

# Good, Clean, Fair: The Rhetoric of the Slow Food Movement

**Stephen Schneider**

*The destiny of nations depends on how they nourish themselves*

Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin

*The Slow shall inherit the Earth*

Anonymous gastronome

In recent years, the problems of industrial agriculture have been the subject of more and more scholarly and journalistic work. Mad cow disease, dioxin-contaminated chickens, the conflict between Immolakee workers and Taco Bell, the abuse of factory-farm chickens, New York City's ban on trans fats, and most recently deaths associated with E. coli-tainted spinach have raised questions about where and how we get the food we eat. Investigative and scholarly works such as Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation*, Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Marion Nestle's *Food Politics*, Steve Ettlinger's *Twinkie, Deconstructed*, and Barry Glassner's *The Gospel of Food* have all addressed the question of what it means to make an industry out of food production and consumption.

Meanwhile, there has also been a slow turn away from industrial food in the marketplace. The rise of organic labels in supermarkets, the growth of local farmers markets, and the emergence of chains such as Whole Foods, Wild Oats, and Trader Joe's all attest to consumers' desire to avoid the perceived pitfalls of industrial food. In this context, it is hardly surprising that the Slow Food movement, originally an Italian organization opposed to the degradation of culture and environment that

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attended the rise of fast food, has received more and more attention and has increased its membership. But it should be noted that Slow Food has in many ways been ahead of the recent trend toward organic, natural, and sustainable food, arguing since the late 1970s for a re-examination of how and what we eat.

This article outlines the origins of the Slow Food movement before examining the ways in which Slow Food rhetoric seeks to redefine gastronomy and combat the more deleterious effects of globalization. In articulating a new gastronomy, Slow Food founder Carlo Petrini attempts to reconstruct the gastronomy of Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, at once endorsing the principles of taste and pleasure while simultaneously defining food as a thoroughly cultural product linked to issues of quality, sustainability, biodiversity, and social justice. Meanwhile, Slow Food's rejection of the fast life connects the organization's concerns about culinary issues to other broad efforts to slow life down and step back from the encroachments of globalization and capitalism. These rhetorical strategies situate Slow Food in the context of new social movements, which increasingly focus on cultural and symbolic strategies as means of achieving increased autonomy or democratization of social and cultural arenas.

#### EMERGENCE OF THE SLOW FOOD MOVEMENT

The Slow Food movement emerged from the turbulent political and social environment of Italy in the 1970s. While Slow Food owes much of its distinctive character to the town of Bra, it also reflects the energies and commitments of its principal founder, Carlo Petrini. Named a 2004 European Hero by *Time* magazine, Petrini has insisted for over thirty years on the role of pleasure and taste as a means of preserving distinctive local cultures from the homogenizing effects of industrialization and globalization (Ducasse). From its origins in the Italian Left to its current work in defense of small-scale food producers and biodiversity, Slow Food has similarly retained a local focus while aspiring to a more global reach.

Carlo Petrini was born in 1949 in the town of Bra. Located in the Langhe region of Italy, Bra was a center for the leather industry and for the production of distinctive local cheese. While the milk for Bra cheese is not produced in the fields surrounding the town, the final product is processed and blended there (Petrini, *Slow Food: The Case* 3). Petrini notes that alongside "pollution problems and a few handsome examples of industrial archeology," Bra also has a history of cooperative businesses, activism, and community organization (3). Finally, owing to its location near the Alba basin, Bra lay near many popular tourist destinations (4). These various elements, along with strong connections to regional food and wine traditions, no doubt made Bra a particularly well-suited territory for gastronomic activism.

The uncertainty felt in the region in many ways mirrored the turbulent political climate that generally engulfed Italy in the 1970s. During the 1960s, the Italian

labor movement lay at the center of a number of more broadly constituted social movements (Virno and Hardt 2). The emergence of the *autonomia* movement, with its strategy of refusing work, provided the backdrop against which intellectuals such as Antonio Negri, Paolo Virno, and Paul Virilio came to maturity (2). While the energies of *autonomia* expanded to other areas in Italian society in the 1970s, the decade was also witness to the violent actions of the Red Brigades and the 1978 murder of Christian Democratic Party leader and former prime minister Aldo Moro (Virno and Hardt 3). One can see the emergence of Slow Food as both a materialization of the Italian left's energies and a rejection of the violence that increasingly ruled the latter half of the decade (Petrini, *Slow Food Revolution* 31).

