

**Beyond Food as Fuel:
A Socio-cultural Analysis of the Slow Food Movement**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis provides a socio-cultural analysis of the Slow Food movement to understand how the movement uses culture as a means to challenge the economic focus of the industrial food system and to construct an alternative vision of food. The research consists primarily of reviewing literature in food studies and examining texts produced by the movement. I examine themes in the movement's writings to build a picture of the role culture can play in creating a different future of food. The thesis also looks at an aspect of social movement culture, identity, to get an idea of Slow Food's potential to pursue cultural change in the food system. Slow Food provides a good example of how a cultural perspective of food is being put into practice to raise awareness of the importance of food and the possibility of organizing a food system differently. There are limitations to focusing on culture, indicating the importance for Slow Food to better account for the political economic dimensions of food.

Examiners:

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis provides a socio-cultural analysis of the Slow Food movement in order to understand how the movement uses culture as a means to resist and change the industrial food system. The research consists of reviewing literature in social studies of food and critically examining texts produced by members of the Slow Food movement. I also consider how an aspect of social movement culture, namely identity, can be an effective strategy for Slow Food to determine actions for pursuing a different future for food. I draw on work from a range of disciplines to inform the analysis, including anthropology, history, geography and political economy, though a sociological perspective reflects the focus of my training. Since food is involved in many social systems, it is a useful medium through which to understand society and to reflect on the relations between fields of social research. As an aspect of culture, food is also a site for working out the politics of diverse ways of living.

In the past, the topic of food has not held very high status in social research, and has often been taken for granted for its ordinariness (Beardsworth and Kail 1997; Bourdieu 1984; Lupton 1994; 1996; McIntosh 1996; Mennell, Murcott and van Otterloo 1992; Mintz 1996; Murcott 1988). Some disciplines, like anthropology, have given greater attention to food than others, like sociology. As a result of this limited disciplinary interest, food studies have been slow to develop broader social perspectives that connect food's multiple dimensions. This work has tended to view food as either a symbolic or material good, and as either an individual or cultural issue (McIntosh 1996). Food studies have rarely combined issues of taste, identity

and cuisine with those of agriculture, income and policy. The formation of divided perspectives of food is related to an analytic separation between cultural and economic spheres of life that is prevalent in capitalist societies (Fraser 1998). The dominance of the industrial model of food, that emphasizes the economic as the most important part of food, limits the possible ways of knowing and approaching food. As Kneen (1995: 125) writes, “it is difficult to even find the words through which a different vision might be expressed.” Culture provides one way to envision a different future of food.

Culture is a broad concept whose lack of specificity can make it difficult to determine its role in social change. For the purposes of this thesis, culture is a toolkit of resources that set the conditions for constructing a view of reality and strategies for action (Gubrium and Holstein 1997; Swidler 1986). Culture does not necessarily determine the goals and results but it defines the means for pursuing action and interpreting a situation. Social groups filter elements of culture in the course of action, creating culture in interaction (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2002; Hart 1996). A diverse range of tools and skills give shape to culture. When researchers speak of culture they often refer to symbols, rituals, values, stories and world views, or *codes* (Staggenborg 2001; Swidler 1986; 1995). Culture can also consist of *contexts* in which cultural meanings are created and *institutions* that structure culture and constrain possibilities for action (Swidler 1995). Contexts and institutions help to bring culture down to a concrete level and they emphasize the difficulty of changing elements of pre-existing culture. The combination of codes, contexts and institutions

provides a useful framework for researchers to understand the power of culture in social change. I draw on this framework in my analysis of the Slow Food movement.

Slow Food is a social movement that promotes the value of local, artisanal foods, agricultural biodiversity, the pleasures of eating, and sharing food in good company. Chapter two provides a detailed description of the movement, including some aspects of the cultural context (Italy) in which Slow Food formed. For the Slow Food movement, culture is a means to challenge the economic focus of the industrial food system and to construct an alternative food model. Slow Food sees that methods, recipes and products constituting material culture represent a heritage of diverse ways of living that needs to be protected, like endangered species. Since “cultural outputs,” such as food, are a means of communication and a source of identity, researchers and organizations increasingly recognize culture as a “method for action in the face of destructive tendencies of globalization” (Alloo et al. 2003: 215). Food is one way to defend a way of life against the standardizing and homogenizing trends of the global industrial food system. Because food is a universal, basic need it has long been a source of power and an opportunity for politics (Belasco 1989; Bourdieu 1984; Counihan 1999; Friedmann 1993b; Welsh and MacRae 1998). In chapter three I examine the ways that Slow Food challenges industrial culture through food. Themes in the movement’s texts provide a basis for analyzing the use, and transformative potential, of culture in Slow Food.

Although a focus on culture provides a way to challenge hegemonic orderings of the industrial food system, there are limitations to a cultural approach. Mies and Shiva (1993: 11) warn that “simply up-ending the dualistic structure by discounting

the economy altogether and considering only culture or cultures” is too simplistic. This would ignore the complexity of food, especially how it is shaped by interconnections between cultural and economic systems, as well as strategies for transforming the current food system. A focus on culture as a means of social change has the potential to reproduce structures of exploitation. If a movement focuses solely on issues of recognition, that have traditionally been associated with the “merely cultural” (Butler 1998), it reflects a limited perspective of social justice.

Maldistribution is an equally important aspect of justice. In effect, an extreme cultural approach can reinforce a division between cultural and economic aspects of food, and even the marginalized role of culture in the food system. Furthermore, using culture as a way to develop political opposition can often universalize a way of life and minimize differences and conflict within cultures. For example, cultural traditions are often associated with proven methods and customs, and a greater sense of collectivity, but traditions are often formed through interactions with other cultural groups, are diverse and changing, and can involve negative features like a hierarchical political structure (Fischler 1996; Friedmann 1999; Swidler 1986; Symons 1993). In this thesis, traditions are diverse, partial “cultural beliefs and practices, but ones taken for granted so that they seem inevitable parts of life” (Swidler 1986: 279).

Placing culture at the centre of strategies for change can also discount alternative explanations for food relations. For example, Warnock (1987: 13) argues that, although culture plays a significant role in good dietary practices, “even where these ‘food habits’ are strongly evident, the wealthiest segments of the population do not seem to be suffering from undernutrition.” Culture is particularly useful when it

provides a means to reconceptualize and reform political economic relations that organize the industrial food system.

Another issue with emphasizing culture as a means to resist current food relations is that the difficulties of changing the dominant culture of food can be underplayed. This may be a result of sometimes “fuzzy,” or imprecise, definitions of “culture.” Hart (1996) argues that in many cultural analyses, “the process of culture-making comes off as less constrained, and also perhaps more opportunistic, than it really is.” Individual beliefs and agency, according to Hart, tend to receive more attention than the actual processes involved in culture change. Additionally, since symbols and codes feature more often in ideas of culture, the difficulty of confronting and altering aspects of culture is minimized (Hart 1996). This point highlights the importance of looking also to contexts and institutions that structure and constrain cultures. In a related vein, some researchers (Goodman and Redclift 1991; McIntosh 1996) argue that cultural analyses often neglect to consider the diversity within cultures, which underestimates the difficulty and conflict in processes of culture-making. In sum, when isolated from the society of which it is a part, culture offers limited transformative potential. Some of these issues will be addressed in the analysis of the Slow Food movement.

One way the Slow Food movement seeks to challenge the dominant culture of food is by constructing an oppositional identity. Researchers have become increasingly attuned to the importance of identity in contemporary social conflicts. They argue that social conflict has shifted from the realm of class and distribution issues to more personal areas of life (Melucci 1989; Sturgeon 1995). Furthermore,

Foucault (1978) influenced new ideas of power as relational, productive and the result of particular techniques, rather than as a predetermined reflection of the social structure (Goodman and DuPuis 2002; Hendrickson and Heffernan 2002; Lockie 2002; Marsden 2000; Reynolds 2002). In Bauman's (2001) view, domination in contemporary society occurs less through coercion and management from above, and more often through the uncertainty of the dominated as they try to predict the actions of rulers. The construction of a political identity provides a means to resist the imposition of power into personal, interpretive realms of life and to create a sense of security in uncertain and unstable times. In this thesis, identity refers to the process by which interacting individuals construct a definition of their experiences, interests and directions for action (Melucci 1989; Taylor and Whittier 1999). In Slow Food's view, the process of defining an identity for itself has helped the movement to grow and gain wider appeal. Chapter four explores how the construction of an oppositional identity can be an effective strategy for the Slow Food movement to pursue culture change.

The concept of identity presents some difficulties for its use in politics. An oppositional identity is usually constructed outside the bounds of traditional political institutions, and is incited to express difference (Bauman 2001; Sandilands 1999). As a result, identity often reproduces the same conditions of exclusion and inequality that it is meant to challenge (Melucci 1989; Sandilands 1999) rather than seeking democratic social transformation. For example, the revival of cultural traditions has become an important source of solidarity and identity for social movements, but since traditions are often invoked to express a need for "autonomous self-determination of

identity” (Melucci 1989: 89), and tradition is itself a contested concept, the use of “tradition” can serve to exacerbate differences and conflict. For example, as corporations attempt to “create a global ‘tradition’ for a culturally diverse world” (Friedmann 1999: 55) they create new inequalities through production and distribution that support changes in eating patterns. One site for a more politicized identity exists in expressions of multiple interconnected identities. An affinity group, for example, consists of members who have localized or situated identities and are not only defined by a communal or collective identity (Sturgeon 1995). Rather than masking differences at the risk of appearing exclusionary, as collective identity tends to do, this kind of political organization builds on the diversity of its members, constructing ties based on their linked struggles. Similarly, imagined communities involve linking distinct local struggles across the boundaries of collective identity to challenge the web of oppression in the dominant society (Baker 1999). By linking diverse identities rather than seeking out sameness, these forms of organization can address issues of recognition alongside those of distribution, approaching a more complex notion of social justice (Warren 1999). Sectarianism loses its potency when researchers place recognition and identity issues in the frame of social justice, a goal traditionally ordered around distribution (Bauman 2001).

Another issue with identity is that, if it serves to contest hegemonic interpretations of reality, then identity can never be stable and final. For social movement identity to appear alternative and to offer a sense of security to individual anxieties, it must mask its constructed origins (Bauman 2001; Melucci 1989; Sandilands 1999). But an oppositional identity can never provide security,

representativeness and stability precisely because it is constructed with particular interests in mind and relies on the existence of an “other” to whom it is opposed. The idea of community has gained popularity as a “safe haven” from the instability and insecurity of identity struggles. In Bauman’s (2001) view, identity serves as a substitute for community since community is hard to find in many contemporary societies. The construction of a common or communal identity provides a kind of insurance against the uncertainties of identity, according to Bauman (2001), but it is usually built on uniformity and cannot achieve the characteristics associated with the community that people desire. Initiatives for linking identities, and identity struggles to other forms of politics, provide opportunities for people to develop an ethical community and a more authentic sense of security. Bauman (2001) describes an ethical community as a combination of long-term commitments, inalienable rights and unshakeable obligations. Ethical community offers the possibility of negotiating the tension that Bauman (2001) identifies between freedom (identity) and security (community). Clearly identity (and community) is a powerful but complicated strategy for pursuing social and cultural change.

Limitations of the Thesis

In addition to the limitations of tackling difficult concepts of culture and identity, there are some more practical limitations to this thesis. A socio-cultural analysis admittedly focuses on one aspect of Slow Food and can minimize other dimensions and contributions of the Slow Food movement. For example, Pietrykowski (2004) argues that the movement provides opportunities to create new diverse forms of economic life. Swidler’s framework for cultural analysis can help to

maintain a link between dimensions of culture and other aspects of society. By exploring the construction of culture through texts, this research does tend to focus on codes rather than contexts and institutions. A participatory form of research could better convey the movement's process of culture making. The use of textual data may reflect intentions more than actions. However, texts also offer the opportunity to explore a range of sources in a short time and with relatively easy access. Finally, cultural differences between the movement and me can present barriers to my interpretation and analysis of Slow Food. Since I am not fluent in Italian I am restricted to (often translated) English texts that do not necessarily represent all dimensions of the movement. As well, my interpretations of the movement are informed by the cultural context in Canada, which is difficult to specify, and the highly industrialized character of much of Canadian society. However, personal experiences inform my deep appreciation for the social and cultural values of food.

Locating Myself in the Research

Although I am not a member of Slow Food and do not have an investment or history with the movement, a personal interest in food attracts me to Slow Food and motivates this research on food. Throughout my life I have enjoyed growing and making food. As a child I was surrounded with homemade goods and taught many food related skills like gardening and food preservation. I recognize that these skills served to prepare me for womanhood and the homemaker role, since my brothers did not receive the same training. But while food activities were constraining, fitting me into a gender role (Lupton 1994), I also enjoyed the physical work, observing the processes of transforming food, and feeling connected to "nature." Lupton (1994)

argues that food memories serve to identify significant meanings, relations and events to do with food. Positive memories of food in my childhood reinforce the idea that food is an important and satisfying part of life, and a means to understand and relate to society and nature. I value Slow Food's efforts to raise the profile of food and to promote the pleasure and community that food can provide.

While positive memories of food in childhood help to make food an important and interesting topic for research, negative food experiences also influence this interest. It may be ironic or fitting that an intimate connection to food early on led to anorexia nervosa later. This experience certainly reduced my enjoyment of food but it also raised my awareness of food issues. Anorexia can be understood as a struggle between body and mind, the denial of hunger and food representing the denial of the existence of body and sensual experience. Some feminist researchers see eating disorders as a form of resistance, in one of the few ways women have available, against the traditional female domestic role, ideals of femininity, conspicuous consumption, and the limits of the body (Bordo 1989; 1992). The experience brought to my consciousness the contradictory relationship of women to food, whereby women are expected to know about and perform much of the food work but not to enjoy the products of their labour in order to maintain an ideal feminine body. In recognizing my own bodily need for food I came to appreciate physical sensations as sources of self-knowledge, cues to needs of the self and how these needs can be met. I do not take for granted the distinct characters of foods, the work involved in providing enjoyable food, and the processes of eating and tasting. The prevalent idea of food as fuel prevents this kind of self-awareness and the possibility of enjoying the

simple pleasures that food can provide. Lupton (1996: 136) notes that “even when anorexics describe themselves as recovered, food retains a sacred quality.” I recognize that promoting the slow enjoyment of good food has far reaching consequences beyond the individual’s body, and that taking time to acknowledge visceral senses can be political.

Work in the produce department of a grocery store has provided a different understanding of food and its politics. This work has unveiled the complexity of processes happening behind the polished displays of perfect produce. It has been especially interesting to observe changes that occurred as the company became a corporation. Policies that aim to standardize products and departments have increasingly shut out small farmers and local produce, reducing the presence of local foods. Whereas many farmers used to sell their fruits and vegetables directly to stores, now all products must be approved through a centralized warehouse. Since all levels of employees established close relations with these farmers and their special foods, corporatization has reduced product knowledge and pride of those working in the grocery store. Guptill and Wilkins (2000) find that incorporating local foods requires educated and empowered local store level staff to organize the retailing of these foods, and developing these human resources is much easier when decision-making occurs at the store level.

Along with changes in the organization of the grocery store, I have noticed gradual changes in the produce itself. Government cuts to the Buy BC campaign have helped to reduce the profile of BC foods, making it more difficult for consumers to connect with local foods and conditions. Consumers have begun to lose trust in local

foods and labels, as when BC Hothouse began growing its products outside BC. Further, since farmers face pressure to produce massive quantities to serve the growing number of stores, the quality of some local foods has decreased and turned some shoppers away. Food choices of consumers seem to be increasingly determined by low prices, convenience and unnatural variety, while the consequences of these choices fade further from the point of purchase. Working in a supermarket has alerted me to the growing power of retailers in the food system and the widening gap between producers and consumers that is facilitated by corporate players.

