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For four days in late September of 2007 the centre of Bra, a small medieval town in the Italian Piemonte, was taken over by tens of thousands of people with, at least on the surface, the simple goal of celebrating a single product – cheese. 1 “Cheese! 2007” was the fourth in a series of biennial fairs organized by Slow Food International, to create a festive atmosphere around “rare and vanishing dairy products” and promote the protection of what it labels as not only artisanal but indigenous dairy products (Petrini and Padovani 2005). For from being on the radical edge, “Cheese” in its various incarnations has enjoyed the consistent support of the Italian Ministry of Agriculture and the European Union. Over the years a host of other formal sponsors have come on board, including many regional governments in Italy. 2 While Cheese! 2007 can best be described as a microcosmic spectacle of consumption, it also served as a good vantage point from which to observe the dense weave of issues and diverse interests that underpin the instrumentalism of cheese as it is used in diverse cultural-political projects at different sites in the world as it travels through a commodity circuit. This paper is an initial attempt to tease apart that dense weave and begin to isolate just what those political projects are, how cheese serves instrumental interests on those projects, and how those projects are interconnected through particular threads of interdiscursivity.

In working to accomplish this, the paper traces an arc through a set of sites in which value is created for cheese. These sites include the spectacular microcosm of Cheese! 2007; the institutions of regulation that seek to govern the definition of cheese; the cheese shop that serves as an ambiguous site of exchange; and specific modes (books, videos, cheese courses) through which a structured appreciation of cheese can be acquired. By momentarily stopping in each of these sites, I hope to reveal the ways, not only in which the value of cheese is created in relation to distinct political projects (and the struggles associated with them) that operate in each of these ‘sites’, but how each of these political sites and projects is inherently translocal, even as they seek to assert a defensive localism.

My point in doing this is to use the circulation of cheese, - the festival and the commodity - as a lens through which to examine a range of relationships and processes concerned with social and economic

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1 Unless otherwise indicated, when I use the word cheese in this paper, I am referring to what is commonly known as artisanal, farmstead, or ‘fine’ cheese.

2 Official sponsors of Cheese 2007 also included a regional governments, municipalities, tourism departments, chambers of commerce and a host of private companies.
transformations in a variety of locations, but more importantly, to explore how the distinct concerns of a range of actors use an artifact like cheese as a way to engage in disparate yet overlapping cultural projects. Specifically, a focus on a single commodity, like cheese, becomes a vehicle to explore:

1) the movement of commodities in relation to projects that both create and subsequently exploit the value of that commodity
2) the ways in which strategies of regulation serve to create value within distinct spatio-temporal locations.
3) the processes through which social status is read into a product and subsequently embodied through acts of consumption,

The paper ends with a number of reflections on methodological approach that begins to structure ethnographic projects in a way that can grasp the complexity of the cultural articulations created, destroyed and reconfigured in that circulation.

**Cheese in the World**

Walking into a cheese shop today in a city like Toronto, where I live, is a microcosmic experience. It is to walk into a small, ordered, world of shelves, typically behind a glass counter, stacked with cheeses organized by country, or even region, of origin. Occasionally the organization might differ and the order may reflect types or categories of cheese, all assembled in a single location, reducing the geographical complexity of production to the micro-globe of the cheese shelf. To paraphrase a clerk in a cheese shop when I asked about this arrangement: “Here are the French Cheeses; we buy direct. Over there are the Italian, mostly from a domestic importer. Above those are the English. We deal directly with producers and reserve a quota of their yearly production.” This, of course is not unique to Toronto. The same general arrangement can be found in Paris, London, Melbourne, Rome, and Buenos Aires. The list goes on. But what is important about the existence of the microcosm of the cheese shop is that it is a product of modernity; the outcome of a set of conditions through which emplaced elements of subsistence economies became mobile commodities in global markets. Along the way, cheese, like so many other commodities, has become an instrument in diverse political projects: the production of cultural identities; the promotion of regional economic development; practices of class distinction; exercises in defensive localism; the manufacture of cosmopolitanism. This has not always been the case. To understand the utility of cheese as an instrument in these diverse projects, it is necessary, at least briefly, to consider the history of ‘cheese in the world’, and the developments that set cheese in motion.

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3 My use of ‘cultural’ here includes what others might call economic, political and social projects.
“Pecorino is just cheese to these people.”

The Cheese festival in Bra is largely about consumption. Producers, buyers, consumers, and distributors elbow their way from stall to stall talking to producers or cheese mongers, occasionally buying but largely devouring the small samples laid out by producers on their countertops. After sampling over twenty different varieties of pecorino, a hard Italian sheep’s milk cheese, I overheard this remark - “Pecorino is just cheese to these people.” For all its flippancy, it contains an important insight on the generic qualities of cheese in its places of origin. To say that pecorino is just cheese is to say that when a particular group of people call something cheese, they are referring to pecorino. What we might call this ‘origin reference’ is a linguistic reflection of the fact that cheese, whatever its distant historical origins, is a local material expression of human-ecological interaction. Specific types of cheese were common to subsistence economies and while there may have been variations in production between villages or valleys based on tenure rights governing access to resources of differing quality, people living in specific places made and consumed specific types of cheese and had little exposure to alternatives. This is not to say that trade did not occur. Indeed cheeses were likely a strong medium of exchange in local markets, but for people whose lifetime spatial horizon was limited to a few kilometers, consuming a variety of distinct types of cheese was not a common life experience.

This widespread limit to consumption within subsistence economies is an important marker in the development of class associations with particular types of cheese, for it is only people who were able to transcend subsistence limits – an elite aristocracy - who could imbue diversity with value. To use Europe as an example, it was at Court where a diversity of food was consumed. Contrary to the representations of organizations like Slow Food International, the peasant diet was restrictive well into the twentieth century (Pilcher 2006). The main components of subsistence diets were locally sourced, whereas a diet of ‘the authorities’ was more spatially extensive. This spatial reach included the capacity to accumulate diverse types of cheese. In France, for example, a wide trade in cheese existed. Nobility owned dairy farms that produced large quantities of cheese and would supply cheese to court. Cheese was also used to pay tithes to the church. In the 12th and 13th centuries, English cheeses were more prized than Norman cheeses as the Normans controlled the best pastureland in England, and Henry II is reputed to have sent English cheeses to Phillipe II of France at Gisors in the 12th century (Boisard 1992). In the accumulation of regional produce from sovereign territory, the consumption of diversity is what can be seen to generate particular class associations with the consumption of cheese.

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4 The story of the shepherd leaving his milk in a rennet-lined calf stomach bag and later finding curd is the most common of these.
This is not to say that specific types of cheese did not take on particular class associations, but that modern taste was shaped to some extent through a historical association with power. Indeed common elements of the origin myths of well-known cheeses like Roquefort or Camembert are moments of consecration by royalty. Any description of Roquefort, for example, contains a reference to the Royal sanction of 1411 through which Charles IV granted the people of Roquefort-sur-Soulzon the sole right to manufacture the cheese (e.g., Herbst and Herbst 2007; Masui & Yamada 1996). And the spatial leap of Camembert from local to French national symbol is said to have occurred through a chance encounter between the grandson of the supposed inventor, Marie Harel, and Emperor Napoleon III in 1863 at the train station of Surdon. The young man presented the Emperor with one of his Camemberts. “The emperor found the cheese much to his liking; congratulated its producer; invited him to his palace...and requested that he deliver the product to him on a regular basis.” (Boisard 1992; 7). In this single act, the new cheese of Camembert was consecrated and made into a national symbol through the favour of a more potent national symbol – the Bonapartes.

That the encounter is said to have occurred at a train station is not without significance. The concurrence of social revolution in Europe with advances in transport not only contributed to the development of an urban bourgeoisie but it facilitated the development of markets to provide urban populations with a range of commodities and provided outlets through which the consumption of diverse foodstuffs could be experienced. With increasingly rapid access to the produce of regional markets, cheeses were made available to urban consumers in varieties and volumes never before seen. But, in many ways, cheese is an odd comestible, for it has been both a dietary staple of rural producers and a luxury food for urban elites. Cheese became a luxury food not so much because of what it was, but because of the many different forms in which it could be consumed. The capacity to consume difference was the mark of distinction that connoted the food as a luxury. In many ways, then, cheese was a food that, on the one hand, transcended class associations through its universal familiarity, but on the other, worked its way up the European class ladder through the capacity of the nobility to accumulate and consume a diversity of cheese from a wide spatial region. What distinguished, say, the 19th century Italian Sicilian peasant from the noble, among other things, was that while the peasant could eat pecorino made in or near her land; the noble, could eat cheeses from across the country.

What is notable about the shifts following the mid-19th century is that the consumption of diversity that had been the unique province of nobility, and its signification of power, worked its way down the European class ladder until it became a mark of distinction for an emergent bourgeoisie (cf., Mintz 1996). In Paris, for example, an increasing range of cheese had been appearing in city markets from the 16th century, but demand rose dramatically in the 19th century and regional cheese makers began to seek
Boisard (1992; 32) relays a tale from the diary of one Normandy Camembert producer who began shipping by train into the Paris market in 1858, and turned to the wider markets of Lille and Flanders in the 1870s. This spatial expansion, mimicked by other producers, demanded greater production, and Normandy quickly saw the commercialization and industrial organization of cheese production. Producers required middlemen – market brokers and specialty grocers – to ensure the distribution and sale of their product. But there was money to be made. “Dedication to cheese making in the Auge”, says Boisard, “was not the result of age-old tradition, but rather the result of a contemporary choice based on economic calculations and abetted by a few innovative farmers with the backing of the Association Normandie.” To some extent, the relation between producer and retailer was reciprocal. To maintain a mark of quality distinction and to supply not simply cheese, but a diversity of cheese, the retailer needed to seek out new sources of product.

It is common, in the interwoven realms of food production, distribution and consumption, to find distinctive origin myths at each juncture. The tale of the House of Androuët, one of Paris’ primary fromageries, is an origin myth from the turn of the 19th century that heralds the structure of contemporary cheese distribution, and hints at the role of the distributor in structuring consumption:

When Henri Androuët, who started off as a peddler for Gervais, had the idea in 1909 of making cheeses from all the regions of France available for tasting to Parisians who were unaware of their country’s rich cheese heritage, the history of the house of Androuët began. Henri Androuët went into business for himself and opened his crémerie in the rue d’Amsterdam the following year. The house of Androuët was born, and with it the concept of curing as a principle of production.

After the tragedy and disruption of the Great War, he developed his business, curing and aging the available cheese on the market. The banality of the products then being distributed encouraged Henri Androuët to seek out new ones, even going to visit the producers directly in order to get them. His quest for cheeses led him to crisscross France at a time when country roads were still unpaved, slowly acquiring a unique and profound knowledge of the cheeses of France, the places where they are made, and the people who make them.

In the mid-1920, the fame of the house of Androuët, which by then was offering more than one hundred cheeses, had reached the point where Henri Androuët was prompted to open a tasting cellar which soon became a gathering place for cheese lovers. Around 1925, out of a desire to familiarize people with the resources of France’s terroirs, Henri Androuët created his “cheese calendars.” They listed over one hundred types of cheese, each presented under a regional or local name and accompanied by its period of full maturity. The innovative brochures were a huge success, and seeing the interest and curiosity that had been awakened in his customers, Henri Androuët opened a tasting room adjacent to his curing cellar. The cream of Paris cheese-loving society rushed there to discover traditional recipes using cheeses.

In the mid-1930s he and his son Pierre opened the restaurant that was to make the family famous, above the cheese shop. The wine selection, the range and quality of the menu, and the care taken with au service soon made it a much-recommended dining place. Success was immediate, and the Androuët gourmet restaurant became an institution. Following in his father’s footsteps, Pierre Androuët took to the highways and byways of France to look for cheeses, *A producers association established to regulate production.*
In this origin myth Henri Androuët and his son, Pierre, are positioned as arbiters of taste, their position legitimized through the acquisition of a specialized knowledge acquired through travel to the source of the product. Of course, this history is constructed to serve the contemporary needs of the Androuët Company. But the narrative presumably plays on latent imaginaries that hold some value for contemporary consumers. In this narrative, the Androuët’s are culinary pioneers of sorts. They not only source and deliver the commodity to unfamiliar consumers, but, as a function of that unfamiliarity, they literally teach consumption as spatial practice, invoking terroir as a basis of distinction between cheeses, and, through their tasting rooms and restaurant, set normative standards for the consumption of cheese.

The role of cultural broker assumed by the Androuëts is made possible by a product set in motion, released from a cage of regional limitation not only by modern transportation technologies, but by social changes that witness the devolution of dietary habits, practices and tastes through class hierarchies. Androuët (the firm) is obviously tying to cultivate an image of prestige, innovation, and tradition in their narrative, but the story suggests that the rise of an ‘appreciation’ of cheese is a phenomenon associated with the development of an increasing interconnectedness in France. It also suggests that the capacity to experience diversity was only available in the large urban centers to an educated class who could afford the product and whose distinction was enabled through agents like the Androuëts. The consumption of cheese, along with wines and other products associated with nationalism, became a way of establishing class boundaries through consumption (the ability to consume, and be taught to appreciate via the skills of the Androuët family, “the resources of the nation’s terroirs”) and thus a mechanism for social distinction. France’s terroirs centered on the capital. Rural areas did not have access to the diversity of products from different areas of the country, but those in Paris could sample cheeses from around the country. With the interlinking of communication networks and modes of distribution in the late 19th and early 20th century Europe, cheese enters wider channels of spatial circulation. And this mobility of cheese is driven by the creation of new value, spurred not only by the social aspirations of a new consuming class but also by the capital interest of producers seeking out new spatially extensive markets for their products.

