

The Practical Aesthetics of Traditional Cuisines: Slow Food in Tuscany

Mara Miele and Jonathan Murdoch

There seems little doubt that modern societies are now strongly configured by the application of an aesthetic sensibility to a whole variety of economic and social activities. For instance, Wolfgang Welsch (1996 p.2) argues that we are currently experiencing an aesthetic boom. It extends, he believes, “from individual styling, urban design and the economy through to theory. More and more elements of reality are being aesthetically mantled, and reality as a whole is coming to count increasingly as an aesthetic construction to us”. Welsch suggests that the (post)modern world is becoming profoundly reshaped by processes of “aestheticisation”, by which he means the “furnishing of reality with aesthetic elements” (1996, p. 2). In part, aestheticisation is a component of a new cultural matrix in which aesthetic values and concerns have become intrinsic to ‘lifestyle creation’ (see also Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Lupton 1996). However, the process of “furnishment” is also driven by economic considerations as “the bond with aesthetics renders even the un-saleable saleable, and improves the already saleable two or three times over” (Welsch 1996 p.3).

Thus, everyday practices - eating, dressing, interacting, cooking, designing, entertaining, managing and so forth - are increasingly underpinned by aesthetic considerations. Not surprisingly, a “general condition of aestheticisation ensues” (Welsh 1996 p.7). However, “this aestheticisation does not follow the same pattern everywhere, and the type of aesthetic glaze applied to the anaesthetic can be different from case to case” (1996, p.7). The process of aestheticisation should therefore be studied in differing socio-spatial settings so that we might assess its practical effects.

Given this general aesthetic condition it seems strange that the role of aesthetics has received so little attention in rural sociology and rural studies. Despite the obvious expression of aesthetics in relation to landscape, nature, community and so forth, it has not been made central to a rural sociology that, for the most part, has continued to pursue its traditional economic and social research themes. In this paper we therefore explicitly aim to open up an ‘aesthetic of the rural’ to sociological analysis. We begin this task by considering the aesthetics of food and examine aestheticisation as it is expressed in food preparation and consumption processes in restaurants. We identify two main forms of aestheticisation in the contemporary context: an ‘aesthetic of entertainment’ and a ‘gastronomic aesthetic of food’. We argue that the ever-wider diffusion of the first of these – the ‘aesthetic

of entertainment' - has coincided with the marginalisation of the second - the 'gastronomic aesthetic'. However, we also indicate that a reaction against the first has given a new lease of life to the second.

In the first part of the paper we outline the emergence of the aesthetic of entertainment and show that this aesthetic has given rise to a 'postmodern' eating experience, one that detracts attention away from food and directs consumers towards the environment of consumption. In the second part of the paper we document the emergence of the second food aesthetic, a concern for the quality of food rather than the quality of the overall 'dining out' experience. We trace this aesthetic from its emergence in high-class nouvelle cuisine through to a more recent concern for typicality¹.

In the third section we then go on to analyse this second aesthetic more thoroughly through the exploration of a case study drawn from the Slow Food movement in Italy. Slow Food provides a useful context in which to study a gastronomic aesthetic as the movement is oriented to the promotion of typical restaurants, i.e. eating establishments that serve regional cuisines based upon typical products. We go on to look in some detail at a Slow Food restaurant in Tuscany. In studying this restaurant we identify three main issues that we believe are significant: first, the 'organisational aesthetics' of restaurant life, where tacit knowledge, craft skills and tradition are to the fore; second, the 'aesthetical ethics' of typical foods which are promoted in these restaurants; thirdly, the connectedness of the restaurant to its surrounding eco-system and local economy. These three aspects all highlight the importance of a practical aesthetic, one that is rooted in the tacit knowledge, craft skills, creative energies, and socio-natural relationships that comprise typical cuisines². Through a consideration of this practical aesthetic we hope to show the value of aesthetic analysis in the food sector. We also propose that the aestheticisation process evident in our case study might provide some lines of future research in any exploration of the relationship between aesthetics and rurality.

The aesthetic of entertainment.

In the West in recent times, with the increase in levels of disposable income, a high level of food security and the increased availability of many differing food types, eating out has become one of the most distinctive features of urban life³. This change has resulted in a proliferation of restaurants and in a broadening of cooking styles⁴. Such tendencies are most evident in the USA (see Fine 1996; Ritzer and Oviada 2000) but they are also occurring in all Western European countries, albeit at varying speeds. For instance, it is well known that Italy, France and other Mediterranean countries are still dominated by more traditional food consumption patterns and regional cuisines while the UK is leading the move to growing internationalisation and 'creolisation' in which there is a proliferation of more 'exotic' and 'authentic' ethnic cuisines (Warde 1997).

