invariants or affordances. Affordances, however, are conceived of more as relations between perceiver and perceived which involve a loop that structures and modulates the optical array. Thus, Ingold stresses that "the perceiver has no need to reconstruct the world in the mind if it can be accessed directly in this way" (2000: 166). Thus perception comes to be an active perceptual system which unfolds in people's practical activities and engagements with the environment. One of the implications of this, however, is that the information that is potentially available to an agent is inexhaustible:

Throughout life one can keep on seeing new things in an otherwise permanent world, not by constructing the same sense data according to novel perceptual schemata, but by sensitization or 'fine-tuning' of the perceptual system to new kinds of information. Novel perceptions arise from creative acts of discovery rather than imagining, and the information on which they are based is available to anyone attuned to pick it up (Ingold 2000: 166).

I showed that taste is shaped by sociality, and it is sociality which enables the emergence of differences and affordances, or what Teil and Hennion call “types of respondence.” They argue that:

Amateurism⁶² begins with the confrontation with others’ tastes: those of some other amateurs functioning as models forcing one to deprecate what one loved, and to love what one despised, and those of some other people functioning as foils helping one to get rid of inappropriate tastes. Far from being mere *snobbishness*, this collective production of a common elaborated taste is a very powerful way of experiencing the stability, durability and various types of *respondance* – that is, the ability to respond – that objects of love may have and, conversely, of producing the collective ability to perceive these differences and give them more and more worth (2004: 31).

In this sense, one’s taste and that of the collective are co-produced in the activity of tasting. Therefore, one can argue along with Latour that “acquiring a body is thus a progressive enterprise that produces at once a sensory medium and a sensitive world” (2004: 207). This argument is pertinent not only for those domains of tasting with a long history such as wine. In certain workshops where products with historically more restricted repertoires of concepts and ways of tasting, such as different types of milk or rice or even cheese, the sensitization to differences often involves at first reliance on propositional knowledge, like knowledge of the different kinds of milk, rice and

⁶² Teil and Hennion use of the word ‘amateur’ is synonymous with ‘enthusiast,’ and does not refer to the derogatory connotation it sometimes has in English. Their core intention is to demarcate their stance from an authoritative view which the word ‘expert’ has and also to avoid a strict opposition between expert and lay.

cheese. In one workshop on milk in York for instance, the feedback from the tasters was minimal. It involved mostly registering striking organoleptic contrasts between four kinds of milk. But this was not followed by the attribution of perceived differences to the specific types of milk and neither did it lead to more detailed discussion about the qualities of the milk. The tasters had to rely on the presenter telling them they tasted buffalo, sheep, cow, and goat's milk.

This example resonates with laments voiced by producers about the lack of interest in tasting and trying foods and drinks and also by social scientists in respect not only to taste but also various other senses. The food sociologist Gary Alan Fine comments that Western cultures do not socialise people to the senses of smell and taste (1995: 251). This resonates also with voices from outside the academic field, such as certain food writers and critics (Dollase 2006; Hanni *et al.* 2004) or practising therapists and dieticians (Orbach 2002; Satter 2001, 2008). Such statements derive their legitimacy, at least in part, from the fact that smell and taste did not lead to the formation of an extensive vocabulary as did for instance sight and hearing. Apart from the domain of oenology (the science and tasting of wine) which enjoys popularity with the general public through wine-tasting workshops, there is no tradition of institutionalised practices of food tastings. This, as referred to in Chapter 1, is part of the reason why various research methods fail in terms of accessing people's sense of taste. This chapter proposes however some steps towards approaching taste and argues that it is only in particular situations that taste is 'expressed,' negotiated and articulated. At the same time this does not mean that the representation of taste through language is the ultimate goal of 'educating' the senses. Sensibilities are perhaps more apparent through verbal expression but are not restricted to or conditioned by it.

Furthermore, some food critics argue that many products actually do not harness the potential of the whole sensorial repertoire and relate this to a certain predictability and homogeneity of flavours in the moment of eating or drinking (Dollase 2005). Dollase, an acclaimed journalist and critic for the reputed national newspaper in Germany, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, dissects each element of a McDonald's hamburger and notes the marked discrepancy between advertised image and actual product. He finds that none of the promises encrypted in the image are met. He comments that the bread is not crisp but rather soggy; the meat is dry and over-cooked; the taste of the meat is barely identifiable; the slice of gherkin is over-salted and rather gooey; and the ketchup is too powerful, making the whole over-spiced; the aftertaste is cloying. Yet he adds that the hamburger is designed to have a particular 'mouth-feel,' which means there is a fairly equal proportion of each of the ingredients at the moment one takes a bite and together these produce a particular 'accord' (2005: 9). The textures of the ingredients are, however, similar to one another in the end-product and they melt into one rather unidentifiable taste.

Dollase is not only preoccupied with sensations alone. He puts together a whole set of tasting manners which are intended to lead the tasters to form an array of qualities, a range of competences, a degree of openness and adaptability to change, or what he calls "culinary intelligence" (Dollase 2006: 4). Culinary intelligence, he contends, makes people comprehend important relationships, not only with regard to the world of products out there but also with regard to people's own selves, their culinary socialisation, and initiates an ordering process (2006: 7). In this context, he proposes that differences (an essential element of learning) can only be perceived by making comparisons and suggests that one should look for differences by tasting foods in their least elaborate form and by gradually engaging in their preparation

(2006: 33). For instance, he suggests frying two chicken breast fillets, one conventionally reared, the other free-range, adding neither salt nor pepper. He concludes that the differences should be perceivable not only in terms of flavour but also in their textures and colours: it may be that one is rather pale and dry compared with the other. Dollase, an eccentric cook and journalist, even set out to experiment with tracing the 'trajectories' of taste which he says, can be visualized as a melody or film developing in the mouth.

In many respects, Dollase's thoughts resonate with David's. For David tasting is primarily a means of discovering inconsistencies and invariants, this is the scope of training as he told me. He ruminates about mass-produced foods and even refers to a McDonald's hamburger and says that the ingredients of these products are not identifiable, that there are no inconsistencies which one can detect. But this does not mean that he or other organizers exclude mass-produced foods in the tastings. Sometimes Slow Food tastings purposely compare mass-produced types of cheddar with small-scale and artisanal ones and thus facilitate the detection of the smallest of differences. Their intention is not to draw separation lines between 'natural' foods and drinks and 'artificial' ones, even if every now and then stances tend to be firm in respect to 'dead' products and contrasted with those alive. The question which comes up then is whether one can distinguish between 'natural' and 'chemical/artificial' flavours and aromas. Latour does not take a stance towards this issue and argues irrespective of product type in favour of an endless proliferation of differences. The examples presented in this chapter hint however at the fact that with 'dead' products differences might be finite.

But it is necessary to also consider the fact that food industries commonly rely on their product development through taste tests and they employ not only expert

tasters but often the general public. French sociologists Méadel and Rabeharisoa explore a range of market-lead tasting tests and remark that what both professionals and analysts stumble against is fluctuations of taste of consumers (2001: 234).

Interestingly, it seems that some retailers welcome such ‘fluctuations’ of taste and encourage it by proposing novel ways of selling particular products. With the occasion of a Slow Food event in the East Dulwich area of London, David took me on a tour around some shops he particularly likes. One of the them was selling wines which rather than being grouped according to geographical regions as most wine stores in Britain, were grouped according to their dominant taste traits, like softer and lighter wines, aromatic and juicy wines, or rich and spicy ones (see Fig. 15).



Fig. 15. Wine shop in East Dulwich, London

Ian’s tea and coffee shop in Lancaster follows a similar model. The teas are arranged on the shelves according to taste and type rather than region or price. More recently, Ian placed his teas in transparent glass containers so that his customers learn the different teas also by the shapes and colours of the leaves. For me, these models represent an exemplification and application of what it means to train and have a

trained taste. David's wine-tasting workshop demonstrates how taste makes people (bodies) responsive and receptive to know and get to know their tastes, or what they might like in particular situations. Ultimately then, it is people's individual sense of taste *and* its formation which appears as primary in such a model. Thus, taste is formed as much collectively as it is individually. When David runs tasting of pairing wines with foods, he is far from enforcing old rules whereby, for instance, white wines should be only consumed with white meats. He is following a model developed by American wine critic Tim Hanni (see 2004) who states that the pairing should aim at a particular balance of taste, often described as *umami*, and that this can be achieved either through adding a bit more salt or acidity (e.g. lemon) to the particular dish depending on the acidity and/or richness of the particular wine. This achievement rests with the client rather than with the marketer. People are thus encouraged to discover the 'affordances' of each wine and food and to adjust to their unique relationships in a particular 'corporated' space-time.

This chapter has explored some of the embodied dimensions of taste by analysing the active and practical engagements between food and people through the lens of tasting workshops. Tasting sessions, as organised by the Slow Food Movement and which I regard as its most distinctive trait, are a fascinating area for such a pursuit because they involve a deliberate recruitment *and* negotiation of tastes, skills, and an array of experiences among amateurs and enthusiasts of the most diverse kinds. Tasting sessions unveil and even accentuate many of the elements that constitute the practice of eating. For instance, they blur and dissolve distinctions between expert taster and general public, and lead to the emergence of 'hybrid' taster types and taster groups which can be described as amateurs, enthusiasts, omnivores, or discerning/reflexive tasters. Moreover, tasting sessions involve a heightened exchange

of verbal and nonverbal knowledge (understood as expressions of likes and dislikes, preferences, judgements, previous experiences, and information) which transforms into a dynamic feedback system between the tasters. A further particularity of such sessions is the fact that to a large extent they bring together people who do not know each other, strangers, in other words, and this differs from other eating practices which mostly rely on relations of friendship, kin, or business.

I showed that tasting sessions are intimately linked to a learning trajectory. This learning trajectory relies on the creation of a set of relationships between people and objects which are elaborated, extended and deepened gradually over time. Sensory relations acquire a multidimensional, dynamic, and generative character through the education of attention and through repeated training.

