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

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Abstract: This paper uses the example of Slow Food International (SFI) and its promotion of artisanal cheese to examine how scale is produced around the defense of particular social relations of production. I argue that attempts by SFI to naturalize discursive configurations of rural/local/traditional express a particular politics tied to the anxiety of ‘losing’ imagined rural communities. However, SFI attempts to ‘save’ these communities are grounded not in planning or policy but in a kind of entrepreneurialism that locates the preferred mode of defense in the ‘natural morality’ of products like cheese, which is associated with the conditions of locale, the presence of communities willing and able to reproduce locale, and the historical processes of production acted out by those communities. This strategy is a paradox for Slow Food in that efforts to communicate the ‘goodness’ of local product rely on spatially extensive markets and memberships that support a defensive localism through consumption of what they read as (morally) good products. In its apparent defense of localism, Slow Food brings ‘the local’ into being and, much like the disciplinary writing of Geographical Indications (e.g., AOC), simultaneously ‘displaces’ 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 institutions it is affiliated with, in its own entrepreneurial agency, and ultimately in the ideological domain of its loose network of parochial, yet transnational, members.

Keywords: food; politics; cheese; scale; Transnationalism; Slow Food

*A poet's hope: to be,
like some valley cheese,
local, but prized elsewhere.*

W. H. Auden (1907 – 1973)

1. Introduction

For four days in the fall of every other year the centre of Bra, a small town in the rustbelt of the Italian Piemonte, is taken over by tens of thousands of people with, at least on the surface, the simple goal of celebrating a single product – cheese.¹ The reason for this gustatory occupation of space is an event which goes by the not particularly original name of *Cheese!*, a biennial fair organized by Slow Food International (SFI), and designed to create a festive atmosphere around “rare and vanishing dairy products” while promoting the protection of what it labels as not only artisanal but *indigenous* dairy products (Petrini and Padovani 2005). On first appearances, *Cheese!* might be described as a microcosmic spectacle of consumption that reflects a significant growth in markets for fine cheese. While this growth is global, much of it, building on the successful expansion of wine consumption and the efforts of producer states to develop new markets has occurred in North America. The signs of this are evident in the relatively affluent sections of North American cities. While luxury food stores like Dean and DeLuca’s in New York or specialty cheese shops like Alex Farms in Toronto or Neal’s Yard in London were rarities in the 1980s, one of the early signs of retail rejuvenation or gentrification in North American cities today is a specialty cheese shop. And these have been accompanied by market devices that link distribution with popular culture:

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.

cheese appreciation classes have sprung up around the continent, former buyers of commodity cheese for supermarkets have started businesses consulting for entrepreneurs wishing to open specialty cheese shops, newspapers have incorporated cheese columns into their lifestyle sections, cheese plates are standard menu items in good restaurants, cheese blogs abound, and in the ultimate sign that a product has secured a place of prestige in society, cheese, like wine, coffee and chocolate, now has its own consumer-oriented magazine.²

But that depiction masks a deeper political purpose for *Cheese!*; one that aligns Slow Food's early goals of 'taste education' with its more recent claims of integrating production and consumption such that consumers become "co-producers" involved in acts of moral salvation and ecological responsibility by contributing to the protection and reproduction of lifeways and landscapes derived from a history of social production and circulation. Much of the work of Slow Food, then, can be seen as integrally linked to the formation of alternative agro-food networks (Hinrichs 2000, Marsden et al 2000, Goodman 2003, Winter 2003, Goodman 2004) and, as with so many curves in academic roads, what has been labeled the 'quality turn' (Murdoch et al., 2000, Bridge and Smith 2003, Sage 2003). But where much work that would fall under those labels has adopted an explicitly political economic stance, invoking Polanyi's construct of embeddedness and looking to the shortening of food supply chains and alternative modes of distribution as one vector of his double movement – the push back against the social and ecological disembodiedness and alienation suffered through relations of industrial food production (Murdoch et al 2000); the role of more avowedly cultural practices and logics in reconfiguring relations between food production and

² As part of my work on consumption I have taken Maitre Fromager classes and found that many of my classmates are people who operate cheese shops, the very people we might expect to already have a detailed knowledge of cheese. In conversations, it turns out that they are learning as they go and saw cheese as a "good retail niche". 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).

consumption have been understudied.³ Critiques of contemporary food systems often overlook the ways in which shifts are not simply driven by the “many problems associated with the industrialization of food chains” (Murdoch et al. 2000; 107) but are brought into being for a variety of reasons and out of the desires of a multitude of collective but differentiated actors, all of them highly contextualized (Latour 2007). They also often assign a unidirectional quality to some vague depiction of globalization that overlooks the ways in which a diversity of actors actively configure material and symbolic resources across space to produce and circulate new discourses and prescriptive models of consumption grounded in cultural practice. Slow Food, as an organization and a movement, represents one set of such actors. While it is composed of individuals ostensibly interested in orienting food production toward the ends of reproducing cultural and biological diversity, these ends rely not only on direct mediation of practices of production and consumption but in processes of qualification that seek to produce a good, in this case cheese, specifically aligned with those practices (see Callon et al. 2002, Sjögren and Helgesson 2007, McDonald and Topik 2008).

In the case of Slow Food, much of the work of qualification, specifically as it applies to the production and consumption of cheese, involves attempts to naturalize discursive configurations of integral relations between ‘the natural’, ‘the local’, and ‘the traditional’ by attaching associated qualities to goods like cheese. In mobilizing these practices of qualification SFI (re)produces a particular politics of scale through its claims to be engaging in explicit attempts to ‘save’ locally-based social relations, practices, and ecological conditions associated with the production of morally and aesthetically good products. However, this process of qualification also involves practices that align products with prescriptive models of consumption that Slow Food produces and circulates to a spatially extensive network of members and markets⁴. The strategy of defensive localism, then, is articulated not only with the conditions of locale, the presence of

³ Sydney Mintz reminded us over 50 years ago in a review of a less well-known work of Polanyi’s that the “the economy too is a cultural product” (Mintz 1958; 584, see also Buck-Morss 1995) and others have pointed out the difficult trick of understanding the coproduction of ‘culture’ and ‘economy’ (e.g., Bridge and Smith 2003).

⁴ The distinction between good and product, often used synonymously, and Slow Food’s role in the process of generating the qualities of product, are discussed below.

communities willing and able to reproduce locale, and the historical processes of production acted out by those communities, but with a transnational cultural economy built around the circulation of the product, cheese, and the production of prescriptive models that explicitly seek to produce cultures of consumption.

In what follows I use *Cheese!*, as a microcosm of a transnational cultural economy of cheese, to explore these articulations and as a site to observe and document practices of qualification through which Slow Food produces cheese as a moral good, brings ‘the local’ into being and, much like the disciplinary writing of Geographical Indications (e.g., AOC), simultaneously ‘displaces’ it by situating the social relations of production in translocal circuits of regulation and consumption. I use ethnographic data from *Cheese!* to describe how Slow Food is reterritorializing ‘the local’ in the space of its own regulatory operations, in the spaces of the institutions it is affiliated with, in its own entrepreneurial agency, and ultimately in the ideological domain of its loose network of parochial, yet transnational, members. Indeed, an important point of the paper is that food festivals, while understudied, reveal the mutuality of culture and economy involved in the formation of alternative agro-food networks as they provide a site that makes visible practices, but more importantly relations, often hidden from view. *Cheese!*, for example, is an event that for a short period of time draws together actors who are typically much more spatially dispersed and exposes to view interactions and forms of agency, including processes of qualification, often hidden from view or at least much more difficult to access. Attending and attending to events like *Cheese!* reveal how organizations like Slow Food have become important nodes, mechanisms, and actors in the development of a transcultural cultural economy. In concentrated time-space it effectively builds associations (Latour 2007) around consumption and draws people together in ways that structure the value of commodities around the diverse interests of different actors.⁵ It also effectively configures a microcosm of that cultural economy in

⁵ In using the phrase ‘association’ I am following Latour (2007; 65), who does not use the term to mean some formalized collective of individuals, but to signal “the social”, in which “social is the name of a type of momentary association which is characterized by the way it gathers together into new shapes” facilitated by effort, intent and mechanisms that work to shift weak, and hard to maintain, social ties into more durable kinds of links. It is the creation of these durable links – associations rather than social ties– that we see happening through events like *Cheese!*.

which it becomes possible, at one 'site', to observe how the creation of value in relation to a product like cheese represents "the strategic interests and partial knowledge with which particular actors encounter and construct a commodity at different moments in its circulation." (Foster 2006; 288)

2. Slow Food and the Articulation of Consumption and Production

Despite its name Slow Food 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 a 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 over 100,000. 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 some members, including

Petrini, formed an organization, Agricola, and adopted “the language of consumption as a form of transformative cultural politics” – a politics of pleasure that, along with other social changes⁶ created the conditions for the advancement of a commodification of culture in Italy (Leitch 2003; 450). SFI’s 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).⁷ 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)

In many ways, this was in keeping with its Leftist roots and the tenet that production and consumption are synonymous. 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 – read as a threat to local small-scale food production); 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

⁶ 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 Agriturismo); 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.