With the explosion in the numbers of restaurants in cities comes a new aesthetic of eating out. Kellner and Best (1998) argue that the aestheticisation of restaurants is steered by the incorporation of the food service sector into the leisure industry. They say that in contemporary western societies, "entertainment is big business

and business has to be entertaining to prosper" (1998, p.2). We thus encounter the rise of 'lifestyle' marketing in the catering services and the emergence of the dining-out 'experience'. For instance, Klein (2000, p.20) quotes Scott Bedbury, a vice-president for Starbucks, who explains that "consumers don't truly believe there's a huge difference between products", which is why brands must "establish emotional ties with their customers". Hence, 'the Starbucks experience': places like Starbucks are not renowned for their food; rather, people go there for the ambience, to buy clothing, and to see music and media memorabilia (Kellner and Best 1998)⁵. According to a recent Time magazine article:

"In the past couple of years, a business exceeding more than a half million dollars has emerged that the trade calls 'eatertainment'. Theme restaurants, a combination plate of amusement park, diner, souvenir stand and museum, have become the fastest-growing segment of the restaurant industry, turning up the heat on fast feeders such as McDonald's and the segment known as casual dining...." (quoted in Gottdiener 2000 p.273, emphasis added).

In these new eateries the meaning of eating out has profoundly changed, as Wood underlines:

"Dining out it is no longer the singular activity it once was; it is not always an activity pursued for itself or in itself, but is associated with other, mainly leisure, activities which are all part of a loose-knit collection of consumption-oriented services dedicated to making people enjoy themselves" (Wood, 1995 quoted in Bell and Valentine, 1997 p.131).

In line with this trend, new sites for food consumption can now be found in theatres, art galleries, leisure centres, cinema multiplexes, sport stadia and airports (Bell and Valentine, 1997; Payne and Payne, 1993; Warde and Martens, 1999).

At first sight it might seem that the emergence of an aesthetic of entertainment is simply a response to growing consumer desire for variety, fun, and 'omnivorousness'⁶. But, according to Warde and Martens (1999) the proliferation of new eating environments should not be interpreted simply as an example "of post-Fordist flexible specialisation" where the provision of food becomes increasingly differentiated in order "to satisfy customers who are more discerning, more concerned with the aesthetic aspects of lifestyle and more likely to demand items tailored to their individual preferences" (1999, p.30). On the contrary, these authors argue that if the combination of novel elements has intensified it is because,

"capital concentration continues to create chains of outlets, often franchised, which provide a standardised branded product using industrial production techniques redolent of the car assembly plant. McDonalds, in 1997, reputedly had 21,000 restaurant around the World and 730 in the UK, dedicated to providing a virtually uniform meal experience. A large segment of the catering industry is oriented towards producing nothing more than acceptable nourishment to people with an immediate need to eat. Many independent outlets have the same suppliers of the same pre-prepared foods which are simply reconstituted at the retail site. The accelerating routinisation of new fashion, transmuting the exotic into the mundane within a few years as successful innovations are rapidly copied, flattens the sense of variety" (Warde and Martens 1999 p.30)

Warde and Martens conclude that the contemporary eating out landscape is characterised by both specialisation (e.g. in the case of 'ethnic restaurants') and massification and standardisation (e.g. in the case of 'fast food' restaurants).

On the one hand, such trends appear to indicate a profusion of restaurants and catering services. The provision of foods through eating out facilities seems to be ensuring greater choice in many regional and local contexts. Yet, on the other hand, the growth of the standardised chains also threatens local variety in eating establishments as differing geographical areas increasingly comprise the same mix of restaurants. Thus, traditional eateries offering typical foods continue to decline both as a proportion of total catering outlets and in absolute terms (Petrini, 2001). In general terms, the aesthetic of entertainment is but one aspect of a 'de-traditionalisation' of food. Thus, we find knowledge about typical and traditional cuisines being lost from diverse national contexts.

For instance, during the 1990s a number of opinion polls in France suggested that knowledge about traditional cooking was sharply diminishing and that the preference of the majority of people had shifted from regional and local dishes to internationalised steak-frites. Gopnik (2001, p.149) reports:

"Thirty-six percent of the French people polled in one survey thought that you make mayonnaise with whole eggs (you use only yolks), seventeen percent thought that you put a *travers de porc* in a *pot-au-feu* (you use beef), and seven percent believed that *Lucas Carton*, the Paris restaurant that for a century has been one of the holiest of holies of haute cuisine, is a name for badly cooked meat. More ominously, fully seventy-one percent of Frenchmen named the banal steak-frites as their favorite plat; only people past sixty preferred *blanquette de veau*, or a *gigot d'agneau*, or even a *pot-au-feu*, all real French cooking".

Even in Italy, a country that represents one of the most traditional food consumption models in Europe (Miele and Parisi 2000), the number of McDonald's restaurants has increased from 143 in 1996 to 320 in 2001, leading to concerns that young people will be drawn away from historically embedded patterns of food consumption into a global 'McDonaldised' cuisine. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that in this ever-expanding context of 'fast' food, concerns about the disappearance of typical foods should come to the fore. Moreover, these concerns have provoked a reassertion of a gastronomic aesthetic of food.