In this sense, this chapter has shown that the process of taste involves a gradual differentiation into several degrees and modes of awareness and acuity. The training character of such tasting workshops emerges out of the ability to shift and focus one's attention to single food items, to the relations between them and towards realizing the interrelated character of co-present imagined bodily ways of being together with people and foods in places. This is achieved through mingling two kinds of practices, tasting and eating/drinking.

The next chapter explores the sociality of taste ignited by dinner events and food tours and draws on the implications of the process of training of taste and the consequences of performing food tasting as a practice.

Chapter 7 Tasting Sociality: Slow Food Dinner Events

For the millions of us who live glued to computer keyboards at work and TV monitors at home, food may be more than entertainment. It may be the only sensual experience left.

Barbara Ehrenreich⁶³

It is not only about what you eat, it is also about how you cook it, where and how you eat it. How you eat it is mainly a question of sharing.

Michel Positano⁶⁴

Introduction

The last chapter examined various ‘relationalities’ of taste that arise as people train their tastes while taking part in tasting workshops. I showed that taste emerges as a mediated, negotiated, dynamic force at the intersection of tensions between biological and cultural, and collective and individual dimensions. More specifically, I focused on the experience of taste as an embodied, framed, situated and temporal interval which comprises specific sequences, like pre-tasting, tasting, and post-tasting. Focusing on this interval opens up further spaces which illuminate the generative potential of taste: it renders the body receptive to differences and enriches and intensifies the degree of attunement to the tasted foods and drinks.

⁶³ <http://www.foodreference.com/index.html>, accessed 20/01/10

⁶⁴ From an interview with Michel Positano, chef at Three Tons in Durham, recorded 12/11/07

This chapter continues the focus on Slow Food events by drawing on convivial dinners rather than taste workshops. However, dinners are not isolated heuristic units but complement and provide comparative elements to tasting workshops. This chapter shows how the sensory practice of tasting gets incorporated in and transformed during dining in such a way that eating, as a form of practice, becomes a specific and situated sensory conduit. I argue that eating is characterised by specific forms of sociality, ways of dwelling, and different temporalities. The entanglements between them shape a view of eating as a process. Following on this, I suggest that Slow Food events engender and enact the ‘slowing down of perception.’ This chapter analyses several Slow Food dining events in which I participated in restaurants and private homes in Durham and Cumbria.

Sociality

The Slow Food ethos regards the education of taste as closely intertwined with conviviality. Moreover, conviviality is seen as necessary and vital for re-framing the relationship between food and people. Conviviality includes also the character and quality of the spaces and places which are seen as conducive to the pleasurable and *slow* experience of taste and place. Carlo Petrini captures the idea of *slowness* as follows:

In order to learn how to find slow pleasure, *one has to travel*, read, and *taste*, abandoning the temptation of entrenched isolation: to eat a *different* kind of food in every street in the world is the best answer to fast food [...] slow

culture is growing, it is heterogeneous but strongly cohesive, and it creates an elite without excluding anyone (2001: 18f; emphasis added)

The quotes evoke how imaginaries and stories of foods, people and places are associated with one another, and how smells, sights and tastes are involved in the expectations, experiences and memories of certain places. They point to inherent interconnections between moving, travelling, eating and sensing. Thus, what is aimed for by Slow Food is a sense of synaesthetic experience of people, place and produce. It is a cognitive, aesthetic, practiced, and embodied search for unity.

In Chapter 2 I referred to the fact that Slow Food events are often led by people who have already been involved in different kinds of food-related activities and therefore have a broad knowledge of the foodscapes which characterize particular places. I use the term foodscapes in order to include the material and non-material aspects of their knowledge such as typical products of a region, producers, dining places, people involved in catering industries, and any economic, cultural aspects of a place accumulated through experience over time.

Slow Food group leaders take, alongside their regular work schedule, the time to volunteer to conceive, coordinate and attend events. Although events are held monthly or every other month, the tasks involved in gathering information about which producers and which places are worth contacting tend to keep the organizers rather busy. Also, some groups tend to be more active than others. London sometimes has two events a month alongside the regular monthly pub gatherings and the fortnightly Slow Food Southbank market. Some of the organizers even remarked that if there were more volunteers more events could be organized and these would meet the distinct interests of its 500 members. The group in Cumbria, by contrast, often

faces difficulties in organizing tastings and dinners as the area is large and involves people sometimes driving up to two hours to particular locations. Despite such difficulties the committee members meet regularly and discuss not only events but also compile substantial lists of local producers and recommendations of good places to eat. The group of usually around ten people exchange and evaluate each other's opinions about the products, people and places and thus refine and redefine what in their view constitutes slow food.

This means that the formation of a local chapter, the organization of events and the perpetuation of various locally based activities always has a double focus: the quality of food and the sociable potential which a group holds in view of the time-spaces of particular events. So, when organizers decide to draw attention to certain foods they also think how they could turn their consumption into an enjoyable event (whether it lasts a few hours or a whole day).

For instance, Jonathan, one of the committee members of the Cumbrian group proposed at one meeting that the group organize a trip to his farm and he would provide a tour of the farm describing the range of meats he rears, the breeding methods and the products. Thereupon another member suggested that they have a half-day event where people can bring a picnic and also have a chance to eat some barbecued meats produced by his farm. In this way families with their children might be attracted to come and everyone present would have a chance to talk to one another. Upon deciding, the group starts to discuss the details of preparation for the event. This way of setting up events underlines the extent of openness, improvisation and flexibility involved in setting up events and running a local group. Worth noting is also the reflexivity shown by organizers in respect to the audience and how a whole range of different groups might be included in the events.

Eating and tasting events are characterized by a combination of known and less known elements and their skilful use and assemblage produces unique outcomes. By known and less known elements I mean a variety of aspects, for instance the familiarity which the organizers have in respect to a place, a product or a producer or by contrast, their anticipation in respect to new places, producers, and products. These elements converge in a group or event and confer it a particular dynamic which can also be described as interplay between trial and error. It is important to dwell upon this idea in order to give a sense and flavour of the atmosphere of such events and also to draw attention to how the exchange and production of knowledge develops.

Furthermore, my observation and participation in these events revealed the contingent character of such groups and events. There is always a degree of uncertainty as to whether people turn up to the events and whether the event itself provides sufficient incentives and enjoyment for each of the members in order for them to keep searching for good foods and places, keep searching for information and knowledge, and above all keep tasting. There certainly are many moments of disappointment as much as there are moments of joy and fulfilment for both organizers and participants. The events around Cumbria are rarer and less well attended than those in Durham where the compactness of the city facilitates more readily people coming together as opposed to the large distances in Cumbria which make it more difficult for people to attend an event. Different particularities of the places and groups contribute as much to the character of the events as do the pre-existing and/or emerging friendship relations between organizers and producers and/or suppliers/caterers. Other factors are the knowledge of and relative familiarity

with rare artisan products, or, by contrast, with readily available local products and their places of consumption.

In the following I provide some examples concerning the collage of known and unknown elements which includes people as much as products and places. Often, local group meetings and events rely on networks of friendship relations. David, the wine tasting guide, knew Matt, the owner of the Flâneur restaurant in London, from high-school and they had been friends ever since. Matt offered to run the tasting series in his restaurant and one of the wine tasting sessions was accompanied by dishes made at the restaurant. Far from being merely a promotional tactic for Matt's business, it was at the same time a way to involve the staff in the tasting workshops as well as a way to experiment with matching foods and wines by having Paul, the chef, initiate a 'conversation' between his dishes and David's wine sample.

The group in Durham which I visited several times over a time frame of several months organizes a dining event every other month. Durham, a historic university town, has a relatively large number of restaurants with a variety of cuisines. This presents the Durham group with an opportunity for experiencing what the town has to offer but also asks of them a heightened reflexivity and 'feel' for the quality of the particular places. John is one of the members of the group and he counts for many of the organizers and participants as the 'heart and soul' of the group. In the 1980s, John was the first to open in the Durham area a vegetarian restaurant. He is now retired, has two grandchildren, and his son runs the restaurant. He likes to be active and socialize with people. He also added that he believes that good company, good food and active engagement in the neighbourhood is a way to take care of some of his health problems. Having been involved in the food service business he has good connections with producers and a couple of the restaurants in the area. For the

occasion of this one dinner event, John discussed with a friend who runs the Café Lilli that they should host a Slow Food evening. He likes to visit the place every now and then for lunch as there is a vibrant atmosphere and he can also chat with the owner and give himself a treat with the specialities he has on offer. On the way to Café Lilly he tells me about the lifestyle of the owner and how he likes to spend a couple of weeks every year in Italy to relax and to provide a balance to the workload they have here in England. Then he tells me that the owner of the restaurant is keen to source quality products from the region but also from France occasionally.



Fig. 16. Gathering of the Slow Food Durham group at Café Lilli 2007

There are no limits to what foods can and should be eaten. Sometimes dinners are centred on a range of two to three preset meals prepared especially for the group, and other times participants choose from the whole menu which a particular place has regularly on offer. At Café Lilly people had a special lamb and aubergine dish and it was accompanied also by meat or vegetable skewers which the chef prepared especially for the group that evening. The chef had learned the recipe in France but

the products were sourced regionally. At Che Vita, another restaurant on the margins of Durham's city centre, people ate Italian dishes at a Slow Food event. Here, as Bruce, another member, told me, the pizza dough is prepared by hand from scratch at the restaurant and the flour is sourced locally but other produce such as the pasta are delivered from Italy. Bruce likes to come here because he enjoys the atmosphere and the restaurant is close to his home, and also because he wants to support and encourage the restaurant to source as many of their produce as possible locally and make most of the dishes on the premises. A further dinner was hosted by Bistro 21, a restaurant on the outskirts of the town, which offers good quality beef from Northumberland.