Offering both theoretical and personal interest, Slow Food is one movement for considering a more complex picture of food in society than that determined by the industrial food system. Slow Food is not necessarily the best opportunity to challenge dominant ideas, relations and models of food. The movement does offer an example for applying and developing theory on the cultural dimensions of food. Slow Food recognizes that food is not only a commodity or an abstract concept but an intimate part of daily life that is essential to sustenance and quality of living. As well, the movement draws attention to the significance of basic needs for understanding and changing society. At a time when processes of development and industrialization create the illusion that such needs can be overcome, Slow Food offers a strong argument for paying attention to how food and eating affect how we live.

Chapter 2

Introduction to the Slow Food Movement

In this chapter I provide an overview of the Slow Food movement, and explore aspects of the cultural context in which Slow Food formed. The material presented here informs the analysis in the next two chapters. While I aim to build a picture of Slow Food to inform the reader and future chapters, it can be difficult to describe Slow Food and to get a complete understanding of all the movement's dimensions. As the movement has developed and expanded, it has grown more complex. One member remarks that "Slow Food is a very big creature, large enough to accommodate more than one point of view as to what it is exactly" (Madison 2001: ix). Slow Food's flexibility has helped the movement to gain global recognition as a voice for a diversity of food issues. The movement's origins in Italy, however, can present some challenges to translating the movement in other locations. An understanding of food in Italian society helps to remind researchers (and members) that the movement's perspective of food is limited, influenced by the specific meanings and values of food in Italy.

The Slow Food movement formed in 1986 in northern Italy as a response to the growing presence of fast food. At a protest against the opening of McDonald's in Rome, an Italian gastronomic association created the name "Slow Food" as a joke, but this play on words took off as its own movement. Reflecting its roots in the association, the movement initially aimed to spread knowledge about local foods and eateries to consumers. As the movement grew, it aimed more generally to promote pleasure in eating local, traditional foods in good company, at a slower pace by which

consumers can know what they are eating. Local chapters called *convivia* formed in Italy and many European countries to spread gastronomic knowledge. In 1989, Slow Food became international with the creation of a manifesto signed by delegates from around the world. Soon after, the movement added a more direct politics by linking ecological issues to those of eating, as reflected in the philosophy of *eco-gastronomy*. Slow Food created longer-term projects to promote and assist local food production and processing that enable pleasure in eating quality foods. The movement continues to grow, with more than 80,000 members in 128 countries and projects expanding to the third world. The Slow Food movement now defines itself by four main goals: to study and spread material culture, to protect agricultural biodiversity, to produce and spread alternative food information and to promote pleasure and conviviality (Petrini 2001c: 12-13). For the sake of simplicity, I discuss these goals separately, although many of Slow Food's projects combine these goals.

The Slow Food movement has always had an interest in learning about and spreading the products of diverse food cultures, but the movement developed a more political stance on food cultures recently. As the primary working groups from the movement's inception, Slow Food *convivia* form the grassroots aspect of the movement. The purpose of these local groups is to connect with related groups in a region, educate about local foods and create initiatives for supporting local foods and farmers. On an international level, Slow Food organizes exhibitions to showcase and promote the foods of diverse local cultures. The Salone del Gusto (Hall of Taste) draws over 130,000 participants every two years to taste, learn about and discuss quality artisanal foods. Along with the 2004 Salone del Gusto, Slow Food also

organized a forum called Terra Madre for representatives of world “food communities” to discuss ways to create a more diverse food system. Although Terra Madre is now over (October 21-24, 2004), the movement envisioned the event as a “forum for those who seek to grow, raise, catch, create, distribute and promote food in ways that respect the environment, defend human dignity and protect the health of consumers” (Slow Food 2004). “Cheese” is a smaller biannual exhibition that showcases high quality dairy products. As well, Slow Fish is a conference (June 2004) and exhibition to build knowledge and support for sustainable fishing practices and the diversity of local species available for consumption. Slow Food has also begun to collaborate with related organizations that provide a broader support base and set of principles for acknowledging diverse forms of food culture. In 2004, Slow Food began working with the Brazilian government to revive the country’s agricultural heritage and reduce hunger. The movement is part of the International Commission on the Future of Food and Agriculture, a group that presented a manifesto on the negative impacts of industrialized agriculture at the Cancun meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The movement also formally established a working relationship with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 2004, furthering initiatives they shared on previous occasions.

Slow Food created the goal of protecting diverse agricultural heritages more recently than its gastronomic aims. It was with the development of environmental consciousness that Slow Food grew more attentive to how issues of agriculture are linked to the consumption of quality foods. The movement came to recognize connections between eating and farming, as well as between human relations to food

and our relation to the environment. For Slow Food, the existence of diverse agricultural and food production models, and hence the variety of quality products, depends upon environmental biodiversity. Biodiversity refers to “the number and variety of living things on the earth” (Harper and Le Beau 2003: 174) and, in the movement’s view, is a resource for and sign of diversity in food cultures. Slow Food’s philosophy of eco-gastronomy provides one way to envision connections between farmers and eaters, and the ecological consequences of these kinds of relations. By encouraging eaters to learn about the environmental impact of certain forms of production and consumption, the Slow Food movement also highlights how daily food activities contribute to, and are influenced by, processes in the global industrial food system. Petrini (2004c) argues that there is a “common thread” connecting these distinct expressions of traditional food cultures and that this shared common approach reminds communities across the world how they are working toward shared goals. This consciousness of a common thread can be related to the movement’s ideas of “virtuous globalization” or a “virtuous circle” that emphasize just relations of exchange.

Slow Food rejects the standardizing and homogenizing aspects of globalization, preferring instead to focus on the potential for ethical food relations and transnational support. With the addition of environmental consciousness Slow Food formed its Foundation for Biodiversity that organizes and funds projects for protecting cultural and ecological diversity of regional food systems. The main groups funded by the Foundation are the *presidia* that work to develop food cultures using traditional knowledge and the natural biodiversity of a region. The Ark of Taste

is aimed at discovering and cataloguing foods at risk of extinction and to find markets for them. Slow Food recognizes those working to enhance cultural and ecological biodiversity of food, from farmers to researchers, with the Slow Food Award for the Defense of Biodiversity. The Fraternal Tables, or friendship tables, provide funds to projects for developing local food systems. Finally, in 2004 Slow Food formed a partnership with the *Ecologist* magazine, linking the movement to an influential voice on environmental social justice issues.

The Slow Food movement plays an important role in producing and spreading alternative information about food. The movement's taste education program teaches members to recognize and appreciate taste through workshops and opportunities to sample local foods. Slow Food sees that kids are an important audience for this sensory education and in Italy the movement runs taste workshops in elementary schools. At the movement's 2004 congress, Slow Food also agreed to build school garden programs in each convivium. In October 2004, classes commenced at Slow Food's University of Gastronomic Science that offers degree programs covering all aspects of food. Since the movement sees that "official culture has never accorded recognition to the study of food, except in connection with science and technology" (Petrini 2001c: 82), Slow Food's creation of a university with a humanistic orientation that combines knowledges from many disciplines is a bold step. In the university, Slow Food aims to deemphasize the lecture format common in many university courses and to develop a more accessible and interesting form of presentation based on its taste workshops (Petrini 2001c).

Through its own publishing company, *Slow Food Editore*, the movement produces food magazines, guides, histories, monographs, tasting manuals and reprints of old recipe books. Slow Food's food and wine guides have become a popular and highly acclaimed resource on Italian food. The magazine *Slow* was created to address the geography of food and consumption and is provided to all paying members in English, Italian, French, German and Spanish. *Slowine* is a magazine dedicated to aspects of wine, beer, spirits and travel, and *SlowArk* focuses on biodiversity, the Slow Food presidia and traditional and local food and drink. Although the publications are geared mainly towards consumers, they have come to address a wider range of issues besides eating, such as traditional agricultural methods and rural development. Slow Food also considers the internet a valuable tool for spreading its message, and many of the movement's projects and convivia have their own web sites. Finally, the movement runs two international film festivals to raise awareness of the cultural aspects of food, especially the stories of "small farmers, shepherds and fishermen who receive the Slow Food Award every year" (Sardo 2003).

Slow Food always promoted the enjoyment of good food and company, although at times the movement has had some difficulty defending these goals. In the movement's view, pleasure and conviviality provide means for individuals to realize their role in the food system and to transform this system. Slow Food sees that individuals can appreciate the value of pleasurable experiences when they learn to recognize distinct tastes of quality local foods. Pleasure provides a way to affirm the value of diverse taste experiences and to reproduce distinct food cultures in opposition to the homogenization of taste and life occurring in the global industrial

food system. In Slow Food's view, learning about taste provides a way to reconstruct "the individual and collective heritage" of food cultures and to resist the McDonaldization of food and culture (Petrini 2001c: 69). By self-consciously taking pleasure in tasting distinct artisanal goods, individuals can resist dominant meanings and values of good, tasty food imposed by the dominant food system. Rather than viewing the pursuit of pleasure primarily as excess (Bauman 2001) or a form of entertainment (Finkelstein 1989), Slow Food sees pleasure as a way to restore meaning to food and to engage the politics of food. The movement envisions a moral dimension to taste, seeing that if pleasure is a right of all people, it is up to consumers to know about it and to ask for it (Petrini 2001c). Furthermore, Slow Food takes the position that the enjoyment of food provides a tool for understanding the issues tied up in food and for building an alternative food model (Chabrol 2004; Petrini 2001c). Slow Food sees that its philosophy of eco-gastronomy puts the movement in a unique position to both deal with social problems and promote the enjoyment of food and life. While reflecting on related movements in the United States, Petrini states that "the American gastronomic community simply contemplates its own navel...while the American environmental movement has tended to have a self-denying, ascetic component" (Stille 2001). Slow Food sees that pleasure provides one means for individuals to gain awareness of the broader issues involved with food and contest dominant meanings and values of food.

While conviviality, or a festive coming together over food, offers Slow Food members a source of personal satisfaction, the movement also considers conviviality to be important to rebuilding the social fabric of food cultures. In the movement's

view “eating together and drinking together at the end of the day is a kind of sign of friendship or communion, and when that doesn’t exist, it’s a sadder, less cohesive society” (Hesser 2003). The *convivia* reflect this social aspect in name and in their practice of organizing over eating together. For Slow Food, sharing a meal exposes individuals to a diversity of food issues, providing an opportunity for people to realize connections between forms of food politics. One member writes that it is by getting to know local farmers that the farm enters a consumer’s “personal landscape,” and “suddenly the landscape is something to care for and protect” (Madison 2001: x). Conviviality also represents a challenge to the individualism and self-serving characters of the global industrial food system. It is one way to incite the value of community, and a sense of security and belonging that are increasingly hard to find in contemporary society (Bauman 2001). Further, pleasure and conviviality involve time and personal commitment that are difficult for the global food system to provide and hence represent spaces where alternative initiatives can gain some political leverage (Hendrickson and Heffernan 2002). Through the promotion of pleasure and conviviality, Slow Food provides opportunities to challenge dominant food codes and to recognize the value of an alternative food model in which people have personally and socially invested.

The founder and president of Slow Food, Carlo Petrini, plays an important role in articulating and spreading the movement’s aims. Petrini’s background as a food activist and journalist in Italy helped to give him credibility in speaking about food and culture issues. His education in sociology influenced Petrini’s activism. Until the 1980s Italy had a tradition of charismatic and expressive politics (Eyerman

and Jamison 1991) that provided a source of cultural identity and social cohesion (Leitch 2003). While the mid-1980s brought growing fears over such issues as the economy, public corruption and Third World immigration (Diani 1996), the cultural heritage of Italian political parties (especially on the Left) weakened (Leitch 2003). As a result, people sought new forms of political associationism. It was at this time that Petrini formed the Slow Food movement. In Leitch's (2003) view, the movement provided one means for people to imagine new forms of collective action and social worlds. Petrini has a certain charisma that seems to have aided the movement's popularity. In sociology, charismatic leaders of social movements are seen as possessing a mysterious power that can build loyalty of members and challenge established authorities (Seidman 1998). For many members, Petrini's presence and presentations embody Slow Food ideals and inspire participation. Alice Waters recounts that she became involved with Slow Food after hearing Petrini speak. According to Waters (2003), he spoke her language and had a "powerful way of presenting" Slow Food that made her feel like she already belonged.

Although Petrini has certainly contributed to the movement's development, he alone does not make Slow Food. Petrini's perceived importance can be partly explained by the conditions of movements in contemporary society. Since social movements rely on a more neutral media to convey their message (Eyerman and Jamison 1991), they can appear emotionless in the public eye. Movement professionals hold an increasingly important role of promoting social movement goals, but this means that a lot of emotion is concentrated in a few individuals (Eyerman and Jamison 1991). An excessive focus on movement professionals tends

to produce a static view of social movements. For example, Petrini's words and actions do not represent the diverse interpretations and *movement* of Slow Food. It can be useful to conceive of Petrini as a movement intellectual, rather than a leader, to better account for the dynamics of Slow Food. Movement intellectuals articulate the collective identity of a social movement and aid coordination and communication, but it is movements "that lead and direct intellectuals, rather than intellectuals that lead and direct movements" (Eyerman and Jamison 1991: 99).

Cultural Context of Slow Food

It is useful to explore some aspects of food in Italy to better understand Slow Food's position on food and the kind of struggle the movement represents. According to Hart (1996), pre-existing culture plays an important role in constraining and shaping the culture of social movements, creating the conditions for movements to construct particular views of reality. Understanding the place of food in Italy is an important part of understanding Slow Food. Even Petrini (2001c: xxi) notes that it is difficult for people to understand how Slow Food formed without knowledge of social life in a particular area of Italy "at that particular moment of time." I do not discuss here the specific conditions of the territory, province or city where Slow Food is based, which may do injustice to the uniqueness of that region as well to the regional character of Italy. I link aspects of the Slow Food movement to characters of food in Italian culture more generally to focus on broader cultural differences and for the sake of simplicity. It is useful to reiterate that, since I consulted only English sources, the picture I construct of food in Italy does not represent the depth and richness of literature on the topic, nor of the food.

A common sentiment of both supporters and critics of Slow Food is that Italy is a “natural” birthplace of the Slow Food movement. For example, members note that Italians have retained a link with food culture that North Americans no longer have (Cimmichi 2003; Inouye 2001; Kummer 2002; Waters 2003). This is reflected in some research that argues that Italians have given more sustained attention to food than other social groups (Root 1971), they have often expressed creativity through food (Camporesi 1993) and they retain a strong link to the past through food (Camporesi 1993). This history and knowledge provide a general shared experience with food as well as specialized experiences with particular foods. For centuries many areas of Italy focused on single crops, and the farmers of these regions knew more about these specialties than anyone else (Root 1971). Slow Food’s aim to gather and spread material culture is an effort to revive these practices that provided self-sufficiency and defined a way of life, and reinforced the social and cultural value of food. The movement’s emphasis on personal, practical experiences with food reflects the general experience with food work in Italian social life. In taste workshops and *convivia* Slow Food promotes the development of personal, practical experiences with food. According to Miele and Murdoch (2001; 2002b), Slow Food encourages members to immerse themselves in a web of food relations and practices, and the movement sees that it is through involvement that people come to realize and mobilize parts of this web. As well, the Slow Food Award raises the profile of people working with and developing traditional food knowledge. Petrini (2001a: 2) writes that “those in the trade must be aware that they are bearers of culture. The pride and satisfaction thus derived, and the recognition of results thus achieved are bound to

contribute to a general increase in professionalism.” This recognition and professionalism can help to legitimate farming and food work that are an important means of reproducing material culture.