As Petrini notes, gastronomic organizations, while a regular part of Italy's cultural landscape, often waxed and waned in response to the political climate of the day (*Slow Food: The Case* 8–9). Slow Food's first incarnation, Arcigola, emerged from Arci—the recreational and cultural organization of the Italian Communist Party. Arcigola, a pun that literally means “arch-taster,” was conceived as an oeno-gastronomical wing of Arci in 1983 and was more formally constituted in 1986. While Petrini and other Arcigola members remained anxious about being seen as nothing more than “a bunch of good-timers interested only in stuffing ourselves” by the left and as “incompetent intruders with an ideological agenda” by more conservative gastronomes, the organization would soon find occasion to build its profile and respond directly to crises in the Italian food and wine industry (10).

In March 1986, wine produced in the Langhe region was shown to be tainted with methyl alcohol, resulting in nineteen deaths. In the same year, herbicide pollution in the Po Valley's aqueducts and the Chernobyl nuclear disaster likewise impacted agriculture and food in the region. But just as significant for Petrini and Arcigola was the decision by McDonald's to open a restaurant in Rome, at the *Pizza di Spagna*. Petrini and Arcigola protested the opening of the restaurant and called instead for a culture of “slow food,” a phrase the group circulated in English. Petrini remarks on the rhetorical felicity of the phrase:

The choice to keep the phrase “Slow Food” in its English-language form in Italy was an ingenious twist. Those two words, a reaction to the Big Mac phenomenon, became the best way to spread the group's philosophy. Another kind of food could exist, another way to eat, another way to comprehend the pleasures of life. (*Slow Food Revolution* 73)

The phrase proved to be so popular that Arcigola added it to the organization's name in 1991; since 2002, Arcigola Slow Food has adopted the title of Slow Food Italia.

Slow Food went international in 1989, with the inaugural meeting of the International Slow Food movement held in Paris from December 8 to 10. As the organi-

zation continued into the 1990s, it faced new challenges on a number of fronts. One of the most urgent challenges came from the spread of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) that were increasingly being used in industrial agriculture. Since the early 1980s, genetically modified crops had gradually increased their market share, often at the expense of local species (*Slow Food Revolution* 97). Of concern to environmentalists and Slow Food was the lack of any long-term studies into the effects these genetically modified crops would have on the environment (97). The patenting of GMOs by large agribusiness firms likewise threatened the livelihood of farmers, who would then be compelled to buy seeds and crops at high prices from a small number of suppliers (Pollan 31). As a result, industrial agriculture threatened both biodiversity and local agricultural economies.

At the same time that Slow Food was gaining greater international attention for its programs, it was also experiencing an international increase in its membership. National Slow Food chapters were established in the United States, Japan, and the United Kingdom between 2000 and 2003, and the movement was joined by such celebrities as Chez Panisse founder and chef Alice Waters and Prince Charles. Respected scientists such as Vandana Shiva, founder and executive director of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology, and Ecology, and Miguel Altieri, professor of agroecology at the University of California, Berkeley, also joined Slow Food and extended the reach of its programs. These individuals contributed not only their names and publicity appeal but also unique programs and directions. Alice Waters, a trained Montessori teacher, first demonstrated to Petrini the effectiveness of school vegetable gardens, a program that is now central to Slow Food's organizing efforts (Petrini, *Slow Food Nation* 47). As a result of this expansion, Slow Food now boasts approximately 80,000 members worldwide.

#### THE RHETORIC OF THE NEW GASTRONOMY

In many ways, Slow Food can be seen as a response to what Michael Pollan has described as “the omnivore's dilemma”—that is, what should one eat? Following Kentucky poet Wendell Berry, Pollan argues that “eating is an agricultural act,” necessarily drawing consumers into various food chains and into relationships with food producers (Berry 145; qtd. in Pollan 11). With the rise of industrial agriculture in the United States, eating is also necessarily a political act; the omnivore's dilemma isn't simply a question of what foods are “good to eat,” but also what foods are “good to think” (Pollan 289).

For Carlo Petrini and Slow Food, resolving the omnivore's dilemma is the task of the new gastronomy. In proposing a new gastronomy, Petrini strategically links his arguments to older and more familiar models of gastronomy. In particular, Petrini builds his arguments on those of Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's *The Physiology of*

*Taste*, which is widely regarded as being the first work to define gastronomy in detail. Brillat-Savarin's definition of gastronomy is surprisingly broad and comprises "the intelligent knowledge of whatever concerns man's nourishment" (Brillat-Savarin 51). Insofar as its purpose is to "watch over his conservation by suggesting the best possible sustenance for him," gastronomy necessarily participates in a number of other intellectual disciplines: natural history, physics, chemistry, cookery, business, and political economy (51). Thus for Brillat-Savarin, gastronomy encompasses not only nutrition, cooking, and taste, but also the cultural and economic dimensions of food.