Participants are motivated to participate in these events for a range of different reasons which are never solely concerned with eating good food or solely with socializing. Rather, as many of the participants told me, most of the time it is a mix between a sense of familiarity with the place or by contrast a curiosity to get to know new places, a desire to eat local produce which they might or might not know, and certainly to get to know and talk with people with similar interests and enthusiasms.

Dinner events share this horizon of expectation with taste workshops. But unlike tasting workshops where the role of the guide is more pronounced, with dinner events the guide is less directive. The guide or organizer mingles with the whole group and is absorbed by the pacing and flow of the dining ritual. Unlike in tasting workshops the attention of the participants is not guided in any particular way by the organizers. Only sometimes does the group meal start off with a brief communication by the guide to the group as to the reasons behind such an event, location, and food. This formal marking of the event is the only 'intervention' which the guide makes in order to remind the participants of the nature of the event. Apart from such

announcements, participants are left to enjoy and appreciate for themselves the whole experience, and the exchange of information, knowledge, or informal chats unfolds throughout the evening among smaller groups at a pace and rate that every participant considers appropriate and feels comfortable with. In places such as London where the frequency of events is higher, certain pubs or restaurants figure as regular meeting points at designated dates and times during every month where each member or organizer can turn up and share an evening.

Sociality is thus central in catalyzing a shared experience of the sensory-material affordances of foods and places. In the case of tasting workshops it is the sensory-material aspects of food which enact sociality, whereas in the case of dinners it is sociality which is mobilized in order to perceive the sensory-material and social aspects of food and taste. With taste workshops the attention is focused on the objects of taste, it is a learning situation where tasters are guided by the trainer into the stages of tasting. But as I showed in Chapter 6 this is not a rigid one-dimensional communication. As people become more and more skilled in appreciating the wines they are becoming more and more sociable but in such a way that speaking about the qualities of the wine makes them engage with more and more aspects which go beyond the qualities of the wine to reach travel experiences and/or to an engagement with their neighbours and their knowledge and experience of places and produce. By contrast, dinner events start off with a heightened communication between the participants and only gradually as the food arrives on the tables do people get focused on what they are eating. Despite this shift in perspective it is the entanglement of these socialities which transform eating and tasting into forms of dwelling (see Ingold 2000). In the following I draw on two main aspects of dwelling which comprise elements such as imagination, movement, and time.

Eating, dwelling, moving

A unique trait of Slow Food groups is that they seek to mobilize ways of living with food rather than simply promote particular foods. In this sense, places, people and food receive equal focus and this is especially apparent in actions and events at the local level. Eating a meal together is supposed to engender this sense of connection between people, food and places and substantiate a sense of a growing food culture. Michel Positano, chef at Three Tons Hotel in Durham, and one of the participants at the Slow dinner at Che Vita explains his affinity with the Slow Food ethos as follows: “it is not only about what you eat, it is also about how you cook it, where and how you eat it. How you eat it is mainly a question of sharing.”

In many ways the quote above invokes the entanglements between ways of knowing and ways of doing and is indicative of the chef’s lifelong direct engagement with food. Michel Positano was born in Italy but has been living and working in England for many years. In his cooking practices and management tasks of restaurants, he draws on the experiences and skills he had been gathering from the different places he lived in. He remembers the long evening strolls and several course dinners with his family in the southern part in Italy and that most of the foods there were local or regional. He has a brother who works in Milan where the pace of life is speedier than in the south such that he often does not have time to cook and eats out. He can understand why the Slow Food Movement is more present in the northern parts in Italy. Equally, he is keen to seek similar attitudes as the ones he experienced in Italy developing here in England where food brings together families and provides a source of enjoyment whether at home or when eating out. Currently he works at a historic, above average priced, hotel and he aims to make the restaurant more

welcoming for tourists and locals and encourage them to come inside. In this sense he comments:

I want this place to get some vibe; people sometimes get intimidated; you have to make people feel comfortable. Here they come more for special occasions (Michel, chef).

Having had the experience of working in a range of different restaurants, he knows that the aesthetics of a place influences the decision of diners. He also implies in this quote that the more pretentious a place looks, the less likely it is that a wide range of people with different backgrounds and budgets will come regularly. He wants to pursue his vision of a restaurant where food and ambience attract a mix of different groups of people. This is an inclusive and not a segregating attitude towards the sociability of dining.

In older times the menu hardly ever changed unless the chef wanted to change it, because people got uncomfortable to choose from a wide variety, they would choose their favourite one. Nowadays I encourage people to have something they could not do at home; for me, that is the experience of eating out at the restaurant. There is pizza, there is veal, and I would suggest you pick things that you cannot cook daily (Michel, chef).

Michel Positano is fully aware of the way restaurants have changed. In his view, restaurants in the past were probably more monotonous and unilateral in what they offered. By contrast today, people should take advantage in the versatile menus and

consciously alternate the menu at home with new experiences at the restaurant. This is further underlined in his statement that: “people have to try and not play safe.” He also adds:

The food has to look good but I want to go away from the garnish, the garnish has to be cooked, the garnish moves you away from the food; I find people just waste more time to make it look good than to make it taste good (Michel, chef).

As a skilled cook he knows that vision greatly shapes the appreciation and taste of food. But he also knows that this fact is sometimes overrated and dishes are overburdened with visual aesthetic tones and this is detrimental to the enjoyment of the taste. Michel Positano’s views resonate with those emphasized by practitioners of nouvelle cuisine (see Chapter 5). Simplicity, a characteristic of nouvelle cuisine, is invoked in the following statement, in conjunction with the origin and traceability of produce.

There are good local produce: at the moment I got mackerel as a starter, it is smoked, simple and you put lemon, yoghurt, and chive and that’s it (Michel, chef).

The quotes above reveal a multitude of facets of eating that bring together food, people, and places. For Michel Positano, the experience of taste implies a degree of openness towards different foods at the same time as it involves the ‘simplicity’ of local produce provided in the intimacy of the dining place.

Chapter 2 emphasized that the Movement is a response rather than a form of resistance to social, cultural, political and economic changes. Further, it is the aim of embracing a wide range of audiences and in liaising with similar-minded groups, which supports the reflexive stance of the Movement. Reflexivity is not only a trait of the Movement as an organization, but is present also in the stories of its members and sympathizers.

Positano's reflexivity emerges from and is based in his daily craft of cooking. He is aware, that now that the hotel management has changed its food sourcing practices from local suppliers to corporate retailers, it will be more difficult for him to be able to provide a local-based menu (as he used to) and he takes this change as an opportunity to switch to more Italian-based dishes. He says he could also do Asian menus, but for him there is no point because it is not his culture. However, he acquired a sense of different cuisines because in his kitchen he worked with cooks and trainees from different national and ethnic backgrounds and at that time they used to try out different menus every week.

There are further layers of meaning to the notion of aesthetic reflexivity. The emphasis placed by the Movement on learning a wider and wider range of produce undermines forms of judgment which impose preset categories on the produce. It is not so important, for instance, whether the produce is organic, fair-trade, mass-produced or local, but much more that people taste repeatedly and evaluate for themselves the quality of the product. This attitude and practice is supposed to engender "pre-judgement" and forethought (see Chapter 6). Ways of being-in-the-world and dwelling discourage the separation between subject-object and subject-subject/world. This is demonstrated not only by a weakening of judgemental attitudes but also by diminishing normativity thereof (see Chapter 2). More concretely, this is

visible in the fact that the Movement does not categorize foods according to circulating discourses. For instance, fat is not a matter of debate and seldom are foods discussed in relation to health. Aesthetic reflexivity resonates with how one feels and expresses one's sense of place.

Michel Positano's thoughts express a sense of attachment to the place he works and lives in and this is interwoven with a sense of adaptability to ever-changing conditions and experiences. He says:

I used to have calves liver on the menu; this used to be very local, but not anymore because this company is from Middlesbrough and they get their meat from the south but before it came from 5 miles down the road. [...] I was very proud of my suppliers because they were local. Whenever I wanted I could go there and visit, to see the cleanliness to assure oneself and to see the animals are happy (Michel, chef).

The interview with Michel Positano reveals multiple ways in which he finds pleasure for and attachment to certain foods and places in his work without however fixing these in immutable and bounded practices. At the same time, there is ambivalence to his statement which echoes at least to some degree a sense of alienation and loss of control in face of changes. But his optimistic attitude prefers to take change as a form of adaptation and accumulation of experience and knowledge. He more generally states:

Life is all about experience: food, people ... if you do not experience you become too judgemental, but if you are experienced you know when you can

trust somebody. If you are inexperienced life passes by and then you are forty and you look back and say I did not do that and that, and then there are regrets. There is still lot to learn (Michel, chef).

Experience and trust seem to redress the ambivalence of the previous statement. Experience and trust become part of the dwelling in anchoring him more fully in the process of life. Experience and trust are some of the factors which drive most of the organizers and members of the group to establish relations with people and places. While the quote above expresses directly Michel Positano's attitude towards life and work, experience and trust are, according to my observations, rarely stated in direct face-to-face communication. These driving factors can be derived in many cases on the one hand from people's stories about certain practices of working and living. This demonstrates the embodied and lived dimension of aesthetic reflexivity. On the other hand, the driving factors are indirectly noticeable in certain recommendation schemes which were introduced by the local groups around England in order to direct people's attention to produce, producers, and services. These further underline the weak normativity of Slow Food practices.

In asking how Michel Positano came to be a participant in one of the Slow Food events in Durham, he explained that he was contacted by one of the organizers of the group, Lucy, a journalist working for one of the local newspapers and writing about food and various community projects. He said: "For one reason or another, I did something that attracted her attention. [...] Ah, I was doing some cooking lessons at Johnston school. It was nice to see children peel vegetables, [...] they ate everything, [...] because you know our kids are difficult."



Fig. 17. Recommendation sticker placed on the window shop of a greengrocer in East Dulwich area of London.