The food history of Italy also helps to define the kinds of food the Slow Food movement seeks to protect and promote. In Slow Food’s view, “quality” foods reflect the ingredients that went into their production and sustain nonrenewable resources and quality of life (Petrini 2001c: 26, 28). Similarly, scholars characterize the food of Italy by values like simplicity, variety, natural flavours of the ingredients, and connections to a place (Camporesi 1993; Pacciani et al. 2001; Tannahill 1981). The predominance of peasant foods and home cooking in Italian food culture reflects food’s practical value that is reinforced in intimate and everyday involvement with food (Camporesi 1993; Root 1971). The strength of peasant food in Italy has meant that there is no high or “haute” cuisine in the country (Appadurai 1988; Camporesi 1993; Fonte 1991; Root 1971; Tannahill 1981). By promoting regionally typical varieties of food and agriculture, Slow Food aims to build appreciation for foods that reflect distinct local ways of living. These foods also provide the movement with a means to resist the standardization of the industrial model of food. In the movement’s view, traditions involve proven techniques and knowledge that can be used to develop new food models for the future. Petrini (2001c: 63) argues that reviving traditions of food and farming is the “only feasible solution” to an industrial model that has reached its limits. These ideas make traditions sound more stable and less contested than they often are. Further, while many strong traditions developed out of Italy’s long food history, members and critics note that North Americans in general do not

have the same traditions or connection to traditions to inform their food choices (Cimmichi 2003; Fort 2003; Kummer 2002; Tuhus-Dubrow 2004; Waters 2003). To his credit, Petrini (2001c: 97) does suggest that “outside the Mediterranean basin, it may be necessary to place more emphasis on landscape preservation and organic production than on traditional foods.” This will be important for the movement’s expansion in countries like Canada that have few well-defined food traditions. Slow Food’s philosophy of eco-gastronomy takes the movement’s ideas of good food further with the message that the enjoyment of quality food should involve concern for the environmental and social impacts of producing that food. In other words, “slow” food not only reflects the character of local cultures and ecologies but also social and ecological consciousness in the process of eating.

There are diverse, changing meanings for quality food, however, and different ideas of good food can affect perceptions of the Slow Food movement. Critics and members (Bain 2003; Hopkins 2003; Kummer 2002; Shirbon 2002; Stille 2001) of Slow Food question whether the movement’s focus on quality over convenience can attract more than a small group of elite consumers who are willing and able to afford better food. It can be difficult for people to appreciate non-economic qualities of food when they have little direct experience with food, and a limited memory of the social and cultural value of food. Slow Food members defend the movement by emphasizing Slow Food’s focus on education, the superior taste of quality food, and the benefits to local farmers and rural development of supporting quality local foods (Bain 2003; Chadwick 2002; Inouye 2001; Petrini 2001a; Shirbon 2002). The movement also argues that good food costs more than most people think it should.

Slow Food points out that cultural and environmental degradation, human exploitation and alienation, and rising obesity are a high price to pay for cheap food (Kummer 2002; Schlosser 2004). In addition, Slow Food stresses that quality foods should not be a luxury for the elite. The movement takes the view that quality is a right of all consumers (Petrini 2001c) and that all people should be able to choose good food. Petrini (2004e: 52) states that “gastronomic pleasures are and should be for all. We work for quality food to be as widespread as possible.”

Equally important, Slow Food stresses that the movement is not only about promoting gourmet food for elite consumers. The movement sees that it is also, or primarily, about people becoming conscious of what they eat and how their food was produced (Bain 2003; Schlosser 2004). The movement’s emphasis on the history and quality of food reflects an influence of Italian food that has developed over a long period of time and in close connection to the daily lives of Italian people. By emphasizing these dimensions in Slow Food, the movement provides one way to value the cultural dimensions of food as important factors for appreciating what we eat. It is difficult for Slow Food to overturn the hegemony of the marketplace since, as a dominant ideology of economic exchange, it shuts out alternative perspectives. But it is also too simplistic to view the movement as an expression of elite consumer values.

The place of food in Italian society also influences Slow Food’s regional or local focus. A defining feature of Italian culture and food is regional diversity (Appadurai 1988; Burer-Stein 1979; Camporesi 1993; Fonte 1991; Friedmann 1993a; Miele 2001; Pacciani et al. 2001; Root 1971). It seems the territories of Italy have

almost never been well-integrated, preventing the formation of a national Italian cuisine. Differences in history and ethnicity fragmented Italian culture early in its history, and these divisions were reinforced by physical geography (especially mountains) and political conflict (Burer-Stein 1979; Camporesi 1993; Root 1971). Diverse patterns of food and eating, or foodways, developed according to the specific regional conditions, with little communication between regions and often more influence from neighbouring countries. Only decades ago Italian food reflected the qualities of a particular space and place because diets were directly tied to the natural habitat (Burer-Stein 1979; Camporesi 1993; Root 1979). As a result, there is no single definitive Italian food but specific regional diets that are closely guarded by their cultural groups. Even bread and wine vary significantly between regions. Eating establishments, including a range of ristoranti, trattoria, rosticceria, and osteria, have held an important place in Italian society for their regional character of products, methods and overall style (Burer-Stein 1979). The decline in traditional eateries has represented the erosion of cultural diversity of Italy.

For the Slow Food movement, foods connected to a space and place represent the diversity of local cultures and ecologies. In the movement's view, a regional focus is the best way to preserve this diversity in food and agriculture and to resist the standardization and homogenization of the industrial food system (Petrini 2001c). Slow Food's publication company communicates a regional focus in guides, histories, recipe books and tasting manuals for Italian regions. Guide books have been particularly important for raising the profile of Italy's osterie and creating a market for many traditional eating establishments. Miele and Murdoch (2002a) find that the

movement's interest in protecting these eateries led Slow Food to protect local food production more generally because of the eateries' close connection to local foods. In the views of some researchers (Miele and Murdoch 2002a; 2002b; Ritzer 2004; Sage 2003b), the movement's work of strengthening localities is important for protecting and developing diversity in food systems. Slow Food adds strength to its vision of diversity by also emphasizing the importance of self-reliance, through its *convivia* and *presidia* for example, which shifts control of food to regions.

A regional focus in Slow Food also reflects the character of politics in Italy. The relative power of regions in Italy to protect their uniqueness has helped to construct the regional quality of Italian food. A weak national state has restricted efforts to integrate Italian society while it has strengthened the power of regional foods (Appadurai 1988; Fonte 1991). Interestingly, Petrini (2001c: 3) notes that the town in which Slow Food formed, Bra, has a strong tradition of forming organized groups or associations. The political atmosphere of Bra likely influenced the movement's initial members to organize and to take a particular form (local groups). This emphasis on local organizing is supported by Diani (1996) who finds that regionalist parties have played an important role in Italian politics, especially in the northern regions where Slow Food formed.

The development of strong historical and regional characters of Italian food puts Slow Food in a good position to form an opposition to the industrial model of food. Italy's experience with the impact of industrialization on its food informs Slow Food's critique of the dominant food system and its opposition. In Italy, the processes of globalization and industrialization have reduced local production (Counihan 1999)

and disrupted the traditional equilibrium between elements of regional food systems (Camporesi 1992). Italy has inevitably been transformed by changes in the global food system but it has presented a strong force of resistance to this system. For example, processed and fast foods have been slow to take root in Italy (Fonte 1991; Harper and Le Beau 2003; Winson 1993), and strategies for recognizing regional and typical foods have been well developed and supported (Murdoch and Miele 1999; Pacciani et al. 2001). A protectionist attitude may be viewed as exclusionary and elitist, but it can also be seen as a counter-hegemonic response to increasing control of food on a global scale.

In response to the erosion of diversity in Italian food and culture, the Slow Food movement reflects a growing realization in Italy that the existence of diverse cultures is critical for resisting and reforming the industrial model of food. Italians have recently been recovering the idea that that regional foods are a cultural necessity, that diet cannot be reformed without drawing on food culture of the past, and that this culture serves as a barrier to the spread of industrial food and culture (Camporesi 1993; Root 1971; Winson 1993). Diverse food cultures inform experiences that provide alternative information on food. Whereas the industrial food system tends to view food as “fuel,” Italy considers food a pleasurable experience, an approach that is related to the country’s strong regional influences and food traditions (Camporesi 1993; Miele 2001).

A major strategy for the Slow Food movement is to develop a cultural policy that supports the development of agriculture and food education (Petrini 2001c). In the movement’s view, culture is key to creating an alternative food system that

reflects diverse interpretations and ways of organizing food. Culture provides a means to challenge the hegemony of the marketplace and the idea that meaningful participation in society only occurs through the capitalist marketplace. By avoiding direct participation in the economic realm, instead seeking to influence economic conditions through cultural transformation, Slow Food challenges the conditions of resistance prescribed by the dominant food system. Petrini (2001c: 93) writes that “Slow Food has always refrained from being a direct player in the economy, drawing its effectiveness and credibility from its character as a cultural and recreational association.” Culture helps to shape knowledge, and a major goal of the movement is to gather and spread alternative information on food as a means to revive food cultures. Slow Food sees the magazine *Slow* as “the cultural measure, as well as the organ, of the movement” (Petrini 2001c: 20). As the movement grows, it finds that its purpose is oriented to achieving a kind of multiculturalism, especially for recovering traditions (Petrini 2001c). The politics of multiculturalism as a goal will be discussed in the next chapter.

Italy has not only demonstrated resistance to industrial food on the basis of culture, but also because food plays a central role in other aspects of society. For example, the family has been instrumental in forming and maintaining traditional eateries (Burer-Stein 1979; Camporesi 1993). By emphasizing family values in food, Italians provide an alternative stance to the individualism of the industrial food system. As well, Italy has given considerable attention to food in the country’s development, incorporating food in aspects of policy and social planning (Friedmann

1993a; Winson 1993). By including food in the process of governing other social issues, Italian society reinforces food's central social role.

Although Slow Food seeks to defend local food primarily on the basis of culture, the movement has taken an increasingly active role in social planning and policy issues. In 1999, Slow Food achieved exemptions for thousands of artisanal food makers from strict hygiene rules of the European Union (EU) that would have put many of these farmers and small farm producers out of business. The movement has criticized the EU's *PDO* (protected designation of origin) and *PGI* (protected geographic indication) because of the difficulties they present to small farmers to achieve such designations. The movement also takes issue with the lack of attention to the quality of the products in these standards (Petrini 2001c: 89). The movement has called for opposition or at least greater flexibility to regulations and policy on multiple occasions (Chabrol 2004; Petrini 2001a; 2001c). Additionally, Slow Food supported the EU initiative to protect a region's right to the names of traditional foods, like Greek feta cheese, at the Cancun meeting of the WTO.

Within Italy, Slow Food has gained official recognition by the Ministry of Education, enabling the movement to run courses on food in schools. Slow Food has supported the development of organic agriculture in Italy. As well, Slow Food has been pushing for Italy to create a Ministry of Food that would handle all aspects of food, including "agricultural production, markets, the processing of raw materials, controls of all types, gastronomy, consumption and education" (Petrini 2003d).

In sum, Slow Food has become a broad and diverse movement, encompassing many aspects of food. The movement has moved away from its initial gastronomic

focus and it has taken a more political stance on food issues in recent years. Some aspects of Slow Food are related to the movement's origins in Italy and may limit the movement's relevance in other locations. The movement's emphasis on traditional foods and certain characteristics of "quality" food reflect ideals of food in Italy but these may not be easily accessible or desirable elsewhere. A focus on tradition also tends to oversimplify how food cultures are created. Slow Food's regional focus helps to acknowledge the diversity of food ideas and practices, shifting responsibility to regions to determine their own actions and interpretations of Slow Food. But one cannot assume that shared geographical boundaries also mean a shared culture and history. On the one hand, the movement's cultural focus seems to limit Slow Food's applicability outside of Italy, for a sense of shared distinct culture may not exist in other countries like Canada. On the other hand, the cultural focus of Slow Food gives the movement political significance beyond Italy's borders as one means of challenging the globalized industrial food system.

Chapter 3

A Sociological Perspective of the Slow Food Movement

Summary of Key Points

<i>Contributions</i>	<i>Limitations</i>
Recognizes that sensuality is important to the eating experience, understanding food issues, evaluating quality and affirming a way of life	Reduces social action to personal choice and responsibility, and attends less to the broader consequences of these choices
Values time, work and personal commitment that are hard to find in the global food system	
Reveals the range of actors involved in a food system and possibilities for reducing distance and exploitation in food relations	Underestimates the processes and difficulties of forming and changing social relations
Seeks to protect and construct diverse contexts in which more direct and ethical relations can form	
Shows the potential for community as a source of identity, belonging, support and control of food	Oversimplifies the processes and difficulties of community building under conditions of late capitalism
Recognizes the importance of developing popular consciousness for negotiating social conflict, building an alternative food model, appreciating personal food experiences, and creating the potential for social action	Reflects a liberal faith in education without sufficient reflection on power-knowledge regimes of contemporary capitalism
Exposes limitations of dominant food knowledge, creates new knowledge and spreads it through alternative channels	
Uses principles from ecology, like diversity and sustainability, to define its strategies for change and ideas of quality food	Relatively weak on concrete strategies for achieving ecological food systems, such as alternative production techniques (but supports initiatives like organic farming)
Local focus provides a way to reduce the environmental costs of food, protect biodiversity and challenge corporate control of food systems	Idealizes local food as the solution to the global industrial food system without addressing conflict and difference within localities and the ways in which localities are shaped by extra local forces
Shows some recognition of the relationship between ethnicity and food, especially as it moves to less industrialized areas	Could give greater attention to the colonialist tendencies in such projects as development, tradition and multiculturalism
	Limited recognition of the depth of class issues in the food system, although this is changing, especially with Terra Madre
	Inadequate attention to the gendered structure of food systems, although this is changing

Is increasingly forming useful political coalitions with social justice organizations, Fair trade initiatives, peasant movements and anti-corporate globalization movements	
A dynamic organization with increasing diversity of associated social movement groups and an expanding agenda that reflects the growing recognition of the connections between traditional Slow Food issues and broader issues of social justice, ecology and globalization	

In this chapter I explore the strengths and difficulties for the Slow Food movement to use culture as a means of resistance and social change, keeping in mind Swidler's (1995) framework for analyzing culture through its different forms. Slow Food's ability to integrate these dimensions of culture can serve as an indication of the movement's ability to challenge the principles of the industrial food system and to transform it. It is evident from the description of Slow Food in Chapter 2 that the movement has focused much of its attention on reinterpreting codes of the dominant food culture, and more recently constructing new contexts, preferring to avoid direct involvement in institutional relations. But this focus is shifting with the movement's creation of a university and its increasing involvement with organizations like the WTO and the EU. To understand how Slow Food uses these dimensions of culture to construct an alternative vision of food, I analyze major themes the movement discusses in its texts. Essentially, these themes represent particular discourses Slow Food utilizes in the process of culture-making. I also consider how Slow Food approaches power relations in the food system, to acknowledge difficulties of culture change and the impact of political economic relations on culture.