Slow Food's model of gastronomy is similarly focused on both the biological and cultural aspects of food production and consumption, with a similar multidisciplinary approach. The rhetoric of new gastronomy attempts to relocate food as the center of human culture. Petrini argues that food "is far more than a simple product to be *consumed*: it is happiness, identity, culture, pleasure, conviviality, nutrition, local economy, survival" (*Slow Food Nation* 166, emphasis in original). For Petrini, food is a network "of men and women, of knowledge, of methods, of environments, of relations"—a network in which all participants are co-producers of cultural and culinary knowledge and traditions (175). Within the new gastronomy, then, food is an expression of various political, economic, cultural, and agricultural networks, all of which demand the serious attention of any would-be gastronome. Understood in this way, "[f]ood is the primary defining factor of human identity" (36).

As the epigraph to this article indicates, Brillat-Savarin also understood food production and consumption as intimately tied to national identity and prosperity. The Slow Food movement takes Brillat-Savarin's point as a foundation for its own gastronomic philosophy and politics. Of particular importance to Slow Food's model of gastronomy is the concept of the grammar (or, we might be inclined to say, the rhetoric) of food. Italian historian Massimo Montinari has argued that food is made up of not only natural ingredients but also numerous cultural codes that govern its production, preparation, and consumption:

In all societies, eating habits and rituals are governed by conventions analogous to those that give meaning and stability to verbal languages themselves. This aggregate of conventions, which we shall call "grammar," informs the food system not as a simple compilation of products and foods, assembled in more or less casual fashion, but rather as a structure, inside of which each component defines its meaning. (99)

He goes on to flesh out the grammar of food in considerably more detail: its lexicon is the available raw food products of a region or culture; its morphology is the various ways that food is produced and prepared from these ingredients; its syntax is defined by the meals associated with a culture and their various meanings (99–101).

For Montinari, this grammar makes food a cultural product that at all points participates in the broader political and cultural identities and histories that surround it.

Montinari is quick to point out that the grammar of food, while implying a “common language” constructed through trade and cultural contact, is nonetheless specific to cultures and their geographic locations (100). Slow Food typically describe this regional and cultural specificity using the concept of territory, which refers not only to specific geographic locations but also to “the combination of natural factors (soil, water, slope, height above sea level, vegetation, microclimate) and human ones (tradition and practice of cultivation) that gives a unique character to each small agricultural locality and the food grown, raised, made, and cooked there” (Petrini, *Slow Food: The Case* 8). In Slow Food’s assessment, it is territory—which is intimately linked to biodiversity and multiculturalism—that is most immediately threatened by industrial agriculture and the monocultures it encourages. For this reason, Slow Food continues to work with specific small-producer communities to preserve and sustainably promote regional foods. Some of this work focuses on the production of guidebooks, such as the highly popular *Osteria d’Italia* and *Vini d’Italia*. Slow Food also organizes regional and national conventions devoted to the promotion of regional food products with commercial potential.

The most successful of these, the biennial Salone del Gusto, has in turn developed new programs designed to preserve regional food communities. Located in Fiat’s former factory in Turin (a site of much of the unrest in the 1960s and 1970s), the inaugural 1996 Salone marketed small-scale food producers and their products to a total crowd of 32,000 (Petrini, *Slow Food Revolution* 91). The event proved so successful that it attracted the support of Turin’s regional government and became a biennial fixture on the Slow Food calendar. In 2002, the Salone hosted 138,000 visitors, and it has become the largest convention of its kind in the world (123).

At the inaugural Salone, Petrini, and Slow Food organizers lay the foundations for a broader program in defense of regional food production. The Ark of Taste, as the program was named, aimed to extend the defense of territories by identifying high-quality food products with commercial potential (Petrini, *Slow Food: The Case* 90–91). Local organizations, named presidia, would be established to promote and protect these products, thereby developing markets and producer-consumer relationships (93). The Ark of Taste currently numbers 195 Italian and 94 international presidia (spanning 42 countries), including those devoted to such North American products as raw milk cheese, Navajo-Churri sheep, Cape May oysters, and Sonoma Valley Gravenstein apples (“International Presidia”; Petrini, *Slow Food Revolution* 290–94). Presidium projects can be as simple as promoting contact between producers and consumers, building new facilities for food production, or technologically revitalizing traditional production and preparation methods.

The Ark of Taste is possibly the most visible enactment of what Petrini and others have called the “Noah Principle.” Following French sociologist Michel Lacroix, Petrini argues that we need to redefine our relationship with the natural world by rejecting the myth of Prometheus and instead identifying with the figure of Noah: “Faced with the excesses of modernization, we are not trying to change the world anymore, just to save it” (Petrini, *Slow Food: The Case* 86). The Noah Principle can be further taken as a strategic move away from protest-oriented action toward more productive efforts at organization and engagement. As Petrini argues, “[o]ur choice is to focus our energies on saving things that are headed for extinction, instead of hounding new ones we dislike” (26). According to the Noah Principle, no one should be rewarded for predicting a storm—only for building arks.