In Britain, according to research, knowledge about certain places and produce comes mostly through word-of-mouth and is driven by the networks of relationships in which the members and organizers of the group are involved and further proliferated by Slow Food events. The establishment of a supporting grid that facilitates the dissemination of information depends on the voluntary engagement of members and organizers, and as noted before, on the degree to which they had been previously active in food-related work. Recommendations in the form of a note on the windows of shops (like the picture above) are regarded by Slow Food groups as a small sign of help for producers and suppliers and are meant to indicate confidence in their practices as well as functioning as an orientation for anyone who is keen to learn more about a given area. It is up to the local group to decide whether they want to deploy such a scheme or not. Such schemes are only in their infancy and groups are compiling lists and putting out the signposts but there are no leaflets published so far and such recommendations are rarely posted on the group's websites. But anyone is welcome to make suggestions.

The sticker (Fig. 17) is posted in the window of a greengrocer's shop in the East Dulwich area of London and points to some of its characteristics which stand out: it is family run, specialises in supplying organic fruits and vegetables, and selling heritage apple varieties from Brogdale. In spite of the fact that the specification of such characteristics lends food and places a certain 'fixity' by attaching foods to their places of origin and linking the trustworthiness of the shop to its continuity and tradition as a family business, recommendations are far more fluid than such stickers at first suggest. At one recent meeting of the newly formed Lancashire Slow Food group in April 2010, one of the committee members pointed out that "obviously we are not looking for scientific proof of the quality of foods or places, and neither do we want to get into people's kitchen, we are not a certification body" and then told those present to think of places which they "feel" are in tune with some of the criteria mentioned in the recommendation schemes. Furthermore, there will be different criteria applied to products and farms, than for restaurants or shops. As has been illustrated above in respect to the events in Durham, the choices for restaurants are somehow contingent and move between places which are exemplary in their practice and those places which hold a potential to meet many of the criteria of the Slow Food ethos.

In the following I focus on what I have so far described as fluid and contingent elements of Slow Food events and practices and illuminate them further by providing a closer look at the actual products involved in eating and tastings: the foods, drinks and dishes. In this way I elaborate further facets of the notion of reflexivity in conjunction with dwelling and movement. In the last part of the chapter I will show how these elements contribute to the slowing down of taste.

Several strands of research in the social sciences have emphasized the centrality of movement in creating relationships to places and objects (see more Chapter 1). Many explorations stem from studies devoted to tourism and mobilities studies (see for instance, Cuthill 2007, Gibson 2007). What this means for the practices of the Slow Food Movement is, on the one hand, that eating and tasting in such events as dinners or taste sessions become ways of dwelling in that they root people in place and remind them of the essential relationships that connect food, people and place. But, as I referred to earlier, dwelling depends on movement. So, one of the tasks then is to grasp at least to some degree the nature of such movement.

This does not simply mean that people physically move to certain places in order to experience the taste of particular foods or that foods come from certain geographic places. Rather it means investigating how the dynamic of particular movements of people and foods informs and shapes the experience of taste. Several perspectives and arguments put forth in the social sciences are of particular relevance in this respect.

For example, places are open and their boundaries are porous and defined by networks of relationships and interactions between people and between people and objects. Urry emphasizes that “places are about the placing of materials and the system of difference that they perform. Places should be thought of as being placed in relation to sets of objects rather than being fixed through subjects and their uniquely human meanings and interactions” (2000: 134). This means that the focus on movement, practices and performances enables a view of place as event and as process. It further implies that emergent properties of food become central within configurations formed by people and places.

Furthermore, eating and tasting as modes of consumption facilitate the experience of place and this is tied to some extent to the exchange of emotions and memories. Urry emphasizes that “the pleasure of such places derives from the consumption of goods and services that somehow signify that place. Through consuming certain goods and services the place itself comes to be experienced” (2005: 79, 1995). Eating, as a form of consumption, facilitates the experience of place.

Deriving from the points above, it is the conjunction between physical and imaginative mobilities of people and the co-present consumption of foods that further underpin the hybrid and process character of places. Lury (1997) provides an analysis of travelling objects which I regard as helpful in approaching the objects of Slow Food practices. She is particularly interested in the relations between “travelling-in-dwelling” and “dwelling-in-travelling” in regard to the capacity of objects to travel and stay still and sees them as “constitutive of both the very object-ness of objects and the organisation of space” (Lury 1997: 77). She proposes three categories of objects in order to point out the mutual but not overlapping implications between dwelling and travelling: traveller-, tourist- and tripper-objects.

What this means for Slow Food practices, is that the foods presented and tasted at workshops, dinners, or markets enter different categories. They acquire a different status depending on their place of origin, the stories told about them, the relation the presenter (farmer, tour organizer, professional taster) has to them, the way the participants experience them (which in turn depends whether they knew the food before, the expectations they have of it, the information they are told about it, etc.). Following in this line of thought then, all foods involved in Slow Food activities have the potential of becoming ‘traveller-objects’. For Lury, traveller-objects tend to retain

“their authenticated relation to an original dwelling,” and do not need to move in order to acquire meaning (Lury 1997: 78). Often, it is their images which travel. As far as this category is concerned, particularly relevant are the products of small producers and those which have been listed as Presidia Products as rare or endangered foods such as, Oliver’s Perry and Cider from Hereford. Tom Oliver has revived his grandfather’s tradition of making perry and cider on the farm he still inhabits. He told me how he got hooked one night while visiting a friend whom he shared a bottle with from his cellar collection:

I think there is one instant that really persuaded me on making cider and perry [...] it had this lovely cidery aroma, a real sparkle to it, poured it into the glass, it was not clear, slightly murky, but it had a lovely taste and smell to it and I thought if I could make something like that it would be really fantastic, and I still haven’t made anything like that (Tom, Perry producer).

Tom is happy to have become involved in the Slow Food Movement. He thus established a lot of networks and now sells his perry at the Slow Food Market in Bristol and even got some offers to send it to a bar in London where they use perry to make a special cocktail. He also started to make a range of vinegars. But he adds:

For me, the way I would like this to work is to have people come to the shop, and ideally maybe buy two cases at a time, come maybe once a year, have a look around, have a chat, go away having learnt something new, having had a new experience ... and I would like to develop this, if you have a decent amount of customers you can keep into business (Tom, Perry producer).

Tom Oliver's stories and thoughts reflect on the one hand his enthusiasm for his dedicated products finding consumption places in several locations around Britain. On the other hand, the stories reflect his desire for people to experience the propinquity of place and taste on his farm. Oliver's produce reminds us more generally of the notion of terroir (see Chapter 4) indicative of the unity between geographical, social and cultural features of particular foods and drinks.

Slow Food events insist on the traceability and origins of foods and drink but they do not, however, confine the experience of their taste to the locale of their production. At one tasting event in Ludlow, Heather, a tour guide specialized on gastronomic trips to Italy, brought ham, sausage, farro, cheese, chestnut honey, potato bread, and maize flour biscuits from the village of Garfagnana. As the twenty participants tasted the produce she told stories of the producers from that community and pointed to the uniqueness of their craft. So, whether foods and drinks come from Italy or from a nearby village, those foods are seen as pregnant with the traces of their origins. Following Lury (1997: 78), such foods retain the "aura" of their origins.

The qualities of the foods do not however point in a single direction and neither do they remain fixed once they were tasted and used. This becomes visible if we take the perspective of the tasters. In this light, particular foods acquire qualities of "tripper-objects." For Lury (1997), "tripper-objects" change their meanings in the course of their movements in different contexts and destinations. With Slow Food events, food and drinks often remind people of particular places they have visited, or of times they had consumed them when they were younger. Therefore, when these foods or drinks are brought 'home' they are imparted with special meaning. Moreover, at home they could be used differently, such that they acquire new meanings. In this way, foods hold a potential for ever-changing characteristics. The

seemingly infinite capacity of foods to accommodate meanings *and* differences parallels their capacity to engage the taster in multiple relationships, thus revealing more and more affordances (as previous chapters have noted).

To some extent slow foods are “in-between.” They never really settle in a particular category, but only acquire certain characteristics as they travel along various paths and alter these depending on how they relate to the people consuming them. This means that they rather move in-between categories, and movement transforms them more and more into what Lury calls “tourist-objects” and are somewhere in-between tripper- and traveller-objects. Lury states that tourist-objects “are those whose movement in relation to travelling/dwelling produces an *object-ness which is neither closed nor open but in-between*” (1997: 79, my emphasis). She also adds that the ‘here’ and ‘there’ is thus rendered insignificant, but “what is important is their self-conscious location in mobility” (1997: 80).

The relevance of tourist-objects, the third category, for my exploration is that it signals an inherent reflexivity of objects themselves which is not necessarily related to their places of origin and neither to their final destination, but rather their momentary space-time within their journey. In the case of slow foods this is sometimes overtly expressed by the mediators of taste literally as an objectification of taste. The picture below is indicative of this manifestation.



Fig. 18. Stall selling “Pies with attitude” at the Marylebone Food Fair in London 2008.

Following on from this analysis of three categories of foods, I draw now further on the notion of reflexivity that is turning both outwards and inwards (see Chapter 1). Thus I bring the focus back to the tasting subjects. The inward reflexivity is interlinked with the temporalities which move the embodied experience and perception of taste. I conceive of temporalities as any experience of taste that is assembled out of elements such as: the co-present conviviality of a shared dinner, emotions and memories triggered by certain foods, rhythms of tasting and eating combining focused attention, movement and pause, and the overall flow constituted by Slow Food events at the time they are unfolding. The stories told in the following section aim to evoke the flow of such events. Furthermore, I want to suggest that these temporalities revolve around two major factors established by the perception of food: the evanescence of taste and the coalescence of time, food, and place through taste.