⁷ 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).

social relations that underpin production and livelihoods in rural areas (Leitch 2000, Labelle 2004, Pietrykowski 2004).

However, as with any social movement, it would be a mistake to see the Slow Food membership as uniform or singularly focused in 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 devices. One is the organization of celebratory festivals such, as *Cheese!*.⁸ 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, organized as local chapters of national Slow Food ‘chapters’, 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’. And this education, which almost by definition invokes market extension, is one of the functions of Slow Food events, like *Cheese!*, which provide 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 (cf., Ebitz 1988, Silverstein 2006). *Convivia* have

⁸ Slow Food has other celebratory devices within its repertoire that seek to articulate, product, place, and people, including *Salone del Gusto*, *Terra Madre*, and *Fish!*

played a large role in circulating taste education as they strive to create conviviality through a variety of social mechanisms that include, for example, restaurant tastings, visits to production facilities, festivals, and culinary tours. Notably, events organized by Slow Food *Convivia* are engaged much more in an aesthetics of consumption than an explicit politics of either consumption or production, which they often facilitate by linking their members to events organized by groups more directly involved in food politics.⁹

This focus on the aesthetics of consumption has contributed to a familiar class politics critique of the Slow Food movement (Stille 2001, Pilcher 2006). Indeed, it is not difficult to uncover a particular colonial ethos and ideology in Slow Food which is focused on articulating, circulating, and embedding values through a prescribed model of how, and with whom, to engage in consumption (e.g., Hinrichs 2000). When a person joins Slow Food, they pay a membership fee to a national chapter, which provides a share of revenue to SFI. They are also assigned to a local *Convivium*, which are typically city or region-based. The amount of ‘action’ around any *Convivia* varies, but this structure of affiliation means that Slow Food, like many chain retailers, has a substantive ‘local’ presence in many countries. Again, in reference to its political roots, the organizational model is more akin to a transnational political party or trade union than to a large charitable organization, and is not only facilitated by bureaucratic mechanisms and practices over which a central administration exercises regulatory control from a distance¹⁰ but is also articulated with the production of scientific knowledge¹¹, and circulated to a broad audience through various modes of popular culture.¹²

⁹ To quote Paul Levy, food and culture critic for *The Guardian*, on his experience with the Oxford convivium: “I wasn’t interested in the equivalent of learning how Farmer Busby made his dandelion wine, or tasting it with his home-made cheese, and the intellectual content of the local activities was zilch.” (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifestyle/wordofmouth/2009/feb>)

¹⁰ For example when Slow Food UK was unable to provide the revenue expected by Slow Food International, SFI dictated changes to the organization and nominated a new director.

¹¹ SFI had a formative role in the establishment of the University of Gastronomic Sciences, housed just outside of Bra, and plays a direct role in its operation, financing, and student recruitment.

¹² the most prominent include the new wave of food television, lifestyle magazines, food blogs, feature films, memoirs and ‘appreciation’ clubs, all of which reciprocally build on and feed what has become known as ‘foodie’ culture and discourse (Johnston and Baumann 2009 DeSoucey et al 2009). I for example, belong to a ‘cheese appreciation club’ in Toronto. Some of my fellow members also belong to the local Slow Food chapter and regularly share chapter ‘happenings’ at our cheese

This model of consumption which prescribes the qualities of products to consume, where to acquire them, how to prepare and serve them, and the social setting in which to consume them amounts in some ways to a new *mission civiltrice*, one in which civilized practices of consumption are grounded in some idealized past in which to quote Dixon (1999; 156) “every consumption ‘episode’ consisted of a number of “distinct facets”: the process of production or provision; the conditions of access; the manner of delivery; and the environment or experience of enjoyment.” In the idealized Slow Food model of consumption the realm of production is ‘the community’ where people, typically women with the ‘traditional knowledge’ required to prepare particular foods, serve their family and friends dishes that not only create positive emotions but create the emotional basis for the reproduction of effective social relations. It is this nexus that, according to Slow Food promoters, is lost in capitalism’s restructuring of consumption, typified by the highly standardized modes of food preparation and distribution characterized by ‘fast food’, a phenomenon that they associate with the cultural ramifications of the growth of industrial capitalism and its relations of production. Much as British imperialists imagined Victorian-era colonialism as a mechanism for circulating and instilling an assumed moral superiority, Slow Food International seeks to challenge the dynamics of consumption practices associated with industrial capitalism by exporting what they represent as a morally superior – a more ‘civilized’ - model of consumption to people’s that have ‘lost their way.’ That model is quite clearly rooted in a conception of Europe, and more specifically Italy, as the source of civilized practice¹³. There is an ostensible dimension to this movement that is at least partly about the assertion of a value hierarchy that gives prominence to an assumed moral superiority of historical consumption practices associated with an idealized representation of Italian social and domestic relations. If a virtuous Slow is the antidote to an amoral Fast, it is the Italians who know how to move at the right ‘speed’. This is the subtle code that underpins not simply the organization but the movement it has spawned. This cultural appeal to

meetings. Other members of the cheese club include a buyer for a major Canadian grocery chain, a food journalist who writes for a major Canadian national newspaper, a number of cheese retailers, **and restaurateurs.**

¹³ The vast majority of Slow Food International’s advisors are Italian, but some of the most humorous moments of *Cheese!* occur when interlocutors seek to resolve disagreements by resorting to cultural stereotypes.

the virtues of nationalism has done much to facilitate the circulation of Slow Food's model of consumption and its own organizational status as it has drawn in both state and regional governments eager to attach qualities of nationalism to lifestyle models and products that can be inserted into export markets, and quick to recognize the potential regional development and tourism revenue that can be generated through supporting the organization. For example, far 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 Italy¹⁴.

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; setting criteria that facilitate their entry into the Ark, and establishing producer's associations – *presidia* – as a mechanism through which Slow Food can 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.¹⁵

¹⁴ Official sponsors of *Cheese!* also included a regional governments, municipalities, tourism departments, chambers of commerce and a host of private companies, including large producer's consortia and supermarket chains.

¹⁵ There is a certain irony in the way that SF uses the language of biodiversity conservation, yet promote consumption as a mode of protection.

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. (Slow Food USA website)

In structuring and circulating a model of consumption and articulating it with the intentional organization of producers SFI relies heavily on representing a cultural logics of production, and is explicitly engaged in “the objective orchestration of two relatively independent logics, that of the field of production and that of the field of consumption. There is a fairly close homology between the specialized fields of production in which the products are developed and the fields in which tastes are determined.” (Bourdieu 1984; 230). Bourdieu’s point here is that the cultural production of taste mediates relations and forms of production and consumption. Changes in one bring about transformations in the other. For a short time during events like *Cheesel*, in the streets of Bra, this orchestration is revealed in microcosm. And it is revealed as an intensely geographic process.