Sensuality

A major focus of Slow Food is raising awareness of the sensual aspects of food. The most prominent aspects of sensuality in the movement are pleasure and taste. By promoting the importance of pleasure Slow Food reveals the poverty of economic conceptions of food that dominate the industrial food system, and it aims to construct an alternative means of valuing food. Slow Food acknowledges that its emphasis on pleasure has been viewed as “hedonistic and a political retreat” (Petrini 2001c: 12) by some. Researchers observe that pleasure has often been associated with hedonism, immorality and lack of future or social concern (Bourdieu 1984; Montanari 1994; Rozin 1999; Symons 1993). But the Slow Food movement maintains that enjoying food is a means of raising awareness and building knowledge of the issues involved in food, and some researchers agree (Bell and Valentine 1990; Symons 1993). In Slow Food’s view, pleasure involves “moderation and awareness” (Petrini 2001c: 5) and it provides a means to realize a different approach to food and life (Petrini 2001c; Pollan 2003).

Slow Food associates pleasure with the quality of food and the processes that went into producing food, as expressed in the philosophy of eco-gastronomy. This perspective of pleasure reflects what Miele and Murdoch (2002) call a gastronomic aesthetic, as opposed to an aesthetic of entertainment that is more concerned with the quality of the dining experience. Whereas an aesthetic of entertainment focuses on lifestyle marketing and the construction of brands, a gastronomic aesthetic “is bound up in economic and social practices but comprises a distinct mode of social action, one that works according to its own modes of valuation and ethical judgements”

(Miele and Murdoch 2002: 325). Pleasure provides a form of politics in Slow Food because it is defined outside the economic realm and according to local conditions. It is a means of affirming an alternative way of life. Further, Slow Food sees that pleasure informs and is informed by taste, food work and slowness (Petrini 2001c: 69) which are important factors in preserving diverse ways of living (Heldke 1992a; Kneen 1995; Kloppenburg 1991; Symons 1993). The movement reflects a growing realization of many movements, like new urbanism and voluntary simplicity, that pleasure is linked to consciousness and quality of life rather than to self-indulgence and the quality of display.

For the Slow Food movement, sensual food experiences also provide tools for resisting the industrial food system. In the movement's view, an understanding of taste forms an ethics of food that can alter food choice. Since the movement sees that quality and pleasure involve consciousness of the environmental and social impact of producing food, and taste is informed by pleasure and quality, taste can provide an indicator of the ethical value of food (Petrini 2001c: 71). The taste of food reflects the social and ecological relations involved in its production. The movement takes this further by declaring that "if quality is our right as consumers, then it is up to us to equip ourselves to recognize it and ask for it" (Petrini 2001c: 70). So if one agrees with Slow Food's ideas of quality and pleasure, then it is her/his responsibility to recognize the tastes of such quality foods and to choose products that reflect these values. It is the ethical choice. The movement does not seem to think these kinds of choices are imperative (they are *choices*, after all), nor does it encourage reflection on the broader consequences of consumer choices. But Slow Food does draw attention to

the power of non-economic factors in choosing food. By spreading knowledge of the importance of taste, Slow Food provides opportunities for people to construct alternative identities, through their choices, that contest ideas of food as fuel in the dominant food system. One member writes that Slow Food is a way of “expressing our preferences, making an identity that’s separate from what’s imposed on us by the corporate commercial bureaucratic enterprises that are out there” (Terry 2001). Taste provides a way to construct and express a way of life and a position of resistance. For Slow Food, taste is a means to self-consciously reconstruct food culture and to resist the degrading effects of the dominant food culture, like McDonaldization (Petrini 2001c: 69).

By emphasizing the importance of pleasure and taste, the Slow Food movement provides opportunities for people to create new stories of food and agriculture that reflect non-market values. Pleasure and taste take time, work and personal commitment to develop, and these elements of sensual experiences are difficult for the industrial food system to replicate (Hendrickson and Heffernan 2002). It is in these kinds of personal investment in food that alternatives can grow. The work and time involved in creating and appreciating the cultural roots of foods is partly what gives value to distinct foodways (Baker 1999; Heldke 1992a; Hendrickson and Heffernan 2002; Johnston 2002; Kneen 1995; Shiva 1992a). By promoting the sensual aspects of food, Slow Food provides a way to connect people to food cultures and to alternative interpretations of the value of food.

Social Connectedness

The Slow Food movement proposes alternative forms of food relations that are defined beyond the market sphere. In the movement's view, the individualism promoted in the industrial food system is degrading the social aspects of eating. For Slow Food, eating together is a "sign of friendship or communion" (Hesser 2003), it is essential to a civilized way of life, and it is an aspect of the pleasure gained from food (Madison 2001: x). The movement's promotion of conviviality constructs an image of eating as pleasurable and interactive, rather than only a means of solitary subsistence. Sharing food becomes a way to establish relations with other people and the world. Social research has long recognized that what we eat plays a role in socialization and the formation of social relations, and that sharing food can create a sense of solidarity and community (Bell and Valentine 1997; Counihan 1999; Curtin 1992; Fonte 1991; Fernandez-Armesto 2001; Goody 1982; McIntosh 1996; Mennell et al. 1992; Montanari 1996; Symons 1994; Winson 1993). As one member (Chabrol 2004) states, "eating is not just a physiological need: it is a cultural, social and political act, a way of relating to the world, becoming part of the environment and society." Opportunities for sharing food, then, are also opportunities to create and communicate an oppositional identity. For Slow Food, conviviality is not simply frivolous entertainment, but a political message that a meal is more than a mechanical, industrial process. This message has implications for political action, in that people can engage resistance in their personal, daily lives. Petrini (2001c: 14) argues that the early members of Slow Food "were not just a bunch of people out for a good time...[they] were dedicated to a project that would have an impact on

everyday life and the way people function in the worlds of production, distribution and consumption.” Insisting that the personal is political was an important strategy of 1960s counter-cuisine movements (Belasco 1989) because it involves a level of personal commitment that is not easily co-optable by the dominant food system.

In recent years, Slow Food has also taken an interest in the kinds of social relations involved in processes of the food system besides consumption. By expanding its view beyond issues of eating, Slow Food reveals the complexity of relations involved in getting food from farm to table and opportunities for altering the nature of these relations. In Slow Food’s view, “ the changed relation between contemporary man and food derived from the slashing of the umbilical cord that once bound the world of the peasant farmer to the world of consumption, the producer of food to the diner” (Petrini 2001c: 67). This disconnection between production and consumption has become a major area of concern in food and agriculture research. Rather than a disconnect, though, researchers often refer to *distancing*. Marx’s (1973) dialectic of production and consumption is also a useful way to envision the connections between relations in the food system, although Goodman and DuPuis (2002) argue that the politics of this dialectic are limited because Marx situates these relations primarily in the economic sphere. In many ways the globalized industrial food system is more interconnected than ever as it adapts to more complex transnational relations (Perkins 2002). However, the interconnectedness in the global industrial food system is occurring in the market sphere (Fonte 1991), driven by industrial imperatives to divide and differentiate processes in the food system. As a result, individuals are increasingly cut off from the larger social processes of which

they are a part. While more people have become “mere consumers” (Fischler 1988: 299), unaware of the origins or consequences of what they eat, new specialized economic relations like retailing and distribution fill in the spaces between farmers and eaters (Kneen 1995; Whatmore and Thorne 1997). The industrial food system effectively destroys the diversity of contexts in which people establish social relations through food and, as a result, the diversity of food relations.

The Slow Food movement is working to raise awareness of the links between farmers and eaters in the food system, and it seeks to construct new contexts for more direct and ethical relations. Like many researchers (Lockie 2002; Marsden 2000; Whatmore and Thorne 1997; Raynolds 2002), Slow Food uses the idea of a network to characterize the range of actors and relations in a food system and to identify opportunities for agency. By network, I mean a net-like system of channels connecting elements or actors in a food system. The movement envisions “a vast global network of men and women capable of generating ideas and programs” (Petrini 2001b: xii), and it sees this “capillary network of informants in localities” (Petrini 2001c: 96) as a strength for Slow Food’s projects. By recognizing the diversity of actors, the Slow Food movement can better address the complexity of struggles in the industrial food system. This recognition can also lead to greater participation by members in decision making and shaping the processes of a food system, a factor in activist visions of alternative food systems (Baker 1999; Feenstra 2002; Hasseinen 2003; Heldke 1992a; Kloppenburg et al. 2000; Welsh and MacRae 1998). Furthermore, it is by extending channels of communication, and incorporating a broader range of localized agents that, in Slow Food’s opinion, the movement has

been able to grow and gain wider appeal. Petrini (2001c: 18) writes that “the spread of the movement means receiving new input, mingling countless voices, discovering allies who think alike while respecting one another at a distance.”

The Slow Food movement also seeks to create alternative contexts in which more direct food relations can form. The movement’s regional focus represents an effort to situate food and people in a place and space that give a particular character to relations of production and consumption. Slow Food encourages people to “get to know their own region and the things that set it apart better” (Petrini 2001c: 16), with the idea that members will come to realize and care about how they are entangled in regional food relations. According to one Slow Food member (Madison 2001), people gain a sense of community and the interconnections between people in it by connecting to local producers and like-minded consumers. Similarly, proximity has become a central theme in research that attempts to reconceptualize relations of production and consumption (Baker 1999; Goodman 2003; Hendrickson and Heffernan 2002; Hinrichs 2003; Kloppenburg, Hendrickson and Stevenson 1996; Kneen 1995; Renting, Marsden and Banks 2003; Sage 2003a). Physical closeness offers the possibility for face-to-face interactions and the construction of mutual knowledge that can shape more ethical and responsible food relations (Hinrichs 2003: 36). Essentially, “proximity makes it difficult to avoid or obscure the consequences of what we do” (Kneen 1995: 113). However, proximity does not necessarily involve more just and ecological relations (Hinrichs 2003), nor does it always lead to action. The realization of connectedness can also highlight differences and generate conflicts between social groups. In addition, the identification of members in a region involves

drawing boundaries and emphasizing differences that can prevent “closer” food relations (Bauman 2001). The Slow Food movement does not often address the potential for food, even sharing food, to divide people (Bell and Valentine 1997; Goodman and Redclift 1991; Montanari 1996). In stressing the *potential* for connectedness, the movement neglects to provide tools for confronting the difficulties in creating alternative forms of social relations. Although Slow Food provides opportunities for people to situate themselves in a food system and to identify channels for action, these efforts do not imply community and cooperation.

Yet Slow Food views the construction of community as a goal in its work.

Terra Madre is an event geared towards identifying and strengthening communities.

In a brochure for Terra Madre, Slow Food (2004) writes that

every participant will represent a ‘food community’ – which means they are part of a chain of production, linked by a common product, ethnic identity, region, a history, or approach. Terra Madre will rediscover the links that connect the primary producer to the vendor.

The movement’s emphasis on commonality oversimplifies the idea and process of constructing community, and hints at the limits of collective identity. Sameness does not imply unity or a commitment to a shared goal and shared rewards (Bauman 2001). A sense of solidarity might be better achieved by recognizing links between diverse struggles of members, rather than by reducing these struggles to a single shared idea. In Bauman’s (2001:3) view, the concept “‘community’ stands for the kind of world which is not, regrettably, available to us – but which we would dearly wish to inhabit and which we hope to repossess.” People seek community for a sense of security because it is no longer available; it seems the power of community is in the seeking rather than in the realization of it. The Slow Food movement

overemphasizes the potential for people to achieve positive social connections through food, even viewing diversity as a source of connection (Petrini 2001c: 37). For example, Petrini (2003b) focuses on the “customs, festivals, social relationships, agricultural practices and beliefs” that make a rural community sound like a fantasy. The movement does not question whether building community is possible or even desirable. Slow Food prefers to promote community as a source of identity, rather than as an achievement at the end of a “long and tortuous labor of argument and persuasion and in strenuous competition with an indefinite number of other potentialities” that Bauman (2001) describes. The movement’s goal of community provides a vision of how food relations can be differently connected, reflecting common anxieties about the need for a sense of life purpose and security. This vision exposes the amoral and individualized characters of production and consumption relations in the industrial food system. But Slow Food does not adequately address how the nature of social connections can actually be transformed.

On an international scale, the Slow Food movement conveys a more complex understanding of how alternative connections and communities can be constructed. While emphasizing the importance of identity in community, Slow Food also recognizes that the construction of community depends on exchange and linking to a network of communities. According to Petrini (2003b), “it is necessary to stress that identities do not exist outside of a system of exchange and that protecting ‘cultural biodiversity’ does not mean closing every identity into a protective shell.” This idea approaches something like an imagined community in that local groups are defined by their specific issues as well as by their role in Slow Food. Transformative

international relations have been a major focus of Slow Food's recent work. The movement's emphasis on creating virtuous globalization and strengthening a "common thread" connecting distinct cultures indicates an interest in achieving more just relations of exchange. Here Slow Food seems to support Sage's (2003a: 13) concept of co-responsibility that "offers a relational understanding of governance, is sensitive to contingency and uncertainty, and speaks to the construction of an ethically responsible frame of action." The movement's recent alliances with other movements and organizations indicate that Slow Food is growing more flexible to diverse identities forming the international Slow Food community. However, the movement's focus on common goals minimizes difference and the difficulties of forming such connections. As Bauman (2001) described, there is a cost to achieving common understanding of a community and, "if reached, common agreement will never be free of the memory of such past struggles and the choices made in their course." Although Slow Food still tends to view community and connectedness as "natural," the movement presents a more politicized vision of alternative social connections in the global food system. In sum, Slow Food draws attention to the ways food can connect people and it provides opportunities for people to realize different forms of food relations. However, the movement tends to assume that consciousness of the characters of production and consumption, and one's place in a food system, will inevitably lead to action and alternative, closer food relations. Slow Food points the way but it does not yet take us there.

Education and Information

According to the Slow Food movement, education is critical to understanding and appreciating food, and for resisting the industrial food system. The movement recognizes the increasing importance of information for people to understand and negotiate the politics and pleasures of food and it aims to incorporate education and awareness in all its projects (Petrini 2001c). Since information is often considered the main resource in contemporary social life, and a means of defining social conflict itself, “the way we imagine a different future will actually shape society” (Melucci 1996b: 507). By producing alternative knowledge and spreading it through education, Slow Food claims control over this information resource and exposes the limitations of the dominant food knowledge. The movement often takes the opportunity to criticize the “distorted” (Petrini 2004b), “contradictory” (Slow Food N.d.), “disappointing and sometimes not quite correct” (Petrini 2001c: 28) information produced in the industrial food system. For Slow Food, the dominant food information is not only inadequate but it prevents people from considering alternative options and even pacifies people through its unreliability. Kneen (1993) argues that reductionist, linear science informs the western industrial food system and the power of this knowledge is reflected in people’s inability to imagine alternative ways of knowing. This kind of knowledge legitimates the logic of the industrial food system and excludes other kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing food. Slow Food takes issue with the reduction of food to agricultural and nutritional sciences, while gastronomic knowledge has been increasingly marginalized in the industrial food system (Petrini 2001c; 2004e). Clearly social knowledge of food reflects particular

interests, values and world views. This is increasingly the case as the knowledge required to use food is itself commodified (Appadurai 1986; Featherstone 1990), and becomes a source of “cultural capital” that depends on income (Bourdieu 1984; Erickson 1991).