Petrini’s discussion of the Noah Principle further gets at the heart of Slow Food’s activities. While he acknowledges that any attempts to preserve food products or ingredients run the risk of nostalgia and potential isolation, Petrini argues that preservation of these traditions needn’t be a “rearguard action” (*Slow Food: The Case* 86). Nor should Slow Food’s defense of natural and traditional preparation be seen as a rejection of scientific knowledge and principles. Petrini’s arguments for biodiversity and agroecology are anchored in what he describes as a “dialogue between realms,” a phrase he borrows from agroecologist Miguel Altieri (*Slow Food Nation* 67). For Altieri and Petrini, traditional knowledge is a means of tempering scientific knowledge and drawing attention to those cultural practices that are not only worth preserving but also educational in their own right. However, these traditions can also benefit from advances in scientific knowledge, if such knowledge is applied to the preservation of biodiversity and traditional food communities. In some cases, the application of new knowledge and technology is itself an essential part of promoting food products and improving their quality.

For Slow Food advocates, any dialogue between realms naturally needs to be mediated by a strong set of principles that can in turn guarantee the quality of food and food production. In his most recent book, Petrini clearly articulates these principles in three words: good, clean, and fair (*Slow Food Nation* 93). Put simply, good food is tasty and diverse and is produced in such a way as to maximize its flavor and connections to a geographic and cultural region (97). Clean food is sustainable, and helps to preserve rather than destroy the environment (114). Fair food is produced in socially sustainable ways, with an emphasis on social justice and fair wages (135). These three terms help mediate the dialogues between scientific and traditional knowledge; rather than simply valorizing one side over the other, Slow Food advocates insist that both science and tradition have a part to play in preserving food that is good to eat and good to think.

Petrini and Slow Food are among the first to acknowledge the demands that modern food chains place on would-be gastronomes. To that end, they conceive

Slow Food as primarily an educational—and rhetorical—movement. Slow Food's model of education insists on lifelong education as a means of improving social knowledge about food and on higher education in the gastronomic sciences as a means of improving the standing of gastronomy as a scientific field (*Slow Food Nation* 155–61). While this second educational model is more restricted in terms of scope and reach, Slow Food's other educational programs attempt to promote gastronomy as a democratic and socially engaged practice. To that end, the movement insists on the importance of sensorial education as means of identifying good food, through school and community-based programs (150).

Petrini's insistence on the need for school-based gastronomic programs extends considerably further than many current nutrition and health programs taught at the elementary and secondary levels. Gastronomy covers much more than nutrition (which nonetheless remains important), extending to knowledge of food chains, agriculture, and cooking (*Slow Food Nation* 153). Within local communities, Slow Food also encourages similar gastronomic education in the form of tasting workshops. Finally, Slow Food's efforts to formalize gastronomy and achieve academic standing for alimentary knowledge were most visibly achieved in 2004 with the opening of the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Pollenza, Italy (*Slow Food Revolution* 148). Through these various initiatives and programs, Slow Food hopes to produce gastronomes and food industry professionals capable of further protecting and promoting high-quality food that is good, clean, and fair.

The attempt to forge new culinary identities through such social and educational endeavors is one of the elements that distinguishes Slow Food's rhetoric from more conventional movement rhetorics. While most social movements routinely mobilize older cultural traditions as a means of validating and authorizing their contemporary political demands, they are often assumed to be securing respectability and representation for previously under-represented or oppressed identity formations (Buechler 20).<sup>1</sup> For Petrini and Slow Food, the contemporary food industry demands the forging of new gastronomic identities in accordance with the Noah Principle and contemporary understandings of agroecology and biodiversity.

As Massimo Montinari points out, these new identities are not without roots. But these roots “never [succeed] in defining our point of departure (even if distracting us with often outrageous collective imagery)” (139). Rather, any attempt to locate or represent one's roots leads only to “a web of increasingly denser threads, ever broader and more complicated, that recede from us, even as we gradually move even further away from ourselves.” In this context, concludes Montinari, “it is not the roots but ourselves who are the fixed point: identity does not exist at the outset but rather at the end of the trajectory” (139). For Slow Food the new gastronomy is such an identity-in-process, as Petrini and other movement members mobilize various roots to form new producer and consumer identities. Slow Food's primary organiza-



tional efforts are therefore devoted to creating the cultural and educational climates in which these identities can take shape.