Temporalities of Taste

The seamless flow of perceptions which invokes the multiple temporal dimensions of the experience of taste relies on physical and imaginative movement. Dwelling, travelling and sociality are implicated in one another. I draw here on one of James Gibson's arguments on perception which I find resonant for the analysis pursued so far. Gibson writes of "perception over time from paths of observation" (1986 [1979]: 167) and emphasises the centrality of movement for perception. He says:

It is obvious that a motionless observer can see the world from a single fixed point of observation and can thus notice the perspectives of things. It is not so obvious but it is true that an observer who is moving about sees the world at *no* point of observation and thus, strictly speaking, *cannot* notice the perspective of things. The implications are radical. Seeing the world at a travelling point of observation, over a long enough time for a sufficiently extended set of paths, begins to be perceiving the world at *all* points of observation, as if one could be everywhere at once. To be everywhere at once with nothing hidden is to be all-seeing, like God. Each object is seen from all sides, and each place is seen as connected to its neighbour (Gibson 1986: 197, original emphasis)

Gibson thus not only emphasizes the temporality of perception but also the relatedness of people to objects and to the environment. To some extent, he suggests an altered state of perception where mind, body and world are experienced in their connectedness.

Below I analyse some sequences from events which evoke the choreography between movement and dwelling. At this point, the stories are meant to evoke the temporality of tasting and eating. I regard these sequences-stories as a further step towards recalling for the reader the physical-imaginative-temporal dimension of the taste of Slow Food events. In this way I argue that the heuristic units referred to in this chapter – sociality, dwelling, and movement – are actually not to be kept apart, and, as far as Slow Food is concerned, are deeply entangled with one another.

Sequence 1: Che Vita and Bistro 21 in Durham



Fig. 19. Slow Food dinner at Che Vita restaurant in Durham 2007

The chef at Che Vita proudly presents the unique location of the restaurant in a former train station hall with architectural features from the beginning of the century, and emphasizes that they are the only place in town to sell draft Peroni beer. Diners for their part may be attracted by such places in a search for grandmas' old recipes, forgotten flavours, or an 'imagined' Italy where osterie host

the carpenter and the postman, the academic and the banker. Osterie represent for Slow Food a powerful model of eateries with moderate prices and cross-class clientele, places of conviviality where dishes reflect seasonal changes and local food cultures (see Chapter 2).

At Bistro 21 the beef was supplied from a farm in Northumberland and the way it was cooked reminded one diner of meals she had at her aunt's place in her childhood. For another it remained a desired meal which she could not cook as she did not have an Aga cooker, and for yet another, a student, it was the meal to have for a special occasion.

Before the dinner participants had a taste of a dozen locally brewed ales by Steve who owns 'The Durham Brewery'. He draws people's attention to the original flavours of his beers which are produced locally on a small scale. By selling ales named 'St. Cuthbert', 'Benedictus' or 'Evensong' the brewer indicates that The Durham Brewery has a strong identity and builds on Durham's history. While all may have had ales before, not all had one which tasted like coffee or one which had as much as 9% alcohol, and might not have had it accompanied by a meal. Indeed, what the passionate brewer tried to convey was that his beers were as good as wine and can equally well be enjoyed over a meal.

Steve, a self-taught brewer, who has run the brewery for 13 years, accompanied people's sips and slurps not only with descriptions of the beers' tastes and the differences between them but also with stories of the history of his brewery, the history of beer-making more generally. As such, the tasting was not put into the straightjacket of the scientific language of the connoisseur but rather related to the lifeworld of the amateur drinker in a playful, informal and interactive manner. Steve directs people's attention to the materiality of the beer. As noted in previous chapters,

his beer is described as organic and alive and contrasted with the artificial, dead, sterilized and over-carbonated mass-produced beers. His stories relate the immediate, fleeting sensation of taste and smell to the material history of the beer.

Tasting becomes a way of holding time and allowing the senses to focalize, perceive and know. In certain ways these practices seek to create a counterpoint to what Camporesi calls the ‘superficial and distracted’ senses of hearing and sight which have ‘abolished touch’ and ‘eliminated smell’ through contemporary supermarket shopping (cited in Haden 2005: 347). The distracted gaze of the culinary traveller is engaged through eating and drinking in “a kind of conversation” (Heldke 2005: 389), a dialogue which is experiential. It is a multi-sensorial exercise of the tasters in perceiving the diversity of flavours rather than a nostalgic gaze at an imagined ‘traditional’ beer. The brewer acquired consciously and practically his knowledge of making beer by reading books, talking to brewers, and by continuously evaluating his products, and not by following a family tradition. He continuously experiments with new flavours and does not sell only ‘the classics’ from the early years of his production. The diversity of flavours is achieved by the mixing of ingredients from all over the world. Malts and hops come not only from Britain, but from the Continent, from North America, and even from New Zealand. But Steve was telling me that the quality of the water in the Durham region as compared to other regions is very high and makes it very suitable for brewing. So, recalling the notion of terroir discussed in Chapter 4, Steve’s beer acquire the taste of terroir through the use of water even if many other ingredients come from further away.

Sequence 2 Eating and Touring in Cumbria



Fig. 20. Annette (left) on a food tour through Cumbria.

The group walk in the garden after they had lunch.

While I have briefly discussed Annette's views on food in relation to catering in Chapter 5, here I focus on the activities of looking, eating and dining in some of the events she organized and which include small groups of people. Annette's tours in Cumbria involve its participants in a different kind of engagement with foods and places than the dining events in Durham. For a whole day the participants are driven to certain places, they walk around farms and also rest to have a taste of local foods and to enjoy a special lunch. The groups are usually between 3 to 7 people and allow in a more immediate manner for the creation of a friendly and more intimate atmosphere. Moreover, Annette's jovial and relaxed attitude which reflects her long experience with organizing such tours adds considerably to people's well being and comfort. The organization of the tours is informed by Annette's long and diverse engagement with the county's foods, with its producers and the county's landscapes.

Annette has been developing over the past 25 years a whole set of activities and practices which train locals and visitors alike in growing, cooking, tasting and eating food, or, in other words, in appreciating what the land, the landscape, and the personal (and collective) histories of the actors involved all afford. She runs cooking classes, food tours, a dining club, school food growing projects, sometimes caters for communal events, wrote a book on Cumbrian producers and their food, and also used to run a television cookery show. Most recently she has been awarded an OBE from the Queen for the services brought to the food and farming communities in Cumbria. All these activities allowed her to weave lasting relations with food producers around the country. For the occasion of each tour she chooses around five producers and designs a special experience for the participants.

Similar to the events in Durham, participants learn about certain foods and the people who produce them in an informal and personal way. However, the tours present the participants not only with producers but also with the whole environment where the foods are produced. They can see how animals are raised, how vegetables and fruits are cultivated, how different products are made and cooked, they can touch, smell and taste them.

The places, whether we look at Cumbria or Durham, are usually 'off the beaten track' (Buzard 1993). This fact confers the events a personalized character and conveys to the participants a sense of privilege. This supports in many ways the whole concept of making 'visible' the passion and care which small-scale producers attach to the foods which they produce. More generally speaking, such activities seek to raise people's knowledge, and following it, appreciation and trust for locally produced, cooked, sold, and consumed foods.

One of the tours took place in June 2008. Hugh and Wendy, a couple from Wigton, and Sue, a Cumbrian tourist board member took a food tour with Annette to get to places where they rarely visit and taste foods which the places afford. They set off in Annette's garden where they taste spinach leaves, which are "lush and sweet, tasting more like asparagus" and the salad leaves and herbs are giving lots of flavour in "thrown together salads," as Annette, reminds them. Later on they go to a cheese monger who lets them compare different kinds of brie and draws their attention to how their different colours gives them clues to what milk has been used and to their freshness and quality. They also hear that the cheesemonger had been a financial consultant in Manchester and one day he got hooked by that tiny shop in Kendal; he bought it and now he is learning about hundreds of cheeses produced in Britain. Driving towards Blencathra, through places which Hugh has not seen since his childhood, he is reminded of how he used to gather fresh peas from his grandmother's garden. While listening to their stories, Annette notices that they are driving on droving roads, those long straight roads where cattle were brought to the market, and she catches a glimpse of a Sycamore tree, one which used to signal the existence of pub several decades ago. The group have lunch at a private estate and then drive back to Wigton where they started their journey and stop for tea at the house of Jude, a marmalade producer.

They leave and some of them carry in their bags perhaps some Cumberland Sausages flavoured with nutmeg as they do in Carlisle but not in the southern parts of Cumbria or some deer meat which they do not often see in their local shops. Others are already thinking of when they may meet Annette again and take a tour with her on the Solway coast to taste Solway shrimps.

By tasting homemade jams or locally smoked cheese, or salmon, and listening to the producers' stories of making these foods, the participants come to be immersed in the whole process of their production. The process initiated by the tasting is not a passive one of receiving information but rather an active one of looking, asking, listening, smelling and tasting, where all actors (producer, participant and guide) engage in a conversation, exchange information, stories and memories. In this way participants learn to pay attention to the little details that go into the foods' taste and are being trained to perceive their tastes.

The participants in the tour came from the region but were not familiar with the places which Annette showed them. Hugh, one of the participants, says: "I'm enjoying this tour because I am seeing things from a different perspective." And indeed he travelled also in areas where he had not been before. Yet, seeing those areas made him recall memories of his childhood, of walking in the hills or picking peas from the garden. Chance had it that towards the end of the tour he came to enter the house of a producer, where he happened to have lived in some twenty years before. These brief encounters show that the lines between the familiar and the exotic are not sharp, but rather flow into one another according to the stories, or life biographies that are 'turned on' in specific circumstances, times and places all of which are held together by the foods that are eaten. Tasting becomes a process of opening up to what the environment affords without it leading to an immediate attribution of meanings.

Sequence 3: Cooking class and lunch



Fig. 21. Annette's cooking class at her home in North Cumbria

Here I present a snapshot from a cooking class held by Annette. It is mostly locals that book Annette's classes and one of their main incentives is to learn new recipes and techniques. This event is different from the restaurant dining in that it involves participants in the making of the dishes.