This creation of value, however, attached as it is to place and technique of production, also created the ability to appropriate a portion of that value simply by name association.6 Not surprisingly, attempts to exploit value by association generated counter-attempts to defend against such appropriation. Short of

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6 e.g., capitalizing on the consumer value associated with Camembert by labeling a cheese a Camembert regardless of ingredients, place or techniques of production.
force, this defense can be established in a number of informal and formal ways. The most common informal mechanism of defense and the one that underpins more formal mechanisms is the invocation of *terroir*. More formal mechanisms include branding/trademarking, which provides legal recognition and protection to the individual cheese maker; the development of societies for the standardization and regulation of production; and the development of regulated Geographic Indications (GIs). However helpful it is to think of these as individual techniques, it is misleading to separate them for purposes of analysis as the development of protective mechanisms typically involves the interplay of diverse mechanisms. Regulatory Geographical Indications or labels of origin, for example, are typically mobilized through the activism of producers associations and the resulting regulatory standards are built around the human-environmental qualities that are said to characterize *terroir*.

The historical structure of production-distribution-consumption described above provides a perspective through which to interpret the spectacle of *Cheese! 2007*, which brought together similar actors – producers, consumers, distributors – albeit from a much wider geographical range, along with government agents and tourism operators, and during which arbiters of taste offered ‘tasting workshops’, reproducing the instructional practices developed in the 19th century to promote the consumption of new foodstuffs among unfamiliar audiences. Of course, actors and events have intervened over the years to modify this structure, including the industrialization of food production and consequent resistance movements, but perhaps one of the most significant interventions has been the development of regulatory mechanisms to codify production practices. One of the most prominent images of *Cheese! 2007* was the intentionally foregrounded presence of the letters PDO – Protected Designation of Origin - the European Union’s version of an origin label. This commanding presence of PDO indicates that new actors have assumed a degree of institutional interest in extending the circulation of cheese in the world. If, historically, a nobility and the subsequent development of an urban bourgeoisie have been the driving forces that set cheese in motion, the sanctioning authority of the three letters PDO points toward the much more recent influence and agency of state and regional economic actors in structuring contemporary flows of cheese as a commodity.

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7 Definitions of *terroir* vary but it is typically seen to be the qualities of natural and human interaction that yield a peculiarly regional character to products like cheese and wine
8 The most common form of protection in Britain
9 Such as the Société Civiles des Caves Réunies (to later become the Société Anonyme des Caves et des Producteurs Reunis de Roquefort), formed in 1842 by independent makers of Roquefort. The Société subsequently takes out a trademark and becomes a publically traded company listed on the Bourse de Paris. The Société also oversees the adoption of industrial techniques for the production of Roquefort.
Nature, Codification and the Institutionalization of Production

Terroir is widely cited as an untranslatable term; a French phrase that indicates the way in which the qualities of place are embodied in and expressed through the agricultural produce of that place. Historically applied to wine, the phrase has become familiar to North American consumers through the increased consumption of wines since the early 1980s, and has an appeal that lies very much in a naturalist aesthetics. Writers on terroir speak, usually uncritically, of ‘allowing a terrain to be itself’ of not interfering with the ‘natural’ taste that products from that locale should display; of a dance with ‘nature’ that of allows ‘the land’ to express itself through the product; of the producer as translator or interpreter of nature (e.g., Wilson 1998). Terroir is intrinsically a vague term – the extra ‘something’ that combines natural qualities with histories of human occupation, knowledge and practice and essentially defines a regionally typicality. Despite its appeal to the ethics and aesthetics of a romantic naturalism, terroir, is rarely treated as a social construct. Barham (2003), for example, notes that government agents cited terroir as the most important of 27 concepts they use in assessing requests for appellation d’origine contrôlée (AOC) designation. Within certain frames, terroir is ontological, and despite its seemingly French origins, the term has traveled far beyond its linguistic boundaries and come to be used to describe a range of artisanal products produced in diverse locales around the world. Given this mobility and adaptability, it is helpful analytically to consider terroir as a cultural strategy, for terroir can only be deployed in an act of comparative distinction - separating this regional product from that regional product - by people who have both an interest in producing distinction, and access to the commodities that can be characterized by applying a knowledge of geographic distinction. Despite its contemporary use as a mechanism of defensive localism, it is not difficult to grasp the class roots of the concept that created social value associated with the articulation of a wide geographical knowledge, but also how a concept like terroir might achieve a hegemonic status.

In his work on cultural production and consumption, de Certeau (1984; 35-36) describes strategies as “the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that become possible as soon as a subject with will and power can be isolated.” A strategy postulates a place—an interiority from which relations with an exteriority, often composed of targets or threats, can be managed. Accordingly, a strategy is accompanied by certain effects including practices of surveillance that allow the transformation of “foreign” forces into objects that can be identified, observed and measured, and controlled. They also contain a type of knowledge “sustained and determined by the power to provide oneself with one’s own place.” In other words, a certain power and social position make the knowledge deployed in distinction of self and place possible, while it simultaneously produces itself in and through that knowledge. Strategies, then, perform

10 But see Tomasik (2002)
11 The French national Geographical Indication, or certification of origin, label.
the work of distinction, of establishing the boundaries through which the interior is separated from the exterior; they create the otherness that is used as the basis for the assertion of difference. But these strategies are enacted from distinct situated positions that represent distinct situated interests. It is not difficult to imagine that a French nobility, seeking to distinguish regional produce, had markedly different interests in deploying terroir than the producers of regional products seeking to defend not only a market demand but the structures of identity upon which that demand is based. That terroir is a durable (and transportable) concept suggests that those multiple interests continue. For the modern state, the valuation of terroir (and related concepts) and geographical typicality lies, at least partially, in the national government’s ability to invoke an appreciation of diversity – diversity of regions, diversity of produce, diversity of peoples, diversity of history – which is both conquered, and fostered, by the nation. In the context of a nation, representation of regional typicality through material product is a mode of expressing the benevolent nurturing power of nationalism – an essence a statement that ‘we, as a nation, can maintain difference within our unity’.12

Indeed, it is to the State that producers turn when external forces threaten the boundaries of typicality. For all its cultural significance, terroir requires codification to provide protection in contemporary markets. This protection has developed, over the past century, in the form of what have come to be known as “Geographical Indications”13. The concept of regulation based on Geographical Indications is certainly grounded in concepts of terroir, but perhaps most importantly it is rooted in the association between place, production and process (Ilbery et al. 2005). Rather than focusing on producers as the key differentiating factor in production, GIs effectively act as a mechanism to restrict the difference between individualized producers and regulate on the basis of place of production. While some producers have readily accepted these terms, others, particularly those engaged in the production of new cheeses have not. Contrast the producers of Roquefort, who sought out communal regulation as early as the 17th century in an effort to restrict competition from producers outside of the community, and established a Société to co-ordinate the legal judgments that defined the characteristics of Roquefort, with the producers of Camembert, who set out to promote lineage rather than place as the essential factor in the production of a good round of cheese. Boisard (1992; 34), for example, demonstrates how her descendants actively produced the legend of Marie Harel, the alleged inventor of Camembert in the mid-19th century in an effort to distinguish their product from that of their competitors. “By proclaiming their kinship with the woman who had invented

12 It is significant, for example, that a successful AOC application in France not only legally protects the appellation as the collective property of the producers, but officially designates the product as part of the agricultural, gastronomic and cultural heritage of France. (Barham 2003, Douget and O’Connor 2003)

13 GATT (Agreement on trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual property Rights (TRIPS), Annex 1C, article 22()), defines these as: “indications which identify a good as originating in the territory of a [member] country, a region or a locality, where a given quality, reputation or characteristic of the good is exclusively or essentially attributable to its geographical origin, including natural, human and heritage factors.
Camembert, Marie Harel grandchildren were giving themselves the stamp of authenticity and tradition”, and creating a discursive means of distinguishing their cheese from those of their competitors. After having had a near monopoly on the production of Camembert, which was becoming increasingly popular, and making a place for itself in the Parisian market, Harel’s descendants lost their exclusive rights to its manufacture. By representing their matriarch as the inventor of Camembert and using her image on their product, they were attempting to use a ‘right of inheritance’ to generate a link between lineage, authenticity, and quality – “[t]hey alone, by virtue of their blood relationship, were in a position to produce true Camembert cheese according to the correct recipe.” Yet they could not develop a loyal clientele solely on the grounds of lineage. The legend was not readily circulated, and other producers recognized the need to organize in an effort to prevent others from impinging on the geographical value of Camembert. By the time they did so, however, it was too late to stop Camembert from having become a generic term and they were unsuccessful in suing for AOC status until 1983 when producers finally acquired protected legal status under the label Camembert de Normandie.

The French Appellation d’origin contrôlée was the first in a series of national legislations that began to appear in Europe at the turn of the 20th century. These were grounded in a simple assumption that “typical” products are “enmeshed in both the place and history of their area of production” and cannot, consequently be held to be the property of individual producers (Barham 2003). Cheese makers, say, may produce Parmigianno Regiano, but no one of those producers has an exclusive right to the name or to the properties of time and space that produce the cheese. Rather, they are recognized as common property within a delimited area. In essence, AOC legislation was an explicit codification of terroir, designed to provide legitimation for a product and to hold producers accountable for their acts of production in an effort to: i) articulate quality and place and ii) defend the spatial limits of production.

The AOC was the first piece of legislation in Europe to regulate the use of regional names for food products. The original applications were for wine, and the AOC has largely become known as a guarantee of a wine’s provenance. Starting in 1905 it began to define the wine-producing regions within its borders, and extended application status to cheese and other foodstuffs shortly afterward. Roquefort was the first AOC cheese, with status awarded in 1925. Other European nations followed the French example. Italian cheeses can be legally regulated under a Denominazione di Origine Controllata (DOC), established in 1951. Over the years, Spain has also attempted to implement a similar system, largely applied to wine but these were not consolidated until Spain’s entry into the EU. National GI legislation in Europe was rationalized

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14 This is one of the reasons why the U.S. has challenged Geographical Indicators legislation through the WTO. GIs challenge the economic and legal logic of individual ownership that underpins American business, and particularly the individual ownership and subsequent market exchange of trademarks.

15 I am using articulate in both senses of the word here. That is, AOCs held quality to be a function of linkages between natural qualities and modes of production; and also communicated that assumed quality through the affixing of an AOC label.
in 1996 under the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union, which established a hierarchy of geographical indication legislation, the most stringent of which is the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO). Like much EU legislation, the PDO is grounded in, and works through, the legislation of member states where it previously existed, and implements new legislation where it did not.\(^{16}\)

PDO criteria vary between jurisdictions but the EU accepts the AOC criteria as the basis for the issuance of a PDO. The AOC constitutes a legal definition of a cheese based on:

1) the species and breed of livestock from which the milk is obtained
2) the catchment area for grazing the livestock, obtaining the milk and producing the cheese.
3) the process or technique involved in making and aging the cheese
4) the composition of the cheese including fat content, type of milk, rind
5) the cheese’s physical characteristics (size, shape, weight)
6) specific attributes of the cheese including color, flavor and aroma

To acquire a PDO producers must organize themselves into associations that agree to uphold the rules of production at a local level, and compile an application. The application itself is telling, as it delineates the fields within which tradition, distinction, quality and authenticity are narrated and codified. In the application, for example, producers must:

1) explain the reason motivating the request for an AOC
2) provide evidence that the name they are requesting has a historical reputation with consumers and is known to them
3) establish the product’s close tie to the terroir of origin based on natural factors, and on human factors, which combined, should produce the products typicality or special traditional character
4) provide evidence that will allow an evaluation of how well the product distinguishes itself from other similar products, which exist on the market
5) describe the area of production and the exact procedures involved in production of inputs and processing
6) carry out an economic study of the product, including existing and potential markets, prices, distribution channels, value-added of this product relative to other similar products

Once a PDO is awarded, government regulatory agencies are expected to establish procedures for inspection and enforcement. Agents are trained in the knowledge of particular products and are responsible for assuring that producers follow the techniques dictated by their label. Producers found to be in violation of the standards can be expelled from the consortium of producers that holds the certification and banned from selling goods under the protected name. Historically, however, this has not meant that, specifications are static. Far from it, producers associations can, and do, seek amendments to

\(^{16}\) The UK, for example, which had historically operated through trademark legislation is in the midst of implementing a PDO system, and awarding status to producer associations (though the UK legislation allows individual producers to apply for PDO status.)
Roquefort, for example, has been subject to five amendments since 1925, most recently in May, 2005\(^\text{17}\). There is a certain paradox in the way that PDOs seek to reify the relation between product, process and place, and the somewhat displacing effect of the codification process that effectively restructure these relations. In many ways Geographical Indications reveal one of the ways in which production is displaced – taken out of a historical set of socio-spatial relations and redefined to both constitute and incorporate new authoritative actors (cf., Cook and Crang 1996). Although production under PDO criteria still occurs in localized contexts, the definition of those contexts increasingly is a function of connection to and negotiation with spatially expansive networks of actors and systems of regulation. The presence of a PDO label on a cheese, for example, reflects the completion of a power-laden process of negotiation across multiple regulatory regimes from the informal normative standards of a village, or producers co-operative, thorough the administrative offices of regional, provincial, and national governments and supra-national institutions. One of the best examples of ‘displacement’ facilitated through PDOs is state-supported attempts to quantify terroir in an effort to streamline the PDO monitoring process (e.g., Brunschwig et al. 1999).