3. The Geography of *Cheesel*

That *Cheesel*, unlike many trade fairs in the fine food world, is not tucked away in some hanger-like convention centre on the margins of town is a sign of the charismatic authority Slow Food has gained in Bra since making it the organizational headquarters in the late 1980s (cf., Peace 2008). It is also a sign of the growing presence and importance of cheese as a focus of regional development programs based on the moral appeal, and consequent economic value, of regionally ‘typical products’ in both Europe and North America (Ilberry and Kneafsey 1999, Tregear 2001, Tregear 2003, Ilberry 2005, Paxson 2006). The impact on the town is significant. For four days, roads are cordoned off and the entire centre becomes an urban homage to a decidedly rural product. Hundreds of thousands of people wander the streets. But their wandering is not unstructured. On the contrary the spatial configuration of *Cheesel* must be read in relation

to Slow Food's role as a cultural mediator; that is as an actor that seeks to create and align models of production and consumption in relation to its vision of an alternative food system that addresses the combined threats of cultural homogeneity and ecological degradation posed by industrialized food production and a reductionist notion of globalization. Accordingly, the geography of *Cheese!* is a lesson in objectivity, meaning the way in which actors are drawn together through an interest in and orientation toward an object - in this case cheese (Latour 2007). Of course cheese in this sense is multiplicitous. Actors may be drawn together by a common object like cheese but it is clear through the spatial configuration of the various components of *Cheese!* that they are oriented toward that object in different, though interrelated ways.

Bra is like many Piedmont towns. A ring road separates newer construction from the primary medieval core. Elegant Baroque buildings line a patchwork of narrow lanes connecting larger *corso* that open onto spacious *piazza*. And it is among these lanes and squares that Slow Food constructs a space of convention and draws together actors and interests that articulate Bra with a transnational cultural economy of cheese. Across from the main station, for example, is the *Mercato dei formaggi* (International Cheese Market) Covering both Piazza Roma and Piazza Carlo Alberto, the cheese market, while dominated by Europeans convenes makers and sellers of some of the finest cheese from around the world. Under the cover of marquee tents, actors are divided into booths in which they display their wares and pass out samples to the hordes of people that funnel through during the event. While most of the distributors sell a substantial amount of product during *Cheese!*, their main objective in coming to Bra is to secure relationships with retailers or distributors in international markets. Their booths are often elaborately decorated and are set up for discussions and more serious tasting sessions with buyers many of whom represent major cheese shops in North America and Europe. The International Cheese Market is just that, a place of interaction and exchange through which producers can establish the associations needed to stabilize the circulation of their products in a transnational market.

A short stroll east of the market along *Via Cavour* the lane opens onto the steps of the Church of San Rocco, staging point, during *Cheese!*, for the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity. The steps of the Church mark the point where *Via Marconi* becomes *Via Principi di Piemonte* both of which house rows of small marquees, each allotted to one of Slow Food's Cheese *Presidia*. The *Presidia* booths are ostensibly educational and each is structured in a way that allows for product differentiation. Cheese makers provide samples and information to consumers as they stroll from booth to booth, each of which is distinguished by a banner that narrates a story of the cheese and its production. Distinct from the international market, *Presidia* are the core of Slow Food's efforts to shorten the cheese supply chain and raise awareness of the relations between consumption decisions and the continued existence of localized 'artisanal' knowledge and practice. The 'localized' knowledge convened in Bra drew from across Europe, the Middle East, Asia and North Africa, and despite Slow Food's attempts to focus *Presidia* on localized product circuits, many of the *Presidia* members were in Bra with the hope of extending the circulation of their product into transnational markets, either through establishing direct connections with buyers or with chefs and culinary professionals who might attach a status value to their products.

Via Cavour ends at *Via Vittorio Emanuele II*, a long road that cuts through the core of the old town. From here a number of lanes run east to *Corso Garibaldi* and the *Gran Sala dei formaggi* (Great Hall of Cheese). The Great Hall is a place of indulgence, a grand marquee lined on one side with tables that look out onto the square and on the other by a series of coolers containing rare and award-winning cheeses from around the world, and a long shelf containing over 1000 Italian wines. Entrance to the Hall is controlled both to raise revenue through an entry fee and to avoid overcrowding in what is meant to be a leisurely space of consumption. Once inside, tickets can be purchased to taste pieces of cheese much larger than the small samples handed out in the international market and at the *Presidia* booths, and to consult with Slow Food volunteers on matching them with wines. As the Press briefing puts it,

On Friday morning the Great Hall will be ready for the *Cheese!* visitors, its jewels displayed in refrigerated cases, labeled and divided into individual portions on cutting boards, ready to give cheese enthusiasts and connoisseurs a moment of pure gastronomic pleasure that can be found only here. (Bra, Sept. 2009, Field notes)

Billed as a space of respite from the packed lanes, the *Gran Sala* is a site of leisurely consumption for those willing to pay, but it is also clearly intended to play a role in the production of connoisseurship.

Indeed the production of connoisseurship, or what Slow Food calls ‘taste education’ is a somewhat subdued but readily apparent focus of *Cheese!* Up the wide stone steps behind the *Gran Sala*, and along *Corso Cottolengo*, for example, two marquees house “Master of Food” workshops. These intensive four hour sessions, for which participants pay over €35, are intended to deepen the experience of *Cheese!* and confer an educational quality on the event by bringing together individuals from Slow Food’s roster of experts¹⁶ including technical specialists from producer’s consortia¹⁷ to relate specific associations between product, history and the natural and social qualities of place. In many ways, these sessions, which focus on teaching practices of product recognition and selection and are sponsored by a long list of groups including not only regional governments and some of Europe’s largest consortia producers, are as much about supplying the information participants need to engage in product differentiation.

Not far from the bustle and crowds elbowing their way through the lanes of town, the more explicit pedagogical intent of *Cheese!* is tucked away in delimited sites that signal the attention of a smaller, more closed world of participants. In these spaces, sheltered from prying eyes and tongues, educational events are run with a stricter protocol than the norms that govern the display spaces of the street. In a small room,

¹⁶http://www.slowfoodfoundation.com/eng/enti_lavoriamo.lasso?cod=4E98738E1afac1DEF5pVk1001CA9&ln=en

¹⁷ The syndicates of producers that regulate production and marketing of certified cheeses (e.g., cheeses registered for national or European certification schemes such as the *Denominazione di Origine Protetta* (DOP), the Italian equivalent of the European Union’s Protected Designation of Origin (PDO)).

atop the *Palazzo Mathis* off the *Piazza Caduti Per La Libertà*, for example, the “*Laboratori del latte*” draws together ‘technical experts’, *Presidia* representatives, and Slow Food staff, with small audiences of about 50 people for conference-like sessions focused on esoteric discussions of the science of cheese production.

But, far more popular and hidden away in the more refined architectural spaces of the town – along *via barbracana* - are the festival’s more enchanted spaces of consumption, the events that take cheese from the realm of market exchange and seek to tether its meaning more firmly to cultural practices of consumption and the production of distinction. These are the *Laboratori del Gusto* - the taste workshops, built around an uneasy alliance among producers, and the instructional practices of *sommeliers* and *maitre fromagers* who seek to guide participants through the ‘proper’ practices and registers of engaging with a cheese, matching its properties with appropriate wines, and quite explicitly performing the proper vocabulary ‘required’ to describe its qualities. In light filtered through thirteenth century stained glass windows, sitting at tables adorned with pristine white tablecloths and sparkling wine glasses, workshop participants learn the skills required to perform consumption and to distinguish themselves through those skills:

Leave prejudices, hearsay and old wives’ tales behind when you take part in Slow Food’s educational activities. Here, thanks to an approach that takes you directly to the product, producers and processors, you’ll learn how to recognize cheeses, evaluate their merits and defects, understand their production techniques, learn their characteristics and appreciate their qualities. (Slow food promotional material for Taste Workshops).¹⁸

Representing these sessions as akin to casting off the restraints of an *ancien regime*, reveals how the pedagogical intent of *Cheese!* seeks to produce a new kind of consumer through a positioning of self and object that is built upon the circulation of cultural models of consumption; models that Slow Food seeks to promote through much of its activities.

¹⁸ Notably, producers are not as comfortable in this role as the connoisseurs. As one particularly grizzled looking small-scale producer said in a sardonic tone to a *maitre fromager* who had just commented on his cheese: “*Signore, tu mi sopraffare con le tue parole*” (Sir, you overwhelm me with your words).