On a Thursday morning a group of 8 people, four women and two men, Annette and I, gather in Annette's kitchen, part of a 200 year old Quaker house, to watch her cook a vegetarian meal and listen to her stories over a cup of coffee or tea with fresh, raw milk from the farm nearby. Annette had prepared some dough and wants to make fresh flat bread with tomatoes; she had caught a glimpse of this particular bread while she was wandering around in Minorca and watching locals buy it at the bakery. Now she wants to test and taste it herself and inspire the ones watching too, and adds: "as soon as you see it you sort of know [how you may go about and making it...]." She also brought leeks from her garden and will prepare them with mushrooms into a breadcrumb tart and red cabbage from the vegetable box

for the main course, a hearty meal to warm everyone up as it is February and quite cold outside. A tomato soup with red peppers should also warm everyone up. She knows to combine things well; different textures and colours will be integrated into a meal; nutrition is important too. She is trained and learned to watch carefully never to have only fried or only steamed foods in a meal, never (only) salty or spicy foods alone, and, always minds that which is available. She does not waste anything as she has lived and worked for several years in Rhodesia and recycling there “was a natural thing to do”.

On the other side of the table the women are alert and start to exchange all kinds of experiences, jokes, and impressions. One of the two men, David, seems impatient about all those details but nevertheless he is inquisitive and anticipates the results; he admires Stephen’s knowledge of the county and is eager to learn about new eating out places and pubs. Julia, a passionate cook, and one also in need of minding several food sensitivities and intolerances she has, brought her mother along to get her interested in new recipes as she is not too keen a cook compared with her daughter but still enjoys doing some stir-fries every now and then, a slow fast food nowadays. After all, as Annette tells me later that day, “how else do you learn, besides talking and tasting?” and adds, we should not forget that “we all get in a rut sometimes and, interestingly enough, when supermarkets came about they conveyed the idea that we don’t have to always eat the same thing.”

Generational and gender discontinuities in skills and knowledge become apparent in this brief sequence and dispel a view of taste as a linear and long-term process determined by dispositions, norms, or habits. French sociologist, Antoine Hennion poignantly argues that “taste is not an attribute, it is not a property (of a thing or of a person), it is an activity” (2007: 101) (see also Chapter 6). He states:

What matters is what happens, what it does, what comes to light, in oneself and in things – and not what one is seeking. It is a question of sensing, of being taken, of feeling. But this is in no way a passive state: this making available of oneself could not be more active, as the word ‘passion’ effectively connotes; it passes through an intense mobilization of one’s abilities, it is backed up by skills and traditions, objects and tools. It has a history, it defines a collectivity (Hennion 2007: 109).

Travelling and eating, moving and pausing are processes of comparing and valuing which move back and forth between the familiar and the exotic, the similar and the different up to the point where these categories are reversed such that the mundane turns exotic and the different becomes familiar.

The processes activated through tasting make temporal and spatial distances shift, shrink, or, by contrast expand. The process of eating thus acquires various temporal contours and dimensions which resonate in many ways with Proust’s experience when he ate a Madeleine. Not all Slow Food experiences necessarily lead people to experience childhood memories. But all experiences have a temporal flow which is sustained by the activity of perception and what Gibson calls paths of observation. The quality of such a flow is triggered in each of the participants through various combinations of the senses, of imagination, emotion, and sociability. The experience is held together by the ingested dishes and the perceived affordances thereof.

This experience of eating is deeply interwoven with the substances which are ingested. In this sense, the Greek anthropologist Nadia Seremetakis (1994) beautifully

captures the multiple temporalities which taste involves in the image of a Greek sipping his coffee in the afternoon and reflecting back on the past events of the day, which she describes as a moment of stillness.

Ale or cheese or any dish consumed during Slow Food events may act similar to the cup of coffee as substances laden with layers of historical and emotional sediments, which interrupt the flow of everyday life in non-synchronous ways. Seremetakis further reminds us that commensality is an “exchange of sensory memories and emotions, and of substances and objects incarnating remembrance and feeling” (1994: 37). For Seremetakis, the experience of taste has a reflexive character which is tied to the awakening of the senses and to the awakening of the capacity for memory, of tangible memory; to be awake is to remember, and one remembers through the senses, via substance (Seremetakis 1994: 28). But Seremetakis points out that stillness or the:

decompression of routine temporal experience and its subsequent recompression into surrogate vehicle and substance is not a stop. It is a different movement within time that captures everyday temporal experience from another oblique angle as if the sensory array is shifted from one point of consciousness to another, from one side of the body to another, which gives rise to a new or alternative perceptual landscape (1994: 14).

Thus reflexivity is triggered by the tasting of *certain* substances and does not fade away once the substances are ingested but stretches and moves back in time, through the slowing down of perception which the tasting event sets forth.

Eating and the training of tastes are part of what Thrift describes as practices of slowness and require the “slowing down of perception” (Thrift 2000: 35). For Thrift practices of slowness towards re-embodying natural ethologies, and promote a politics based on the intensified attention of the present moment (2000; see also 2008). Annette, the Cumbrian cook pointed out in one interview: “slow foods, yes, what are they other than the appreciation of the here and now.”

But the slowing down of perception is not a linear progressive reduction of speed. As referred to above, Seremetakis emphasizes that stopping in order to taste affords another angle of perception, or indeed a different quality or degree of perception and acuity, as I propose. Moreover, it has various durations as it is experienced in the moment of co-presence and eating with others and through the repetition of the practice of tasting-eating it induces a changed attitude towards the way one approaches food. It is in this latter sense that slowing down of taste produces constancy *and* change in the experience of taste. According to my own processes of learning about food in Britain and sharing repeatedly meals with Slow Food participants but also with friends in public and private settings, I can say that I not only acquired more interest in food but also more care when buying, and preparing food. The combination of interest and care resulted not solely in heightened moments of enjoyment but also in an ability to like and appreciate a growing number of foods and dishes along with a drive towards exploring and testing them in different combinations and situations. While this drive is self-propelling, it is however interspersed with moments of trial and error. I did not always enjoy my food. Long days of interviewing, watching, acquiring information, and searching for better ways of communicating with my fellow tasters often interfered with the detached but intense moments of appreciating foods at the dining table at the end of the day.

However, such processes do form a part of an ongoing dialogue between one's body and between fellow eaters and keep informing and shaping ways of knowing food and taste. It is important to stress the processual character of taste because this makes taste open-ended, multiplicative, and interrogative. Irrespective of whether people like or dislike the food they eat, punctuated moments of attention during the dining event change the ways people approach and sense certain foods. Each of the attended Slow Food events raised my awareness in some way or another and this was different in every situation and with every meal, food, or drink I had. Over time, certain patterns started to form. These patterns represent my own way of perceiving certain distinctive contemporary ways of consuming food in Britain. Among these patterns, there is for instance the emphasis on cooking meals from scratch as much as possible whether at home or in restaurants. I tend to notice when dishes are prepared on the premises or whether local or seasonal ingredients have been used. But there are differences and degrees here too, and it does not matter so much whether everything is local, organic or actually cooked from scratch. What does matter is to spot those elements which make a dish 'different'. It might be the fact that many restaurants stopped using large amounts of salt in their dishes, like for instance in soups. Or it might be the fact that leeks, a much consumed and often locally grown ingredient, are used in sauces or added to mashed potatoes. These elements along with the moments of searching for them translate for me notions of Slow Food (in Britain).

It is important to stress that the processual character of taste affords an altered state of perception through various temporalities, but that it involves moments of interrogation. Some such moments are derived from idiosyncratic confrontations with food. Awareness of food is often translated in instances which prompt a need for justifying one's choices and modes of using foods. This is not only present in cooking

demonstrations or tasting events where presenters give an insight into the processes which preclude or accompany cooking and tasting. It also occurs in situations where images of what slow food is collide with everyday practices of using and preparing food. Let me give an example. Prior to one dinner event I was invited to one of the organizer's home to have an informal discussion about the latest developments of the group. As discussion progressed, my interlocutor, mother of two children, was preparing dinner for them. She felt the need to explain to me that even if the family does not always eat together, she would sit at the table with her sons as they ate. This was important to her. At the same time, however, she explained that, due to lack of time she cooked frozen fish fingers, but assured me that the quality of the meat was high. While cooking fish fingers appears to collide with images of slow food, what is important to notice is how eating and taste become interrogative in such a confrontation. Rather than being a simple attempt to rationalize once choices, this example shows how tensions in the process of cooking bring about a more intense engagement with what one eats.

While the various temporal dimensions indicated earlier demand further inquiry (see Chapter 8), in this chapter I have drawn on how it is that these temporal dimensions are initiated. In this way, I showed how the perception of taste configures these temporal dimensions and how it orientates people towards experiencing taste as a sensory conduit.

The sensory and temporal embodied dimensions of eating and taste are achieved in Slow Food practices both through the dissection of several elements of taste into discreet units (see Chapter 6, taste workshops) in order to amplify the range of perceivable differences and through their reunification through co-present convivial dining where the different elements flow seamlessly into one another. Through

repeated practice, eating and tasting sediment relationships with food and people and intensify in multiple ways the perceived experience. This experience includes all the five senses and also extends to proprioception (the sense of one's body) and kinaesthesia (the sense of movement).

I have shown how coming together, talking about and exchanging impressions about foods, drinks, people and places generates an effervescent, convivial atmosphere such that sociality itself becomes a perpetuating mechanism for the training and learning of tastes. It is also indicative of a heightened communication among the participants but also with one's body and self. Sociality becomes a process of knowing.