Not surprisingly, given the expense and labour involved in inspection and monitoring production conditions, national governments have supported efforts to scientifically demonstrate a link between product and terroir. One of these efforts has been work on terpene\(^\text{18}\) profiles, which allow the tracing of seasonal and geographical variations in ruminant diets; distinction between milk from animals fed on natural pastures versus hay; discrimination between milk obtained from pastures located in different geographical areas, and between milk from animals fed on highly diversified plant diets and those fed on monospecific grasslands. This has contributed to the development of ‘Terpene fingerprints’ which produce “a measurable component of the terroir-to-product linkage” (Cornu et al 2005) and could help in delimiting areas for PDO products; and verifying that specifications concerning animal feed and production technologies have been fulfilled – in essence generating traceability to ensure that cheese production processes accord with legislated specifications (e.g., Lombardi and Zeppa 2005). The displacing effect here, however, stretches beyond the spatial extension of networks regulating production and counterposes two concepts of place. One, essentially ‘cultural’, requires the adjudication of taste to identify and delimit terroir. The other translates taste to chemical or geographical signature, further reifying terroir by seemingly absolving it of the need for human judgment. Given that part of the cultural-economic cache of terroir is its mystification, this would seem to have the ultimate effect of devaluing, or at least radically altering the

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\(^\text{17}\) The most recent amendment reduced the minimum time that cheeses must spend in the caves of Roquefort-sur-Soulzon to 14 days, allowing producers to circulate more cheese through the caves and satisfy an increasing market demand.

\(^\text{18}\) Plant secondary metabolites ingested by herbivores and present in milk and milk products.
value-added effect of terroir, as it not only reifies, but also demystifies it. That mystique – the je na sais quoi quality of terroir – has, until recently, been an integral part of the ability to assign an intangible, yet profitable, value to products like cheese. This is, after all, the role and cultural cache of connoisseurship - the value that the taste judgment of expert panels, and the awards they bestow, assign to cheese.19 By subjecting production to a much more specific set of delimited and exact criteria – those that can be expressed through chemical signatures - terroir becomes dematerialized and taken out of the hands of human judgment; much less an expression of the nuances of human-environment relations, than a product of denatured, transcendent rules that allow particular groups (regulatory agencies, producer associations, foreign buyers and distributors) to govern not only production standards but ecological relations (cf., Mintz 1996).

**Political Projects and the Instrumental Utility of Geographic Indications**

The setting of cheese in motion – its travel into the domain of market-based exchange -has created the possibility of changing the constitution of place-based production by displacing production relations and ‘reterritorializing’ them within a regime structured by contested negotiations between distinct actors: the bureaucratic, and economic interests of the state, the economic and cultural desires of producers and consumers, the ideological desires of rural and culinary activists, and the profit motivations of brokers, among others. This has been achieved largely through the productive domain of disciplinary writing emblemized by the PDO. In seeking to become a signifier of quality and authenticity (and associated ideologies of place, tradition and idyllic rurality), the promoters of PDOs are more than open about the added value of such associations. The European Commission highlights the premiums generated by GI designation, citing surveys indicating that consumers are willing to pay a 10% premium for GI products:

“GIs provide added value to our producers. French GI cheeses are sold at a premium of 2 euros. Italian “Toscano” oil is sold at a premium of 20% since it has been registered as a GI in 1998. Many of these products whose names are protected, are exported.” (European Commission 2003).

While the economic gain associated with assurances of quality and authenticity are frequently cited as the driving forces behind the promotion, and acceptance of PDOS, it is difficult to assign a singular instrumentality to these regulatory mechanisms. Stepping behind the facade of EC market concerns, it is not difficult to parse multiple strategic interests involved in the application of PDOs to products like cheese. These include:

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19 What Appadurai (1986; 46) termed the “cultural regime for authentication”, in which authenticity is a product of “popular and public kinds of verification and confirmation.”
1) Regulatory Agencies - Certainly the existence of a regulatory structure serves both the interest of State and Supra-state agencies like the EC as a mechanism for the extension of governmental authority and oversight. In an adjudicating role, the state can, on the one hand, claim to be adhering to its obligations to safeguard and promote the interests of its citizens through the application of the PDO while simultaneously using certification as a mechanism of social control. The PDO like any form of certification acts as an instrument through which the state attempts to solicit the accommodation of its regulatory legitimacy – a means to reproduce the social contract, and justify its existence, as it were. This is certainly the case, with the emergence of PDOs and their attempt to spatially, and administratively, extend Geographical Indication legislation. As the EC, for example, claimed the authority to advocate on behalf of member states, it sought to extend its legitimacy through developing a uniform mechanism to sanction commodities, in many cases simply replicating and operating through mechanisms, like the AOC, already in place. At the same time, confronted with the need to standardize health codes, PDO specifications can be used to define ‘tradition’ in a way that accords with and extends modern health codes and concepts of sanitation, and in doing so, encouraging producers to alter the characteristics of their cheese, which they willingly do in an effort to reach wider markets (Sage 2003).

2) Rural Development Agencies - Regional governments and tourism authorities recognize the utility of PDO status as a mode of rural economic development (Bessière 1998, Goodman 2004). Their primary interests are economic gains expected to derive from: i) the expected income increases from the price premiums associated with PDO products; and ii) indirect economic benefits associated with leisure tourism. Governments and private producers have been quick to appropriate the benefits of a leisure economy that exploits PDO status (and the association between place, process and product) to package ‘culinary tours’ that combine visits to sites of production with exercises in consumption – visits to ‘traditional’ restaurants; expert-led tastings, and so on (e.g., http://gourmetsafari.com/). In many cases, it is knowledge of a product that facilitates knowledge of, and desire to experience, place. Private and public interests recognize this and regularly work together in attempt not only to benefit from this association, but also to actively generate and popularize the association between product and place. In 1986, for example, the autonomous Murcian government insisted that local cheese makers develop a cheese unique to the area that could be awarded regional commercial status and distinction. The result was Queso de Murcia and Queso de Murcia al Vino. These were quickly designated a regional product and assigned an Alimentacion by the Spanish Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación, the first step in acquiring PDO status from the European Commission. Queso de Murcia is in many ways, then, an example of the creative value of the PDO, as it effectively brings typicality into being through the specific agency of regional governmental agencies and the desire of
producers to capitalize on the potential markets created by product/place affiliations. This strategy reveals the operation of a politics of scale and difference in the creation of value. Regional governments are engaged in creating a ‘typicality’ for the region (i.e., using products tied to place defined as region) as a means of distinction - a way of establishing boundaries (fluid though they may be) through the materiality of the production of cheese. But any resulting economic development only works through i) restructuring local identity formations around the new product; or ii) extra-local markets in which people express a desire to consume that typicality and possibly aspire to visit the region because of that consumption. Typicality, then, means something different for a local than it does for an extra-local population, suggesting that part of the interest of regional authorities in developing typicality through consumption may be a way of marking out an interiority and developing a commonality and trying to retain a fixity of the place/identity relationship in a context of increasingly mobile people and capital.

3) Producers Associations - PDO status, as much as it is represented as a mechanism for protecting ‘tradition’, acts to facilitate the assertion of control by associations of producers who can use it to standardize and regularize production to their advantage, and exclude those producers who challenge the normative boundaries structured by the majority, or the powerful. It is not difficult to imagine the play of power among local groups of producers meeting to produce an application for PDO status, and the subsequent structuring of production around a successful application. While there is research to suggest that consumers value GI labels as a guarantee of quality and safety (Tendero and Bernabeu 2005), business initiatives centered on product differentiation and the representation of quality are responses to market saturation caused by an increase in agri-food production and decreased demand for the traditional or artisanal product. In response dairies have simply engaged in redefinition of their products in an effort to differentiate themselves from their competitors by stimulating specific demand and facilitating commercialization. GI labels help achieve this through diversifying the product base – creating new submarkets – and making that diversification recognizable to consumers. Remarkably, they are able to achieve this through a mechanism that demands, facilitates, and subsequently codifies ‘tradition’. Indeed, a commonality of GI applications is the requirement for a narrative that recites a traditional history of production, yet as Bérard and Marchenay (1995) point out, submitted narratives of the territorial uniqueness of a product, or the history of traditional production practices, are rarely questioned by granting agencies. (cf., Tregear 2001). This is not particularly surprising given the dominant EC interest in PDOs as an institutional mechanism through which imaginaries of tradition and place (and associated ideals of nature and community) are used to create added-value for producers and to cultivate export markets.

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20 It is just this kind of imagining that can be given substance through ethnographic practice.
Producers are not blind to this and structure GI applications and amendments not so much in defense of tradition, but in defense of market position. A brief reading of amendment applications for example, reveals the ways in which the constituents of productive practice are reinvented behind the PDO veil of tradition that shields the consumer from knowledge of such changes. Over the years, for example, the members of the Roquefort consortium that oversees the AOC/PDO status have shortened the time that cheeses need to spend in the caves to be considered ‘true’ Roquefort. They have also reduced the amount of salt in the cheese to accommodate contemporary tastes\(^{21}\), and mechanized certain aspects of the production process (Fabricant 1988). Producers who do not abide by these changes in procedure cannot call their cheese Roquefort.

PDO status also allows dominant groups of producers to invoke other disciplinary practices that lead not only to alteration of production but also to the diminishment of other regional products. The production of Crottin de Chavignol, for example, a cheese once sold at various stages of ripeness under different names, was altered when it was awarded an AOC status in 1976. The AOC specification described the mature cheese, which has a desiccated, crumbly character. After the AOC designation was awarded, the syndicate of producers suppressed the sale of the young fresh cheeses (known as Sancerrois) because they did not meet the aging requirements specified in the AOC (Rance 1989). Similarly, in their application for PDO status in 1994, the Stilton Cheese Makers Association (SCMA) made mandatory pasteurization a part of the Stilton PDO specification. The application was approved in 1996 and subsequently any cheese made with the Stilton recipe but using raw milk cannot legally be called Stilton, even though they more closely resemble the cheese ‘traditionally’ called Stilton. The SCMA has adopted a firm defence of the PDO:

“The SCMA is responsible with the relevant government authorities for ensuring correct use of the Stilton name and in recent years action has been taken against traders, manufacturers and retailers in the UK and elsewhere who have attempted to pass off ineligible cheese as Stilton.”

As with many acts of domination, resistance is not far behind, and ‘Stilton-like’ cheeses using raw milk have begun to appear in the market. In a thinly veiled challenge to the SCMA, one set of these producers, unable to use the name Stilton because of the legal status of the PDO, have called their cheese Stichelton\(^{22}\). In a more direct challenge to what they see as the industrialization of Stilton,

*We intend to keep the production of Stichelton small-scale and farm based and, when demand outstrips supply, to encourage and help others to start production of similar cheese. The name Stichelton is a registered trademark and we are applying for a European Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) to help preserve this traditional new cheese. (Stichelton Dairy Ltd. 2007).*

\(^{21}\) And presumably salt’s loss of luxury status.

\(^{22}\) The producers originally considered calling the cheese Notlits, a more direct slap in the face to the SCMA.
The odd juxtaposition of “traditional new cheese” indicates many of the contradictions wrapped up in PDO status. Prevented from using the Stilton name, while producing a product closer to the historical standard than cheeses made by SMCA members, Stichelton Dairy is in the odd position of making a ‘traditional’ product under a ‘new’ name. The reason for this largely circulates around the concerns of producers whose individual livelihoods are bound to a collective, largely identifiable only by the name of a cheese. In the case of Stilton, for example, the demand to pasteurize milk stemmed largely from a fear that an outbreak of illness from any one company’s raw milk cheese would compromise all producers. Pasteurization as a legal standard, operating through the PDO, solves this dilemma of collective risk, but it simultaneously compromises producers who want to produce what they see to be a higher quality, more traditional product. This facilitation of large-scale producers is one of the emergent critiques of GI legislation: that it is seen to paradoxically hide behind a veil of tradition while effectively suppressing small-scale producers who are seen to be competing with PDO status cheese. They are also seen as a way to implement production specifications that reflect legal imperatives and modern sanitation norms, and help producer associations to tailor specifications to modern consumer and retailer demands (Bomberger 2005). Yet, as we see in the case of Stichelton, the opposition created through the exclusionary uses to which PDOs are put is ready to appeal to the same, seemingly transcendent rulebook, to mount its reaction. It is not willing to challenge the foundation. It is not willing to compromise the material and symbolic value sanctioned by a legally codified relation between place, process and product. Rather, it uses it as defense and it is these defensive strategies that are perhaps the most important in appealing to emerging transnational markets that are, increasingly, the outlet for fine cheese.