My point in laying out this textual map of *Cheese!* is, in part, to reveal how the event is articulated with the old town of Bra, but also how it collapses a transnational cultural economy into the space of this small northern Italian town. Unlike conventional trade shows, which typically occupy ‘placeless’ convention centers and exclude consumers¹⁹, *Cheese!* occupied urban space in a way that accentuated its engagement with a ‘cultural’ product – cheese - and clearly sought to mimic and capitalize on assertions of authenticity associated with romantic images of European street markets so neatly pulled apart by de la Pradelle (2006) . During *Cheese!* streets inscribed with the memory of Piemontese heroes of Italian unification and nationalism, are, for a short period of time, written over with a new identity, one that very clearly articulates the transnational position of Slow Food both as an organization and a movement. To some extent, this indicates how Slow Food has become a major actor in the economic well being of Bra and has acquired the institutional capacity and the authority, through its relations with state and major corporate actors, to configure the space of the town in relation to a new commemorative politics of consumption. But it also marks a shift in the commemoration of space. The value of *Cheese!* to Bra lies largely in the private wealth accrued over the space of a few days every other year, but the value of Bra to *Cheese!* lies in the qualities that the space can attach to the product. Embedding the event in the urban structure of the town imparts a number of more subtle effects – the Baroque architecture, for example, imparts an air of tradition, and setting a number of events inside churches and stately mansions buttresses that tradition with an aura of authority. It also firmly situates the good – cheese - in the context of what Slow Food would represent as the durable social relations that help to reproduce the structure of the town.

Indeed, the further I dug into the space of *Cheese!* the clearer it became that the configuration of sites within the town delimited a series of stages, each of which constituted their own social space but when linked together revealed how Bra, or more precisely *Cheese!*, is a space of convention that draws together in microcosm the primary actors and actants that constitute a transnational cultural economy that both drives

¹⁹ See Bathelt and Schuldt (2008a, 2008b), and Power and Jansson (2008).

and revolves around the qualification of cheese. Here we have the ‘commodity circuit’ collapsed in space, with most of the players represented: the producers, the regional authorities that support the development and promotion of regionally typical products, the buyers, distributors and retailers, many of them one and the same person; the chefs and connoisseurs, the consumers. But *Cheese!* does more than simply convene. It configures and engages them in particular ways and, through the organizational interest and work of Slow Food, acts as a durable mechanism that allows usually disparate actors to build associations around their interests in cheese, its cultural attachments and the sources of value they produce. *Cheese!* configures Bra as a space that aligns certain actors in ways that not only extend markets but converts fragile and fast-decaying social ties into durable associations that generate a transnational cultural economy (Latour 2007)²⁰. And, as such, it is a space that reveals the capacity of Slow Food as a cultural producer in effectively articulating the market (products and identities associated with Slow Food movement), social institutions (its own mechanisms, and institutions of the state), and taste (engaging in the reproduction of a register of quality that defines taste).

The stages, and their accordant plays are, in essence, the building blocks of the geography I have laid out above: the congested space of the *Mercato dei formaggi* crowded with an anonymous mass of consumers trying to gobble down as many free samples as they can in the space of a few hours, looking for new products and arguing over the quality of old favorites²¹; the ‘behind-the-counter’ dealings of a much more cosmopolitan set of cheese buyers and distributors; the random ‘across-the counter’ encounters of *presidium* producers and consumers in the centre of town; the more intimate and structured space of the tasting, with actors rooted in place by plates, glasses and chairs, their attention focused on the interlocutor; and the much

²⁰ It was common to come across small distributors at Bra who had been told of the festival and acquired display space through relationships they had developed with larger distributors on the international food show circuit. While at Bra, they were able to translate these personal relationships into organizational associations with Slow Food.

²¹ One of the notable benchmarks of the 2009 edition of *Cheese!* was that the stock at the American booth, which had been funded by a distributor, Atlanta Foods International, and featured four American cheese makers (including the current and past-presidents of the American Cheese Society), sold out well before the end of the show. In a sort of role reversal American cheese in Italy was assigned the added value of ‘the exotic’.

more sedate and ‘serious’ arena of educational sites where the alignment of scientific and cultural discourse acts to confer a special status on participants; and where it becomes easier to develop a particular affinity as the deeper immersion (indicated by the willingness to spend money and invest money for knowledge as opposed to goods) makes it impossible to hide within the anonymity of ‘the mass’

The irony is that the defined space of *Cheese!* performs an amputation of sorts. Even as the *actors* in a transnational cultural economy are conspicuously present, the *apparatus* of modernity that creates that transcultural economy, and allows “trade of the sort adapted to producing for a far-flung international clientele”, has been excised (de la Pradelle 2006; 16). American cheeses, and Americans, sit adjacent to Belgian retailers. Irish-accented Italian beckons people to come and try a farmhouse cheese from County Clare. But the large trade floors of the Rungis market through which most French cheese makes its way to North America in large refrigerated transport fleets, the vaults of Parmigiano Reggiano managed and aged by banks as security against production loans, the aging rooms of Comté that contain upwards of \$200 million worth of cheese on any given day, not to mention the legislative and regulatory mechanisms and actors that structure their circulation, are all absent from view²². The literal mass of the economic value of cheese is reduced at *Cheese!* in order to emphasize a cultural value that is reliant on the representation of a more singular and exclusive relation between the producer, the product and the consumer, all of which are drawn together on the streets of Bra by an organization seeking to configure a cultural template for consumption grounded in the attribution of particular qualities to the product - cheese, the structuring of particular place and people-bound narratives about that product, and the orientation of consumption around those qualities. As an animate, if microcosmic, expression of the transnational cultural economy of cheese, *Cheese!* is an effective vantage point from which to observe, document and analyze the ways in which cultural producers like Slow Food orchestrate, mediate and define ‘goods’ in relation to political

²² Though they are nonetheless present. One of the American producers in Bra was unable to sell the blue cheese they had shipped because of differences in American and European testing for Brucellosis in herds being used to produce raw milk (interview notes, Bra, Sept., 2009).

objectives, and the broader socio-spatial effects of those practices.

4. Slow Food, Qualification and a Transnational Cultural Economy

This process, what Callon et al (2002) have called an ‘economy of qualities’ involves a significant investment in the alignment of models of consumption – models that provide for the needs of social identity production - with the configuration not simply of production practices but with the goods that result. It involves, in other words, the work of qualifying the product, which is an explicitly cultural act that entails delineating the meaning of goods and articulating that meaning, often through a reliance on symbolism. That qualification is an act of cultural production is an important rejoinder to some of the work on alternative agro-food networks that interprets the emergence of alternatives as a function of general acts of re-embeddedness, as a push back against the alienation brought on by the industrialisation of food production and preparation. While this work hints at the coordinating effect of certain actors and institutions in shaping consumption, it tends to focus excessively on production and has taken quality and qualities as ‘authentic’ objective characteristics that can be used in product differentiation to acquire both an advantageous position within niche markets, and price premiums (Marsden et al 2000, Murdoch et al 2000, Penker, 2006). Little attention has been paid to this ‘economy of qualities’ as a cultural product, dependant on the work of cultural producers or mediators - often in the shape of movements like Slow Food - actively engaged in circulating models of consumption and articulating production practices with those models through process of qualification and the accordant attachment of consumers to those products in ways that help individuals engage in the production of differentiated identities. This is more than simply a suggestion that cheese, or any other good, is an “effective vehicle for exploring reciprocal relations between the ‘cultural’ and the ‘economic’” (Bridge and Smith 2003; 258) but a recognition that qualification is an integral part of the interpenetration of production and consumption, that the economic judgments involved in qualification are encultured and institutionalized in society, and that ‘goods’ are the result of collective

innovation by a variety of participants connected, organized and structured by specific cultural forms and conditions under which creative and innovative ideas can be mobilized - including the market, social institutions and individual taste (Pratt 2004, cf. Bourdieu 2003).