The new gastronomy, then, can be understood as an attempt to define a new culinary identity capable of navigating contemporary food markets. As such, the rhetoric of the new gastronomy is a reconstruction of the earlier gastronomic tradition inaugurated and represented by Brillat-Savarin; mediated through the concepts of good, clean, and fair, this tradition becomes an important means of evaluating food production and consumption. Nevertheless, the identity that Petrini and Slow Food attempt to forge with the new gastronomy is understood as a contemporary, avant-garde phenomenon, one that uses tradition as a means of evaluating rather than rejecting modern agricultural science. This dialogue between realms, between science and tradition, further mirrors Slow Food's rhetorical negotiation between the fast life of global capitalism and a slower, more thoughtful engagement with the world around us.

#### SLOW FOOD'S RHETORIC IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION

While Slow Food's origins are intimately tied to the town of Bra and the Italian left of the 1960s and 1970s, the movement's contemporary context has increasingly been defined by globalization and the impact of global capital on the production and consumption of food. While Petrini and Slow Food have maintained a degree of critical difference from the anti-globalization movement associated with the World Trade Organization protests in Seattle in 1999, their work has nonetheless engaged many of the same targets. As a result, Slow Food often appears to be a member of the anti-globalization movement, albeit one that focuses more on cultural and rhetorical intervention than political and economic action.

Slow Food does show some similarities in strategy to the Italian workerism movement that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. Workerism was defined not by an attempt to valorize labor, but rather by a strategy of refusal; workers thus asserted their autonomy from capitalist exploitation rather than fighting for wage recognition (Virno 7–8). Slow Food similarly argues for the autonomy of the pleasures of the table, seeing the preparation and enjoyment of good, clean, and fair food as a rejection of industrial agriculture and fast food. While these acts take place within a capitalist context (restaurant dining and market shopping are both dependent on commercial transactions), they nonetheless allow consumers to “control the rhythms of [their] own life” (Honore 16). Much as workerism rejected a life reduced to capitalist labor, Slow Food rejects a life reduced to capitalist consumption.

This rejection has increasingly aligned Slow Food with broader campaigns against globalization. As Gary Paul Nabhan has noted, biodiversity and genetically

modified organisms were among the issues protesters hoped to address in 1999 (266). José Bové, one of the most public faces of the anti-globalization movement, is himself a small-scale farmer and producer of artisan Roquefort cheese. With its insistence on quality, sustainability, and social justice, Slow Food would seem to be a natural ally of these various groups. Furthermore, the food industry seems to be one of those areas of production most intimately associated with globalization.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have described globalization as the extensive and intensive expansion of the capitalist economy, as it first formally subsumes noncapitalist markets and modes of production and then further subsumes social life within existing capitalist markets (*Empire* 272). Global capitalism is thus able to produce modes of social production that further the accumulation of surplus value and the various flows of profit. The food industry is one of the most noticeable instances of real subsumption, as farming practices were first incorporated into capitalist markets and then reconstructed in alignment with capitalist production methods.<sup>2</sup>

While the real subsumption of agriculture first took the form of agribusiness and industrial farming, it has since extended to the production of genetically modified crops. Agribusiness, arguably made possible by the ability to synthesize fertilizers and maintain monocultural crop production, has since extended to the cultivation of plant and animal species bred for high yields. These practices not only favor those species specifically suited to particular kinds of production (such as Holstein cattle with their high milk yields or tomatoes with enough aesthetic appeal for supermarket shelves), but also go so far as to engineer species for greater yields and resistance to weather and pests (Petrini, *Slow Food Nation* 15; McKibben 13). Corn, for example, is now engineered to be both pest resistant and limited in its reproductive abilities. By preventing high-yield corn from effectively reproducing beyond second-generation plants, seed companies have developed the “biological equivalent of a patent” and have ensured that farmers must buy new seeds each season (Pollan 31). Industrial agriculture has thus gone far beyond the subsumption of older agricultural production and instead has begun developing plant and animal species uniquely suited to a capitalist economy.

The logic of globalization is also premised on speed, or, more specifically, the ability to do business at ever-increasing speeds. Bill Gates has famously written of his desire to do business at the speed of thought, while contemporary philosophers have likewise argued that it is speed that increasingly determines the global economy (Gates). Italian philosopher Paul Virilio has argued that capitalism has been defined by three revolutions: the first was a revolution in transport in the nineteenth century; the second was a revolution in broadcasting technologies in the twentieth century; the third revolution, currently underway, is a revolution in optics. These three

revolutions have led to a shift in which “the urbanization of real space is giving way to a preliminary urbanization of real time” (*Open Sky* 9). As a result, “teleaction” technology now makes it possible to connect distant points on the earth instantaneously, rapidly increasing the speed at which communication and commerce take place. The centrality of this logic of speed to the contemporary economy has led Virilio to assert that “*Globalisation is the speed of light. And it is nothing else!*” (“Kosovo War,” par. 12; emphasis in original).