4) Rural Activists - Despite the ways in which GI status has served large producers consortia, the expression of product-process-place relations that underpin concepts of terroir and its subsequent codification, have been remarkably useful in assisting social activists to mount a defensive localism that grounds itself in the reproduction of social tradition. The instrumentalism, however is steeped in a particularly parochial conservatism that reproduces a particular politics of difference. Certainly terroir and its codification in GIs can be read as an attempt to capitalize on authenticity through marketing, and that is certainly a tactic of defensive social movements. But that tactic is grounded in a strategy that sincerely seeks to delineate ecological and social boundaries - to distinguish an interiority from an exteriority. It expresses a desire for fixity, and that desire allows authoritative bodies to regulate – just as monarchs once regulated the production of comestibles as a mode of distinction, states exist within networks of institutions that seek to

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(23) The challenge mounted by Stichelton is to some degree unusual in that it is financially supported by the owner of one of Britain’s largest cheese retailers and exporters, Neal’s Yard Dairy
reify products like cheese, consign them to categories (place of origin), and regulate their production. Increasingly one of the actors in this network of institutions have been social movements that seek to defend what they represent as traditional rural livelihoods against the emblems of a simplified globalization. One such organization is Slow Food International (SFI). But organizations like SFI do more than simply defend localism. Rather they seek to expand ideologies of production-consumption relations that help to structure new markets, and in the process alter the product itself. It is important, then, to treat these organizations not simply as a node through which to explore the creation of value, but as a mechanism through which consumption is increasingly shaped. Before I do that, however, I want to emphasize the way in which what I have been discussing is an attempt to substantiate Foster’s (2005; 286) observation that the creation of value in relation to any particular commodity represents “the strategic interests and partial knowledge with which particular actors encounter and construct a commodity at different moments in its circulation.” Governments, regional authorities, farmers, the local fromagerie, international distributors all embody these strategic interests in the construction of ‘cheese’, but increasingly so does SFI.

The Morality of Cheese: A Paradox of Defensive Localism in a Transnational Cultural Economy

Slow Food International has been anything but slow in extending an odd cultural politics of activism that it labels eco-gastronomy. The standard mythic origin tale is of its founder Carlo Petrini, experiencing an transformative moment in 1986:

“Walking in Rome one day, he [Petrini] found himself gazing at the splendid Spanish Steps when the overwhelming odour of French fries disturbed his reverie. To his horror he discovered that not twenty meters along the piazza loomed the infamous golden arches of a well-known food chain. ‘Basta!’ he cried. And thus begun a project which would take him all over the world in order to promote and protect local culinary traditions.” (Italy Daily cited in Leitch 2003; 454)

After establishing Slow Food’s headquarters in his hometown of Bra in 1989, the organization has grown rapidly both in scale and influence. It now has offices in Switzerland, Germany, New York, and Brussels where it seeks to influence EU agricultural policy, and has an international membership of 80,000. Petrini’s transformation and the growth of the movement must, of course, be contextualized. Petrini, a well-known food and wine journalist in the 1980s was able to mobilize a relatively educated group of activists because of existing social clubs tied closely to the Italian Communist Party. While Petrini had been associated with the northern Italian Left through the 1970s, he had also been part of a change during the 1980s in which the historically rigid austerity of the party shifted and many members, including Petrini, adopted “the language of consumption as a form of transformative cultural politics” – a politics of pleasure that, along
with other social changes created the conditions for the advancement of a commodification of culture in Italy (Leitch 2003; 450). The movement was originally conceived within a class-based politics of consumption but rooted its activism in an opposition to the standardization of both production and consumption that links the pleasure of consumption to the maintenance of ‘traditional’ modes of production. This opposition is grounded in a rhetoric of threats including: standardized food production by industrialized agriculture; processing and distribution by large agro-industrial corporations; the disappearance of specific tastes and local material cultures of production through regulated processes of standardization (e.g., EU Health standards); the disintegration of traditional rural foodways; and the absence of alternative food distribution networks. These forces are loosely ascribed to a monolithic ‘globalization’ and are seen to account for a decline in the social relations that underpin production in rural areas (Leitch 2000, Labelle 2004, Pietrykowski 2004).

SFIs initial goal was to provide symbolic and material support for ‘traditional’ relations of production, through the promotion and restoration of consumption of ‘traditional’ cuisine, in ‘traditional’ – read, ‘slow’ – ways (Miele and Murdoch 2002). As one North American writer put it, aptly exposing the mobilization of pleasure as the appeal to class interest: “their goal is to preserve the excellent culinary delights that have existed in various cultures for centuries” (Anonymous 2002; 6) This statement, however much it continues to reflect dominant North American perceptions of the movement, does not reflect the identity and strategy shifts that Slow Food has gone through since its inception. In an effort to be more widely relevant and incorporate more issues and actors, SFI has extended its political base by accommodating and adapting the languages of environmental and social justice, and developing mechanisms to engage in the protection, reproduction and extension of not only production systems but the promotion of ‘taste education’ with a goal of securing markets for those production systems it promotes. Says Petrini, “it is our view that rather than pay homage to the logic of macroeconomics, we should operate within a regional framework and promote new forms of ‘slow’ production and supply” (Petrini et al. 2001: 2) This statement is remarkable for its lack of reflexivity, the degree to which it fails to recognize how localness and regionality are already subject to macroeconomics, and the way in which the ‘success’ of the movement in ‘taste education’ and defense of pleasure create a macroeconomic context.

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24 e.g., the decline in the influence of historical actors (political parties, labour unions, Catholic church); the emergence of economic growth; the expansion of commercially organized leisure (e.g., rise in Agriturismi); the passage of cultural power into the hands of an economic elite; the rapid emergence of an influential independent non-profit sector; the development of new civil spaces facilitating new forms of civic associationism; and the emergence of the Italian state as development actor within context of EU assistance programs.

25 Slow is code for an opposition to the relations of production and consumption involved by an image of ‘fast food’, anticipating more recent ventures like “fast food nation”. “Slow, then involves notions of unadulterated, locally based products, cooked in conventional ways and enjoyed at a leisurely pace in which social relations can be developed and reproduced. Read descriptions of this ‘slowness’ closely and it is not difficult to discern the patriarchal lens through which it is conceived, yet there are few gender-based critiques of the Slow Food movement (but see Bock 2004).
that extends the market not simply for the commodity BUT for the qualities that the commodity (e.g. fine cheese) transmits to humans through the act of appreciation (a result of taste education) and consumption (an act in defense of pleasure). The goals of the movement imbue the commodity (fine cheese) with new power (the facilitation of distinction) that creates its own spatially extensive markets facilitated by new models in and technologies of transport and retail.

As with any social movement, it would be a mistake to see the Slow Food membership as singularly focused either through its membership or its mode of operation. Indeed, it is designed, in part, to facilitate local expressions of taste in production and consumption. But there is a clear template through which the organization operates. While coordinated from an international headquarters, the organization functions through a number of different forums. One is the organization of what it recognizes as celebratory festivals such as *Cheese! 2007*. But the primary mode of international co-ordination is through the formation of *convivia*.

Convivia are chapters of Slow Food that form the foundation of conviviality and provide the grassroots fuel for the movement. More than 160 convivia all over the US invite members to taste, celebrate, and champion the foods and food traditions important to their communities. Convivia are led by volunteer leaders, and convivium is distinct in its approach and local activity. Convivium comes from the Latin word convivere – “to live with, hence to feast with” – because conviviality is an essential ingredient of Slow Food. (Slow Food USA - http://www.slowfoodusa.org/contact/index.html)

Convivia are often described in Slow Food literature as the frontline in the *defense of pleasure*. This defense was accompanied from the beginning by a second foundation of the movement – *the education of taste*. This is one of the functions of Slow Food events, like *Cheese! 2007*, which are always opportunities for gustatory indulgence, filled not only with samples of supported products, but with ‘expert-led’ workshops designed to teach consumption through the circulation of knowledge regarding production practices, techniques to develop a discriminating palate, and the development of vocabulary to describe the taste sensations produced through that palate. SFI has also been successful in introducing curriculum packages to Italian public schools, and establishing a University of Gastronomic Sciences in Bra with the support of regional and national governments. It has also partnered with Italian and EU government agencies in support of food-related international development assistance projects.

Beginning in 1996, however, these programs were joined by a more avowedly political objective – the preservation of biodiversity through the support of eco-agricultural practices – what Slow Food calls the *Ark of Taste*. The biblical reference is intentional. The Ark of Taste was envisioned as “a way to catalogue animal breeds, cheeses, meats, fruits, grains, and herbs threatened with extinction due to consumer substitution with lower priced, standardized products.” and is designed as a vehicle through
which threatened production systems and products can be protected and extended (Pietrykowski 2004; 315). It operates through the development of a rubric for identifying foods typical of a particular region or locale; identifying endangered products; establishing associations – *presidia* – as a mechanism to provide resources to help protect the product through technical assistance, apprenticeship training, assistance with government regulatory systems; and promoting consumption through the development of market outlets and encouraging restaurants to adopt endangered products for inclusion on menus.\textsuperscript{26} According to the Slow Food USA website,

*Presidia...are conceived as ‘forts’ that protect and bolster regional artisanal foods. The survival of many producers of local artisan products is threatened by the mass-marketed homogeneous products of a global corporate food industry and by dramatic changes in the farming environment.*

For producers to be considered for a presidia, their product must be: unique, of high quality and with excellent flavour; tied historically, economically, and culturally to a precise territory or locality (sometimes named after their place of origin); limited in production although a potential for increased production is desirable; prepared according to specific techniques that reflect tradition or an innovative interpretation of traditional methods; and symbolically important as a regional food.\textsuperscript{27}

Presidia are, to some extent, the showcase of Slow Food. Organized under a separate foundation – the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity – *presidia* are conceived as a line of defense against the extinction of livestock species, lifestyles, production practices, products, and consequently tastes. They are organized around a rhetoric of the relation between traditional practice and biodiversity protection, and not only reveal the application of an instrumental naturalism to products like cheese, but invoke a static conception of tradition.\textsuperscript{28} Here, for example, is a written description of the *presidium* organized around Bitto:

*Bitto cheese descends from an ancient tradition of high mountain cheesemaking. Slow Food created this presidium to help augment and maintain the production of Bitto cheese from Alpine meadows. Presidium members are engaged in maintaining and promoting a list of traditional practices: from the rearing of local goats (the cheese is made with 10-20% goat milk), to the rationing of pastures; from manual milking, to the use of calècc, ancient stone huts that serve as mountain dairies.*(Fieldnotes, Bra, Italy, Sept. 22, 2007)

And another for a Swedish cheese: Jämtland:

*Cellar matured goat cheese is a traditional product from the mountainous area of central Sweden. There are today producers in the provinces of Jämtland and Häggedalen. For centuries this cheese, then simply called white goats cheese, was produced in the summer pasture villages, far away from the home farm, as a way to reserve the excellent*

\textsuperscript{26} There is a certain irony in the way that SF uses the language of biodiversity conservation, yet promote consumption as a mode of protection.

\textsuperscript{27} Note the similarity to requirements for PDO status.

\textsuperscript{28} The value created through this rhetoric is discussed below.
quality, creamy milk produced from the goats that grazed in varied pastures of meadows, heath and forest. Now ... it is made in a few remaining summer pasture farms. ...Each producer’s cheese is made unique by the pastures on which the goats graze and by the natural molds of the old stone cellars. Cheese making also means a better chance for survival for the indigenous breed of goat, the Svensk Lantrasget...Once tens of thousand soft Svensk Lantrasget could be found in Sweden, but now it is considered a threatened species and less than 2500 survive today...Production of traditional raw milk cheese in Sweden has been threatened by increasing industrial cheese production and food safety legislation aimed at large scale production...The presidium was created to encourage the continued making of this traditional cellar matured goat cheese by increasing the awareness and appreciation of the tradition and of the cheese taste and quality.

These short examples of presidia representations reveal how cheese becomes produced as a moral object through an ethics of naturalism and tradition. Slow Food promoters have effectively adopted the vernacular of biodiversity conservation and play on the constructed value of diversity (biological and cultural), and a consequent fear of extinction, as a rhetorical strategy for justifying the protection of production practices and the lifestyles that underpin them. In doing so, they capitalize on a negative public moral association with the idea of extinction that has been produced in relation to wild animal and plant species. This is complimented by an aesthetic of redemption; as species conservation has broadened to a concern with biodiversity conservation/protection, the artisanal movement has been able to capitalize on the public gains of the conservation movement and its vernacular – the romanticism associated with and consequent support of local knowledge, ecological diversity, and indigeneity. Within this rhetorical framework, cheese is vested with redemptive properties for the producer. As a commodity with value to an external market it is seen to contain the capacity to maintain, and in some cases, restore the social relations that are necessary for its production and are that are read as ‘traditional’ in the locales of production. It is seen, then, to maintain a social order that is often read as naturalized – as ‘the best way’ to live a life within a given set of environmental constraints. It is in this context that a vocabulary, developed in the context of socially-oriented biodiversity conservation, has come to be applied to cheese. Within the rhetoric of Slow Food, and the presidia it sponsors, cheese is seen as a vehicle that derives from local ecological conditions (not necessarily seen as dynamic). Perhaps more importantly, it is seen as the pure physical expression of local knowledge and customs. The descriptions found in presidia documents and imprinted on banners lining the streets of Bra during Cheese! 2007, for example, clearly appropriate a language of indigeneity and cast at least some European farmers not only as romantic peasant but as noble savage with an accordant mystical understanding of his surroundings. As a result, their products, once consecrated by the seal of royal approval, are now consecrated by the new spiritual undertones of indigeneity.