This is made clear in the work of Callon et al. (2002) who predicate qualification on a distinction between a 'good' and a 'product'. Rather than use the terms as synonyms, they treat a good as an object or outcome – “defined by a combination of characteristics that establish its singularity”; and product as the process that gives rise to that good – “different networks coordinating actors involved in its design, production, distribution and consumption”. Goods, in this sense are constantly being brought into being through acts of qualification and requalification around, for example, issues of ethics, economics, and identity. The process of qualification involves positioning a good within a space of goods – “a space comprising all possible dimensions and qualities” - and requires agents with the ability to modify the list of qualities of a good in order to achieve that position (Callon et al. 2002, 200). Goods, then, do not exist in advance of their qualification. Rather they must be qualified and come into being as singularities through processes of qualification that seek to attach a set of characteristics that can be attributed, stabilized, objectified and arranged, at least for a while. Callon et al's (2002) point is that a good is defined by the qualities attributed to it and these qualities must be invented and articulated (in both senses of the word) before they are experienced as real. To be successful, however, qualification must address the problem of attachment, the need to destabilize consumers from existing routines and to align the characteristics of a good with some interest on the part of a consumer through “the configuration of an apparatus of distributed cognition in which information and references are spread out between many elements” (Callon et al. 2002, 205).

Qualification, however, does not occur outside of an institutional and organizational structure responsible for attributing, stabilizing and objectifying qualities. Slow Food provides just such a structure. This certainly becomes clear at festivals like *Cheesel*, where the role of Slow Food in processes of

qualification and attachment is not hard to discern. The entire festival, for example, can be understood to some degree as a configuration of actors engaged in “positioning goods within a space of goods”. Most come to the festival clear in the distinction between ‘fine’ and ‘commodity’ cheese. And the modes of ‘taste education’ at *Cheese!* build on this, defining broad categories of qualification for cheese – traditional, natural, local, all with moral associations - while simultaneously allowing a more specific register of aesthetic terms – creamy, firm, unctuous - to allow for the differentiation of different types of cheeses within those categories; bind them in relation and facilitating judgment without challenging their ‘goodness’. Around every corner narratives reveal the metrics and the processes of qualification that produce a good. In the *Mercato dei formaggi* buyers are looking for products with certain qualities. But they are also looking for the stories that they can use to transmit these qualities to their customers and help them satisfy the economic, political and social ends of consumption (West 2010). Certain qualities stand out in conversations between distributors and buyers, and in the taste workshops attended by *Convivia* members from around the world, all of which relay reverence for the trinity of people/place/product and scale: historical pedigree, family operations, traditional practices, localized single-herd production, unique ecological conditions. Similarly, the *Mercato dei formaggi* is all about attachment. The sheer variety of products from around the world is aimed at breaking people free of routine patterns of (cheese) consumption, and putting them in the position of having to calculate, to ask questions of their preferences and tastes and, finally, through the explicit debates that implies, to question their own social identity.

Despite the importance of these encounters however, it is in Slow Food’s institutional mechanisms that qualification is most evident and durable. Certainly *Convivia* constitute an element of Callon et al. (2002) ‘apparatus of distributed cognition’ and play a strong role in the circulation of information and knowledge that produce a destabilized consumer open to new qualities and modes of attachment. But it is *Presidia* – producers associations – and their subjection to the regulatory devices of Slow Food that are most clearly mechanisms of qualification. It is in the institutional devices associated with *Presidia* where the

process of articulation is most explicit and where the mechanisms of qualification most clearly tailored to ethical consumption and the romanticized association between people place and product become apparent. It is in the mechanism of *Presidia* that we find most clearly the production of the ‘goodness’ of cheese – the qualification of cheese as a moral good – and strategies of qualification that tie into political movements and discourses concerned with the anxieties of ‘modernity’ and some unqualified force of globalization - the contemporary concerns that allow value to be produced by positioning a good (and its relations of production) as traditional and natural and, therefore, under threat (see Roseberry, M. Goodman 2004, Ilberry et al 2005, Carrier 2010, West 2010).

4.1 *Cheese!*, Qualification and the Morality of an Ecological Naturalism

Presidia are, to some extent, the showcase of Slow Food. Now organized under a separate foundation – the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity (SFFB) – *presidia* were originally represented as a line of defense against the extinction of livestock species, lifestyles, production practices, products, and consequently tastes. If *convivia* are SFT’s primary means of shaping consumption, *presidia* are Slow Food’s main point of engagement with production. As Slow Food grew during the mid-1990s there was a noticeable increase in the organizational presence of *Presidia* within the organization. This became fully realized with the formation of the SFFB on 2003. In part, this presence related to the organizational success of Slow Food and the emergence of a network of institutional actors that could see their interests realized through the position of Slow Food has established in the development of alternative agro-food networks. Primary among these was the Italian state and its emergent role as a development actor within context of EU assistance programs. In sourcing civil society partners, the state saw an alignment with Slow Food as a vehicle through which Italian nationalism could be directly attached to development assistance projects built

around the protection and refinement of regionally ‘typical’ products and the use of Slow Food as a mechanism to tie ‘developed’ conditions of production to sympathetic consumer markets. Both the state and regional governments also saw local development benefits in Slow Food’s spreading reputation and used it as the basis for the expansion of tourism and the construction of a new University of Gastronomic Sciences built around the concept of ecogastronomy and aimed primarily at foreign students (with the accordant high tuition fees) (cf., Bessire 1998).²³ In becoming project oriented, Slow Food ultimately became increasingly production focused. While initially having represented its support of sustainable production as grounded in the reorientation of consumption, the shift to the rhetoric of development, and the consequent demand for production outlets, increasingly structured the organization as an actor that worked to shape relations of production and modes of distribution²⁴.

Presidia are organized around a rhetoric of the relation between 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’.²⁵ Indeed, the criteria for *Presidia* formation emphasize the importance of locale and tradition, and an implicit relation to nature, in the process of qualification. 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; prepared according to specific techniques that reflect tradition; and symbolically important as a regional food.²⁶ These criteria also clearly serve as benchmarks for the qualification of *Presidia* products.

²³ Notably while students at the University come from all over the world, instructors are almost entirely Italian. And, while faculty seem hesitant in interviews to critique the University program and its attachment to the cultural objectives of Slow Food or the state, students showed no such reluctance and in conversations, a number of them were openly critical of Slow Food’s mode of operation.

²⁴ Most recently this has taken the form of agreements with the COOP chain of supermarkets or its role in new forms of retailing like Eataly in Torino (http://www.eatalytorino.it/eatalytorino/welcome_eng.lasso) or through associations with buyers for Whole Foods in the US, an operation that despite the qualifications of the products it carries operates based on a corporate model of mass retail, as became clear from the CEOs statements during the recent US health care debates.

²⁵ The value created through this rhetoric is discussed below

²⁶ Note the similarity to requirements for PDO status.

At *Cheese!*, for example, it is clear that *presidia* have a social ‘stage’ of their own and are differentiated from other actors by virtue of their status. Every *presidia* booth is identified and marked as a Slow Food *presidium* by a banner with a standard layout that includes a uniform colour scheme, the prominent display of Slow Food logos, the name of the *Presidium* and an accompanying narrative. The banners simultaneously mark an ‘association’ across *Presidia* through their uniformity, while seemingly differentiating the *Presidia* and their products through the substance of the narrative. But a close look at the narratives also reveals a striking uniformity. 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, emphasis mine).*

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 Härjedalen. 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 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 *Svenske lantrasget*...Once tens of thousand soft *Svenske**

*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* (Fieldnotes, Bra, Italy, Sept. 22, 2007, emphasis mine).

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 naturalism²⁷. 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 mediator – commonly artisan - rather than manufacturer. For example, the promotional brochure of the Artisan Somerset Cheddar *presidium* - a group of three cheese makers 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) - 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)

²⁷ Again see Cook (2007) for a discussion of the value of a naturalist aesthetics in Western European history.

This 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 expression of what a 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.” This possibility of corruption exists because the pathways of distribution, over which the cheese maker has little control, contain nodes in which the intended qualities of 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, all the while believing that they are consuming a natural product.

This is the job of qualification and it is these descriptions serve in part to define *presidium* ‘goods’ by highlighting a combination of qualities or characteristics that establish its singularity. As Callon et al. (2002; 198) point out,

“This singularity, because it stems from a combination, is relational. In fact, the selected characteristics can be used to describe other goods, with which relations of similitude or proximity are likely to be established. Defining a good means positioning it in a space of goods, and a system of differences and similarities, of distinct yet connected categories.”