Through education, the Slow Food movement defines opportunities for contesting the dominant forms of information and the processes of producing it. For example, the movement sees that knowledge and awareness are critical to the experiences of taste and pleasure (Petrini 2001c). What people know of food, and how they know it, can alter how they experience it. Bell and Valentine (1990) note that many people gain pleasure from knowing that they are minimizing the global effects of what they eat. Knowledge and education can “turn on” and inform sensory experiences. Since, in Slow Food’s opinion, knowledge helps to shape pleasure and taste, knowledge is also what makes these personal experiences political, rather than only self-indulgent. Through education, the movement defines the nature of conflicts over food and possible channels for action. For example, Slow Food seeks to reconstruct the “capacity to distinguish...taste” through a “large-scale campaign of consumer education” (Petrini 2001c: 69). Similarly, Goodman and DuPuis (2002: 18) argue that knowledge practices represent one aspect of a “capacity to act.” Knowledge has the potential to alter food choice, establish new values and communicate these values in exchange (Appadurai 1986; Dixon 1999; Fine and Leopold 1993).

The Slow Food movement also constructs new knowledge in order to build a new food model (Petrini 2001c: 63, 58). By learning about and spreading material

culture, Slow Food reproduces sources of alternative perspectives and information on food. These knowledges provide resources to define a different model of food. For example, Petrini (2003b) sees that the exchange of knowledge between farmers, fishermen, artisans and cooks can help to strengthen a cultural heritage. Slow Food draws on the local knowledge of small farm producers in order to rebuild material culture. Local knowledge involves the personal, experiential skills and understanding that developed in interaction with local ecological and cultural conditions (Hasseinen and Kloppenburg 1995; Kloppenburg 1991). The movement provides opportunities for local groups to speak for themselves and to devise their own means to protect their cultural and ecological resources. By providing a vehicle with which local cultures can express their world views and values of food, Slow Food is one means for recovering and disseminating aspects of diverse food cultures. As Gubrium and Holstein (1997) note, cultural knowledge is always local knowledge. Slow Food also recognizes the value of multiple knowledges for building resistance, and the movement provides more venues for people to exchange this kind of information. The value of multiple, practical, relational knowledges has been well recognized by researchers seeking to understand and represent the complexity of food and agriculture (Heldke 1992b; Kloppenburg 1991; Lacy 2000; Manning 2000; Symons 1993). These diverse fronts provide the means to construct alternative codes and contexts to challenge the hegemony of the dominant food system. According to Goodman and DuPuis (2002: 15), new food and agriculture models can be constructed from alternative knowledge systems that see food as “an arena of contestation rather than a veil of reality.” Knowledge has the potential to transform

society when it opens up conversations on diverse of interpretations of food, rather than claiming to reveal the truth. By promoting personal, sensual, local knowledge, the education efforts of Slow Food can be transformative.

However, there are limitations to this form of politics. It is important to examine whose interests are represented in knowledge practices. For one thing, the main audience of Slow Food's education is already knowledgeable consumers. This is not surprising given the claim that information itself has become commodified (Appadurai 1986; Featherstone 1990). The knowledge produced by Slow Food may simply represent a niche market for elite urban consumers, as gastronomy often has. Although the movement draws attention to the liberating possibilities of knowledge, it does not address the constraining aspects of information. Knowledge practices are usually performed by elite members of a society (Kirby and McKenna 2004). Furthermore, participation in the construction and interpretation of knowledge implies a recognized level of literacy. Particular definitions of literacy can restrict social groups from participating in knowledge practices, representing a form of cultural domination (Kirby and McKenna 2004). Focusing on education as a strategy ignores the structural inequalities that shape how we know, and do, knowledge and education. It is also difficult to accept that knowledge practices will necessarily lead to transformative change. Slow Food's emphasis on education and the identification of alternative cultural codes seems to reinforce a division between theory and practice. Through the construction of new food knowledge, Slow Food provides a means to envision aspects of an alternative food system, but it might place more emphasis on the ways education and awareness can be translated into meaningful action.

Ecology

As mentioned, Slow Food's addition of ecological consciousness to the movement's aims helped to create a more direct politics for the movement, and it also shifted the focus of Slow Food's work. The movement came to recognize interconnections between cultural and environmental diversity and, as Shiva (2001) notes, the existence of biodiversity depends on the persistence of cultural diversity. Diversity itself has become a major organizing principle of Slow Food that, in the movement's opinion, has helped it to adapt and to be successful in its development projects (Petrini 2001c). Activists and researchers emphasize the importance of diversity in forming alternative food systems (APM World Network 2003; Baker 1999; Hasseinen 2003; Kloppenburg 1991; Kloppenburg et al. 1996; Kneen 1995). The concept points to the possibility that there will be many different forms for alternative food systems, based on the particular issues of a local ecology and culture. Slow Food, too, sees that "different areas face different situations, each with their own biodiversity and social structure. There is a wide range of complex systems which need studying and analyzing case by case" (Petrini 2003e). The Slow Food movement seeks to create a new model of development that promotes rather than reduces diversity (Petrini 2001c). As well, the movement's interest in protecting biodiversity informs Slow Food's defensive approach to preserving food cultures. Slow Food prefers to work on "saving things that are headed for extinction, instead of hounding the new ones we dislike" (Petrini 2001c: 26).

Slow Food's growing interest in ecology and diversity has also turned the movement's attention to the importance of sustainability. Petrini (2004b) even states

there is an “urgent need” for sustainability. Sustainability has become a critical concept for research on ecological food systems (Allen 1993; Buttel 1993; Hassenin 2003; Johnston 2003; Kloppenburg et al. 2000; Kneen 1995). However, the concept is open to many interpretations and is rarely well defined, making it difficult to implement and assess sustainability. Kloppenburg et al. (2000: 178) identify fourteen dimensions of sustainability and note that “the term is deployed by all sorts of organizations and actors who want to access the word’s discursive potency but whose goals and interests are not necessarily compatible.” Although there is continual tension over the meanings and practices of sustainability, the breadth of the concept hints at the importance of balanced and regenerative relations between all elements of a food system. In Slow Food’s view, a sustainable food system will involve a balance between “environmental protection, social justice and economic feasibility” (Petrini 2004b). Slow Food sees that approaching sustainability is one of the most important means of changing the current system, especially because, for the movement, it would require individuals to reevaluate their lifestyle and habits (Petrini 2004b). Slow Food’s recognition of a need for people to address the nature of their own relations and practices is significant. Slow Food goes further in declaring that a food system will not be sustainable and transformative “if it does not address the social issues of those working on the land” (Petrini 2003e). Similarly, Allen (1993) and Buttel (1993) suggest that sustainability should include social justice in order to acknowledge the range of interpretations of the concept.

More generally, achieving a food system that reflects ecological values appears to demand social justice. Plumwood (1994: 215) describes a web of

oppression that contains “both distinct foci and strands with room for some independent movement” and is driven by an overall mode of operation. The dominant cultural codes, contexts and institutions that systematically devalue ecology also play a role in the exploitation of people and cultures. Ecological consciousness has helped to draw Slow Food’s attention to social justice issues. It is not entirely clear how committed the movement is to social justice, however. For example, food sovereignty represents one aspect of Slow Food’s vision of an alternative food model. But food sovereignty refers primarily to the right of people to define their own approach to food and agriculture (APM World Network 2003). Alternatively, the concept food security emphasizes sustainable food production and self-reliance (Hassinen 2003). The idea of food sovereignty reflects a focus on human rights that emphasizes self-interest over collective action. By focusing on defending the right to define and control local resources, Slow Food tends to neglect the politics of distribution that would make for a more complex notion of social justice (Warren 1999). Although the movement links the goal of social justice to its ecological initiatives, Slow Food’s means of implementing justice are not very concrete at this point. In turn, a limited perspective of social justice can limit Slow Food’s efforts to create a more ecological food system.

Slow Food also incorporates ecological consciousness in its views of good, quality food. As mentioned, in chapter two, the movement sees that quality is determined by whether foods improve quality of life rather than diminishing non-renewable life energy (Petrini 2001c). This definition points to the importance of considering the impact of what humans eat on our own and others’ lives. As concern

for the environmental impact of industrial production has increased, foods considered “organic,” “natural,” and “seasonal” have become important means for consumers and producers to express ecological values. By inciting these characteristics of foods, farmers tell a story about the origins and values of their special products. Eaters help to reproduce these stories when they ask for these kinds of quality foods. In supporting organic, small-scale and regional foods, Slow Food promotes social relations that make explicit and respect environmental limits. Although ecological dimensions of food often have multiple, contested meanings, they inform alternative (and more complex) modes of evaluating goods other than market price (Fonte 2002; Goodman 2003; Murdoch and Miele 1999; Renting et al. 2003; Sage 2003a). For example, foods considered “seasonal,” “natural,” “regional” and “organic” highlight a combination of environmental and social factors that contribute to producing food (Atkinson 1983; Belasco 1989; Bell and Valentine 1997; Leay 1999; McIntosh 1996; Mintz 1996; Montanari 1994). For the Slow Food movement, ecology informs the construction of alternative codes of quality that express oppositional values and identities. The movement also contests the effectiveness of dominant information for evaluating quality. Petrini (2004b) writes that

we need to know what environmental impact the product has had...we should be able to have a guarantee that it is healthy and safe; we should be able to find out whether it has enabled people to have work and make a living and that it has not caused economic hardship to poorer countries. It is not easy: the information is often not available or it is distorted.

Slow Food recognizes that “the concept of quality is, in itself, an abstraction” (Petrini 2001c: 99), and it draws on ecology to make quality more concrete and enforceable.

Finally, ecological consciousness informs Slow Food’s focus on local food systems. Although the Slow Food movement aims to confront the global food system,

it stresses that regional foods are the key to preserving diversity in ecologies and cultures. Slow Food recognizes that a food system based on long-distance transportation reduces the variety and regional characters of foods, it degrades the environment, and distances consumers from the consequences of what they eat (Böge 2001; Sheer 2001; Petrini 2001c). For the movement, a local focus is one of the only ways to respect diverse forms of agriculture around the world, and it can reduce the environmental impact of food (Petrini 2001b: 2). Researchers and activists also point to the potential for local food systems to address environmental issues of the industrial food system (APM World Network 2003; Baker 1999; Feenstra 2002; Hinrichs 2003; Kloppenburg et al. 1996; Kneen 1995; Manning 2000; Ritzer 2004). A local focus enables people to realize the distinct ecological and cultural resources available in their territory and to develop appropriate practices. As Slow Food points out, “the combination of natural factors...and human ones...[give] a unique character to each small agricultural locality and the food grown, raised, made, and cooked there” (Petrini 2001c: 8). Local foods offer a means to reconnect space and place, and they provide a specific context for linking processes of the food system. However, locality has multiple meanings. For example, food can be “local” in face-to-face relations, like farmer’s markets, when introduced into institutional settings and even in extended relations with other regions (Hinrichs 2003; Renting et al. 2003; Whatmore, Stassart and Renting 2003). In other words, the idea of locality can involve a range of physical distances. Some of this complexity is reflected in the Slow Food movement. Convivia provide opportunities for direct marketing of local

foods, while events like BC's Feast of Fields celebration or the Salone del Gusto in Italy showcase local foods from other regions and convivia.

While the Slow Food movement recognizes diversity in the "local" however, the movement tends to assume that emphasizing such boundaries will naturally lead to more just and ecological food relations. The smaller-scale of local operations makes responsible and ecological relations and practices more likely, but this is not necessarily the case (Hinrichs 2003). Essentializing the local as the ultimate solution to globalization ignores diversity and conflict within localities, and homogenizes processes of globalization. Slow Food often places more emphasis on what Hinrichs (2003: 37) calls "defensive localization," or resistance to external forces. This approach can create rigid boundaries between "us and them" and minimize internal differences. The movement could benefit from greater receptivity to internal diversity and conflict, what Hinrichs calls "diversity-receptive localization," particularly for Slow Food's interest in protecting cultural and ecological biodiversity. In other words, a local focus requires attention not only to physical geographical boundaries (which vary) but also to the complexity of social boundaries that often penetrate definitions of physical space. Hinrichs does point out that the different approaches to localization are not oppositional and may occur in different degrees in different times and places. To his credit, Petrini (2001a) has cautioned that supporting only small-scale and local goods can cut members off from complex processes. Slow Food could make this point more explicit in its projects.

Along with attempting to rebuild food systems on the local level, Slow Food promotes locality on a global level. Ritzer (2004: 185) describes Slow Food as an

organization oriented to global growth that is also “interested in sustaining that which is locally conceived and controlled.” For the movement, protecting diversity in cultures involves linking them to a network, rather than isolating them, or else they risk being cut off from “highly complex processes” (Petrini 2001a: 2) of which they are a part (Petrini 2003b). Miele and Murdoch (2002a) suggest that Slow Food views local and regional foods as too embedded in local cultures and ecologies and that the movement frames these foods in ways to partly isolate them from their local contexts in order to promote them. Self-reliance of local food systems is important to reduce relations of dependence and exploitation that organize the globalized industrial food system, but isolation and exclusion are not desirable for Slow Food. On an international level, Slow Food reflects greater consciousness of the complexity of the local, combining the goals of identity as well as interdependence and exchange among localities. This effort is similar to the idea of imagined communities, providing opportunities for sharing resources and support while respecting the particular struggles of any one region (Baker 1999). In seeking to protect and promote the specific character and resources of regions around the world Slow Food is working to protect the local globally. The movement writes that “the international dimension is truly global in this case, because differences become a form of wealth, and variety a tangible value” (Petrini 2001c: 106). Local food systems provide the specific context for applying ecological principles and, when linked globally in Slow Food, they present an alternative to the standardization and homogenization of the globalized industrial food system.

Power Relations: Gender, Ethnicity, and Class

It is curious that Slow Food addresses the relations between gender and food so little in its work, considering the highly gendered character of all aspects of food. The absence of gender in Slow Food is even more interesting given the movement's origins in Italy where women, especially mothers, hold a major role in preparing and providing food (Counihan 1999). Slow Food's statute and manifesto, project descriptions and publications do not account for women's place in producing and providing much of the world's food. In most societies, women are responsible for preparing and providing food, and in non-industrialized countries women are still the primary producers, processors and distributors (Barndt 1999; Counihan 1999; Field 1999; Kneen 1995; Madeley 2000; McIntosh 1996; McIntosh and Zey 1998; Mennell et al. 1992). Slow Food's language can sometimes exclude women from projects or certain kinds of work. The idea of *Fraternal* Tables seems to convey that women do not participate in development projects or in the role of providing (rather than receiving) assistance. In practice as well, women appear to have little representation in the Slow Food movement. For example, although Philip (2002: 6) reports that Slow Food Awards "go to between 1/3 and 1/2 women," the numbers posted on the movement's web site are much lower. Only in one year did slightly more than one third of the awards go to women, and in 2003 only one of 10 awards went to a woman. I located only one article from the Slow Food web site on women. The article does note women's "enormously important roles for social life and agriculture, even though some live in countries where they are still subject to unbelievable discrimination" (Petrini 2003c). However, the movement does not seem to think

discrimination is significant in “developed” countries, and there is no acknowledgement of who does the work of knowing and preparing traditional feasts. It is promising that Slow Food recently organized a symposium on women and food production at Terra Madre.

Gender discrimination in food systems is well-documented in social research. Although women have performed most of the food work throughout history, they continue to benefit least from this work. Women farmers have little voice in food policy, their contributions to the food system are largely invisible, and they receive the least security, quantity and quality of food (Baker 1999; Counihan 1999; Field 1999; Harper and LeBeau 2003; Madeley 2000). Further, whereas women are considered responsible for food work, particularly in the home, they have little control over the resources and conditions of this work. Such an intimate and entrenched relationship to food gives women little agency in gaining some control over food. Commonly women deny themselves food for the benefit of other family members (Field 1999; Madeley 2000) and as farmers they have become increasingly disconnected from productive resources (Madeley 2000; Shiva 1992a). By focusing on gender discrimination in colonized or less developed countries, however, Slow Food ignores gender inequalities in “developed” areas. In making this distinction, Slow Food also reinforces divisions between northern and southern countries on which the discourse of development is based (Shiva 1992b).