The gastronomic aesthetic of food

Historically, cuisines have developed in differing ways according to food availability, taste and cultural aspiration. Nowadays the words 'fresh and in season' evoke for many people images of a 'golden age' of food when flavours were intense and authentic, and the food industry had not yet 'flattened'. Yet, according to the Italian historian Montanari (2001), in the 'golden age' the provision of food had little to do with either freshness or seasonality. 'Fresh' was a quality restricted only to the aristocracy and to this élite 'in season' was not an appealing attribute; quite the contrary, 'out of season' fruit and vegetable and exotic varieties represented objects of desire and were sought after around the globe. At the same time, the majority of

the European population was primarily concerned about preserving or saving food because periods of famine and starvation invariably followed times of abundance. Therefore, most people had little chance to develop a taste for 'fresh' food as their diet was based on grains, pulses and preserved products.

Nevertheless, a distinctively Western taste emerged in the early capitalist societies as cuisines spread beyond courtly circles to society more generally. As they filtered down the social hierarchy, so cuisines became 'standards of aspiration' and 'norms for every bourgeois family' (Fernandez-Armesto 2000 p.139). Within the growing bourgeois strata of European societies a taste for diversity and distinction began to dislodge the consumption of simple staples (in keeping with general patterns of wealth). This process of cuisine dispersion and sophistication became especially pronounced once the establishment of empires joined with new developments in transportation to permit the easier import of previously rare or exotic foodstuffs.

Thus, European tastes and patterns of consumption increase in sophistication: this increased sophistication is captured in the term 'gastronomy'. A gastronomic aesthetic is most readily discernible in France. French food has long been celebrated as the most refined and complex in Europe. Rebecca Spang (2000) argues that this perception extends back to the French Revolution when the break-up of the great aristocratic houses sent chefs out onto the street looking for new sources of employment. At this time, the modern restaurant and a whole new social stratum (notably the bourgeoisie) gained access to fine food. The fame of French cuisine was subsequently established by chefs such as Antoine Carême, who invented 'presentation' (his cooking looked a lot like architecture, with the dishes fitted into vast, beautiful neoclassical structures – Gopnik 2001, p.152), and by Auguste Escoffier, whose name is linked to the invention of the 'master sauce' (the unchallenged basis of 'haute cuisine'- Trubek, 2000).

French cuisine came to mean an elaborate sophistication in preparation and presentation. However, following another French culinary revolution - the emergence of 'nouvelle cuisine' in the 1970s – the emphasis on rich and ornate combinations of foods gave way to a new concern for fresh ingredients and simple treatments. With nouvelle cuisine the notions of 'fresh' and 'in season' became the new reference points for aesthetic judgement. Now the complex dishes of earlier periods were replaced by simpler and more subtle modes of preparation. In nouvelle cuisine the ingredients are to be allowed to 'speak for themselves': thus, the style of cooking becomes more muted and understated (presentation comes to the fore, perhaps revealing an aesthetic of 'freshness').

Nouvelle cuisine is divided into two styles, underpinned by what Gopnik defines as two rhetorics of food: a rhetoric of terroir and a rhetoric of épices (soil and spice): "The rhetoric of the terroir emphasised the allegiance of the new cooking to French soil; the rhetoric of épices emphasised its openness to the world beyond the hexagon" (2001, pp.156-158). In the ensuing tussle between these two 'rhetorics', the notion of terroir became dominant in defining the intrinsic nature of the new cuisine⁷. Thus, the new aesthetic of food became associated with freshness, seasonality, and typicality, and it now represents the reference point for a niche of contemporary high-class restaurants both in Europe and other industrialised countries. Moreover, it has facilitated a new attention to 'forgotten' cuisines in countries such as France and Italy.

It appears that the gastronomic aesthetic – by appealing to freshness, seasonality, and typicality – has opened itself to a greater number of cuisine types and influences, notably those rooted in differing terroirs. Yet, as we have pointed out in the previous section, lower down the eating hierarchy, these facets of food are increasingly being displaced by the aesthetic of entertainment and its standardised modes of food provision. This displacement is most marked in informal eateries, places that are used by a range of social groups. Thus, in countries that have traditionally held a rich array of local eating establishments and have developed sophisticated and specific regional cuisines based on typical and local products, a concern has come to the fore that a rich cultural and gastronomic heritage may be under threat from the standardising chains. Thus, a reaction against the marginalisation of the aesthetic of typical foods in the catering service has become evident. In what follows we consider this reaction in the context of the Slow Food movement.

The aesthetic of typicality: the case of Slow Food.