It is in defining this space of goods that Slow Food excels. Indeed, these short examples of *presidia* representations are characteristic of Slow Food promotional materials and reveal how particular kinds of cheese, while retaining singularity, acquire status as moral objects through the assertion of a naturalism that invokes both ecology and aesthetics and conflates them with social relations in the form of ‘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; just as **species** conservation has, over time, become a concern with biodiversity conservation/protection, the Slow Food movement has been able to generate value on the public gains of the conservation movement and its vernacular – the romanticism associated with, and consequent support of, ‘local’ knowledge (in contradistinction to the ‘scientific’ knowledge that characterizes industrial processes), as well as the ecological diversity it is seen to support. But it is the ‘crisis’ of extinction that is the most ingenious, if incidental, innovation in Slow Food’s exercise of qualification. One of the primary issues involved in qualification is the threat of disqualification brought on by the fact that in the act of qualification a good is brought into relation with other goods and projected against a background of substitutability and comparability. This need to constantly differentiate the good against the background of goods – to position a good in a space goods - is what generates a constant demand for requalification. In qualifying a cheese as ‘natural’ and attaching the threat of ‘extinction’, Slow Food is radically reducing competition by making ‘potential nonexistence’ a primary quality through which the cheese acquires value and through which consumers can attach themselves to the product. That quality which Slow Food, in combination with other actors, attaches to the good effectively reduces the range of competition and potential substitutability by saying, in essence, that there is no substitute; that the social and ecological relations that revolve around

the production of this product are unique, that they will cease to exist without consumption, and that is (morally) bad.

Within this rhetorical framework, cheese is vested with redemptive properties for the producer. As a product 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 considered both necessary for its production and seen as ‘traditional’ in the locales of production and consumption. 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 relation to a socially-oriented biodiversity conservation, has come to be applied to cheese. Within the rhetoric of Slow Food, and the *presidia* it sponsors, cheese is qualified as a good that derives from and reproduces local socio-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 *Cheesel*, 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 accordant mystical understandings of their surroundings.²⁸ But they do not hint at the active role that Slow Food actually takes in sanctioning the organization of production and materially shaping the products they produce, and through its operations producing a politics (as much as an economy) of scale.

4.2 Slow Food, Qualification, and the Production of Scale

While the name connotes a temporal significance, a much more central element of Slow Food

²⁸ That cheese, or at least ‘goods’, can be seen to embody these moral qualities is not a particularly new idea. We can find parallels in Renaissance Europe where Cook (2007; 14-15) points out that a large proportion of private wealth was spent on the consumption of valued objects that subsequently took on the quality of personal virtues and became imbued with moral qualities as their consumption served to fuel the expansion of trade, the prosperity of the state, served as a basis for friendship and fame...and became “discussed as examples of human betterment.” The idea that moral virtues can be rooted in a good rather than “the good” is key to the concept of ethical consumption but also to its critique (Goodman 2004, Carrier 2010) as it diverts attention away from ‘doing good’, or ‘the common good’ and, by focusing people’s attention on the moral virtue of a product, allows systems of production, distribution and consumption to ignore deliberations on just what constitutes “the good”.

involves not simply the defense but the creation of particular socio-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 associations of rural-local-tradition (Bérard and Marchenay 1995). Attempts to naturalize this configuration express a particular politics tied to a declensionist narrative that associates the anxiety of ‘losing’ imagined rural communities with an accordant loss of morality. As Leitch (2003) points out, Slow Food’s activities are wrapped up in questions of moral economies and with the imagination of Europe’s future as much as its past.²⁹ 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 the production and qualification of objects like cheese that are, in turn, associated with the expression 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 efforts to attach qualities of ‘goodness’ to that product and communicate those qualities across space, rely on spatially extensive markets that value and seek out diversity, and whose members support a defensive localism through the consumption of what they read as ‘good’ goods; that is as products that contain, as much as reflect, moral qualities.

In its apparent defense of localism and its relation to entrepreneurialism, Slow Food is, in effect, bringing ‘the local’ into being. Through the circulation of a model of consumption that emphasizes qualities of nature, tradition and scale, Slow Food engages in a process of creative production to meet the resulting demands for products with these qualities. This alignment happens through the act of identifying, defining and delineating a terrain associated with the production of particular foods, defining ‘tradition’ through the

²⁹ See Guy (2003) for a wonderful example of the same questions in the deployment of the concept of *terroir* during the class struggle for control over production in 19th century Chamapgne.

relation between terrain and people who inhabit it, but then investing the food with added value by signifying place as ‘the local’.³⁰

In some cases, like description of *Presidia* products, this can involve structuring the representations of the relations between people, place and product, often in markedly conservative ways.³¹ But it can also involve a more explicit engagement in the manufacture of products, subsequently labeled as traditional or typical, to meet the demands of consumption. In these cases, representations of social relations of production found in Slow Food promotional material often differ from the descriptions of those social relations offered by producers. *Cheese!*, for example, is one site where producers are markedly open in discussing the ways in which production is modified in efforts to penetrate new markets and extend circulation. To take a single case, the *Presidium* for Bulgarian Green Cheese, established in 2007, and present at both the 2007 and 2009 editions of *Cheese!*, is represented in Slow Food promotional materials as an association to protect the traditional knowledge and practice required to make *zeleno sirene*, a product that they claim is unique in the Balkans and under threat of extinction. Interviews with *presidium* representatives, however, reveal the more specific cultural economic work performed through the intervention of Slow Food. In keeping with the salvation motif of the Ark of Taste, SFFB actively seeks out new *presidium* products, using its national associations and a network of associated academics and food professionals to identify potential candidates for possible inclusion in the Ark and formation of *Presidia*. The

³⁰ For example, a *presidium* is established not simply because of the qualities of a product that have qualified it for registration in the Ark of Taste but on the basis of having an explicit point of origin designated as ‘local’ but without any particular scalar configuration. The importance of locale/local becomes clear in cases where SFI has turned down requests for *Presidia* on the basis that there is no single community of origin that can be identified. In many ways this indicates the way in which *Presidia* are predicated on European rural history and the prevalence of common property over private property more common in North America. It is easier to mark a community of origin when a product can be tied to the existence of common property and cooperative forms of production. “Our history is fundamentally about communities and about the men and women who live there. **Theirs** [North America’s] is a newer, more recent history with a flexibility to move around so it’s not something that exists there – to have, for centuries, a product in one community” (Piero Sardo, President of SFFB, **Interview**, Sept., 2009). Sardo’s implicit assertion here is that ‘the local’ in North America and Europe are not commensurate.

³¹ In many ways, this is nothing new. Ideas of *terroir* and its codification in Geographical Indications have been serving this role for decades even if the role of class struggle in the origins of these mechanisms has been overlooked (Brodhag 2000; but see Guy 2003, **Douget and O’Conner 2003**). The association between place, product and process and their articulation with the ‘moral’ demands of consumption generates a market, and sets those products into a commodity circuit facilitated by the model of consumption circulated by Slow Food via its promotional activities, its social mechanisms like *Convivia*,³¹ and its instrumental mechanisms such as its own new label of authenticity for *Presidia* products.

entrepreneurial quality of Slow Food and its practice of hosting promotional events like Salone del Gusto, Terra Madre and *Cheese!*, that are heavily dependant on the devices of spectacle, also demands the frequent sourcing of new products to consistently refresh the stock of actors and the appeal of their events³². They also need to consistently draw in new actors and new product to provide new associational opportunities for buyers and distributors who are also constantly seeking out a competitive edge by sourcing new product and relatively exclusive supply lines. Bulgarian Green Cheese was ‘discovered’ as part of this process. In the words of one representative of Slow Food Bulgaria:

“the cheese was recently discovered only two years ago. In 2007, when representatives of slow food together with Mr. Sardo visited Bulgaria to nominate cheese communities to participate in the *Cheese! 2007*. And it was a funny story that the mayor of Tcherni Vit had found a small piece of this green cheese and it was on the breakfast table among all the other things that we had to taste. And then all of a sudden this small piece became a star because immediately after it had been discovered on the table it was decided that Slow Food would make a *presidium* to keep, to secure this cheese from extinction. So far with the support of Slow Food we have managed to renovate and equip a small aging place for the cheese so that it will become a kind of center of production for the green cheese and it will show people that this is the place where cheese is prepared under controlled conditions and so on. And the green cheese had the chance to be presented at *Cheese! 2007* and then Terra Madre was here and now this year we have also green cheese here at *Cheese! 2009*.