Slow Food’s goal of promoting sensual and personal experiences of food could pay greater attention to gender. Women’s sexuality is closely linked to food and eating, and interpreted as a source of power (Bordo 1989; 1992; Heldke 1992a). But

women are often prevented from realizing this aspect of food. On the one hand, the prevalent cultural image of a devouring and insatiable woman (Bordo 1992) reflects a belief that women have special knowledge of the sensual dimensions of food. Lorde (as cited in Heldke 1992a: 223) envisions women with a kind of erotic energy that comes from “sharing deeply any pursuit with another person” and serves as a “capacity for joy.” According to Lorde, women express this erotic energy through food work, creating food as a form of love. On the other hand, ideas of women’s sensual and sexual experiences with food are a source of anxiety. Researchers commonly link eating disorders to fears of becoming an overly sexual, emotional and needy woman, and these images of women tend to thrive “in periods of gross environmental and social crisis” (Bordo 1992: 44-45). This is no coincidence, for in times of social upheaval the established power structure is at stake. Suppressing a source of power for women is a means of maintaining the patriarchal status quo. Yet the connection of women to sexual and sensual knowledge of food suggests that Slow Food could better account for the gendered dimension of sensuality. Women’s roles in domestic food work, for example, could expand Slow Food’s ideas of personal, practical food experiences. As well, the feminist effort to make women’s personal daily experiences political can add a politics to such food work in Slow Food (Sturgeon 1995). The connection between food and sexuality necessitates an awareness of gendered experiences of food as well as identities associated with food.

Researchers find that gender is a major factor affecting how people identify with food. Food is more problematic for women’s self-identity since it forms part of caring work that women provide to others, and women are often defined in relational

terms (Counihan 1999; Charles and Kerr 1986; Crouch and O'Neill 2000; Rozin 1999). If women's self-definition is more intimately and problematically linked to food than men's, it is difficult to imagine that women and men will interpret and enjoy taste in the same ways. Counihan (1999: 46) finds that women's role of feeding is a "cultural universal," a major aspect of female identities and a source of women's connection to and influence over others. A woman's experience of taste and "good" food may be based primarily on the preferences of her family or social group. Furthermore, food's connection to sex and reproduction (Bell and Valentine 1997; Counihan 1999; Goody 1982; Heldke 1992a; Loxon 1983; Mintz 1996) entails self-attention (especially to the body) that contradicts the expectation that women should care for others (Charles and Kerr 1986; Counihan 1999). A woman's attempts to negotiate these multiple aspects of food can create conflict for herself, and food can even become threatening to her sense of self. In light of the rise in eating disorders among young women (and more recently young men) over the past few decades, the movement's lack of attention to gender identity is a significant oversight, especially for its interest in educating youth.

Although food generally reflects and reinforces gender inequalities, it also provides a means for women to reclaim power. Western women have attempted to express control through starvation (Counihan 1999), and women across the globe have been at the centre of grassroots food projects and struggles for increased access to better quality and quantity food (Baker 1999; Barndt 1999; Field 1999). Since women are so closely involved with food, they bring an important voice to alternative initiatives and to an understanding of food politics. Women farmers provide an

alternative perspective on the food system (Kloppenburg 1991) and they have been shown to interpret elements of an alternative paradigm differently from men (Kloppenburg et al. 2000: 80). Slow Food's development and education projects require some recognition of women's work, and representation and support for women in the presidia and Award can be improved. Further, an ecofeminist perspective, that links environmental and gender injustices, could inform the movement's interest in environmental biodiversity. In many cultures, women are the "custodians of biodiversity" and they are often the first to feel the effects of ecological devastation from industrial agricultural practices (Shiva 1993b:168). In effect, the movement's neglect of gender helps make invisible the central role of women in the functioning of food systems and it restricts Slow Food's transformative potential.

The Slow Food movement has taken increasing interest in issues of ethnicity or race in recent years, although one might expect greater interest by the movement given its origins in an ethnically diverse society. Slow Food has become a vocal critic of how industrial food relations reflect ethnocentric and paternalistic perspectives of powerful western countries. The movement's interest in aspects of ethnic conflict appear to have followed from its adoption of ecological consciousness, reflecting the idea that ecology is (or should be) linked to social justice issues (Bullard 2001). The movement questions the motivations behind dominant notions of development when such processes have destroyed local foods, cultures and economies, altered local cuisines and increased poverty in undeveloped areas (Petrini 2003a). The movement makes an important point that industrial growth for some countries has relied on the

cultural and ecological degradation of other countries. According to Shiva (1992a), the western industrial model of development is based on the exploitation and erosion of “other” cultures.

Colonization has helped to legitimate the unequal distribution of the costs of development. Slow Food recognizes the ethnocentrism behind development projects and the complexity of issues in countries that have been colonized. The movement also recognizes that a certain Eurocentrism behind many of its own projects can make invisible the diversity of cultural knowledge and practices. This realization presents some difficult issues for Slow Food’s goal of reviving local food cultures. For example, delocalization associated with industrial “development” has degraded diets in poor countries (Mennell et al. 1992), undercut local farmers (McMichael 1998), and helped to make southern countries dependent on northern countries for food and livelihood (McIntosh 1996). Slow Food’s promotion of traditional, local, artisanal foods does not easily translate to regions that struggle with immediate issues of hunger, poverty, access to resources, and dependence on exploitative food relations.

The Slow Food movement has attempted to alter its approach and its projects to address some issues of ethnicity and race in the industrial food system. For example, Slow Food revisited its intentions for the *presidia* and Fraternal Tables. The movement intends to incorporate issues of landscape preservation and organic production rather than only traditional foods, and local development rather than financial aid (Petrini 2001c). The complex issues of development and ethnicity have helped to shift Slow Food’s attention to more material dimensions of culture. However, by focusing on issues of production in the “third world,” Slow Food helps

to reinforce a division between northern consumers and southern producers (McMichael 1998). The movement could simultaneously place greater emphasis on local farming in wealthy northern countries. One critic observes that Slow Food's emphasis on consumption as a means of preservation seems contradictory (Waters 2003). One might also ask to whom Slow Food teaches consumption practices as a form of resistance. Although the movement shows some recognition of the relationship between food and ethnicity, in my view Slow Food does not adequately interrogate the racialized structure of food systems. This carries into Slow Food's aims for constructing an alternative model of development. Slow Food seeks to create sustainable self-reliance for local groups, recuperating and making known "traditional knowledges so that they become motors of development and prosperity" (Petrini 2001c: 98). Although Slow Food views tradition as a resource for recognizing and reviving diversity, the movement does not acknowledge that traditions are diverse, partial and contested (Swidler 1986). As well, the movement's position of itself as a helper in relation to colonized countries reflects a paternalistic attitude. The movement defends itself by emphasizing that Slow Food can provide visibility, connections and support to groups working out of the limelight (Petrini 2001c: 96). However, these initiatives still have an appearance of charity to areas that cannot provide for themselves. Furthermore, the effort to build local self-reliance tends to ignore difference and conflicts within ethnic groups. Certainly, this approach can help to break exploitative relations of dependence and revive local cultures but it does not necessarily address the forms of relations within groups (Cook, Crang and Thorpe 1999). The movement could consider inter-ethnic conflicts as well as intersections of

class and gender that shape ethnic relations in a food system. Finally, while Slow Food emphasizes the importance of diversity for alternative food models, the movement's approach to diversity is problematic. The movement claims to seek a form of multiculturalism, even a "melting pot" (Petrini 2001c: 106) of diverse cultures. But ideas of multiculturalism often presume "the vanity of negotiation between different ways of life" (Bauman 2001) and represent a discursive attempt to solve the "problem" of ethnocultural diversity rather than recognizing diversity (Day 2000). Despite the movement's interest in protecting cultural and ecological diversity, the language of multiculturalism tends to reflect a colonizing project that aims to reduce, rather than celebrate, differences. In some ways, Slow Food seems to reproduce the homogenizing trends of the globalized industrial food system.

Although Slow Food has become more overtly political in its work, the movement shows some difficulty recognizing the depth of social class issues and the enduring nature of class as a social category. For example, Slow Food has constructed a definition of its members that seems to imply a certain class membership. Aspects of this member identity do support and encourage awareness of the diversity of people in a food system, like alertness, tolerance and eagerness to learn and participate (Petrini 2001c: 15). However, Petrini also defines members by their frequenting of restaurants or wine cellars and their financial contributions to initiatives like Fraternal Tables, linking participation to social class. The movement seems to think that quality and taste can override differences in economic resources associated with social class. Wealth is only one aspect of social class (McIntosh 1996), but an important one in a society and food system dominated by the economic

imperative. Price remains a central characteristic in the industrial food system and a major factor in food choices. Local, organic, specialty foods are often more expensive than imported, packaged and processed foods. As well, such quality foods may not necessarily be available in grocery stores and may require personal transportation and conscious weekly and seasonal scheduling. For those short on time and disposable income, like single parents and students, acquiring good food can seem impossible. The movement does make an important point that the “demagogy of price” (Petrini 2001a: 3) must be left behind for other qualities of food to be appreciated, but this is not an easy choice for all members of society.

Along with overemphasizing the role of factors like taste and quality in food choices, Slow Food rarely acknowledges how social class influences the construction of these characteristics of food. Yet, concepts like taste, cuisine and gastronomy often express and reinforce class differences (Appadurai 1988; Bourdieu 1984; Fonte 1991; Goody 1982; McIntosh 1996; Mennell et al. 1992). All people may not desire the same “quality” or “tastes” of foods that Slow Food advocates. In one article, Petrini (2004a) discusses how “disgraceful” and “revolting” are products using “artificial truffle-flavored oil” rather than real truffles. Yet many people (including myself) likely have never tasted such a delicacy and may be accustomed to the “taste of necessity” (Bourdieu 1984: 178), or the flavour one can afford. However, as Bourdieu (1984) points out, since the idea of taste is associated with luxury, the taste of necessity is inconceivable for many people. In other words, the functioning of the food system rests on inequalities of class, while it makes these differences invisible. Slow Food’s use of taste and gastronomy emphasizes the liberating and

democratizing potential of these aspects of food (Bourdieu 1984; Mennell et al. 1992; Mintz 1996) but the movement pays little attention to how these experiences and practices are structured by social class. Slow Food's attempt to undo class by removing it from the movement's language minimizes the importance of the economic dimension of food and helps to reinforce socioeconomic differences that help to shape categories of social class.

The Slow Food movement tends to reinforce the dominant ideology of free consumer choice and frames the economic dimensions of food consumption as a private matter. For example, in an article on organic food, Petrini (2004d) states that "food habits and high quality taste" depend on personal choices and the value consumers give to health and well-being. The movement does not often acknowledge the role factors like income and access play in "choosing" such foods. Roberts (2001) challenges the liberal belief in free choice. He identifies factors like a centralized and car dependent retail system, the availability of agricultural land, economic support to farmers and restrictions on urban sprawl that affect people's abilities to choose quality food. Economic language creates the illusion of choice and individual responsibility, even though such "choices" are often unequally distributed. Slow Food prefers to focus on promoting education and awareness as means to transform people's ideas about food and their spending patterns. While knowledge practices represent one aspect of a "capacity to act" (Goodman and DuPuis 2002: 18) to change the food system, it is still important to examine whose interests are represented in this form of politics. Not everyone can afford the time and money to learn about food and even if they could many are unable to choose foods that reflect this awareness.

Slow Food is more attentive to inequalities in less developed countries. In its aim to expand to third world countries, the movement recognizes from the outset differences in wealth. Slow Food notes the complexity of the “economic and social issues in countries where two waves of colonization have had a devastating effect on agricultural practices and food” (Petrini 2003b). Recently, Slow Food agreed to increase membership fees in wealthy countries in order to contribute money to promoting the movement in the developing world. According to one member (Kummer 2002), funds are important “because those places, unlike Europe and America, don’t have enough individual members to take really active stances helping artisan food makers.” Certainly global inequalities, and the expansion of the capitalist industrial food system on a global level, necessitate a different approach to raising awareness of food. Wimberley (1991) makes a convincing case that “transnational corporate penetration contributes to Third World hunger.” But the movement tends to forget that there are many people in wealthy countries who cannot get enough to eat or participate in Slow Food. As a developed country like Canada dismantles its social assistance programs, it is moving towards a two-tiered food distribution system for ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ (Davis and Tarasuk 1994). While it is important to be aware of the bigger picture of food politics, there are complex food issues within cultures and regions, even those that appear to have enough.

Recent interest in the concepts *food democracy* and *food citizenship* represent efforts to recognize that food is a universal right and that all people should be able to claim it, regardless of income (Baker 1999; Hasseinen 2003; Hendrickson and Heffernan 2002; Welsh and MacRae 1998). Programs for universal access, rather

than for target groups, are often most successful at approaching equality in the food system (Field 1999: 201). It is an obvious but challenging thought that recognizing the universal need of food can potentially meet all peoples' needs regardless of social class. Slow Food shows greater sensitivity to inequalities in focusing on the marginalized roles of farmers in the food system. Slow Food acknowledges a need to protect the right for farmers to choose freely and democratically the kind of agriculture they prefer, especially those in developing countries who have felt the effects of colonization (Petrini 2003b). The movement links the issues of resource distribution and access to the existence of small-scale production, recognizing the central role of farmers in food security. In Petrini's (2003b) view, small-scale farming is "a basic requirement in the struggle against GMOs, reasserting the importance of biodiversity, food sovereignty, maintenance of small farmers, occupation of the land, protection for the environment, and opposition to the agrichemical and agrifood multinationals." The movement's recent (2004) agreement to create school garden programs in each convivium is a step in broadening the audience of its sensory education. As well, one Slow Food member (Chabrol 2004) observes that "poorer consumers are the first victims of marketing gadgets and continual food novelties," have higher rates of obesity, and should be a priority for Slow Food's taste education events. The movement could strengthen this effort by focusing on getting better quality food to more people rather than emphasizing tastes and qualities that are not easily accessible.

The Slow Food movement presents a strong case for why culture is important for appreciating and changing food. Culture influences the value of sensuality, the

nature of social connections, forms of food knowledge and the importance of ecology, factors that can challenge the economic focus, as well as the exploitation and degradation, of the globalized industrial food system. By redefining codes of the dominant food system, like pleasure and quality, Slow Food exposes the limitations of an economic perspective of food and the movement constructs an alternative vision of reality. The movement also seeks to create new cultural contexts, like in the local food system, in which alternative food relations can thrive and give shape to an alternative food system. These contexts enable members to envision the links connecting participants of a food system and to seek alternative, and possibly more accountable, routes for food. Slow Food also aims to challenge some institutions that structure dominant food relations, like education and the discourse of development. But the cultural challenge of Slow Food is primarily through the construction of alternative cultural codes that can define an opposition to economic perspectives of food. This focus suggests that Slow Food's ability to make culture change is limited. Additionally, the complexity of issues associated with institutional challenges, especially with development, indicates a need for Slow Food to address the political economic aspects of food in more depth. This is reflected in the movement's minimal attention to power relations. The movement's use of culture provides a means to contest dominant knowledge claims, and the passivity this knowledge creates, and to suggest how ideas of food can be different. However, Slow Food shows a limited understanding of the structures constraining symbolic change and of the need to confront different forms of culture.