While Virilio’s arguments on the relationship between globalization and speed tend to center on shifts in our optical relationships with the world around us, they nonetheless seem particularly well suited to describing contemporary food consumption. Carl Honore has commented on the role of speed in the transformation of agriculture:

The acceleration at the table is mirrored on the farm. Chemical fertilizers and pesticides, intensive feeding, antibiotic digestive enhancers, growth hormones, rigorous breeding, genetic modification—every scientific trick known to man has been deployed to cut costs, boost yields and make livestock and crops grow more quickly. [. . .] The small landowner gives way to the factory farm, which churns out food that is fast, cheap, abundant and standardized. (55)

A similar increase in speed of transportation has made virtually any grocery or supermarket product available for the right price. Modern supermarkets seem built upon a similar effacement of space and time, as products from a wide range of countries and seasons sit side by side on store shelves, erasing local traditions in favor of product range and innovation. It should be noted that this isn’t all bad—the availability of vegetables in winter months has certainly improved the diets of many people. Nonetheless, the modern supermarket is as much a reflection of the speed of globalization as are modern television and Internet media. Food thus emerges as a natural place for critics of globalization to direct their energies.

Petrini and the Slow Food movement focus on both the impoverishment of food and culinary traditions and the part that the capitalist logic of speed has played in that impoverishment. As such, Slow Food could be seen as contributing to the development of what Paul Virilio has called a “political economy of speed” (“Kosovo War,” par. 12). Slow Food at once insists on the pleasures to be derived from slow living and demonstrates the critical democratic potential of such a lifestyle. This has linked Slow Food to other campaigns for slow living across the globe and has allowed the organization to act as an exemplar for other individuals and groups attempting to live at a more relaxed pace.

Carl Honore has chronicled the scope and development of the Slow Food movement in the best-selling *In Praise of Slowness*. While chronicling the development of slow organizations in the areas of schooling, driving, sex, and social life, Honore also clearly defines the slow style that links these potentially disparate groups:

Fast is busy, controlling, aggressive, hurried, analytical, stressed, superficial, impatient, active, quantity-over-quality. Slow is the opposite: calm, careful, receptive, still, intuitive, unhurried, patient, reflective, quality-over-quantity. It is about making real and meaningful connections—with people, culture, work, food, everything. (14–15)

For Honore, slowness is not a simple refusal of the fast life, or a Luddite response to an increasingly technological world. Rather, it is a more intense mode of engaging the world. Petrini echoes Honore's sentiment, arguing that the slow style isn't about being slow all the time; we can all remember a wedding that went on far too long, he quips (Petrini, *Slow Food: The Case* 32). The slow style is about thinking through the pace at which we live, which in turn “means that you control the rhythms of your own life” (Honore 16).

It could be argued that the focus on lifestyle—on pleasure, taste, consumption patterns—is the primary difference between Slow Food and other anti-globalization movements. Petrini makes this distinction, arguing that Slow Food's strategies are in keeping with the organization's aims:

The fact is that we have never fully linked arms with the angry crowds on the streets of Seattle and Genoa, or said, with José Bové, that “when a hamburger place springs up, Roquefort cheese dies.” [. . .] [W]hen he adopts a strategy of direct action, he chooses a path leading to head-on confrontation with the multinationals, the path of the guerrilla fighter, that we prefer not to take. That is not the slow style. (*Slow Food: The Case* 26)

For Petrini, slow politics involve devoting one's energies to building the kind of world we most want to live in. “[I]f you want to revive a tradition and give it fresh life,” he argues, “often what you need is new toolkit and some avante-garde ideas” (26). Slow Food thus sees itself exploring new means of intervening in the food industry and organizing in defense of good, clean, and fair food.

The focus on lifestyle is not without its critics. Slow Food has long dealt with charges of placing hedonism before politics and of focusing on taste to the exclusion of real political intervention (*Slow Food: The Case* 10). The organization's advocacy of artisanal foodstuffs and small-scale production also runs the risk of creating a movement limited to those who can afford it. Petrini acknowledges the difficulties associated with Slow Food's campaigns while reflecting on his trip to a California farmers market:

The amiable ex-hippies and young dropouts-turned-farmers greeted their customers with a smile and offered generous samples of their products to a clientele whose social status was pretty clear: either wealthy or very wealthy. (*Slow Food Nation* 130)

Petrini's discomfort at the possible elitism involved in supporting already expensive foods is nonetheless balanced by his belief that “farmers' intelligent, productive efforts deserve to be paid for generously” (129). In *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Michael

Pollan expands upon this belief, explaining that the low cost of supermarket produce often conceals other costs, such as fossil fuel consumption, soil degradation, and exploitation of cheap or illegal labor (243–45). Slow Food’s insistence on the need to pay a fair price for better-quality products thus reflects a belief that such a price doesn’t conceal other morally questionable practices. Furthermore, the money from farmers market and artisanal sales ideally goes to family farmers and other small producers, thereby contributing to less affluent and often underrepresented sectors of the community.