³² Notably, this can also be a source of alienation. In the words of one producer referring to his experience at Salone del Gusto, “when we first had the *presidium*, we were right at the front, and there was a lot of promotion, and it was really encouraging. But then we gradually got pushed further to the back. And it was really quite stressful. And we are farmers, so we thought, every other year at Bra was really all that we would do.” His point here is that being new solicits greater promotional support from Slow Food and provides a competitive advantage, but the constant refreshing diminishes the utility of participating in the event.

This statement highlights the interventionist effect of Slow Food and how those effects not only articulate both place and product with new actors and sites, but bring into being new practices of production that, in essence, create a new product. While *presidium* members claim that ‘green’ cheese is unique to the area around Tcherni Vit - white, barrel-aged, cheese is common in the Balkans, but green cheese is not - they also agree that the moulding responsible for the ‘greening’ of the cheese is not intentional. The cheese is made two or three times per day, while shepherds are at pasture, packed into wooden molds until the end of the grazing season when it is transported down to the village and stored in the basements of people’s houses. Unlike most veined cheeses, mould spores are neither injected into this cheese nor washed onto the surface. According to producers, moulding occurs spontaneously when the barrels are opened and the cheese is exposed to humid cool air, and they cannot predict whether a cheese will mould or not. Producers, stressed, however, that this was a random process. Some cheese moulds and some do not.³³ They also stressed that not everyone enjoys the green cheese:

“Some people do not have the developed culture for it. So it’s up to the family, or the families who like green cheese. Some wait for the cheese to become green and some throw it away because they think that the moulding is related to rotting. So it is an absolutely natural product but some of the people in the region like it, and some of the people do not.”

Perhaps more importantly, rather than protecting ‘traditional production practice and knowledge, Slow Food’s intervention has involved technical consultants with the specific role of taking a product whose qualities were to some degree random and dependant on ‘natural’ conditions and generating a controlled production environment using standard techniques and a standardized recipe:

³³ Presumably this is dependant on the different conditions in which the cheese are stored, with some locales providing better habitat for the microflora responsible for moulding.

“Green cheese has never been a market product, so nobody has worked deliberately on achieving a constant quality of the cheese itself. So it’s a kind of experiment that we are now making to make the cheese product for the market so that the consumer can find always one and the same cheese and rely on the producer.” (representative, Slow Food Bulgaria)

First we are trying to standardize the recipe because still the recipe is quite variable...different families, different recipes. So we are trying to develop the recipe to have, to have one product finally, for the community, for the village, and then we have many people from the States, and here from Italy who will have an interest in buying bigger amounts for restaurants, for the shops, so I think that will be good for us.” (Bulgarian Green Cheese *Presidium* member)

In an interesting twist, however, the cheese that producers made following the advice of the consultant³⁴, displayed the ‘traditional’ quality of random moulding and failed to mould:

“when *Cheese!* was approaching, we started to make the green cheese. We put the white cheese to mould and then it didn’t mould at all. No green fungi developed on it. It was desperate because *Cheese!* was approaching very fast. So then we used some cheese, which was produced in the old way, with the old recipe, and we brought some of this cheese here.”

Rather than see this as evidence that their conventional mode of production yielded the desired result - a green cheese - Slow Food Bulgaria and *presidium* members continued to pursue the more apposite objective of securing market entry and persisted in their search for the knowledge and practice that would produce standardization and yield a product suitable for market:

³⁴ A member of Slow Food International’s Roster of Experts and Technical for (what consortium)

“Yesterday we had an inspiring meeting with Mr Guyarin [the Slow Food consultant] and we found some of the mistakes which we made, because none of us are cheesemakers. None of us is an expert; none of us knows the science behind the cheese. We are becoming more and more experts in cheesemaking, probably next time we will be more successful.”

Notably this remark reveals how the attachment of qualities to the cheese is related to market demands for consistency. The apparently random process of moulding that has typically characterized the cheese is not valued as a quality worthy of attachment in a representational process that seeks to differentiate the cheese made in Tcherni Vit from other white cheeses made across the Balkans. Rather than making the randomness of moulding a defining and differentiating quality of the cheese, the formation of a *presidium* has set in motion the apparatus of Slow Food, including assistance in standardizing production conditions needed for product uniformity, integration into a network of social relations required for the circulation of that product, and the provision of representational services that mask the ways in which joining the Slow Food movement has altered not simply production practices and the final product, but in doing so has in fact altered place:

“People in Cherni Vit are becoming more and more supportive and they are contacting the mayor and saying that they want to join the *presidium*, they want to give either their milk or the cheese for moulding.”

This seemingly simple statement masks a shift that implies significant change. As production becomes centralized, does the knowledge of production practices also become compartmentalized? As cheese production moves out of houses, what happens to the habitat for the microflora responsible for moulding?

As the focus of dairying becomes more directed toward centralized accumulation and single product production, what happens to the articulation of social relations between the household and the village? The list goes on. But what is important here is that as actors related to Slow Food ostensibly seeks to engage in practices of defensive localism, they simultaneously ‘displace’ and reterritorialize ‘the local’ by situating the social relations of production in translocal circuits of regulation and consumption (cf., Cook and Crang 1996).³⁵ The product, the production process and the social relations of production – “the local” if you will – are being brought into being – manufactured - in relation to the translocal demands and the multiple interests of distinct actors – the mayor’s interest in economic development; Slow Food Bulgaria’s interest in gaining visibility within the Slow Food network and in the eyes of the Bulgarian state; SFFB’s interest in the formation of *presidium* and in the attachment of qualities that differentiate *presidium* products; the interest of restaurants, shops, and distributors in capitalizing on the added value of providing ‘traditional’ products like Bulgarian Green Cheese; and the interests of consumers seeking to construct social identity through the qualities attached to those products. But for their plurality, all of these interests revolve around the organizational work of Slow Food; the action taken by Slow Food to start the *presidium*, the social reorganization implied in the need to find dedicated people (like the mayor) willing to expand production, and the creation of standardization (through consultants) to generate a consistent product for market (see Mutersbaugh 2005a).

³⁵ Much the same occurs through the disciplinary mechanism of Geographical Indications. In defense of the local, sanction is ceded to the state, which subsequently regulates who and what qualifies as local and determines how localness will be measured and assessed. In the process, ‘the local’ is deterritorialized, subjected to the regulatory and disciplinary mechanisms of the state (which include the use of science to qualify ‘the local’, and the articulation of the local with foreign trade objectives of the state), and reterritorialized within ideologies of nationalism (see Guy 2006). In a transnational cultural economy where actors focus on the qualification of products in relation to ‘consumer desire’ and social identity, ‘localness’ breaks free of its material geographic pinning and becomes a virtual quality that can be attached to a product and circulated. The proximity of the consumer to the point of production is not as important as the role of consumption in protecting lifeways thought to be ‘local’ and the signification of place-bound modes of production that can be represented as ‘traditional’ (see West 2010).

“I’m happy to present to you the three most important people in this story. This is the first, Mr. Piero Sardo, who discovered the cheese in 2007; then this is the mayor of Tcherni Vit who tries to keep the cheese alive, and motivates people to support the *Presidium* and produce the cheese; and then Mr. Guyarin who gives us the hope that our cheese has a future because he helps us to stabilize the product.”

The effect of these actors is to create a requalified product, grounded in socio-spatial relations that transcend the community, but one that will assume value through the mediating qualities of nature, ‘tradition’, threats of extinction, and the claims that Slow Food makes to defend local ways of life.

Presidia products supposedly stand as ideals, as examples of what might happen to other products if their qualities are not protected. In many cases these products have suffered from changing modes or practices of consumption in their local markets and those products have not been ‘requalified’ to engage with those changes (cf., Callon et al. 2002). It is just this act of requalification that Slow Food is engaging in – but a significant component of that requalification lies in articulating the product with a more spatially extensive market, such that the product travels far beyond the boundaries of its historical sphere of circulation. It is able to do this in part because of the transnational commensurability between ideas of nature and tradition, particularly surrounding food. And in important ways they hope that the requalification of a product in those spatially extensive markets will lead to its requalification ‘at home’. For the Bulgarian Green Cheese *presidium*:

“local people can see that their product is highly appreciated and highly valued by foreigners and all over the world; that they value their product, because sometimes this is a problem - that the local people cannot believe that they have something valuable in their hands, some product that can bring money and benefit to them.”