Chapter 4

Identity as a Strategy:

An Aspect of the Slow Food Challenge

This chapter explores the potential for the Slow Food movement to create change in the current food system. I draw on social movement theory to understand how an aspect of Slow Food culture, identity, provides a useful strategy for the movement to transform hegemonic food relations. According to Petrini (2001c: 5), Slow Food “began to grow as its own collective purpose turned into a search for a new identity.” The movement’s process of redefining its dimensions does appear to have enabled Slow Food to expand and gain wider recognition. Focusing on identity may seem to detract from strategizing for social change, since struggles for representation have become “increasingly separated from struggles for the democratic transformation of social life” (Sandilands 1999: 36). However, research on social movements has come to show how the construction of an oppositional social movement identity can be a means to redefine the field of politics and pursue meaningful change. An analysis of Slow Food’s identity can alert researchers to some of the difficulties of altering the dominant culture of food and the significance of culture in contemporary conflicts over food.

It was primarily New Social Movement theorists who drew attention to the importance of identity issues in social movements. They argued that new social conditions, particularly of late capitalism, shifted social conflict away from class and distribution issues to more personal and interpretive realms of social life. Conflicts have become centred on how particular interpretations of reality influence hegemonic

modes of ordering as well as the power to construct these claims to knowledge (Cohen 1985; Melucci 1989). New Social Movements stood as examples of the kinds of social conflicts that could not be accounted for in dominant interpretations of “effective” politics and strategy. The American school of social movement research viewed effectiveness in terms of a movement’s ability to engage in relations with state political institutions. New Social movements provided the impetus for challenging and expanding this idea of instrumental action. A broader definition of effectiveness, provided by Sturgeon (1995: 37), is a movement’s ability to critically intervene in the “ongoing process of the construction of hegemonic relations.” Identity and strategy are intertwined in the process of contesting hegemonic knowledge claims and creating alternative visions of reality. The construction of an oppositional movement identity is a process of contesting hegemonic knowledge claims and defining an alternative position. Strategy is part of this meaning system, as the vehicle with which a movement defines its context and situation, and the means of achieving aspects of its project (Epstein 1990; Eyerman and Jamison 1989; Flacks 1995).

It is important that researchers continually turn to movements themselves to understand the many ways identity and strategy work together. While social movement theorists have given little attention to food and agriculture movements, they are useful examples for understanding the negotiation of multiple aims since they are often viewed as contradictory for pursuing both material and symbolic change (Tovey 2002). Similarly, the Slow Food movement has seemed ambiguous for advocating pleasure and conviviality *and* an alternative system of food. Throughout

its development Slow Food has struggled to define an identity that incorporates these diverse interests. The movement now defines itself by its goals to protect environmental biodiversity, preserve diverse material cultures, spread alternative food knowledge, and promote pleasure and conviviality. I consider how Slow Food's definition of these dimensions has helped the movement to gain recognition as an alternative to the industrial food system.

The construction of an oppositional identity provides Slow Food with a means to challenge dominant cultural codes of the industrial food system. The movement recognizes the importance of information in social conflicts and aims to situate itself as an alternative in the vast amount of food knowledge. Since information is considered a source of control in contemporary society, the reinterpretation of dominant forms of information provides a way for movements to enact agency and create an alternative vision of reality (Cohen 1985; Epstein 1990; Freeman and Johnson 1999; Melucci 1996b; Sturgeon 1995; Swidler 1995). By producing and disseminating alternative information on food, Slow Food can reflect on and resist the structure of power relations in the industrial food system. Through education and publications, Slow Food challenges knowledge claims produced by agricultural and nutritional sciences, as well as the authority of these professionals. The movement's taste education program provides a way to empower people to construct their own knowledge on food and to recognize the importance of sensory skills in understanding food. But there are limitations to the politics of education, for it often reflects and reproduces the interests of elite members of a society. Slow Food publications provide both an alternative channel of communication and a venue for the expression

of subversive perspectives on food. In the movement's view, the creation of a publishing company provided Slow Food with "an emblematic name and a powerful vehicle of identity" (Petrini 2001c: 7). The transformative potential of publications is also limited. Non-literate people cannot easily access the movement's publications and, since many of the movement's publications are translated, it can be difficult to grasp the intended political meaning of movement writings. Written work brings to mind the limitations of language itself. One Slow Food member (Sonnenfeld 2001: xiv) writes that the movement's reliance on Latin terms like *convivia* and *presidia* limits the "universality that Slow Food aspires and deserves to achieve." Yet, the movement does not question its reliance on the English language. Petrini (2001c: 17) even argues that the "force and bite" of Slow Food "come from the choice of an English-language name conveying a stance that people all over the world immediately understand." By universalizing one perspective of reality, Slow Food neglects to consider the local, situated character of any one language and of the movement's political position. While the process of constructing identity provides a means to create alternative information on food, this knowledge conveys a particular view of the world. It also tends to de-emphasize the importance of taking direct action.

Through the process of defining an oppositional identity, the Slow Food movement seeks to construct counter hegemonic codes that expose the limitations of the dominant food system and the strengths of Slow Food's vision. Concepts like *eco-gastronomy* and *virtuous globalization* subvert dominant interpretations of gastronomy as self-indulgence or globalization as homogenizing. These terms contest

the inevitability of dominant knowledge claims and they resist reductive, economic interpretations of the industrial food system. Since social movements often lack political power (they are *alternative*), it can be difficult for them to produce entirely new cultural codes that will be widely relevant. Instead, movements often reinterpret and confound hegemonic cultural codes to create discourses that can be identified as alternative, expose the irrationality of dominant interpretations and reflect the contradictions in the social system (Brunori and Rossi 2000; Eyerman and Jamison 1989; Melucci 1989; Swidler 1995; Whittier 2002). For example, by redefining pleasure as a sensual and political experience, Slow Food challenges dominant ideas of food as merely fuel and enjoyment as separate from the realm of social issues. The movement reveals the impersonal character of the industrial food system and it makes sensuality important to food and social life.

Bauman (2001) argues that when pleasure is the ultimate goal in life, social justice tends to be measured against past conditions of living, rather than against other people. A focus on pleasure can overemphasize the importance of personal transformation, to the neglect of broader democratic goals. But Slow Food does not promote hedonistic pleasure; rather, the movement stresses the importance of knowledge so that pleasure does not lead to self-indulgence (Petrini 2001c: 61). The idea that pleasure can turn into uncontrollable excess without consciousness is a common theme in consumption studies, especially consumerist critiques (Featherstone 1990). By adding knowledge to pleasure, Slow Food makes more palatable a degree of self-indulgence and it constructs for itself a defense against claims that the movement simply represents the interests of elite consumers. Slow

Food's idea of revaluing pleasure is related to the aims of many quality of life movements. For example, Low (2003) identifies a link between Slow Food and New Urbanism and even suggests joining the principles of the two movements. The thrust of New Urbanism is to create compact, friendly neighbourhoods and reduce urban sprawl. In Low's view, Slow Urbanism would involve pedestrian-friendly streets, low-tech buildings, meetings held over pleasurable meals in "a group of rocking chairs," and "field trips to visit great towns...for intellectual study and to have some fun." While quality of life movements represent resistance against the speed and rationality of industrialized society, they tend to promote a lifestyle politics that neglects to consider broader inequalities. On the one hand people will more easily understand a new message when it incorporates elements of hegemonic codes. On the other hand, alternative codes are often constrained by hegemonic meanings.

One way for a movement to gain some political ground is by working in the vulnerabilities of the dominant system, and finding these spaces often requires intimate knowledge of hegemonic codes (Cohen 1985; Freeman 1999; Hendrickson and Heffernan 2002). By identifying weaknesses, Slow Food can move into these spaces to gain oppositional ground. For example, Slow Food draws on ecological concepts like diversity and sustainability to create a more complex, interconnected picture of food. The movement also acts reflexively on these alternative codes constructing goals and an organization that reflect these alternative modes of operating. Slow Food self-consciously constructed its own definition for these concepts, it has diversified its structure and it seeks to apply diversity and sustainability to its projects. Researchers suggest that consciousness and reflexivity

provide ways for movements to reevaluate their oppositional stance and avoid totalizing meanings they contest (Cohen 1985; Melucci 1989; Taylor and Whittier 1999). The movement's addition of ecological consciousness helped to turn Slow Food's attention to the issues of agriculture, methods of production and food regulation, for example. Slow Food realized strategic alliances with aspects of the organic and sustainable agriculture movements that give the movement a complexity and political edge. With the addition of ecological consciousness, Slow Food could draw meaning and oppositional strength from related organizations, broaden its gastronomic base and deflect criticism of it being an elitist movement. But Slow Food does not reflect all the dimensions of these movements. For example, although Slow Food has grown more attuned to the technical aspects of agriculture, the movement tends to focus on the symbolic value of organics. There is little indication in its texts that Slow Food provides strategies for developing new production techniques or innovative forms of livelihood, issues that are central to the organic agriculture movement (Tovey 2002). For one American member (Kummer 2002) of the movement, Slow Food could focus more on this kind of work. He states that

one of Slow Food's goals should be finding ways for small farmers in America to be able to be certified organic without having to pay a fortune, whether it's helping them with paperwork, or subsidizing them for a year while they're making the transition to being officially organic (Kummer 2002).

Ecological consciousness alerted Slow Food to spaces of resistance where the movement can grow, but the movement is not necessarily committed to transforming these spaces. Slow Food's identity project demonstrates the potential to challenge dominant cultural codes. But the movement does not always overturn dominant

interpretations of these codes, exemplifying how social reality is constructed through the interaction of hegemony and counter hegemony.

Slow Food's identity project provides a means for the movement to alter its participants and forms of participation. Having moral and emotional along with cognitive dimensions, movement identity can be an incentive for participation (Friedman and McAdam 1992; Melucci 1996a). Researchers argue that the process of defining an oppositional identity can offer members a source of social connection, a new lifestyle and the potential to affect social change through personal change (Epstein 1990; Friedman and McAdam 1992; Melucci 1989; Reger 2002; Sturgeon 1995; Taylor and Whittier 1999; Tovey 2002). For example, the movement's notion of pleasure as a source of personal knowledge and politics can be an incentive for participation and commitment, since it offers the potential for self-transformation.

Slow Food members have the opportunity to create personal food knowledge and to link this knowledge to larger social issues. As well, the movement's idea of conviviality can make a meal fun, rather than an inconvenience, and it can provide the context to transform the experience of a meal. Both conviviality and pleasure take time and personal commitment that are means for resisting the fast life reflected in fast food. These dimensions of Slow Food help to build personal investment in food that can be the basis of a more participatory food system. But, according to Johnston (2002), an emphasis on personal responsibility for social issues represents a lifestyle politics that satisfies a need to participate but does not usually articulate the broader outcomes of different forms of participation. Opportunities for personal change can provide people with a way to better understand how their lived daily realities are

linked to larger social processes. By reducing politics to personal change, however, social movements neglect to address structural issues that shape these opportunities. For example, the fair trade movement often overemphasizes personal responsibility for social justice, framing consumption as ethical while leaving unexplored the inequalities produced by consumption practices (Johnston 2002). The politics of these forms of participation suggest that issues of recognition take precedence over issues of democracy in Slow Food. Participants and forms of participation help to shape aspects of Slow Food's oppositional identity.

Social movement identity serves not only to attract members but also as a way to determine the kinds of members a movement will recruit (Jasper 1999). A movement's oppositional identity effectively serves as its recruitment strategy since the knowledge claims a movement makes will often resonate with particular groups. While pleasure and conviviality can be incentives for participation, they have also tended to attract a limited kind of participant. Hegemonic interpretations of pleasure and conviviality as "excess" may constrain the transformative potential of these aspects of the movement. As well, political economic food relations that link the attainment of pleasure and conviviality to financial resources can restrict peoples' abilities to participate in the movement as well as the politics of Slow Food's identity. The limited participation implied in pleasure and conviviality echoes a consumer politics of the fair trade movement that involves "voting with your dollar." According to Johnston (2002) this discourse of consumer sovereignty reduces politics to a choice in the marketplace, obscuring the lack of choices available to producers or the class-based ability to purchase fair trade goods. Ecological consciousness,

however, has helped to expand the range of participants and forms of participation in Slow Food. By taking an interest in agriculture and biodiversity, Slow Food has been able to draw wider support from farmers and other small farm producers whose work is directly linked to the condition of the environment. The limitations of certain kinds of participation highlight the difficulty for movements to appear alternative and to represent interests that many people can relate to.

Some researchers (Friedman and McAdam 1992) suggest that, by expanding its identity, a movement will become more exclusive because its identity becomes harder to control and offers less powerful incentives. A movement's attempt to represent all localized identities and knowledges of its members can result in a universalizing expression of a narrow elite group, like in Slow Food's use of the English language. Researchers (Cohen 1985; Melucci 1989; Sandilands 1999) argue that social movement identity cannot be socially constructed, or alternative, *and* representative. Although the Slow Food movement has become flexible to more kinds of participants, the movement's effort to define typical characteristics of its members limits the movement's representativeness.

The construction of identity is a means of drawing boundaries. Slow Food's effort to build a network among its members and projects creates a kind of affinity group that can link the political struggles of diverse participants. The presidia make particular use of this network of resources that can be utilized in diverse situations. A network of members serves to build resistance on local and international levels and diverse fronts, from biodiversity to taste education. The process of constructing an oppositional identity can serve as a source of solidarity and commitment for members

(Melucci 1989; Staggenborg 2001), especially when a movement is connected to a network of organizations with shared interests (Brunori and Rossi 2000; Gerlach 1991; Jasper 1999; Melucci 1984; Staggenborg 2001). By establishing links to related organizations, Slow Food builds a sense of solidarity in diversity. These organizations, like the FAO and the *Ecologist* magazine, give weight to Slow Food and provide greater complexity to its goals. Related movements can contribute participants and other resources that help define the identity and purpose of a movement. As well, a movement's oppositional identity can gain credibility by connecting the names of important people to its work (McCarthy and Zald 1977). For example, Slow Food draws on well-known scholars, like Vandana Shiva and Eric Schlosser, who speak at its conferences and will eventually teach courses at its university. The construction of an oppositional identity can be a means to define and attract members and participants play a role in defining a movement's identity. Although Slow Food has become increasingly attuned to the diversity of members in the food system, its identity still restricts the kinds of participants in the movement and the alternativeness of its forms of participation.

The process of constructing an oppositional identity has also enabled the Slow Food movement to construct an action orientation that reflects its identity. Although the movement has stated that a defensive position is the best way to preserve cultural and ecological biodiversity (Petrini 2001a: 2; 2001c: 26), Slow Food has also begun to take a more active stance on its politics. As the movement incorporated new dimensions in its identity, like ecology, Slow Food's strategies for action also expanded. It is in a movement's organization that the strategic potential of identity

takes shape. Identity helps form a movement's organization, and its organization is one way that a social movement conveys its message or strategy (Eyerman and Jamison 1991; Gerlach 1991; Melucci 1989; Reger 2002; Whittier 2002). As previously stated, the process of constructing an oppositional identity is often reflexive. A social movement's organization embodies the way it defines itself in relation to dominant cultural codes. For example, with the movement's growing concern for preserving biodiversity, Slow Food's organization became more flexible and adaptable to local needs. The movement describes its presidia as "agile, able to offer help and encouragement in many different situations" (Petrini 2001c: 96) and Slow Food considers its network of informants and adaptability as strengths in its development projects.