But the dynamic is not only dependent on people and foods as shown in the previous chapter but also on the particularities of the place and the relations people have with places. I devoted particularly focus on those aspects referring to ways of eating and their relations to particular ways of dwelling. I discussed how modes of eating and dwelling are interwoven with ways of imagining foods, tastes, places and people and how these are shaped by alternating moments of movement and rest. Thus I pointed out that the temporality of the shared meal plays an important role in the experience and enjoyment of taste.

I also showed that Slow Food events are very heterogeneous. Tasting workshops are but one part of a larger spectrum of activities. While predominant, they are often incorporated in whole day trips to producers, or open an evening dinner. Other times the shared meal is the prime incentive for people to come together. In this case, taste as a deliberate and negotiated activity fades into the background while other elements and relations become more apparent. These elements emerge as enjoyment and curiosity drive the conversation between participants, getting to know

new places, new members, producers, suppliers, restaurant owners, and foods, drinks and dishes.

The following and concluding Chapter evaluates the findings of this research, synthesizes the arguments presented in each chapter and draws on the implications of the understandings of taste presented in this chapter.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

This thesis has explored ways in which taste is mobilized as a sensory, cultural, and political force in contemporary Western societies. My explorations are derived from a context in which there is a growing dissatisfaction with the quality of food and this is seen as severely impacting upon social and cultural structures and institutions and as altering people's health, habits and ways of life. This thesis investigated in what way taste and people's sensuous engagement with food offers insight into the nature of relations between people, food, and environs. It has further examined how such relations tackle the transmogrification of food and the systems supporting it, how these surpass dichotomous views of fast and slow food, and how these redefine (essential dimensions of) what it is that constitutes food and eating. I showed that taste, rather than being a static attribute which determines people's choices and status, is an active process of exploring and learning.

The structure and themes of this thesis were grounded in and emerged from ethnographic research with the Slow Food Movement; from web research (food columns of British newspapers and various food blogs); and from reading and analysing popular-scientific and fiction writings on food. I participated in the events and meetings organized by the Movement and experienced a multitude of ways in which people engaged with food. I accompanied Slow Food members at food fairs in Italy and Britain, attended conferences and talks, cooking demonstrations, tasting workshops, meetings of the organizing committee and shared lunches and dinners with slow food enthusiasts. These different but related activities allowed me to observe various levels of engagement with food of different actors: of small-scale producers, farmers, butchers, cheese-mongers, honey producers, brewers, coffee

suppliers, bread makers, wine sellers, consumers (visitors/ guests/ tourists/ locals), food writers, tour guides, cooks and chefs, natural and social scientists. Each of these actors had different degrees and forms of knowledge about food products, the place of origin and history, and the production and distribution method. Some, by nature of their craft, were closely and daily involved with the materiality of the foods they made and sold, others acquired the knowledge about certain foods through repeated visits to their place of origin, while yet others experienced certain foods and places for the first time. But all of them shared an interest in communicating their knowledge and in enabling experiences which promote a more intimate encounter with food. The spaces for such dialogue ranged from large and crowded food halls where the ubiquity of foods, smells and tastes over-flooded people with a stream of visual and organoleptic impressions; shops and farms where the array of experiences was focused around a small range of products; and restaurants and private homes where the pace of experiences was slowed down and centred more around meals and chats.

This thesis has analysed the nature of these forms of engagement with certain foods, between different actors, and within various spaces, in terms of patterns of perceptual experience of taste. Thus, I offered a research perspective which includes food, taste and the senses into one heuristic frame of analysis which, as noted in Chapter 1, is largely underexplored in social science. Furthermore, I showed how such a perspective attends to the relations that connect or entangle food, taste and the senses into each other, without, however undermining or conflating the importance of each element. This approach has been underpinned by an exploration of concepts of taste such as ‘umami’ and ‘terroir’, tensions and contestations around taste, and speedy and slow patterns of experience of taste, which I connected to discursive, theoretical, and practical/ empirical examples. While the Chapters of the thesis follow

a progressive analysis from the more discursive towards the more embodied dimensions of taste, all chapters have addressed conceptual, theoretical, and experiential components of taste. In this way, I have made the claim that discourse and practice, theory and the empirical cannot be separated from one another (but see section on future research in this Chapter). Moreover, people who eat and taste, as my observant participation in the activities of the Slow Food Movement revealed, rarely separate experience, practice and discourse. Rather, thinking about food, debating about the inherent challenges and idiosyncrasies of food, and enjoying the pleasures afforded by its taste, flow into one another as people enter into face-to-face relationships with each other while eating, drinking, and talking.

My thesis addressed the nature of people's relation with food from two perspectives which were woven one into the other. First, I unfolded a range of recurring themes such as tensions between biological and cultural taste, drives towards normativity, interplay between slow and fast experiences to taste, and the search for differences. These themes appear and take on a variety of shapes in popular-scientific journalistic food advocacy writings, within social movements, among such concepts as terroir and umami, and in historical and contemporary forms of cuisine, and in a range of practices of eating and tasting certain foods. Secondly, I evaluated the role of these themes in conjunction with anthropological and sociological approaches to food, taste and the senses. More broadly, I analysed these themes in relation to approaches informed by the ecology of perception, phenomenology, cultural geography and sociology.

In a more linear manner, however, Chapter 2 and 3 have situated the context of research, Chapter 4 and 5 have analysed some of the concepts of taste and the

formation of tastes as perceptual and knowing entities, and Chapter 6 and 7 have examined the performative aspects of taste in taste workshops and dinner events.

In Chapter 2 I have shown that food advocacy is a growing field in popular-scientific writings in the West. I presented the perspectives of several food journalists many of which took part in the meetings and conferences of the Slow Food Movement in Italy, Britain, and the USA (i.e. Pollan 2006, Tudge 2007). While various forms of food advocacy have existed for decades and even centuries, these popular-scientific writings are unique in the way they conjoin political and cultural aspects of food with the sensory and material aspects of food afforded through taste. These writings bring the issue of human diet in a fresh light and implicitly invoke that eating requires a certain degree of normative guidance (on what to eat) and, resulting from it, a change and reflective re-evaluation thereof. In this sense, food advocates insist that the cognitive dimensions of eating should be informed by its sensory dimensions which are in their turn, shaped by modalities of using food, like for instance by cooking and combining raw ingredients.

With their focus on sensuous and material processes of eating, food advocates (Pollan, Tudge) contribute to and expand the nexus of food advocacy concerned rather with giving advice on which food categories are more appropriate than others in respect to politics, economy, and health (as for instance, choosing organic rather than conventional foods, choosing low-fat food over high caloric food, or vegetables over meat, etc.). In contradistinction to advice deemed on dualistic taxonomies of 'right' versus 'bad' food, the propositions made by popular-scientific journalists are less normative. Instead of causally loading the responsibility and ethics of eating upon the consumer, Pollan for instance, traces the systemic contradictions and anomalies of capitalist food systems, and shows the complex entanglements between substances

(i.e. sugar), processed and less processed foods, and people's biological and cultural make-up (2006).

Such food advocacies also challenge certain philosophical approaches to taste as a human sensibility, in that they undermine perspectives which regard cognitive dimensions of food as dominating over sensual and aesthetics aspects of eating. Philosopher Korsmeyer contends that "knowing what one is eating – or smelling – can be indispensable not only for enjoying the object of experience but even for having the "correct" experience – that is, the experience of the substance in question" (1999: 90). The author further stresses that "what we know we are about to eat legitimately affects how it tastes. Not just whether or not we enjoy it, but actually how it is experienced, including whether we find it palatable" (Korsmeyer 1999: 91). Herewith, the tension between biological and cultural aspects of taste is expressed in terms of dominance of mind over body. This resonates with the Western tradition of hierarchically conceptualizing the structuring mechanisms of the five senses (see Howes 2003).

But the tension between biological and cultural elements of taste is elaborated by popular-scientific advocacy journalism from a different angle than by philosophers of taste. Food advocates relate disjunctive uses and attitudes to food to radical breaks in the history of the Western world brought about by industrialization, mass-production, and the post-war economic boom. According to them, these historic processes have radically altered the way people relate to food. The speeding up of food production and processing, the advent of fast food, have brought about a cultural and sensory speeding up of the experience of taste and thus altered the metabolic rhythms of people's lives, their bodies and of socio-natural environments. Thus, Pollan (2008, 2010) and Tudge (2007) advocate for practices of rebalancing and fine-

tuning people's lives to the larger patterns which sustain them by growing food, gardening, cooking, and buying slow foods. So, it is not so much a matter of sensory hierarchies but rather one of separation between different patterns of sensing that food advocacies bring into focus.

The ethnographic research presented in this thesis has revealed ways in which people create forms of attachment to foods by speeding up and slowing down *and* by scrutinizing and questioning hierarchically-shaped ways of perceiving. Participants in the Slow Food Movement hone and sharpen their sense of taste by paying close attention to the foods they eat, the places they dine in, and by socializing. In this way they induce the conditions which facilitate an open and reflexive process of experience and learning. In this thesis I explored the training of tastes by showing how various practices mediate the perception of taste, but showed that the goal of such practices is to achieve direct forms of perception. I have unfolded the analysis over several argumentative stages and by providing snapshots into a range of practices and events.

However, the weaving of these complex themes generated through ethnographic research with insights from scholarly thought proved challenging. The difficulties stemmed on the one hand, from the fact that the practices of the Slow Food Movement involve a large range of aspects related to people's engagement with food, and therefore make it difficult for social science researchers to ascertain key differences which make a difference to the process of cultivating and training taste. On the other hand, difficulties also stemmed from a paucity of conceptual tools in the anthropology and sociology of food and the senses which address the processes of sensuous engagement between people, food and environment and their relevance in and for Western contemporary ways of life.