Amid these criticisms, Carl Honore asks if the Slow Food movement can be considered a movement at all. Honore concedes that while the Slow Food movement enjoys “popular sympathy, a blueprint for a new way of life, grassroots action,” it often lacks formal structure and low brand recognition (274). However, these problems hardly exist for Slow Food, which has both formal structure and brand recognition among gastronomes, chefs, and restaurateurs. Nonetheless, Honore draws attention to the difficulty in building a movement based on individual lifestyle choice, particularly when such choices are understood only as individual lifestyle preferences. To this end, it is important to note that Slow Food rhetorically anchors its activities in its origins with the Italian left and in the immediate context of globalization and biodiversity. Individual choices are thus articulated in terms of their broader social motivations in an effort to promote a broader network of campaigns and activists.

Slow Food further looks like one of the “new” social movements that have emerged alongside post-industrial capitalism and globalization. In considering the role of collective action in the context of contemporary capitalism, sociologist Steven Buechler has argued that new social movements tend to exhibit a number of key traits that differentiate them from more recognizable labor, civil rights, and independence movements. First, new social movements are linked causally to a “societal totality” such as modernity or postmodernity and can be seen as a response to that totality (46). Second, the social base for these movements is more varied and diffuse than traditional social movements’. Third, the cultivation and maintenance of collective forms of identity are central to new social movements’ strategies (47). Fourth, the politics of new social movements registers the “politicization of everyday life” and the blurring of public and private categories. Fifth, new social movements focus less on “seeking power, control, or economic gain” and “are more inclined to seek autonomy and democratization” (47). Finally, new social movements utilize “cultural and symbolic forms of resistance alongside or in place of more conventional political forms of contestation” (47).

The collective identity fostered by Petrini’s new gastronomy, and its articulation as a response to issues of globalization and biodiversity, arguably identify Slow Food as a new social movement. This identity further highlights the rhetorical and

pedagogical foundation of the Slow Food movement, providing the theoretical basis for much of the organization's activities. But while these activities can be understood as rhetorical (that is, "cultural and symbolic") strategies, they also demonstrate the materialist understanding of activism with the Slow Food movement. School gardens, farmers markets, and the Salone del Gusto are all understood as opportunities to educate consumers about food and gastronomy and to further persuade them to seek out those products that are good to eat and good to think. But all these activities also make immediate economic and cultural contributions to the communities around them and thereby help to organize food- and producer-communities into the broader community of destiny that Petrini hopes to build. Slow Food rhetoric, then, is less a rhetoric of protest and more a rhetoric of community organization.

For Petrini, then, Slow Food is founded on "this concept of 'community,' of destiny and belonging to the human race" (*Slow Food Nation* 135). Through local projects such as the presidia, and more global events such as the Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre, Slow Food aims to "[restore] a sense of communitarian belonging and [reinforce] it through meetings, assistance, exchange, and gifts" (191). The focus on local food economies has also drawn comment and support from author Bill McKibben, whose latest book, *Deep Economy*, also challenges the fast life. Understood as a slavish and uncritical addiction to economic growth, the fast life is at once impoverished, unsustainable, and unhappy (McKibben 11). To combat these undesirable qualities, McKibben argues for an economics built around the concept of community and local participation (122). Having spent a year buying and eating almost entirely local food and beverages, McKibben identifies the Slow Food movement as one group devoted to community-based political and economic action (90).

Despite the local focus of this rhetoric, Slow Food is far from encouraging provincialism. Petrini is the first to acknowledge that producer communities need the advantages of the global market if they are to revitalize local economies. "Globalization is absolutely desirable," he argues, "when it creates networks of communication among diverse realities instead of leveling them" (*Slow Food: The Case* 28). Slow Food thus marshals globalization's insistence on diversity in defense of local culinary traditions and the communities they support. Read in this way, Slow Food's objection to industrial agriculture might be that it isn't global enough; by reducing the food markets to a small number of plant and animal species, cultivating plant and animal monocultures, and transforming farmland into the same limited resource, industrial agriculture undermines the very diversity upon which globalization is allegedly premised. Petrini's model of "virtuous globalization" thus demands that the food industry enact the multiculturalism it so often champions.