The greater diversity of the movement's organization enables Slow Food to be more flexible to new oppositional knowledges. For example, Slow Food has sought out traditional local knowledges of small-scale farmers from across the globe for the recent event, Terra Madre. Researchers (Gerlach 1999; Reger 2002; Taylor and Whittier 1999) argue that a social movement can accommodate diverse aspects of its identity by creating boundaries between its dimensions. This can make for an adaptable movement rather than a divided one. Projects function with some independence in Slow Food, enabling the movement to expand without conflict between Slow Food's dimensions. For example, *convivia* have the autonomy and responsibility to define the specific goals and strategies for a region and its members. As Slow Food expands its presidia to less developed countries, the movement also aims to be flexible to the needs and resources of the local groups. The Slow Food

movement can take action in more ways with less risk, and also take on meanings of related movements and different members (Gerlach 1999).

The process of constructing an oppositional identity has also provided a means for Slow Food to determine appropriate courses of action and to mobilize its diverse resources (Cohen 1985; Freeman 1999; Jenkins 1999; Melucci 1989; Polletta 1997). Although Slow Food challenges dominant interpretations of globalization as a process of cultural homogenization, the movement also recognizes that globalization is a powerful strategy of the industrial food system. To gain some political ground, Slow Food sees that it has to work on the on the terms of the dominant food system “using their weapons: globalization and worldwide reach” (Petrini 2001c: 17). The movement has also taken a more political stance on food rules enacted through the WTO and EU, for example.

As well, the movement’s criticism of dominant ideas of development has led Slow Food to reflect on its own colonizing impulses. The movement altered the strategy of its presidia and Fraternal Tables to better reflect its ideas for an alternative model of development. These actions do not overturn exploitative visions of development, for in some ways Slow Food’s projects reinforce racialized characteristics of production and consumption and a paternalistic attitude to development. However, the shifting form of Slow Food’s organization approaches a more politicized identity. As the movement orients itself towards an organization that preserves diversity while establishes links between unique struggles, Slow Food stands a better chance of proposing radical social change.

By understanding the strategic potential of Slow Food's identity, it becomes clearer that culture is an important site for working out contemporary conflicts over the food system. The process of defining an oppositional movement identity can challenge hegemonic cultural codes, forms of participation and an orientation to action. But aspects of Slow Food's identity, like pleasure and development, also restrict the transformative potential of the movement. Not only do hegemonic interpretations constrain alternative definitions, but Slow Food also reinforces aspects of the dominant food culture, like in its emphasis on education over direct action. The limitations of Slow Food's identity highlight the interactional nature of culture-making. Social movements do not make knowledge claims in a vacuum, but in conversation with elements of the pre-existing culture. This points to the limitations of identity as a strategy, for it is only one aspect of movement culture and one means for pursuing change. Research on movement ideology and framing processes can also provide an understanding of how the culture and structure of Italian society influences Slow Food's form of politics, as well as the movement's means of conveying its message. However, culture is also only one dimension of social change. The construction of alternative modes of ordering can conflict with political economic relations that make culture change impractical. Slow Food's commitment to changing the food system demands a wider variety of strategies. However, Slow Food's success at addressing new definitions of itself suggests that struggling with identity has played an important role in the movement's expansion.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Throughout the process of writing this thesis I have been intrigued by how interesting the Slow Food movement is to people. In all kinds of settings, Slow Food provides a basis for lively conversation and personal reflection on the social issues relating to food. Despite some of the limitations of the movement that emerge from my analysis, Slow Food strikes a nerve in people. The movement serves as a reflection of not only a growing interest in the cultural dimensions of food but also a social *need* of culture. Slow Food also provides opportunities for people to reflect on the limitations of the globalized industrial food system. By focusing on culture, it becomes possible to see that the dominant mode of organizing food relations is producing not only cheap, standardized and alienated foods, but also certain cultures. The movement is a useful example for understanding the diverse dimensions and politics of food. In some ways, Slow Food is like a utopia. According to Gare (2000: 25), “a utopia transcends the present, putting the existing social order into question and forcing people to experience its contingency. ...it is a dream that wants to be realized.” I do not wish to suggest that Slow Food has no practical value for daily food experiences or for transforming the food system, but that the power of Slow Food seems to be in its ability to envision a different future of food. This in itself can be transformative. Although Slow Food cannot address all the issues with food, it helps people to understand the food system and it can inspire people to create a new future.

Since its inception the Slow Food movement has defended food cultures as sources of alternative information on food issues and resistance. The movement recognizes some limitations to focusing on culture as a means of social change. As a result, Slow Food has attempted to expand its focus and be more open to a diversity of food issues. Petrini (2001c: 12) observes that although the movement

never ceased to affirm the cultural worth of gastronomy and the right to pleasure as indices of the quality of life, for a long time... [it] had to worry about justifying a choice that was often portrayed as purely hedonistic and a political retreat.

It was by incorporating ecological consciousness that the movement attempted to broaden its approach to food.

Slow Food grew more attentive to the material and economic dimensions of food, acknowledging that issues of identity and communication are connected to those of hunger, trade and production. Beginning in the early 1990s, Slow Food shifted its attention to the work and issues of farmers and other small producers rather than only consumers, raising awareness of the distance between actors in the food system and providing contexts for establishing more direct and responsible relations of exchange. The movement has also come to recognize the importance of challenging institutional relations that help to structure the dominant food system. Slow Food recently turned its attention to reducing consumption, it has challenged national and international bodies regulating food, and it has pushed forward efforts to reform education and government. Additionally, by forming partnerships with related organizations like the FAO, Slow Food expanded the scope and form of its work. Through the process of constructing its identity, Slow Food has been able to develop more diverse practices and a flexible organization. The shape of the movement and its

projects has also helped to define the principles of Slow Food. By shifting its attention to cultural contexts and institutions, rather than only codes, Slow Food presents a more powerful force for constructing an alternative culture of food.

Although the Slow Food movement has begun to recognize the importance of the political economic dimensions of food, the movement's focus on culture change restricts its ability to address power relations in the food system. There remain some limitations to Slow Food's approach to food. Throughout this thesis I have noted that Slow Food neglects to consider the conditions and local knowledge of women in farming and domestic work. The movement's lack of attention to gender is a reflection of gender relations in the larger society and a major barrier to Slow Food's transformative potential. Since research indicates that women are the primary workers in nearly all areas of the food system, playing a major role in producing material culture, women represent both an important audience and resource for Slow Food.

The movement's future development could even depend on its ability to recognize women's experiences and knowledges of food, especially for its efforts to protect diversity in cultures and ecologies. For example, the movement's growing interest in rebuilding rural communities and small-scale farming seems to depend in large part on women, for "culturally, 'doing community' is women's work, and women are overrepresented among small farmers" (McMahon 2002: 203). The movement's cultural approach does not account for gendered food experiences within local cultures. Maybe more importantly, it appears that the defense of local food cultures necessitates an awareness of women's food work. This supports theoretical perspectives, like ecofeminism, that link ecological and social justice initiatives and

call for opposition to the larger system of oppression rather than to parts of this web (Plumwood 1994).

The relation between ethnicity or race and food deserves greater attention in the Slow Food movement. For one thing, the movement expresses concern for racialization only in less developed countries, which ignores the interlocking issues of race and social class as well as the extent of ethnic conflict in industrialized countries. By focusing on development strategies in colonized areas, Slow Food also tends to reproduce the authority of western, white cultures. The movement's regional focus helps to give autonomy to regional projects to develop their own solutions and the presidia do reflect greater flexibility to local needs. However, Slow Food tends to assume that ethnic groups correspond to the physical geographical boundaries of a region. The movement could better address the complexity of oppressions that operate in conjunction with ethnic exploitation, and confront the difficult issue of preserving the diversity of localized identities while finding ways to link political goals. Slow Food's efforts to create a multicultural group are questionable, given the extensive critiques of multicultural policies in social research. Essentially, Slow Food could give greater attention to power relations in the food system. This would not only enable a more politicized perspective of culture, but also a better understanding of the political economic dimensions of food.

The Slow Food movement has developed greater awareness of class issues in the food system but it still underestimates the impact of social class on experiences and perspectives of food. In one instance, Petrini (2001c) even suggests that social class is an outmoded category for consumers. Yet researchers find that social class is

tied to many aspects of food, from variety (Mennell et al. 1992) and cuisine (Goody 1982; Harper and LeBeau 2003) to food security (Field 1999; Lezberg and Kloppenburg 1996), distribution (Winson 1993) and health (Harper and LeBeau 2003; McIntosh 1996). While Slow Food acknowledges that its gastronomic aims have been perceived by some as elitist and it sees that gastronomic culture and quality food should be open to all, it often assumes that appreciating these dimensions of food is simply a matter of choice.

The movement gives inadequate attention to the enduring importance of socioeconomic status in the food system and the class stratification that structures different abilities to “choose” good food. Rather, Slow Food emphasizes the potential for individual agency and responsibility in the food system, through alternative food information and awareness for example. This is an important strategy for building personal investment in food but it tends to link participation to social class, restricting Slow Food’s politics to the realm of lifestyles and identities. In some ways, Slow Food appears to be a movement for those who are already conscious of and active in food issues. This does not mean the movement cannot become more widely relevant for, as one member observes, “women’s rights and other social movements started small and affluent before going mainstream” (Hopkins 2003). However, the movement’s approach to food could be more open to other dimensions of culture. For example, Goody (1982) identifies a need for cultural analyses to be attentive to differences within cultures, historical factors, external socio-cultural influences and material elements. Although Slow Food presents a challenge to dominant economic perspectives of food, the diversity of issues and actors in the food system might be

better acknowledged by creatively linking the cultural to the economic aspects of food. This could make for a more complex notion of social justice in Slow Food, one that combines issues of recognition and distribution. Food research could also more explicitly acknowledge and address approaches to linking cultural and economic dimensions of food, possibly by supporting more interdisciplinary food research.

An analysis of Slow Food highlights opportunities for food politics and it offers some insight for theories of food. Considering the relation between identity and strategy in social movements, it is difficult for Slow Food to represent the diversity of struggles in the food system. The limitations of Slow Food's cultural politics point to the importance for movements to form strategic alliances or imagined communities with related organizations and movements in order to address the complexity of food. Slow Food has begun to build such relations with, for example, the Brazilian government, the International Commission on the Future of Food and Agriculture and the *Ecologist* magazine. The idea of an alliance could enable Slow Food to address issues of distribution that inform the goals of groups like the *Ecologist* magazine. In other words, collaborative relations between movements and organizations might be better able to combine cultural and economic dimensions of food.

Further, in understanding the particular values and goals of Slow Food, this thesis draws attention to the value of food as a medium for realizing relations between multiple social systems and forms of politics. It becomes clear that it is difficult to understand a system of food from any single perspective. The movement's addition of ecological consciousness as a means to expand the principles and strategies of Slow Food is illustrative for realizing and building connections between disciplines. Not

only are ecological ideas useful for envisioning the “bigger picture” of food, but the study of food itself seems to offer opportunities to envision a common thread linking different fields of research. The Slow Food movement draws attention to the complexity and importance of food in society and to the power of culture as a means to protect the diverse forms of food.

On the Research

I began this thesis by exploring issues in social research on food with which I could begin to grasp the theoretical relevance of the Slow Food movement. Since I was not that familiar with social theories of food, this approach enabled me to gain a good understanding of the scope of food studies. In analyzing Slow Food, I often returned to research to seek a better understanding of an aspect of food that could be applied to Slow Food. I did not encounter the movement with complete knowledge of food theory and did not proceed in an entirely linear fashion. Slow Food texts informed my understanding of food research as much as research helped me to comprehend Slow Food. A socio-cultural analysis of Slow Food texts provided a good way to understand the contributions of the movement for challenging the dominant food system. The kind of analysis and data allowed me to grasp a fairly broad view of Slow Food and its activities. I was able to draw on a range of authors and projects that can give some complexity to the movement. As well, a socio-cultural focus enabled me to account for the cultural context of the movement that informs Slow Food’s views. An understanding of food in Italy helps to construct a more complex picture of Slow Food than elitist critiques provide. It is still difficult to make solid conclusions on Slow Food given that my knowledge reflects a particular

cultural influence, and many of the materials I used were translated into English. On the one hand, a focus on the cultural dimensions draws attention to the importance of culture in changing the industrial food system. On the other hand, this research does not explore the depth of political economic relations that structure the food system and define other kinds of food movements, like anti-hunger and food security.

The form of data, texts, provided some benefits as well as restrictions to this research. I was able to work on a flexible schedule and gather information as it was needed with little difficulty. Text offered the benefit of an outsider's perspective, from which potential members might view Slow Food. As well, text and language provide a useful medium for understanding how the movement constructs a particular view of reality. However, analyzing texts tends to represent intentions more than actions, making it difficult to say a lot beyond my interpretation of Slow Food's view of itself. Text does not easily convey the experiential dimensions of the movement, like in the experiences of conviviality and pleasure. Furthermore, working with text places the responsibility for interpretation on the researcher, limiting opportunities to test out and get feedback on meanings and actions of the movement. Finally, because a major part of the thesis involved reviewing and synthesizing a large amount of literature, I sometimes felt conflicted in needing to simplify information in order to understand it yet realizing that a simplified picture cannot convey the complexity of either Slow Food or food in general. The thesis has certainly tested my organization and writing abilities.

Although this research provides a limited perspective of the Slow Food movement, it contributes to a growing realization of food issues and of the

movement's work. It is important to recognize that Slow Food shares many goals (like localization, biodiversity, organics, quality of life) with other social movements, and that aspects of Slow Food can be applied without officially being part of the movement. So, while Slow Food presents a unique vision of how the industrial food system can be changed, it is part of a larger force of resistance and is not the ultimate solution.

Having said that, more people are coming to value Slow Food's work. In the past year there has been a noticeable increase in media coverage of Slow Food in Canada. For example, CBC ran its two part story on Slow Food three times since it first aired in February 2003, and the Knowledge Network played the film *Slow Food Revolution* (Musca and Buralli 2003) twice so far in 2004. As Slow Food is gaining public recognition, it becomes increasingly important for social research to take the movement more seriously. It is useful to see Slow Food as practicing a form of direct theory, or developing a political position on food through its practice (Sturgeon 1995) that is attuned to current conditions and realities of food, at least the conditions in many industrialized countries.

Social researchers are gaining more interest in Slow Food. For example, the journal *Food, Culture and Society* will have a special section for articles on Slow Food in its fall issue of 2004. Such research is timely. In monitoring activities of the Vancouver and Vancouver Island convivia, I have come to realize the impact the movement can make on a local level. Members of these convivia are instrumental in organizing the annual Feast of Fields celebration of local foods. As well, members of the Vancouver convivia have participated in forming the Vancouver Food Policy

Council that will hopefully receive funding within the next year. Considering the waning government support for local food and agriculture, an organization like Slow Food can provide structure and visibility to related organizations and to individual farmers and eaters. Research on Slow Food can give voice to emerging local channels of resistance and quality of living in a globalized industrial food system.

The Slow Food movement is not only a movement for recovering traditional forms of food and agriculture but an example of how cultural politics is being practiced to challenge a hegemonic global food order and to recover meaning and value in growing and eating food. For the movement, culture is a resource for raising awareness of food's social meanings, the relations and links forming a food system and aspects of alternative food systems. Slow Food provides a model for how the cultural dimensions of food can be used to defend diversity and quality of life and to create a new future.

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