But this also suggests that the requalification of the product has different implications in its locale of production than it does for a new market. For the new market, Green Cheese is represented as a traditional and natural product, made in a small region of the Balkans by a small group of farmers whose historical livelihood is being maintained by the act of consuming the cheese. These representations are meant to condition consumption so that it becomes an exclusive experience of consuming the rare, and the exotic, while simultaneously doing the 'good' work of contributing to the reproduction of traditional, and supposedly sustainable, livelihoods by consuming the 'good'. Yet, for the producers, green cheese has become something new - a standardized product no longer made in underground cellars, no longer a product of chance, no longer made by individual households, no longer made for their own consumption, but something standardized, produced in a centralized location and explicitly created not to defend the local, but to create it. As green cheese becomes a vehicle for economic development rather than, say, the acquisition of protein, new commercial modes of valuation come to dominate its production and bring with them new ecological conditions, altered social relations and new forms of calculation (cf., Murdoch, Marsden and Banks 2000, Mutersbaugh 2005b).

The cheese makers of Tcherni Vit are not alone in this attempt to restructure production and break what they see as the restrictive economic shackles of local circulation. In conversations with members of other *Presidia* present at ***Cheese!*** it was clear that they too are engaged in acts of calculation not necessarily or singularly devoted to the maintenance of local conditions of production but to expanding markets, and to extracting profit from multiple sites of value creation which occur at different points in the 'commodity' circuit'. Despite the supposed educational focus of *Presidia* and their role in the preservation of biodiversity, all of them stated clearly that their reason for coming to Bra was to make contact with retail buyers, distributors, chefs, restaurateurs, journalists, - anyone who could extend the circulation of their cheese into larger markets through which they could command a higher price premium. In fact, a number of *Presidia*

were organized not by farmers but by cheese distributors seeking to stabilize the volume and quality of production so that they could export it internationally and realize revenue well above domestic returns.³⁶ In some cases *Presidia* booths were staffed not by cheese makers but by marketers – this only became apparent when the question was put directly - who explained that they were better trained in developing new markets and were more suited to promotion than cheese makers. This makes cheese makers and marketers no different then any of the other actors at *Cheese!* - distributors looking to gain access to new markets, regional governments seeking to procure greater economic development, buyers looking for differentiated, exclusive products to extend their range of offerings, food writers and journalists planning to write on the new cultural cache of cheese, academics carving out new research spaces, an organization seeking to extend its legitimacy as a cultural economic actor - each with strategic interests and partial knowledge, and each actively engaged in the creation of value. The difference with *Cheese!*, and what makes it such a valuable site of study, is that each of these ‘actors’ who typically “encounter and construct a commodity at different moments in its circulation” are copresent (Foster 2006; 288). Multiple locals, and the locales they represent, convene to give shape to the space of a transnational economy, and reveal the knowledge, interests, social relations, mutuality, interactions, devices, and instruments involved in configuring that space; shattering the notion of the defined, delineated and bounded ‘local’ that lies at the heart of Slow Food’s organizational strategy and revealing it as a quality actively produced and attached to cheese in the simultaneous production of a transnational product space.

5. Conclusion: The Boundary Effect of Slow Food

Envision yourself in a cheese shop, shelves sagging under the burden of diverse products from just as many diverse sites of production. The 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

³⁶ The Somerset Cheddar *Presidium* is a case in point.

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 1989; 300). Historically, however, it is just these relations, often obscured in the representation of other commodities, that Slow Food is trying to selectively expose through deploying a rhetoric of aesthetic and ecological naturalism, and in doing so linking consumption with a knowledge, and valuing of processes of production.³⁷ Through this strategy, 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. That is ostensibly one of the primary goals of festivals like *Cheesel*; to bring consumers face-to-face with producers, to educate consumers so they are better able to identify distinctions between ‘traditional’ and industrial conditions of production. But Slow Food also effectively reconfigures the veil through discursive projects that produce tradition, ‘the local’ and associated images of 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 (see Carrier 2010).

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 or 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 or alp. But this relational boundary tends to externalize an opposition that is really internal (de Certeau 1984). It is ‘local people’, to use the vernacular, who are taking jobs in cities, selling pastures to recognize material gains, and using processed foods. Despite this relationality, Slow Food rhetoric occludes the complex cultural politics of livelihood change in rural areas while both (re)producing and exploiting 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

³⁷ I say selectively because the phrases traditional and artisanal mask the **sometimes-oppressive** social relations implicated in their processes of production.

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 constructed relation of tradition, ‘the local’, and ‘nature’ - 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. This 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’. Even as it conflates the spatial with the social, 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 engaged, at different points, in the commodity circuit.³⁸ 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), even as it cynically engages with highly capitalized modes of distribution (Fonte 2005). In fact, all indications are that it is not producing practices that challenge market domination, it is not subordinating the demands of the market to the interests of producers, it is not creating co-producers out of consumers. Rather it is subordinating ethics to the market, and creating/requalifying products in relation to the qualities of a model of consumption that Slow Food itself has played a strong role in producing.

³⁸ For example, oppressive gender relations that facilitate, and are reinforced by, certain production practices? Or the conditions of retail workers situated differently within the commodity circuit (e.g., New York Jobs with Justice and Queens College Labour Centre 2005)?

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!*, 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.³⁹ 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 also tends to expose the weakness of simplistic characterizations of the relationship between defensive localism and some loosely defined idea of globalization. Take Wilson and Fearn (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.

This aligns directly with 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). Statements like these are remarkable for their lack of reflexivity, the degree to which, in Petrini’s case, he fails to recognize how localness and regionality are already subject to macroeconomics, and the way in which Slow Food’s ‘success’ in ‘taste education’ and the ‘defense of pleasure’ have created a macroeconomic context that extends the market not simply for the commodity **but** for the qualities attributed to the commodity. The goals of the movement imbue the commodity (fine cheese) with new

³⁹ 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.

power (the facilitation of distinction) that creates its own spatially extensive markets facilitated by new models in, and technologies of, distribution, marketing and retail. These statements also 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 evaluated in relation to the cultural-economic contexts in which they develop. To write off the rise of goods attributed with qualities of ‘the local’ to “globalizing and modernizing forces” is to avoid the empirical responsibility of analyzing and describing this context. It is also to ignore the ways in which ‘local’ and ‘global’ as delimited phenomenon are brought into being in relation to specific political projects like those of Slow Food⁴⁰. Indeed, one of the primary benefits of attending and attending to events like *Cheese!* is that it provides an ability to directly observe the explicit cultural political work required to simultaneously produce and articulate a demand for ‘quality’ goods (such as ‘good’ cheese) while aligning the supply of those goods through specific processes of production and qualification (e.g., practices of qualification that attribute moral virtues to cheese). It also shows how approaching the development of alternative agro-food networks from an ethnographic sense of the “making and shaping of things” and through attention to mediated practices of production and consumption, reveals the role of organizations, institutions, and networks, and the mechanisms of coordination and control, involved in this development, (Pratt 2004; 125).

Perhaps most importantly, it opens to view the a paradox that results from the ways in which not only the state but social actors like Slow Food appropriate the historical space of certain social relations of production, distribution and consumption – ‘the local’ and reterritorialize them in the space of their own regulatory operations, in the spaces of the governmental and institutional agencies and businesses they are affiliated with, in its own entrepreneurial agency, and ultimately in the ideological domain of its loose

⁴⁰ 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’ 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.

network of parochial yet transnational members (*Presidia* and *Convivia*). Rather than seeing this as an analytic end, however, it is productive to treat this observation as an empirical means, because the paradox is instructional if what we seek is an understanding of how ‘the local’ and ‘the global’ are relationally brought into being through the multiple and interrelated cultural-political-economic projects that set ‘goods’ like cheese in motion and direct their flow.

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