It is important to note, in the context of value creation, that the morality ascribed to cheese is not only read into practices of production but into the product itself in a way that allows cheese to enter the consumptive realm as natural and accrue the commodity value associated with naturalism. These naturalist
representations appeal to the consumptive desires of a consumer base that values health benefits and a distinctive social status and identity associated with the consumption of natural products, while simultaneously casting the producer in the role of creative vehicle rather than manufacturer. For example, the promotional brochure of the Artisan Somerset Cheddar *presidium* invokes nature to account for difference:

> Where the three artisan cheesemakers are totally committed to the key principles, there are clear differences between the cheeses. It is impossible to know precisely what causes these differences, but it is certain that the location of the farm, and therefore the soil type and pastures grazed, will have subtle but fundamental effects. Also, what cannot go unrecognized is the individual skill of the cheesemaker, who gently shepherds the natural process to allow the milk to become the cheese it wishes to be. (Fieldnotes, Bra, Italy, Sept. 22, 2007)

This, of course, is the language of a naturalist aesthetics; at once the assertion and disavowal of knowledge. Similar to the sculptor who claims only to be a medium through which a natural material expresses itself, these cheesemakers are claiming to be mere facilitators of a natural process, rather than manufacturers of a cultural artifact. It also assumes of course an end point – the final product. But the final point of expression in what the ‘cheese wishes to be’ is a desiccated, bitter mass. Ultimately, the commodity escapes the hand of the maker and enters a distribution system over which they have little control, and that belies the assertion of an inner character. As one North American cheese importer put it to me: “they [cheesemakers] hate us. Well, it’s more of a love-hate relation. They know they need us, but they think that we corrupt the purity of their creation.” The pathways of distribution contain nodes in which a cheese may alter in dramatic ways if not given ‘proper’ treatment. In relation to consumer desires (and to ideal standards) it may ripen too quickly, or dry out, or be sold ‘past its prime’. In other words, the ‘natural’ qualities of the cheese are not necessarily what the cheese maker wants to reach the consumer. It is the manufactured and controlled qualities that they want the consumer to experience as distinctive taste.

My point in laying out this description of Slow Food is threefold: i) to demonstrate the way in which Slow food seeks to lift a corner of the veil of commodity fetishism, while reconfiguring it anew; ii) to expose the paradoxical situation of defensive localism within Slow Food’s repertoire of practice; and iii) to position Slow Food as one vehicle through which the mechanisms of taste education travel into new market contexts such as North America. Recall the shelf in our cheese shop, sagging under the burden of diverse products from just as many diverse production locales. This coming together of different commodity worlds in a single space is an old observation by now and the visual selective arrangement of ‘the world’s offerings’ is usually invoked as a veil that “conceal[s] almost perfectly any trace of origin of the labour processes that produced them, or of the social relations implicated in their production (Harvey

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29 A group of three cheesemakers who produce some of the most expensive cloth-wrapped cheddar exported from Britain - hardly the endangered producers represented in Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity promotional literature.
Historically, however, it is just these relations, often obscured in the representation of other commodities, that the Slow Food movement is trying to selectively expose through deploying a rhetoric of artisanal and traditional production, and in doing so link consumption with a knowledge, and valuing of processes of production. In doing so, they lift a corner of the veil of fetishism to reveal a glimpse of producers, the geographical and ecological origin of products, and processes of production.

But Slow Food also effectively reconfigures the veil through discursive projects that reify tradition, ‘the local’ and idyllic rurality, even as it simultaneously transforms, reinvents, and repackages foods, like cheese, that were once common parts of local diets into rare, exotic items for gourmet consumption – and sends them back up the class ladder of food hierarchies. This work of Slow Food is grounded in boundaries. Slow Food effectively represents a sense of conflict that is built around some externally recognized force such as land developers consuming pasture, food producers/retailers manufacturing the convenience of processed, ready to eat, foods, or jobs taking people away from the farm or the village and the localized relations of production, distribution and consumption that revolved around the village/valley/alp. But this relational boundary tends to externalize an opposition that is really internal. It is ‘us’ – ‘local people’, to use the vernacular – who are taking jobs in cities, selling pastures to recognize material gains, and cooking processed foods. Despite this relationality, Slow Food, both (re)produces and exploits a boundary between an ‘industrial’ and ‘domestic’ sphere as fixed – the latter as a realm in which “quality conventions embedded in face-to-face interactions, trust, tradition and place support more differentiated, localized and ‘ecological’ products and forms of economic organization.” (Goodman 2004; 8).

Yet this boundary of the domestic and the social relations of production within the domestic sphere are never really penetrated by Slow Food. One reason for this presumably derives from the way in which the reification of tradition and the local - and the qualities they contain as seen through the Slow Food lens – become ontological configurations rather than the contingent outcomes of dynamic and power laden processes of social and spatial change. And yet the ontological condition of tradition and place or ‘localness’, occurs largely through a failure to engage with an analysis of the social processes and relations of power that reproduce and restructure the scale of ‘the local’. By conflating spatial relations with social relations, Slow Food fails to actually expose the social relations of production, and perhaps not inadvertently, legitimizes relations of domination at particular scales by hiding behind a fetishistic veil of place that masks and ignores the social conditions of different types of bodies in the commodity circuit.

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30 I say selectively because the phrases traditional and artisanal mask the sometimes oppressive social relations implicated in their processes of production.

31 What of oppressive gender relations reinforced by relations of production? What of the conditions of other workers situated differently within the commodity circuit (e.g., New York Jobs with Justice and Queens College Labour Centre 2005)?
Looking to challenge larger structures seen to be the fault of declining rural values and norms, it sets the boundaries of defense at the local - the community - and does not engage with questions of the operation of power in the domestic enterprise, the position of domestic labour, gender relations, or patriarchal property structures inside that defensive wall. (cf., Bock 2004; de Roest and Menghi 2000).

The absence of the kind of intellectual work that might address some of these concerns seems grounded in the development of Slow Food as a charismatic entrepreneurial, rather than a reflexive, social movement. The entrepreneurial quality is not only evident in the marketing of the movement, and the extension of its ideological platform through spectacles like Cheese! 2007, the declarations of manifestos, the writings of its founders and close associates, and book and speaking tours, but in the constant scanning for new product, new opportunity, new market niche. While the individualist basis of entrepreneurialism may seem at odds with the defensive platforms of Slow Food, the organization has been successful in articulating ideals of ‘tradition’ and place with the interests of leisure capital, the state, and science. The entrepreneurial character of Slow Food tends to expose the weakness of simplistic characterizations of the relationship between defensive localism and some loosely defined idea of globalization. Take Wilson and Fearne (1999 3), for example, who suggest that:

> globalizing, and modernizing forces often result in a search for place and tradition, i.e., rootedness. In the face of the new, some seek out authentic or shared sets of customs that can be protected, defended or reproduced. This, we argue, is at the abstract heart of regional specialty foods and regulation 2081/92.

Statements like these fail to recognize that ‘the new’ is always coming into being and the degree to which defensive ideologies are political (just as EU regulations are), and need to be considered in the context of the cultural-political contexts in which they develop. To write this off to “globalizing and modernizing forces” is to avoid the empirical responsibility of analyzing and describing this context. It also ignores the politics of a production of scale which understands ‘local’ and ‘global’ not as ontological configurations but as delimited phenomenon that are brought into being in relation to specific political projects like those of Slow Food

32 Slow Food, for example, has become a vehicle for the production of celebrity – think of the chef Alice Waters, recently elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Irony, a common characteristic of entrepreneurialism, can also be found in Carlo Petrini’s appearance on Whole Food podcasts, or in the use of multinational wine producer Robert Mondavi, recently vilified in the documentary Mondo Vino, to produce the ‘blurb’ for the back of Carlo Petrini’s first book.

33 These latter two are most clearly apparent in i) the adoption of the presidia model as a basis for Italian international development assistance and ii) the establishment of the Universita degli Studi di Scienza Gastronomiche – the University of Gastronomic Sciences, Slow Foods educational arm, founded by Slow Food International in conjunction with the regional governments of Emilia-Romagna and Piemonte. The professed objective is to create an international research center, working to renew farming methods, protect biodiversity and maintain an organic relationship between gastronomy and agricultural science. (http://www.unisg.it/eng/index.php)

34 Slow Food International, for example, produces multiple variations of localism and globalism delineated in terms of virtue. ‘Good localism’, for example, includes artisanal production for a spatially delimited market. ‘Bad localism’ might include the consolidation of small holders by regional producers who grew from initial positions as artisan producers. ‘Good globalism’
Slow Food does, through its operations produce a **politics** (as much as an economy) of scale. While the name connotes a temporal significance, a much more central element of the organization involves the defense of particular spatial relations. The organization is not simply engaged in a defense of rurality and rural livelihoods, but a defense of a discursive configuration (and the political/material expression of that configuration) that articulates situated representations of rural-local-tradition. Attempts to naturalize this configuration express a particular politics tied to the anxiety of ‘losing’ imagined rural communities. As Leitch (2003) points out, Slow Foods activities are wrapped up in questions of moral economies and with the imagination of Europe’s future as much as its past. Attempts to save these imagined communities are grounded not in planning or defensive policy but in a kind of entrepreneurialism that situates the mode of defense in material products like cheese that are, in turn, associated with the expression of conditions of locale (ecological expressions of beliefs/values/knowledge/practice), the presence of communities willing and able to reproduce locale, and the historical processes and networks of production and circulation acted out by those communities. But this, in many ways, is the paradox of Slow Food and the products, like cheese, that it supports – attempts at defensive localism, grounded in the production of a singular product, and attempts to communicate the goodness of that product, rely on spatially extensive markets that seek diversity, and whose members support a defensive localism through consumption of what they read as (morally) good products. In its apparent defense of localism, Slow Food is bringing the local into being and, much like the disciplinary writing of GIs, simultaneously ‘displacing’ it by situating the social relations of production in translocal circuits of regulation and consumption. It is reterritorializing the local in the space of its own regulatory operations, in the spaces of the governmental and institutional agencies it is affiliated with, in its own entrepreneurial agency, and ultimately in the ideological domain of its loose network of parochial yet transnational members (convivia).

Rather than seeing this as an analytic end, however, it is productive to treat this observation as a means, for the paradox is instructional if what we seek is an understanding of how ‘the local’ and ‘the global’ are relationally brought into being (in other words, how scale is produced) through the multiple political projects that set commodities like cheese in motion and direct their flow. This direction of flow, however, involves other actors in locations where the cheeses I have been discussing so far are largely unfamiliar. It is to these locations and actors that I turn now.

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includes international networks of activists that operate cells in locally delimited hubs in support of localized artisanal production. ‘Bad globalism’ most certainly includes large industrial producers that operate wide networks of locally delimited producers that do not defend localized artisanal production.
The Direction of Flow: Economies of Regard and New Spaces of Consumption.

“Hmmm... Rubbery...hmmm, now that’s not really a word we would use to describe a cheese, is it” (instructor of cheese appreciation course)

Once again we return to my cheese shop. I was there yesterday. The manager saw me coming. He always sees me coming. And he’s always ready. “Hey, long time no see” he says, with a big grin on his face. He doesn’t ask me what I would like, as he does other customers, but reaches into his mental database of good customers, locates my preferences and, as if he’s been waiting all day for me to walk in the door, smiles, quickly draws out a sample, and starts the dialogue that leads to the exchange... “you’ll love this. It’s the last piece of the round. I was going to take it home myself, but now you’re here. You have to try this. It’s perfect right now.” The assumption in this dialogue is that I am expected to know, appreciate and confirm the seller’s judgment of perfection. But this moment masks a great deal of spatial and temporal ground that precedes that piece of cheese entering my mouth and filling me with the pleasure that leads me back to the shop each week. Some of that ground we have covered. The rest – questions of how cheese ‘arrives’ in a city like Toronto, how it is circulated, how I and others are educated in appropriate taste, how it shapes identity will close this commodity circuit and lead us into more methodological questions of how we go about understanding the ways in which a commodity like cheese is constructed differently as it encounters different actors across space and time.

Cheese, in many ways has become ‘the new wine’ in North America. The correspondence is, in some ways, fairly obvious – initially exported from Europe, it has expanded its market through the shaping of North American taste, altered relations between consumption and class identity in Europe and North America, and led to the subsequent expansion of domestic producers. While there are similarities between the expansion of markets in wine and cheese, the methods, networks and motivations for expansion contrast in striking ways. Understanding not simply the expansion of cheese but the contrasts with other products like wine means looking deeply into value struggles that occur in a number of different realms of consumption and the interests of distinct actors engaged in each of these overlapping realms. Marketers would have us believe that consumption opportunities are created by consumers, as if market opportunities simply respond to consumer demands and that producers, retailers and marketers play no role in introducing unfamiliar products, producing demands and teaching people how to ‘appreciate’ new products and use them in acts of distinction: “Plurality, diversity and originality characterize consumer behaviour patterns, or rather the absence of regular behaviour patterns.” (Kupiec and Revell 1998; 237). The presence of cheese in

35 It’s a running joke. I’m there every week.
36 By which they mean ‘brand loyalty’.
North American cities tells a different story. It is a story of directed market expansion, the conditioning of meaning, the brokerage of distribution and consumption and the education of taste.

Finding the cheese I like to eat is a relatively new experience in a city like Toronto, or any North American city for that matter. But over the last 25 years the presence of a diversity of cheeses from around the world has become commonplace in major North American cities. Alex Farms and Cheese Boutique in Toronto, Murray’s and Dean & Deluca in New York, Cheese Plus in San Francisco, Whole Foods everywhere. Like mine, they are all stocked with cheeses from around the world, descriptions of the cheeses posted on the counter with indications of PDO status, and informative staff to help you make choices. This situation, the result of a the extensive circulation of artisanal and specialty cheeses that began in the late 1970s and early 1980s, was not initiated by large corporations that dominate the dairy industry. Rather, it was driven by a number of forces that included, states seeking new mechanisms for economic development amenable to a rural proletariat that carried considerable political clout; the loosening of import restrictions; the development of transport and distribution networks; the existence of a recently developed ‘wine culture’ that served as a demonstration that importation can be profitable and as a model for the expansion of taste education; access to a group of consumers willing to pay the price for high quality imported cheese; the profitability desires of regional distributors in Europe, the emergence of culinary and rural social movements (including Slow Food) claiming to protect traditional relations of artisanal production in the face of the cultural and social threats posed by industrial standardization associated with globalization; and the development of an educated populace openly engaged in the practice of consumption as a mode of communicating identity politics. But the rapid growth in the consumption of cheese likely would not have happened without one key driving force - the emergence of the ‘gourmet’ food shop.