Slow Food emerged out of the cultures of food that surround regional cuisines in Italy. It was established in 1986 in Bra, a small town in the Piedmont region by a group of food writers and chefs. The immediate motivation was growing concern about the potential impact of ‘Americanised’ fast food on local food cultures. The first Italian McDonald’s had opened the previous year in Trentino Alto Adige, a region in the North East. It was quickly followed by a second in Rome. This latter restaurant, because of its location in the famous Piazza di Spagna, gave rise to a series of protests (see Resca and Gianola, 1998 for a full account) and these protests provided the spur for the founding of Slow Food. As Renato Sardo, the director of Slow Food International, put it:

“There was a lot of public debate at the time [1986] about standardisation, the McDonaldisation, if you will, of the world. Up until then, any opposition was split in two. On the one hand there were the gastronomes, whose focus was fixed entirely on the pleasure of food. The other tradition was a Marxist one, which was about the methods of food production and their social and historical implications. Carlo Petrini, Slow Food’s president, wanted to merge the two debates to provide a way forward”. (quoted in The Observer Food Monthly 11/11/2001 Slowly does it).

The movement’s founders were concerned that the arrival of McDonald’s would threaten not the growing up-market restaurants frequented by the middle/upper class city dwellers, but local osterie and trattorie, the kinds of places that serve local dishes and which have traditionally been frequented by people of all classes. Because, in the Italian context, traditional eateries retain a close connection to local food production systems, Slow Food argued that their protection requires the general promotion of local food cultures. Thus, Slow Food was established on the basis of a local structure, coordinated by a central headquarters in Bra (which now employs around 100 people). The local branches effectively engage in a range of activities aimed at strengthening local cuisines. These branches were initially established in all the Italian regions (and were called *condotte*) but soon began to spread to other European countries and then further afield (where they are called

convivia). At the time of writing, convivia exist in 40 countries and the movement has around 80,000 members (see Miele and Murdoch 2001, for a fuller account of Slow Food's development).

The philosophy of the movement is that typical products and regional cuisines are important features of cultural distinctiveness. They need to be cultivated and protected, not for nostalgic reasons or because they are the latest fashion in high-class restaurants, but because they represent a rich cultural 'heritage'. This concept is neatly expressed by Barberis in the following terms:

"There are enormous reserves of local experience that must be preserved in view of the fact that they actually represent a cultural patrimony. When we say that we have a heritage of products, we are basically saying that we have a cultural heritage.... A material fact is thus a fact of civilisation, with its obvious economic consequences, because a cultural heritage also has an economic value....[Our local products] are the creation of a body of farmers and tradespeople who have expressed the spirit of the land, their ideologies, their way of living through their products. That's why it is a question of cultural heritage" (2001, p.10)

In seeking to protect this cultural heritage, Slow Food has effectively become a 'clearing house' for knowledge of local foods, initially in Italy, but latterly, globally. The main means by which knowledge about local and typical cuisines is disseminated is the publishing company, Slow Food Editore, established in 1990. It publishes a range of guides in order to lead consumers to the food products available in a whole variety of local areas. The leading publication in this regard is *Osterie d'Italia*, a guide to the traditional cuisine of the Italian regions. The majority of the eateries listed in *Osterie d'Italia*, which is updated annually, are small restaurants presenting unpretentious meals, though a certain number of these have recently gone through a process of gentrification associated with 'gastronomic tourism'. To be included in the guide, the restaurants must embody the 'philosophy of slowness' in terms of the ingredients, the style of cooking, the wine lists and the hospitality they offer.

In the 2002 edition of *Osterie d'Italia* there are about 1700 osterias⁸, and a smaller number of historical cafés, artisan ice-cream shops, delicatessen shops which specialise in regional products, traditional bakeries and producers of typical products who sell directly to consumers. The restaurants, as well as the cafés and delicatessen shops, are brought to the attention of Slow Food headquarters (situated in Bra in Piemonte) by members of the *condotte* who utilise their local knowledge of the products, the producers and the chefs in making their selections. In the next section, we illustrate an example of a restaurant that features regularly in *Osterie d'Italia*: the Bagnoli restaurant, which is located in the countryside of Tuscany. We have chosen this establishment because, in our view, it is representative of the osterias that make up the Slow Food movement⁹. It embodies the principle of 'slowness' in its adherence to typical cuisine, in its use of local materials and products, and in its ambience of relaxed conviviality. The restaurant also illustrates how a practical aesthetic becomes bound into the every day practices of food production and preparation

A 'slow' aesthetic? The case of Bagnoli

Ristorante Bagnoli is located in a farm house on top of a hill in the middle of a forest close to the small village of Castagneto Carducci, on the South West coast of Tuscany. From the restaurant it is possible to see the nearby beach of Donoratico and the Tirreno Sea. The restaurant was first opened in 1964 by the owners of the farm on which it is situated. In those years it was extremely simple: there was no electricity (the owners used gas lamps to illuminate the interior), no refrigerator, and no central heating (warmth was provided by a fireplace and a large antique wood-burning stove). The menu offered only a few traditional Tuscan dishes and the products came mostly from the farm (e.g. chickens, eggs, geese, pigeons, fresh vegetables, honey) and the forest (e.g. wild mushrooms, wild asparagus, wild boards, deer meat and berries). In 1980 the owners of the land franchised the management of the restaurant to a woman who moved to live there. She ran the restaurant with her two sons until 1992. Few changes were introduced during this period and the restaurant retained its typical character: products were drawn from both the vegetable garden and the surrounding forest and there was no wine list.