From yet another perspective, the loose ways in which many Slow Food members I spoke with articulated their understanding of what slow food means for them (see Methods section, Chapter 1) proved revealing because this provided the clues towards grasping taste as a processual, fluid, emergent, and generative force. By first analysing the projects and programmes of the Slow Food Movement in Chapter 3, I have shown that taste is a relational concept. As such, the projects, while centred on specific foods, are driven by the awareness that the qualities of food, its taste, is immediately related to the welfare of those who produce it, and to the quality of the land they are grown in. But it is not only in this sense that taste emerges as a relational entity. It is also in the way that Slow Food figures as a response to consequences of capitalism and globalization, rather than as a form of resistance to fast foods, as the initial stages of the formation of the Movement claimed.

However, despite such relational understandings of taste, changing taste and the patterns of eating remains an extremely difficult and challenging task. Social scientists have shown that tastes are relatively stable and rigid, shaped by class (Bourdieu 1984) and by socially organized ways of eating (Warde 1997) and endure over decades and centuries (Mennell 1984). With this in mind, exploring the internal relations of taste that organize and structure the way people think about and perform food-related activities has been the core focus of the thesis. This has entailed attending to the processes of its formation and tracing the connections and path-dependencies of taste. As such, this approach differs from the above mentioned sociologists of taste and food, by transcending considerations of class and status, and aligning with issues of subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and ‘ways of being in the world’.

Furthermore, the methodologies which I have used in the research of taste by combining concepts, practices, stories and biographical segments of people, have proved fruitful in minimizing the distances between practices of taste and theories of taste. I therefore introduced terms such as sensory expertise, sensory pageantry, and sensory practice. Having displayed various facets of these terms, I then developed an analysis of the process which characterises the formation and experience of taste. This is an essential step towards grasping the ways in which sensuous relations between food, people and environment come to be meaningful. By analysing concepts such as ‘umami’ and ‘terroir’ I have not only demonstrated the interplay between the materiality of food and representations and symbolism of food, but also ‘carved out’ their historical transformations. Thus, I illuminated how the displacement and emplacement of such tastes provide insight into the nature of various forms of addiction to food and adulteration of food as well as showing their complex entanglements in political and economic structures. This approach is different from sociological and anthropological analyses of food trajectories, food chains, and single commodities, in that it focuses on the sensory dimensions of food and thus highlights how tensions between cultural and biological taste and between slow and fast foods ease.

I drew on ecological approaches to perception developed by Gibson (1986) and further extended by anthropology (Ingold 2000) and sociology and showed how the affordances of food provide insight into the multiple agencies of food and taste. In this way, I showed how *differences* train and structure perception. By using examples from historic moments in the formation of nouvelle cuisine and demonstrations of the processes involved in cooking, Chapter 5 has shown not only that there are analogies between principles of nouvelle cuisine and slow foods, but also how various forms of

mediation used by cooks and chefs in order to guide people's perception of taste involve the elaboration and contestation of the visual sense of taste. Following upon many of the Slow Food members and organizers' comments regarding the fact that people are relying too much on their eyes in the judgment of foods and dishes, this thesis has approached taste as a multi-sensual form of perception involving all the five senses and extending towards the sense of movement and sense of one's body. In this way, I contributed to the extending field of the anthropology of the senses (Howes 2005) and showed that not only is taste multi-sensual and multi-modal but also that vision is not necessarily a detached and distant sense but often an engaged and embodied form of perception.

Thus, I showed the ways in which taste becomes a training practice, a skill, and a mode of dwelling. I demonstrated that people who train their taste get enmeshed in a sensuous temporal flow once they are provided the spaces and techniques conducive to such experiences. Repeated tasting, sensory pageantry, the 'education of attention', and the sociality of tasting and dining, involves people in the experience of a multitude of altered states of sensitivity which afford a mix of imaginaries, memories, kinaesthetic, proprioceptive and synaesthetic sensuous relations. Whilst the role of the guide (be it a cook, chef or wine enthusiast) is of central importance to the training of attention, the normative presence of the guide weakens as tasters and diners engage in collective, repetitive tasting and dining. This thesis has shown that with Slow Food there are no 'correct' forms and ways to taste and that tasting involves the alternation between sensory pageantry and slowed down forms of perception. As such, there are multiple ways to train tastes, and the repetition of such training patterns deepens and intensifies the experience of taste such that individual tastes transcend into the collective and gain access to altered states of perception.

My thesis contributes to the anthropology and sociology of the senses by exploring practical and embodied ways in which people live in the world through tasting it. I also argue that an interdisciplinary approach is an essential and necessary way to illuminate the way in which food mirrors wider cultural issues at the same time as these are mirrored in the materiality of food. In this sense, future research should invite the domains of material culture studies, consumption and food trajectories studies, and practice theories to further explore the ways in which the approach offered in this thesis can contribute towards understanding of those contemporary ways of living (food being only one aspect) which share a drive and impulse towards transcending the sense of separation between self and world.

As such, further research needs to explore how taste aligns with affect (Thrift 2008), atmospheres (Böhme 1995), and practices of slowing down (Thrift 2000) to provoke changes and shifts in perception and practices in today's "intensive culture" (Lash 2010). Moreover, in the face of increasingly unpredictable environmental, economic, and social crises, ways of eating seem to have become a part of a range of training techniques of bodies and collectives, which philosopher Sloterdijk (2009) regards as imperative in contemporary societies. Furthermore, more research should be done regarding how ways of tasting illuminate the problematic and pervasive fetishization of food and relations to it (see Cook and Crang 1996). Also, more research is needed on how taste may enrich theories of the body through an exploration of both the vulnerability of human bodies and socio-natural environments to rapid changes of food systems. Such an analysis should then be evaluated in relation to the vitality of slow foods and of heightened forms of sociability afforded through slow foods. Last but not least, further theorization of sensuous perceptual

patterns should include those domains of arts which engage with the problematic relations between representation, aesthetics, materiality and meaning.

Further research will build upon the essential relations explored and elaborated in this thesis, namely the relations between tasting and knowing. I have shown how practices and discourses of the Slow Food Movement facilitate the sensuous deployment of taste as a modality of knowing. In this way taste and tasting disclose themselves as tools which allow not only exchanging information and knowledge through discourses and face-to-face verbal communication but also testing and exploring the sensuous encounters between food, body, and other fellow tasters in particular space-time configurations. The ability to test and taste requires lifting eating out of routines. This elevation is achieved by using the act of tasting as practice (at food fairs, cooking demonstrations, or taste workshops). In the process of putting one's taste to test, people experience their habitus in terms of dialogue, or often confrontation with, and/or tension to, acquired patterns of eating, preferences, memories, and also ways of seeing and talking about food and drink. These ways of experiencing and engaging with food certainly differ from a Bourdieusian view of the habitus where eating provides solely a means of enforcing group belonging, or separateness from, or dominance over, other groups. While, certainly, people who meet at Slow Food events perform a collective form of belonging, their tastes are always open to debate and further formation. People scrutinize their habitus and render it responsive to novel perceptions and experiences. This open interrogative performing of taste is much more than a licence to omnivorousness or an endorsement of myriad individual tastes. It is a sensuously active way of confronting and reshaping the unevenly distributed forms knowledge and power in food systems.

In this sense, I have argued that the training of taste is achieved within various patterns of perception which involve different speeds. This means that taste is embedded within certain flows and rhythms which initiate, promote, and support the education of attention. Thus taste extends beyond the momentary and the evanescent. The speedy sensuous experience of multiple tastes allows for the accumulation of differences while the slowing down of perception and repeated tasting integrates such differences into deeper forms of engagement and attunement to food, body, and environment. The incorporation of taste into collective practices of tasting and eating invites not only the confrontation with one's habitus but also its transformation into a skill which perceives, relates, anticipates and knows.

At this point I draw once again on what seems to me a characteristic aspect pervading the atmospheres of events and attitudes of people participating in such events. I would like to call it playful discipline. There is something interesting about it in that people, while enjoying the informality and conviviality of events, do not necessarily experience food and taste through excess or other forms of transgression. Food in Roman or Medieval times for instance has been noted for its notorious allegiance with Dionysian bodies rather than Apollonian, which tended to become more visible for instance during the World Wars or the periods following it and demanded a rational calculation of food intake. In this sense, this playful way of conjoining detached appreciation of foods, places and services with intense engagements with the tasted foods creates a certain kind of alert enjoyment of being with foods, people and in places and being open to whatever might occur next. While not excessive in their nature or overtly calculative, dining and tasting events do retain to some extent a subversive character. Below I refer to several subversive aspects.

Slow Food events experiment not only with tasting but perform food tasting as a practice of eating. This is innovative. Tasting becomes eating and eating becomes tasting. This is an act of translation which requires a re-engagement with food and with the way one eats. This re-engagement is however anything but a return to traditional dishes even if these are often reinvented. It is more an orientation towards the future, a future unknown and uncertain. Testing and experimenting with foods, with growing and eating them, with gathering knowledge about different foods and techniques from many places initiates learning processes which start with one's body rather than end with it.

It is a learning process which does not end or close down. It is open in that it on the one hand affords care and on the other hand in that it incorporates change. I tend to not only pay more attention to food but also tend to sense some of the processes involved in cooking dishes and this also when I eat out. And I might sense this better in Britain than somewhere else. It might be in a restaurant where care in cooking merges with using local vegetables or locally supplied meats irrespective of whether the produce is organic or not, or whether the restaurant provides Greek dishes or more traditional British ones. Several chapters have emphasized that making taste involves the mingling of processes of terroir and processes of nouvelle cuisine.

However, because this thesis has emphasised above all the relational aspects of taste, food is but one element in a whole configuration of objects, techniques, processes and patterns of engaging with the environment. Therefore, these innovative ways of re-engaging with food are significant for a current context of 'crises' which may involve rapid changes in the food system, in that they bring about various ways in which people/bodies could more readily and easily respond and adapt to novel circumstances. In this light, further research is required to evaluate and explore

alternating and altered patterns of perception examined in this thesis, in domains which extend beyond Slow Food activities, to incorporate comparative analyses of ways of eating in different parts of the world, or involving a wider range of cuisines, ranging from mass produced foods to ethnic cuisines.

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