Culinary writers represent North America as a cheese wasteland before the emergence of gourmet retailers in the 1980s. That the boom happens in the 1980s is significant for a number of reasons. While some writers’ credit increased travel of North Americans to Europe and exposure to good cheese as driving demand, North Americans had been traveling to Europe frequently and in large numbers since the 1920s, including thousands of men over two World Wars, and had many opportunities to experience European food products. Over the same period, Europeans had been immigrating to North America, presumably bringing with them the tastes acquired in their upbringing. What seems to have happened in the 1980s is the appeal of a small group of gourmet food retailers to an identity politics grounded either in representations of exclusivity and sophistication (e.g., Dean and Deluca) or in a populist linking of production and consumption (e.g., Alex Farm Toronto which started as a small table stall in the St. 

But see Klonsky (2000) on the effect of Whole Foods on smaller retailers and producers
Lawrence Market Hall, or the Cheese Boutique which emerged from an immigrant-run mom and pop milk shop). It is not at all clear what mobilizes the growth of gourmet food shops in the late 1970s but the growth does seem to be temporally concentrated. Dean and Deluca in 1978, Alex Farm and the Cheese Boutique in Toronto in 1980. Indeed many cheese shops now seen as long-standing and authoritative, such as Murray’s in New York or Cheese Plus in San Francisco have only been serious cheese retailers since the mid-1990s. According to Steve Jenkins (1996; xix), Dean and Deluca’s first cheese manager, when Dean and Deluca opened in New York there were “virtually no great, authentic European cheeses available in the U.S., and ... few [Americans] had tasted, let alone developed an appreciation for fine cheeses.” To that point, the modern history of cheese in much of North America (Québec excluded) had been one of a limited product.

As Rosenberry (1996) and others have pointed out, we understand and value particular commodities in relation to ‘the past’. Accordingly, the contemporary networks of production, distribution and consumption that see an increase in the availability and popularity of ‘fine’ cheeses in North America cannot be understood in isolation from a particular past - “the broad range of economic and social transformations in the history of American capitalism – the industrial revolution and the creation of a more homogeneous proletariat; the development of national markets and modes of distribution; the revolution in food production, processing and distribution that resulted in the creation of the supermarket...; the revolution in advertising; the concentration and consolidation of American industry, and so on.” (Roseberry 1996; 126). These transformations, to some extent, explain a move away from small-scale, dairy, farm, or home-based production of cheese, toward the standardization of cheese as an industrial food product, manufactured by industrial food conglomerates, shrink-wrapped or vacuum packed, sold on the vapid white grate shelves of supermarket dairy sections, and inserted into the altered lifestyles of people adjusting to the wage labour demands of industrial capitalism. Over this period stemming from the late 19th century, tastes were shaped through advertising and availability or, more to the point, the lack of availability of the many products that immigrant populations were familiar with. People had to learn to consume the products of ‘modernity’ as they ‘assimilated’ and accommodated a new lifestyle. ‘Mr. Kraft’, in fact, didn’t make particularly ‘good’ cheddar, but people came to think that ‘he’ did for lack of alternatives.

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38 This absence of research on the emergence of ‘gourmet’ food stores in North America and their links to contemporary consumption practices is a significant gap in studies of food history.

39 Jenkin’s remark implicitly raises questions surrounding acts of distinction. Does the characterization “fine”, for example, come into existence in relation to other products designated “not fine” (e.g., industrial food products) and a reaction against those products? Is the reaction ‘populist’ or is it manufactured through the efforts of retailers to generate a class-based market niche by capitalizing on the North American association of Europe with superiority and ‘fineness’? And, given the apparent absence of ‘fineness’ in North America, do potential consumers then need to be taught to appreciate the distinction between fine and not fine, and how to reproduce that distinction (i.e., it is not simply the product they are being taught to appreciate but the ability to distinguish between products on the basis of their ‘fineness’.) These questions are to some extent addressed below but deserve much greater empirical attention.
In contrast, new specialty and artisanal cheeses, mostly imported from Europe, and made available through ‘gourmet’ shops (and some supermarkets), play on an association with a more authentic past, and all that authenticity embodies - genuineness, sincerity, localized and traditional modes of production, and so on. Indeed the cheese shop reflects this. The ordering and identification of particular types of regional cheeses recalls a ‘place-based’ past, that is reflected in the display of whole rounds of cheese in the rind, unburdened by the emblem of nameless industrialism – plastic packaging. But if the display connotes a kind of authenticity, it also creates an anxiety, and ambiguity – what do you ask for? how do you know what you’re looking at? It is difficult to shop in a good cheese shop without a broker – either the cheese seller themselves, the instructor of a course that seeks to help you to develop a discerning palate, or the authors of what might be thought of as gustatory ‘self-help’ books that offer to instruct you on the appropriate ways to assess and consume the commodity. The fact that, for cheese at least, all of these brokers have emerged since the mid-1990s indicates the degree to which the introduction of cheese to North America was, in many ways, bringing a commodity into a terrain of unfamiliarity.

Ambiguity, Ambivalence and Authenticity: Consuming Cheese in Unfamiliar Terrain

It is by now a fairly common observation that food is never simply eaten; that “its consumption is always conditioned by meaning. These meanings are symbolic, and communicated symbolically; they also have histories” (Mintz 1996; 7). Eating food also imparts meaning. Consumption is not merely an act of biological reproduction but of social reproduction that contributes to identity formation, through the value ascribed by the meaning associated with particular foods. Brillat-Savarin, in his 1825 treatise, The Physiology of Taste, might as well have written “tell me what you eat and I will tell you who you are”, as what you are. But what Mintz misses here is that these meanings also have places; that the meaning of consumption (even of the same commodity) varies in time and space. And, in places where consumption of a commodity is a relatively new experience, there is a struggle to imbue consumption with meaning.

To some extent, a frame for that meaning is latent. In North America, for example, cheese is introduced into a context in which people know the qualities of food that they would like to consume in an effort to make statements about themselves and their concerns. They may, for example, choose to consume products that convey certain politics including: a respect for ‘the natural’ (cheese made using small-scale, non-industrialized production techniques); or compassion (support for “small” cheese producers and the ‘tradition’ of knowledge and practice they embody). This compassion may include a regard for animal welfare (e.g., cheese made with milk from small dairy herds); or a concern for ‘local

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40 After whom Henri Androët named his delicious triple crème brie.
community’ (the idyllic association of small scale producers-tradition- community). Their problem, being so physically and ideologically distant from sites of production is that they do not know whether a cheese actually conveys these politics, so directly in line with the virtues of Slow Food. They need some vehicle to certify the authenticity and accuracy of what they seek to consume. This unfamiliarity generates a particular ambivalence and ambiguity that surrounds cheese and reaches out for some kind of authoritative advice.

The way in which desire to consume is blocked by ambiguity is also not lost on those who seek to expand their markets. In the words of the former president of the French Commission for Sustainable Development:

“If we want consumers to consume “terroir” products and services, we need to set up procedures allowing the identification of their characteristics and to foster synergies between the action of local bodies in charge of local development and production and distribution networks. But ...one also needs to work on the demand end by advocating consumption models and life styles that contribute to personal development. In consuming ‘diversity’, we increase our personal ‘diversity’. Diversity encourages human development and is thus an essential component of sustainable development. But consumers must be given the capacity to orient their consumption in this way.”

(Brodhag 2000)

And therein lays the role of the contemporary broker: the certification of authenticity; the manufacture of consumption models – new cultures of consumption - framed as personal development; and the reduction of the anxiety associated with the lack of product knowledge.

To an audience unfamiliar with a commodity, certain instruments have proven useful in the reduction of consumption anxiety. Two of these include markers of authenticity and ‘expert’ guidance. Again, this has not gone unnoticed by groups tasked with the extension of markets. Bérard and Marchenay (1998; 155), for example, two anthropologists who consult with the French INLA in establishing terroir zones, advised that:

“[t]he very specific nature of many food products, which are often unknown to consumers from outside the production locality, means that unless detailed information is made available on how to prepare them, they will not be eaten. We are tempted to insist on the fact that consumers must be initiated to the product, its originality, and the way it is prepared in order for them to appreciate it fully”

Here again, the disciplinary element of Geographical Indications like PDOs comes into play. In the value regime of cheese consumption in North America, territorial labeling schemes in many ways become a marketing tool to address the anxiety of unfamiliarity. Cheese producers rely on identity labels to make relational connections between ‘local’ sites of production and more distant spaces of consumption, and PDO labels authenticate these material and symbolic exchanges between worldwide
consumers and situated *terroir*. Goodman (2004; 10) suggests that “the effectiveness of these symbolic mediators of quality, commitment and certification inevitably suffers from processes of abstraction as supply chains are extended.” Conversely, however, I suggest that they become more effective in helping an audience unfamiliar with a product, but increasingly familiar with the concept of certification standards, to engage in discriminate acts of not only consumption, but the production of identities. There may well be a case to be made that new consumers do not trust so much in the producer as they do in the certification that authenticates a product, particularly when the ‘brand’ is geographic rather than individual. “Am I eating a ‘true’ Roquefort?” rather than “whose Roquefort am I eating?” is the question solved by certification.

The value of GIs in authenticating producer-consumer relations can be seen in other ways. The fact that Geographical Indications like PDOs are expected to have an effect on consumption decisions is highlighted by the degree of marketing research on just what the effect is. (Kupiec and Revell 1998, Bogue et al. 1999, Dupont 2003, Gibbs and Morphitou 2004, Mccarthy et al., Tendero and Bernabéu 2005). But more significantly is the marked increase in applications for GI status in the late 1970s and 1980s. In fact, despite the existence of the legislation for over 80 years in some countries, most European cheeses that have national status have only received it since the 1980s. That status has been claimed so recently is an indication that GI status is more directly related to easing anxiety in new distant markets, than it is to fending off maverick producers at home. Also, the correspondence between the production of formalized ideas of *terroir* and the emergence of domain registrations for cheese in Europe with the emergence of the ‘gourmet food shop’ boom in North American cities, suggests that GI status plays a mediating role in the introduction of particular cheeses to North America. GI status, read as a mark of quality by retail buyers, relieves them of the need to adjudicate quality, and quickly find privileged space on the shelves of gourmet stores and on the plates of consumers.

The second mechanism of reducing consumer anxiety is the emergence of expert guidance. This of course, follows the production of the expert and that happens in a variety of ways. Authorship is certainly one. The concern with quality that is seen to be, at least partially, behind the expansion of fine cheese consumption in North America, cannot be divorced from a style of food writing that seeks to popularize taste. Beginning in the mid-1990s popular books on cheese have appeared, usually written in instructional ways meant to cultivate a particular routine of consumption (Jenkins 1996, McCalman 2002, 2005, Rubino et al. 2005, Herbst and Herbst 2007). Indeed, there is a whole critical apparatus that has emerged around cheese consumption as an aesthetic experience, manifest even to the occasional consumer in the lifestyle sections of newspapers and magazines. In standard template fashion, they have begun to publish ‘cheese of

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41 The issue of whether a cheese has a PDO, without ever really discussing in detail what PDO status is, comes up regularly in the cheese appreciation course I take. The implicit suggestion is that a PDO cheese is ‘better’ than a non-PDO cheese.
the week’, or ‘cheese of the month’ columns. ‘Foodie’ websites have also begun to post streamed videos of the same authors extending their words into the visual realm of presentation (e.g., http://www.seriouseats.com/videos/2007/01/-by-use-of.html).

‘Experts’ not only describe cheese, they also play a significant role in defining it in ways that accord with what they perceive to be the identity concerns of consumers. Once again in drawing the divide between ‘fine’ and ‘unfine’, promoters of artisanal and specialty cheese build on a concern (and realize increased profitability) associated with ‘natural food’, by highlighting cheese as a natural product, a living organism unto itself. A common element of cheese books, for example, is a description of the production process typically broken into stages that represent a cheesemaker as simply intervening in a natural process, rather than as someone engaged in an act of manufacture. By breaking the representation of production into stages like this it is possible to articulate the role of the agency of the cheese maker in production. For example, Jenkin’s (1996; 9) suggests that it is the ripening stage that “provides the cheesemaker’s chance to help nature turn that cheese into the best it can be”, as if the rest of cheese production is a wholly natural process, rather than a wholly contrived act of production. This notion of a minimal hand guiding ‘the natural’ accords with contemporary desires to represent artisanal cheese as a ‘natural’ product. Here is Jenkin’s (1996; 9) again: “During the ripening stage, a number of natural components of the cheese are triggered to play their role in the cheese’s final character.” While these representations of the natural seek to disguise the fact that the entire making of a cheese is about intervention and manufacture, they expose an irony- that certain qualities need to be manufactured to create a distinction between industrial and artisanal cheese, but the representation of a product as ‘artisanal’ seeks to diminish the degree of ‘manufacture’ involved in the production of the cheese in an effort to accentuate the ‘naturalness’ of the final product.