Photograph 1: *Entrance of the restaurant Bagnoli*



Even though the restaurant, which has about 50 seats inside and another 40 outside, was profitable, the management changed in 1992 and the current proprietor and chef, Sauro Conforti, took over along with his brother and his parents. Previously the Conforti family had managed a larger pizzeria in the nearby village of Donoratico, located by the sea. Work in the pizzeria was quite intense, especially during the summer, when large numbers of tourists come to the area. So when they heard that Bagnoli's manager was leaving the family expressed an

interest in taking over the restaurant, believing that the change would allow them to do something different, something less labour intensive and more fulfilling. As Sauro Conforti puts it,

“I wanted to do a different type of work, less intensive and more interesting, more creative. Now we are seven people working during the summer and only five at weekends for the rest of the year (two waiters, three people in the kitchen). I work in the kitchen with my mother and another lady from Castagneto Carducci. I decide the menu and the recipes with my mother (she always makes the cakes). My father takes care of the barbecue. We start from the traditional recipes and the products we always used, and we offer many traditional dishes. Yet I also like to innovate and experiment a bit, but always within the line of our regional cuisine, without going out of the seeded field, as we say.... because these are the tastes and flavours I like. We have our chickens, geese etc. and a vegetable garden and I like to propose seasonal products - now, for example, it is the season of asparagus and I like to think about recipes with asparagus, that are best at this time of the year”¹⁰.

In the light of these aspirations it is unsurprising that Sauro and his brother should have been drawn to the philosophy of Slow Food. Once they had taken over the restaurant they joined the movement and began to work closely with the local condotta.

While the restaurant continues to base its cuisine upon the products of the forest, and thus embodies the traditional Slow Food philosophy, it has also become more sophisticated in recent years. In particular, the wine list has been expanded and now includes about 300 labels, all from Tuscany. Recently a list of distillati (Italian Grappas) and a menu of typical cheeses have been introduced. However, in Sauro's view, the restaurant has not changed in its original spirit:

“I have always liked to go and visit the wine producers of the region and buy myself the wines that I want to have in the restaurant. Now the market has changed, you cannot buy yourself any longer: all Tuscan wines have become more fashionable, especially the ones from this area, and you can only buy through a middleman. Still, I like to go and visit the producers every year and taste the wines before buying them. Also the cheese menu was my idea: cheese has always been my passion. But I started to think about a menu based on a selection of typical cheeses after the crises of beef consumption in 1996, after the BSE scare. Tuscan cuisine is very much centred upon meats, especially beef, and in 1996 we felt the need to broaden our menu because the customers were more reluctant to order meat, especially beef and the T-bone steaks were banned. I go to visit the farms and buy directly the cheeses from the producers in the region. For all the other products, DOP cheeses from other regions, beef and other meats, I have a supplier specialising in typical and high quality products and I buy everything I cannot produce or buy myself from him”.

In winter most customers come during the weekends from the nearby towns of Piombino and Livorno (for Sunday lunch) but during the summer the customers comprise mostly tourists (a number of whom have discovered the restaurant through Osterie d'Italia and other such guides). Thus, as Sauro Conforti confirms, the type of client visiting the restaurant has gradually altered:

“During this ten years the type of clients who visit the restaurant has changed significantly, the number has increased but the ‘level’ has also changed. Sometimes among the clients

you can find some ‘celebrities’ [many famous singers, actors, musicians, photographers and so forth have bought summer houses in the hills of Tuscany and it not unusual to see them in typical restaurants]. Still, most clients are middle-class tourists, not particularly sophisticated in their choice or knowledge of foods and wines. For the German tourists the ambience, simple and warm, and the location in the forest is especially important. The use of typical products, many of them originating from this environment and our vegetables coming from our garden, is reinforcing the positive impression created by the ambience. But the number of ‘food and wine lovers’ is growing, i.e. those people who come specifically for tasting wines or for special occasions, and they are able to appreciate the quality of wines and cheeses or olive oils and the new presentation of traditional dishes. Many of these new food and wine lovers are quite young, in their thirties, and this is new.”

When asked whether he has introduced new products – such as wines and cheeses – in order to cater for these new customers, he says:

“No, because they are not so many, the majority of our clients are common people, not food experts. I have broadened the menu, introduced the cheeses, enlarged the wine lists because it is my aspiration to bring in more things that I like. When the wines of this area (i.e. the Bolgheri wines such as Sassicaia, Ornellaia, Paleo) gained an international reputation I have seen a possibility that this discourse could have been successful...”

Photograph 2: *View of the dining room*



The restaurant is not only deeply embedded in the ecology and the associated products of the area, it is also well connected with local institutions and food networks. One of these stems from the municipality of Castagneto Carducci, which is actively engaged in creating an image of the locality as an ideal destination for eco-gastronomic tourism. During the last decade the municipality has sponsored

a series of events for the promotion of local high quality wines and typical foods, such as food fairs, wine tastings and thematic dinners. These initiatives include a 'seasonal products dinners' which is devoted to the promotion of local gastronomy and local products¹¹.