The role of brokers in defining a commodity is not insignificant for there are indications that their words are heeded. That their books are read, videos watched, and advice followed, can be assessed through a simple web search of food ‘blogs’ (themselves sources of advice). Here, for example, is one blogger on a recent book by Max McCalman:

McCalman, also understanding our blind kitten approach to cheese, also guides you through various aspects of cheese. Early chapters deal with how to select, store, prepare, serve various kinds of cheese. Later on we are given a thorough [sic] lesson on how to pair cheese with various breads, fruits, and nuts, or how to simply lay back and enjoy a piece unmolested by any other food. Basics for how to create and serve a cheese course or a cheese tasting party will inspire you to host your own (I know I plan to have a truly stinky one shortly!). Lastly, of course, an extensive, though maybe a bit too much so, course on how to pair wine and cheese. The watchful and caring teacher, he does this in a simple, plainspoken manner, allowing any reader to understand not only how to perform [sic] each task, but the why behind it as well. I have to say, [without it ] I would not have discovered my love of Lancaster, my passion for Prattigauer, my desire for Doddington, and how I give resounding praise to Roaring 40’s Blue! (http://vanillagarlic.blogspot.com/2006/05/course-on-cheese.html)
Expertise is, of course found in other forms, and these too emerge in sites of consumption – the _maître fromager_ in restaurants that have begun to make ‘the cheese plate’ a common feature of their menus; and the cheese shop itself. But a close read of the knowledge of cheese sellers reveals the way in which distributors (an important element of the commodity circuit only briefly touched on so far) play a substantial role not only in the delivery of product but also in the education of taste. For example, the cheese seller that I refer to as ‘mine’ throughout this paper, was trained through the same course that I am now ‘consuming’. And the woman who initiated that course was herself a cheese buyer for North American distributors and retailers. In some ways this is not surprising given North American modes of commodity distribution.\(^\text{42}\)

Starting in the 1980s, buyers and brokers who could negotiate European marketing systems and North American regulatory regimes quickly became the control point of an expanding market, developing new supplies, “taking on regular customers among shop owners, and running ‘educational’ seminars to cultivate a more detailed knowledge of [cheese] among retailers, expecting that they in turn would educate their customers” (Roseberry 1996). Consider this from the website of “Cheese culture” (http://www.cheeseculture.ca/news.html#updates), a Toronto company run by a former cheese buyer:

**Professional Development for Cheese Retailers**

Cheese Culture now offers the following educational opportunities for cheese professionals:

**Cheese Fundamentals for Retailers**
A five-hour (two session) course that develops product knowledge and customer service skills. Lectures, discussions, tastings and activities cover the following topics:

- Cheese history, production, ingredients, families, regions and current issues
- Sensory appreciation of cheese and communication of cheese flavour
- Advising consumers about cheese selection, storage and service for optimal enjoyment

Materials and presentation are adapted to the retailer’s inventory, learning goals and existing level of knowledge. The course is on-site and at the client’s convenience.

**Master Classes for Cheese Retailers**
Customized educational seminars and workshops for retail teams with specific learning goals. Topics include, but are not limited to: cheese and beverage pairing, regional or seasonal cheese focuses, cheese catering and gift programs.

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\(^{42}\) The ways in which distribution syndicates block direct links between European exporters and retailers is something that European exporters regularly complain about.
What is fascinating about this program is that it is directed at instructing people who already operate cheese shops, the very people we might presuppose to have a detailed knowledge of cheese. In many ways these courses are addressing a concern that “at a time when so many food lovers are curious about cheese, there are so few knowledgeable retailers to introduce consumers to the world’s finest, and to advise and guide them in selecting the most enticing examples” (Jenkins 1996; xxv). But that retailers might not have this knowledge before deciding to invest in and open a cheese shop is another indication that cheese, in North America, is a potentially lucrative market being constructed through the action of entrepreneurs who seek out additional ways to create demand and construct value (rather than an outcome of consumer demand). They do this through attempting to expand their customer knowledge base in a diversity of ways – offering cheese of the week selections; organizing wine and cheese tastings for corporate clients; developing a profile of regular customers and offering suggested purchases; cultivating a sense of exclusivity surrounding the product through the deployment, for example, of a specialized vocabulary; and popularizing that vocabulary by applying it in the design of search engines on cheese shop websites, and in the tasting sessions they offer. The cheese shop, I frequent, for example, will have good customers in after the shop closes for private tasting sessions. In essence, brokers are engaged in the ‘education of taste’. They are fulfilling the demands of producers that, in new markets, taste needs to be developed and certain lifestyles of consumption promoted and framed in terms of personal development – the lifestyles and sense of fulfillment both desired and derived through the acquisition of ‘taste’ (cf., Bourdieu 1984). Notably the mechanism put in place to teach taste in relation to cheese in North America mimic those of European brokers at the turn of the century. What is the distinction between the tasting salons and restaurant of Pierre Androuët and Artisanal’s cheese plate or “Murray’s Cheese” tastings? On the surface, not much. And this reveals the way in which taste development in support of consumption and the creation of symbolic and material value have, in many ways simply entered a phase of spatial expansion. As the product - cheese – travels through wider circuits of consumption, the modes of teaching consumption travel as well, even as much as they enter new cultural contexts of consumption.

But, in a striking indication of the context of unfamiliarity into which cheese is introduced in North America, the arc of instruction and expertise that reveals itself through books or in cheese shops, is tied directly back into sources of production and certification in Europe. The knowledge imparted through brokers is embedded in what we might call networks of mutual certification. As consumption expands in North America, the brokers of consumption are recognized and sanctioned by producers and exporters in production locales. For example, Steve Jenkins, a partner in New York’s Fairway Market, or Kathy Strange, global cheese buyer for Whole Foods, have both been inducted into the France’s Guilde des Fromagers de Saint-Uguzon,
the most celebrated association of cheesemongers and specialists in France, recognized for comprehensive knowledge and attention to the merits of French cheese. Founded in 1969 to safeguard and promote quality cheeses with a goal to create synergy around cheese production and to promote cheese consumption.

Strange’s reply to this award was to invoke tradition, history and respect in the operations of her employer:

I am honored to be considered an ambassador of traditional French cheese in the United States. This is a reflection of Whole Foods Market’s overall commitment to the tradition and history of cheeses and shows quite a significant level of respect for the cheese program we have built....This is a wonderful validation that I am able to communicate this care and passion to our Team members and shoppers. [http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/pressroom/pr_01-16-06.html](http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/pressroom/pr_01-16-06.html)

Here then, the added value of personal recognition, in the form of an award that can serve as the basis for individual distinction, is used by a producer’s association to validate that retailers are effectively brokering consumption, and, to paraphrase Boghard (2000), advocating consumption models and life styles that contribute to personal development, and providing consumers with the capacity to orient their consumption in ways that extend the market for French cheese, and all of its associated material and symbolic value. For markets to expand and the profitability of particular relations of production to increase, products must not only be shipped to new outlets, but, particularly in relation to commodities that aspire to an epicurean status, consumers need to internalize the product (and its mode and relations of production) as essential not only to their well-being but to their identity. This, more than simply selling cheese, is the value that is created by connoisseurship.

**The Cultural Logics of Consumption: Expert Framing and the Development of Connoisseurship**

Though I have held them apart for analytical purposes brokerage and connoisseurship are intrinsically related. If we think of the delivery and distribution systems required and developed synonymously with the cultural production and extension of class identity associated with the consumption of artisanal or specialty cheeses, we need to distinguish between previously existing ethnic or place-based identities associated with consuming cheeses associated with one’s place of origin (e.g., regional Italians in Toronto seeking out regional cheeses that help to perform and reproduce an ‘authentic’ identity away from home) and the class identities associated with the development of connoisseurship that claims a knowledge across a diversity of cheeses rather than an identity associated with the consumption of a regional product. This is the lever that opens the door for taste education and shifts us onto the terrain of the connoisseur. This new terrain, however, also requires a guide. And connoisseurship itself assumes a brokerage role in a number of different realms. One of these is positioned in direct relation to the product itself as the
‘connoisseur’ assumes the position of judge and enters a network in which cheese is subjected to adjudication and any subsequent awards, or records of achievement, are used to communicate quality to consumers, in an attempt to unburden them of the ambivalence associated with the general rise in awareness of the distinction between artisanal and industrial production and the desire to consume artisanal products.43

The other is through the structuring of celebrity within spectacular commodity realms. Any commodity associated with distinction and identity affiliation produces interlocutors who are subsequently produced as celebrities within particular realms of knowledge and taste. These individuals assume the privileged title of ‘critic’. Walk into any good wine shop and the quantified and qualified pronouncements of people like Robert Parker or Jancis Robinson are quickly apparent. And they are displayed because of the value that they add to a product. Cheese is quickly gaining ground, producing its own celebrity critics, offering their own guidance, creating their own value:

Thank heavens for Max McCalman, may choirs sing his spoiled milk praises! For those who don’t really know this guy, he is the man and fromager (cheese brainiac) who pretty much single handedly spearheaded the idea of presenting true artisanal cheeses, cheese courses, and giving cheese the kind of credit we give to wine here in America. He has become well known for his work in the New York restaurants Picholine and Artisanal, and luckily for those of us not living shibby in New York, has gone out of his way to create a wonderful guide to the best of the best in his second book, Cheese: A Connoisseur’s Guide to the World’s Best. (http://vanillagarlic.blogspot.com/2006/05/course-on-cheese.html)

The words of McCalman are repeated weekly in the cheese appreciation class I am taking as part of my ethnographic work on consumption. “Are you supposed to eat the rind on cheese?” a student asks. “Well it’s really personal taste”, says the instructor, “but Max McCalman, who’s the cheese guy, and is the cheese consultant for Artisanal in New York, never eats the rind because he thinks the taste interferes with the wines he chooses to go with them.” More importantly his words on cheese echo across what has become known as the ‘blogosphere’. What is significant here, however, is not so much the advice of critics as the emergence of interlocutors for a product that is being introduced to the uninitiated. For interlocutors both mark and provide the guidance to cross a boundary. In our case this is not so much a boundary of taste as it is a boundary between a place of origin (e.g., Europe) and a people who are presumed to possess an intrinsic or inherent knowledge of fine cheese, and those in a locale (North America) without the qualities, palate, or knowledge of those in that point of origin. In North America, industrialism is seen, rightly or wrongly, to have constrained not only artisanal or fine food production, but

43 i.e., the awarding of ‘medals’ relieves the consumer of the burden of ‘knowing’ the difference. The presumption is that a body of connoisseurs (i.e., judges) have already made that distinction.
knowledge of how to evaluate and consume artisanal products. It is a desire for this knowledge, whether mobilized by the sheer physical pleasure of eating cheese, the satisfaction that comes with knowledge, the material demands of employers, or the acquisition of new practices of distinction that shifts us onto another terrain of consumption – the education of taste that produces connoisseurship.

**Connoisseurship and Distinction: Learning Taste, Learning Difference**

It is clear that for the uninitiated that the capacity to appreciate distinctive taste has to be produced. It is here that we enter a new regime of value. Many scholars have traced the social relations and material linkages that the movement of commodities creates and within which the value of commodities emerges (Foster 2006). But for products that come to be labeled or designated ‘fine’ we also need to examine the movement of commodities in relation to projects that create and subsequently exploit the value of a ‘fine’ commodity. One of the most important of these projects is connoisseurship, which, in a cultural economic context that prizes marketing and ‘expert knowledge’, has become incredibly lucrative for the value that the positive judgment of a connoisseur can yield to a product like cheese. To be a connoisseur is to borrow on pre-existing knowledge and the ‘prestige’ qualities of a product and claim them as your own; it is to gain personal advantage from the existing value of a commodity and to subsequently extend that value by transmitting that knowledge (in doses) to others, in ways that reproduce and enhance the value of the commodity. Take the practices that distinguish Bleu d’Auvergne and ‘stinky moldy stuff’. Making the distinction, and capitalizing on the existing value of Bleu d’Auvergne means, not simply knowing the characteristics of a good blue cheese, but taking advantage of dominant representations of Frenchness and the complex weave of stereotypic images it evokes (class, taste, quality, distinction, age, tradition) and extending those into new settings in ways that exploit that existing value to create new value for a commodity and the consumption of that commodity in a new setting. It is to define, through assertion, arrogance and the invocation of authority, what that commodity is, or should be, for others. The point here is that connoisseurship is a practice that acts on prestige commodities to give those commodities meaning that enhances value not only for the product but also for the person who eats it.

Take, for example, my cheese appreciation class this week; a fellow student was leading us through a tasting of Shropshire Blue, a British cheese that first appeared in the early 1980s. Despite its recent origin my classmate described the difficulty she had in finding an accurate history of its development and said that there were a number of stories in circulation. The instructor quickly produced Max McCalman’s *Cheese: A Connoisseur’s Guide to the World’s Best*, and recited his history of Shropshire Blue. Whether the

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44 Of course, this is an unacceptable representation of a monolithic ‘Europe’ and ‘North America’, but what is important is the production of the interlocutor, is representation and not the complex reality.

45 Many of my classmates, for example, are employees in the food and liquor industry and are taking the course for what it can offer them in terms of career advancement, as much as for any personal desire for distinction.
McCalman’s history is accurate or not is beside the point. What the instructor was implicitly illustrating, in her turn to the book, was that in the development of connoisseurship “there is a structure of authority to judgments that radiate from the representative-declarative acts of some to inform those of others by a kind of interdiscursivity. One quotes or cites or alludes to authority in orienting oneself to the object of aesthetic judgment.” (Silverstein 2006, 483). “This is what McCalman has to say about Shropshire Blue”, the object of our regard, began the instructor, and then proceeded to cite authority in the definition of that object.