Through involvement in these local initiatives Bagnoli is incorporated within a rich array of local linkages. These linkages mean not only that its products retain a strong sense of the local terroir but that the restaurant gains customers who are seeking an authentically local cuisine experience. In this sense, Bagnoli can be seen as part of a local network that binds together the local ecosystem (such as the forest), local political authorities (such as the municipality), and local economic institutions (such as hotels and restaurants). The eating experience at Bagnoli thus mobilises this local network while simultaneously revealing its component parts.

Discussion

In evaluating the significance of this case, we identify here three concepts that help us to capture the distinctiveness of the osterias that are included in Osterie d'Italia. The first is the notion of practical aesthetics which refers to the tacit knowledge of local terroir and the craft skill involved in reproducing traditional cuisines. The second concept is an ethics of local, typical products which refers to the systems of evaluation that are brought to bear in the local gastronomic context. The third is connectedness which refers to the set of linkages that comprise the "gastronomic landscape" (O'Neill and Whatmore 2000, p.132) of local food suppliers, institutions, rural animators and brokers.

The practical aesthetics of restaurant work

As we mentioned earlier, practical aesthetics is a concept we employ in order to describe the artful or pleasurable component of restaurant work. We were alerted to the significance of this component of food preparation by Gary Fine's (1996) book *Kitchens*. Fine proposes that the work of chefs, cooks and other kitchen staff cannot be fully understood if the aesthetic dimension is not factored into the analysis. In his study he argues that much of what is defined as the 'quality of labour' has aesthetic attributes: "For some the criteria for quality labour are primarily in the product: the sights, feel, taste, or smell; for others they are in the performance: but for each the work has a style, a sense of form, an aesthetic" (1996, p.180). In Fine's analysis, food preparation requires 'aesthetic choices' to be made and these choices are a form of organisational decision-making in which restaurant workers have genuine freedom of expression. Thus, the aesthetic dimension holds some relative autonomy from the economic: "aesthetics emphasises that these choices are distinct from purely instrumental and efficient choices: that workers care about 'style' not only technical quality" (Fine 1996, p.178)¹².

In the example of Bagnoli indubitably the scope for practical aesthetics is very high. For Sauro Conforti the possibility of expressing his own style of cooking and proposing the 'tastes' he prefers represents the main motivation for moving from the pizzeria (that was also profitable) to the restaurant in the forest. Since he started to run Bagnoli every innovation introduced in the management and provision of

dishes (from recipes to wine lists and new menus) has been shaped by some form of aesthetic evaluation (even though such evaluation has never been fully disconnected from economic calculation). Yet, at the same time, the dishes and foods emanate from long-standing traditions – they express a localised version of the Tuscan cuisine, one very much rooted in the surrounding landscape (i.e. the forest).

Thus, Bagnoli, along with most ‘slow’ restaurants shows how a practical aesthetic animates the labour process in ways that work with, rather than against, tradition and typicality. Moreover, this aesthetic has a sensory component. Fine believes “food involves more sensory dimensions than any other art form....” (1996, p.13). And according to Parasecoli (2001, p.69), all the senses are involved in some way in the appreciation of food quality:

“eating (in a cultural sense) is impossible without taste....[there are] primary tastes (sweet, salty, acid, bitter) and nuances (tart, astringent, spicy, balsamic – for which there does not yet exist a satisfactory categorisation) [and] appreciation of the harmony among the elements, which is primarily intellectual”.

This sensory dimension comes to fore at Bagnoli. The food retains an ‘earthy’ taste and carries with it clear connections back to the terroir of production. The linkage between the elements can also be appreciated through an understanding of the restaurant’s cultural and ecological significance: it sits in the midst of the forest and brings the flavours of the forest to the table. It is this confluence of flavours that marks the success of Bagnoli’s aesthetic endeavours.

The aesthetical-ethics of typical products and regional cuisine

The practical aesthetic of typical foods is founded on the linkage between food and terroir. This linkage is important in defining the quality of the food, for typical products, as much as typical dishes and local restaurants, embody a distinctive quality. The specific taste of typical foods is constructed through their association with the landscape of production, as though the soil can somehow be savoured in the food. Yet, the ‘nature’ enshrined in the food needs to be cajoled into playing this role. The creation of traditional dishes is, therefore, an ‘artful’ activity, one that requires skill, knowledge, and care.

A practical aesthetic here combines the social and the natural in the very taste of the foods themselves and this combination points to an ethical element in the products and cuisines proposed by Slow Food. Firstly, the ‘slow’ ethic is closely tied to the pleasure of food: to Slow Food supporters that which is truly ‘good’ is that which embodies taste. This is evident in Sauro’s narrative about his choice of local and typical foods. The selection of products (regional cheeses and wines, olive oil from local producers) and the appreciation of the quality of these products is partly rooted in tacit knowledge derived from his mother’s cooking (“the products we always used”) and is partly derived from his personal knowledge of the producers gained through his frequent visits to the farms. Secondly, the ethical value of the foods derives from their embeddedness in terroir, in the local natures and ecologies that comprise the products. Thus, Sauro takes great pride in drawing his ingredients from the forest that surrounds the restaurant. In the food, the restaurant and the

forest flow into one another and the resulting 'hybrid' conjures up notions of the 'common good' in terms of both a robust local ecology and a vibrant local society.