Learning to be a connoisseur, in a structured educational format like this is intellectually productive not only in relation to developing a knowledge of cheese, but in the way it provides an opportunity to productively reflect on connoisseurship as a structured process of conditioning rather than a condition of being. To analyze connoisseurship as process is to observe the development of specific practices (what connoisseurs might call skills); that result in a product (the connoisseur) with consequent effects (distinction for the product and the connoisseur, and the circulation of knowledge not only as instruction but as judgment).

As a commodity thought, by some, to be an art form, as much as a cultural or natural product, cheese is subject to a social organization of judgment. The capacity for appreciation of an ‘artisanal’ product, then, requires the production of an adjudicator - ‘the connoisseur’, with the ability to appreciate and distinguish between products on the basis of certain criteria and a ‘sense of taste’. But it is not simply the development of a sense of taste that is required to appreciate ‘fine’ cheese. It is the acquisition of a refined sense of taste - a process of refinement that the consumer must undergo to be able to recognize and appreciate the distinction that underlies the division of fine and unfine products. And this requires education. The practice of connoisseurship is, in essence, the licensed judgment of taste. It is a value-determining (for both the object and the judge) performative act. But it is an act refined through training, experience and memory. It is to engage a practiced tongue and nose, and combine that with aesthetic memory to assert sensitivity to quality (Ebitz, 1988). It is to learn how to approach a cheese. In the practice of connoisseurship, the approach is structured. “Always the attention is on cheeses that have enjoyed a long grand tradition of hands on attention...I have... respect for cheeses that are unchanging and true to their region” (Jankins 1996, xxiii). These comments indicate that connoisseurship has particular expressive qualities (e.g., respect) that are dependant on the assumed character of the product (in this case, stasis and geographic typicality). The reasons to respect a cheese are also used as criteria to distinguish the quality of that cheese. A cheese that can be respected because of its unchanging qualities, tied to geographic typicality, is distinct from one that has seemingly lost (or never had) those qualities, and considered more worthy of judgment. Indeed, it is in the act of distinction that Jenkins (1996; xxiii)
invokes ‘respect’ – to distinguish “real cheese” from “cheeses that have become mass-produced, tasteless dairy products, cheeses that are not original and that stress visible style over palatable substance.” Cheeses worth the attention of the connoisseur are cheeses that are already a prestige comestible.

Once a cheese has been designated as worthy of approach, the critical practice of connoisseurship – the tasting - begins:

Eyes first, what are the visual cues, what is the colour of the paste in relation to the ideal? What is the texture of the cheese? What does that tell you about production? What type of rind covers the paste? What is the colour of the rind? What does the colour of the rind tell you about the age? Then the nose. The paste first, never the rind. Break open the paste to acquire a fresh scent. What do you smell? How do you characterize the aroma? What does the smell tell you about production? Now the flavour. No, no, we don’t bite cheese, we don’t chew it. We suck it. Remember, from the paste outward to the rind. A Blue cheese? Taste the white paste before the blue spores. What hits you first? What about secondary flavour? And the finish? (Fieldnotes, Toronto, Oct. 2007)

Within each of these bold words are a host of descriptors – fresh, bloomy, encrusted, lactic, musty, grassy, bony, runny, supple, satiny, balanced, acidulous, livery (the list, and there is a list, goes on) - that are to be recorded under specific categories and referred to in the development of an aesthetic memory. But the process of refinement goes deeper still. “You say the cheese tastes nutty? What kind of nut – walnut, hazelnut, filbert...?”

My point here is that a significant component in the development of connoisseurship is not simply the refinement of observation and taste, but what Silverstein (2006; 491) calls the “mastery of a register”... the development of a specific vocabulary and “a characteristic way of talking about some area of experience” that not only demonstrates knowledge of a commodity, but serves to “index one’s membership in the social group that characteristically does so”, and distinguish one from social groups that do not. But that index is not acquired in an unstructured environment. It is acquired through tentative assertion of the neophyte (“is it rubbery?”) and the correction of authority (“Hmmmm... Rubbery...bmmm, now that’s not really a word we would use to describe a cheese, is it?”); and through the acceptance of a template – the register to be mastered - that forces you to engage in distinction and categorization. In the process the mouth is instructed to become a temporal cavern of assessment - isolating flavours across time and identifying each in sequence as they progress into nothingness – and the point from which emerges the utterance of judgment:

*At its peak, Serena is soft, spreadable, and ultimately liquefying. It is rich, buttery, and creamy in consistency with emphatic, fairly pungent flavors, featuring concentrated grassy notes and a sweet fruitiness – truly a superb and highly desirable delicacy. When I meditate on the greatness of sheep’s milk cheeses, this is one of the first that comes to mind* (McCalman 2005; 238).
When the cheese is sliced, it releases pungent notes of fermentation and damp cellar, deriving from the treatment of the rind, but these give way to meadow aromas of Alpine grass and ripe fruit. Puzzone di Moena is satisfying on the palate and tends to melt in the mouth, suggesting roasted hazelnuts and offering impressive length. (Rubino 2005, 205)

It is this utterance that connects practice with effect in the process of connoisseurship. For the utterance is the articulation of distinction. On the one hand the utterance creates value for a product by articulating it with a desire for authenticity and quality on the part of consumers; defining it as superior or inferior. This statement of value is readily circulated. Descriptive displays in the cheese shop, for example, bring the text of connoisseurship to the very site of exchange. But the utterance not only describes a cheese as distinct. It also, in the way that it expresses both the acquisition and compartmentalization of knowledge, positions the connoisseur as distinct. And yet a connoisseur does not stand apart from others in her appreciation for a product. Rather the skills are judged against others. The articulation extends. Present utterance and the authority of judgment are linked to the past. Certainly the creation of new markets for products like cheese facilitates the production of new connoisseurs – those who will become celebrities in relation to the advertised appreciation of a product. But in acts of legitimation they constantly refer to the past in an effort to represent their judgment in the context of a continuum of evaluation.

It is this continuum of evaluation, and the reproduction of connoisseurship that demand attention, for it is through this process that the effect of connoisseurship in both defining and creating value for a product like cheese, and the manufacture of social distinction can be seen. But to a surprising degree, connoisseurship has escaped ethnographic attention. It is tempting to think that this is because it involves ‘studying up’, as Nader (1972) put it. But I suspect it has more to do with the fact that it involves ‘studying in’ - studying ourselves, our friends, our colleagues, our desires, and asking some potentially disturbing questions about the source of those desires, and our own role in the reproduction of the fetishism that feeds the ability of the connoisseur to create value. Important questions abound: what ‘type’ of person is recruited to connoisseurship and why? Through what network effects of participation do the registers of connoisseurship spread? How does the practice of connoisseurship act as a model for what a prestige comestible should be (e.g., in what ways is it a moral statement)

And lest we sink into Appadurai’s (1990; 307) trap of festishising the consumer/connoisseur in the determination of taste, it is important to observe that that the agency of the connoisseur as much as other consumers is structured through “the many forces that constitute production.” Connoisseurship reacts against Appadurai’s assertion that the consumer “is at best a chooser”, or that simply choosing can be overcome through knowledge. I, for example, have been seduced into believing that my previous cheese buying adventures were ‘willy-nilly’, not informed by knowledge but happenstance. I have sought, and to
some degree gained entry to the world of organized cheese knowledge, so that now I can exert a particular authority when I enter the cheese shop; so that I am understood (by the seller) to know, to be able to appreciate, to distinguish. Within this operation of power, it is easy to forget the degree to which the taste and discrimination that I am currently cultivating through both my cheese course and my physical consumption of cheese is being shaped by traders and marketers. Step back with me to Bra and to my encounter with a cheese buyer for Neal’s Yard Dairy. “We’re probably the largest exporter of English artisanal and farmstead cheddars to North America, but we only send the fruity cheddars to you. That’s what North Americans like. They taste a livery cheddar and they say, ‘What’s this? That’s not cheddar’. But Brits prefer a livery cheddar and we can’t sell them the fruity ones. They both come from the same lots. It’s just that there’s such variation in each lot that some come out livery and some fruity.” I ask the obvious question – what generates the impression that North Americans will only eat fruity cheddar? Is there any market research? “No”, replies the buyer, “it’s just what the owner thinks.” A small example perhaps, but it does make a larger point – particular factors, beliefs and interests shape production and distribution in particular ways and subsequently align the choices available to consumers, and the subsequent development of taste.

Conclusion: Thoughts on approaching cheese

For the majority of people, the experience of cheese is purely retail. That is to say, they think about buying cheese, they travel to the cheese shop, they take some advice, they may serve it at a party, and derive some social cache, but ultimately they eat it. Their interest centers on preparation and consumption.

But there is a whole set of interlocking organizational structures that bring the average retail consumer to [cheese] (and vice versa) at a site of consumption. At every culturally recognizable node on the trajectory from production to consumption, then, there will be [political projects and] special lexical registers that conceptually define the object of discourse, frequently with a view back or forward to other nodes in the chain of sites. (Silverstein 2006; 493)

There are also struggles at each of these sites, struggles that are masked in the operation of power that seeks to produce cheese as a particular kind of object – a moral object worthy of not only consumption for pleasure, but consumption as a statement of political support for reproduction. We need to pay attention to these sites and the struggles they define as well as to the articulation, in both senses of the word, that structure those contests of value. This is what I have begun to try to do in this paper. By isolating, and providing incipient glances into certain sites – the spectacular microcosm of a cheese festival associated with a social movement; the institutions of regulation that seek to govern the definition of cheese; the cheese shop that is the site of exchange; and the modes through which structured appreciation of cheese is acquired. This is, in many ways a complex ethnographic project, but one that is extraordinarily valuable in
seeking to understand how commodities are defined differently through the operation of power as it relates to spatially and culturally embedded political projects, and how that operation of power both shapes and is structured by the consumption of commodities as apparently ‘good’ as cheese. Cheese, in effect, provides a lens through which to examine a range of relationships and processes concerned with social and economic transformations in a variety of locations and how the distinct concerns of a range of actors can use a commodity like cheese as a way to engage in disparate yet overlapping political, social, economic projects. But more importantly, it reveals how a commodity links actors and their diverse projects across space, creating the appearance of a seamless set of social relations that so easily masks processes of ideological and material domination.

This paper constitutes a starting point in an ethnographic project designed to address these concerns. But the spatiality of relations behind the travel of cheese in the world makes it impossible to conduct this kind of work using standard emplaced ethnography. An alternative, might be an approach closer to what we could call guerilla ethnography (and not in the marketing sense). This would involve aligning intensive participation and observation with opportunistic moments when projects that constitute the commodity circuit expose themselves and their weaknesses to observation. In my case this would include weekends and evenings in cheese shops, lunchtimes and evenings in restaurants, one night a week in a cheese appreciation course that may not be offered again; attendance at trade fairs held once every two years. These and other dispersed locales (sheep arms in the Pyrenees, a cheese importer and distributor in Boston, the Rungis wholesale market in Paris) are ethnographic sites that need to be attended to in this project. Gaining access involves a degree of negotiation but often it is opportunistic, and the opportunities for observation may also be temporally as well as spatially fragmented. This is not the kind of ethnographic practice many of us are accustomed to. But it is possible to structure a longitudinal project that provides a sense of cohesion and frames potential moments and sites of observation. Throughout this paper, the empiricism I have presented has revolved around scenarios of production, consumption and commercialization. Yet the sites where each of these activities occurs are multiple. Sites of observation in the realm of production, for example, might include farmhouses, dairies, small factories, educational or apprenticeship programs. Consumption may involve observation and dialogue in shops, educational programs, festivals, house parties, restaurants, and in books and magazines. Commercialization may well include some combination of prior sites: shops, distributor’s offices, wholesaler’s warehouses, and markets. The list could go on, but the point is that the sites of observation are dispersed and place different demands on the ethnographer. But each observation can be structured through the development of a particular focus that can help to compile an iterative guide to observation (Table 1).
Table 1. Exploratory Empirical Matrix for Cheese Project Participant Observation

In this paper, for example, empiricism has largely focused on social relations, cultural representations, and the contestation of value. And we can think of these as broad observational categories that will be refined through inhabiting each of these spaces at distinct times for distinct periods (cf., Long and Villarreal 1998). Those times and locations need to be chosen carefully and considered in context. There is, for example, a marked difference in what is happening in a Toronto cheese shop in the week before Christmas than on a hot summer weekend. Obviously, the same is true of a Basque farming community.

As much as I think of this as effective in terms of data-gathering, conceptually I am uncomfortable with it. My preliminary work into cheese and specifically the creation of value at distinct points in the commodity circuit of cheese suggests a shattering of the conventional domains of production, distribution, and consumption and a need to rethink the way in which all of these processes occur as a commodity is brought into being, circulates through space and is converted into a new symbolic or material substance (e.g., incorporated into the human body, or the human identity). If we begin to treat the commodity as traveling in a circuit we need to rethink production and consumption and see both at work in the creation of value along the entire circuit that is traveled by the commodity; which means that we need to be situated in different locations in the circuit to actually observe the contest of values at work in distinct political projects, and the different instrumentalities that are exercised at distinct sites within that circuit – what are
those locations? What are the struggles that we look for and pay attention to? What is contested? How do we understand the creation of both material and symbolic value within that circuit? What is the influence of the emergent fluidity of social and political boundaries on the creation of value?

To address these questions requires the application of ethnographic practice, the composition of guides that help to structure observation in places and ways that expose struggles over production and consumption in the circuit of a commodity. But as much as much as it is a helpful language for observation, the practice of observation itself needs to break free of these concepts and look at the mechanisms through which value is created in acts of production and consumption throughout the circuit.

References:


Anonymous (2002) Slow Food, *Health Care Focus* 18(11); p.6