Connectedness: typical products in their local context

The quality of typical foods derives from a combination of human skill and knowledge, the character of the surrounding ecosystem, and the cultural appreciation of the interlinkages between these components. The terms cuisine and terroir convey the nature and character of the interlinkages. According to O'Neill and Whatmore (2000, p.133),

"Cuisine de terroir challenges the notion that food preparation is a service which is increasingly able to be reproduced from place to place according to venue and demand. Instead, it sees food preparation and consumption as grounded in the landscape – soil, climate, growers and suppliers that have been historically assembled and nurtured into a complementary and evolutionary network keenly tuned to local growing conditions, markets and each other's needs. Yet cuisine de terroir requires a flow of local produce grown in quantities, varieties and to a standard quite different to that required to supply modern urban supermarkets"

So food culture, environmental sustainability and the local economy converge in an interconnected set of linkages across the gastronomic landscape.

Bagnoli is an example of this embeddedness: it holds strong ties not only to the ecology and the associated products of the forest and the surrounding area, but also to local socio-economic institutions. For instance, the restaurant participates in the wine route 'Costa degli Etruschi', which was established in 1994¹³. The Consortium around Costa degli Etruschi now consists of eighty-four members, including wine-growers, agri-tourist farms, producers of honey and olive oil, artisan processors of salami, and local entrepreneurs from the leisure sector (Brunori and Rossi 2000, p.410)¹⁴. By playing its part in this route, Bagnoli is able to build up its customer base while also ensuring that its products feature on the local gastronomic landscape.

Another example of the restaurant's embeddedness in the local economy is its participation in the promotional activities advocated by the municipality of Castagneto Carducci which, as we mentioned above, is actively engaged in creating the image of the locality as an ideal destination for eco-gastronomic tourism. In this context, Bagnoli and other Slow Food activists in the area act as catalysts for the constitution of a heterogeneous network which includes both rural entities (e.g. restaurants owners, wine producers, local farmers, typical products, endangered species, local institutions, etc.) and urban actors (hotel owners, tourists and food lovers). The network is constructed around the cuisine de terroir and strives to assert the value of typical foods in ways that maintain both local traditions and local ecosystems. It therefore consolidates 'slow food' in the Tuscan countryside.

Conclusions

In the preceding pages we have examined the aestheticisation of food in the context of 'eating out' and we have distinguished two main aesthetic types: first, an

'aesthetic of entertainment' in which food quality is subservient to the restaurant experience; second, a 'gastronomic aesthetic of food' in which the quality of food, notably seasonality and freshness, is seen as the primary consideration. Having distinguished the two types, we then investigated the second – the gastronomic aesthetic – through the case study of a Slow Food restaurant in Tuscany. The Slow Food movement seeks to heighten the aesthetic appreciation of typical products and works mainly through local groups and typical restaurants. Using the in-depth analysis of one such restaurant, we outlined three main strands in the gastronomic aesthetic: a practical aesthetics of restaurant organisation; an ethics of typical foods; and, an aesthetic of 'connectedness' or 'embeddedness' in which the food is seen as a reflection of surrounding socio-economic and ecological relationships.

In general terms, the practical aesthetics of typical foods indicates that the aesthetic dimension of food and rural development is an important, if neglected, area of study in rural sociology. For instance, we find in the case study presented above a whole variety of actors – including restaurant owners, chefs, consumers, local political institutions, social movements – operating, at least to some degree, according to aesthetic criteria. These criteria hold some relative autonomy from economic and social criteria, that is, the aesthetic is bound up in economic and social practices but comprises a distinct mode of social action, one that works according to its own modes of valuation and ethical judgements. For this reason we believe the aesthetic dimension of social life should be given much greater consideration in the theories and research agendas that make up rural sociology. The countryside itself is largely an aesthetic construction, one that reflects the variety of aesthetic criteria that diverse social and economic actors and institutions bring to bear. As we have shown in our brief consideration of food-inspired rural development, social struggles around aesthetics can hold profound consequences for economic, environmental and social structures in contemporary rural areas.

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Notes

1. 'Typicality' may be thought of as "historical memory, geographic localisation, [and the] quality of raw materials and techniques of preparation" (Torquati and Frascarelli 2000, p.343).
2. Practical aesthetics is a concept we borrow from Gagnier (2001) to describe the artful or pleasurable component of work in typical restaurants. Gagnier calls "practical aesthetics" the aesthetic component of everyday activity and indicates that it marks out a zone of economic life that cannot be subsumed within economic modes of calculation or evaluation. In other words, it retains a non-instrumental or intrinsic value of its own.
3. Promar in a recent market research report has estimated that by 2020 the catering industry will provide 40% of all food consumed in the European Union, and even higher

percentages are estimated for USA (<http://www.retailing-studies.com/PROMARUK/>).

4. Fine (1996) reports that already in 1987 in the USA there were over 330,000 eating places. Warde and Martens (1999) cite a Business Monitor report that counted 110,195 businesses in catering in UK in 1994. In Italy, according to the data provided by ISTAT (National Institut of Statistics) in 1998 there were over 236,000 businesses in catering (restaurants and hotels).
5. This trend is also confirmed by the growing number of 'themed' restaurants, such as Planet Hollywood, inspired by the Hard Rock Cafè, and the proliferation of themed Cafè bars, such as Harley Davision Cafè, Rain Forest Cafè and Fashion Cafè (Gottdiener, 2000).
6. In the sociology of culture the term 'cultural omnivorousness' has been used by Peterson (1992) in order to describe the process by which people develop an appreciation and knowledge of an increasingly large number of cultural genres in different fields, e.g. music or food. See Miele (2001b) for a discussion of the concept.
7. The dominance of terroir was assured by developments outside France, notably in 'New World' locations. A version of nouvelle cuisine was imported into the USA at the end of the 1970s by chefs such as Alice Waters, who celebrated local origin, seasonality and wholesomeness of ingredients. This led on to the New American (or Californian) Cuisine which similarly extolled the virtues of local rootedness and belonging. The same rhetoric is informing food preparation processes in Australia (see O'Neill and Whatmore 2000) and the new American fashion for 'Sustainable Cuisine', as defined by the organization 'Chefs Collaborative' (founded in 1993). 'Sustainable cuisine' means that cuisine should not only celebrate the pleasures of food (in terms of taste) but should also highlight the impact of food choice on health, animal welfare, the environment and cultural diversity (Schwartz 2001, p.21).
8. 'Osterias' in Italy are small restaurants, generally family run businesses, and they offer meal at reasonable or medium price.
9. The material presented in the following section is drawn from fieldwork on Slow Food restaurants in Italy conducted by the authors which comprised visits to over 20 restaurants listed in *Osterie d'Italia* during the last three years and interviews with a number of proprietors (five in total). More specifically Mara Miele carried out several interviews with the Bagnoli restaurant chefs and workers (both old and new management personnel). She also met with *fiduciario* of the local Slow Food Convivium and representatives of the local authority in Castagneto Carducci. These formal interviews (which numbered six) in total were supplemented by participant observation, including visits to the restaurant as paying customers.
10. The following quotations are taken from an interview carried out by the authors with Sauro Conforti in January, 2002 at the restaurant. The interview was tape-recorded, transcribed and translated into English by Mara Miele.
11. For example, during the 'new olive oil dinner' (*la cena dell'olio nuovo*) held in January, typical restaurants in the locality serve dishes which allow for a tasting of the full flavours of new olive oil. The municipality and Slow Food promote this initiative by sending an invitation to all the members of the *condotta* and other local organisations. The restaurants involved will use the olive oil produced by local farmers and the farmers themselves will take a tour around the tables, introducing themselves to the clients, and describing the characteristics and differences of the local olive oils.
12. While Fine wishes to show that aesthetic concerns animate restaurant workers in food preparation, he is also aware that these concerns must interact with the economic dimensions of restaurant work. He says "cooks must keep one eye on the stove and the other on the marketplace, balancing their sensibilities with what the hospitality industry will permit" (ibid. p.190). The structure of the industry and the labour process within the

restaurants 'enable' and 'constrain' the expression of aesthetic sensibilities. Comparing a fast food restaurant with an up-market eatery in USA, he (ibid. p.192) says: "the self-image and market niche of a restaurant affects how workers view the sensory qualities of their production". Thus the scope for practical aesthetics varies according to the organisation of the labour process and the economic positioning of the restaurant.

13. As Gatti and Incerti (1997, p.148) define them, "wine routes are a 'signed-posted itinerary' through a well defined area (region, province, denomination area) whose aim is the 'discovery' of the wine products in the region and the activities associated with it. This discovery is carried out directly on the farms (enabling the traveller to meet the producer) and/or in the spaces specifically organised around the wine produced (wine tasting centres or wine museums)".
14. The Consortium was formed and the wine route was formalised in the 1990s. The promoter of this initiative was a group of wine growers (most famous of all the Marchese Incisa) that in the early 1960s introduced Cabernet vines to the Bolgheri area and started to age the wines in barrels. A new generation of quality wines was created and some of these (e.g. Sassicaia) have gained an international reputation. The example of these wine making pioneers was followed by other producers (some of whom specifically decided to move into the area to produce quality wines) and nowadays 90% of the wine farms included in the Consortium produce only high or medium quality wines.

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Mara Miele

Dip. di Agronomia e Gestione dell'Agroecosistema
University of Pisa, Italy

Jonathan Murdoch

Dept of City and Regional Planning
Cardiff University, UK