Despite these more global and theoretical goals, Petrini and Slow Food also understand slowness and the dialogue it fosters in material terms. Petrini's understanding of the pleasures of the table "[brings] to mind a philosophical banquet in

which eating and debate about the resources and values of the human race go hand in hand” (*Slow Food: The Case* 71). The dinner table, then, is understood as the critical space that the Slow Food movement advocates, a site where slow philosophy can be immediately and effectively practiced.

Michael Pollan describes the philosophical banquet Petrini envisions in the final pages of *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*. After preparing a meal for friends made entirely with ingredients he had gathered or hunted himself, Pollan provides food as much for thought as for the stomachs of his guests:

As you might expect from this crowd and this occasion, the talk at the table was mainly about food. Yet this was not the usual food talk you hear nowadays; less about recipes and restaurants, it revolved around specific plants and animals and fungi, and the places where they lived. (407)

The stories “cast lines of relation to all the places and the creatures living (and dying) in them,” thereby focusing the attention of Pollan and his guests not only on the food they’re eating but also on the complex ecologies of which they are all a part (408). Carl Honore, in describing his dinner with a Slow Food member, likewise highlights the vivid stories about food and the local food economy, and the ways in which sitting down to a relaxed meal can open consumers up to more varied and engaged conversation (79–81).

Understood as a cultural and symbolic form of resistance, slowness becomes an important rhetorical strategy. Insofar as slowness is understood as a more thoughtful and intense way of living, it also encourages critical engagement on a number of levels. “In urging people to slow down,” Petrini says, “we are asking them to look around with greater interest, to be receptive to the details and flavors of the world” (*Slow Food Nation* 183). Understood in its simplest form, the act of slowing down forces us to ask how fast we need to live our lives. By questioning our devotion to speed, we already short-circuit the logic that supports fast food and the fast life.

But just as important is the manner in which strategically slowing down opens the very critical space that Paul Virilio counts as a casualty of our real-time culture. By taking the time to think through what we should eat, how we should shop, and the kinds of pleasure most important to us, we are already thinking more deeply about the kind of world in which we want to live:

In urging people to slow down, we are asking them to respect nature and not to appropriate it for their own private gain against the common good. We are asking them to respect others, favoring passion and understanding over the quantity of utilitarian aims, friendship and the joining of forces over economic competition, the public over the private, the gift over trade. (*Slow Food Nation* 183)

While it is important to note the limitations of this form of questioning—it may amount to little more than choosing hamburgers at home over McDonald’s in the

long run—we should also note the pedagogical potential of this critical space. As Petrini makes clear, education on all matters related to food is an essential part of the new gastronomy and of effectively answering “What should I eat?” Critical space can thus be seen as the foundation of Slow Food’s dialogue between realms. But just as importantly, critical space provides an important venue for rethinking globalization and its impact on our lives.

In considering the work of Slow Food as a new social movement, one whose activities are defined by their cultural and rhetorical character, we should not be blind to the limitations of these strategies. While Slow Food now claims a membership of 80,000, it remains a small organization whose appeal is potentially limited to restaurateurs, chefs, gastronomes, and those cultural critics invested in issues of food. As Petrini acknowledges, gastronomes will always run the risk of being seen as elitist and hedonistic in their political outlook. Slow Food’s attempts to redefine gastronomy should be understood in this context and should be appreciated within its own rhetorical limits.

Nonetheless, Slow Food stands as a reminder of the potentially broad rhetorical and educational scope of new cultural movements. Recognizing what Buechler has called the politicization of everyday life, Petrini and Slow Food insist that everyday life is precisely the terrain we need to re-examine. By approaching how and what we eat in a more thoughtful and informed way, we also begin to think about the society in which we live through the same lens. Following this logic, Slow Food “asserts the absolute centrality of the role of food (a centrality which perhaps has been lost) if one wishes to interpret—and perhaps influence—the dynamics that underlie our society and our world” (*Slow Food Nation* 35–36).

Slow Food also demonstrates the importance of cultural movements and the increasing attention given to rhetorical action within them. By eschewing direct action in favor of educational and organizational projects, Slow Food avoids protest in favor of producing new relationships between individual consumers, the communities in which they live, and the food and producer communities on which they depend. This shift in rhetorical emphasis may encourage rhetorical scholars to look at the role of community organization as well as protest within contemporary movement rhetorics. Petrini’s desire to build a broader community of destiny among these groups speaks to organization’s focus on building collective identities that can then exert social, economic, and political power. As Hardt and Negri note, we should never mistake the economic power that cultural movements wield (*Empire* 275).

Slow Food’s Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre projects stand as evidence of this economic power and the role that publicity, organization, and communication play in its mobilization. By linking consumers and producers, and small-scale producers to other producers, these projects revitalize local culinary traditions as means of transforming globalization. Tradition is thus understood not as a retreat from



global capitalism, but as a means of contesting real subsumption in the interests of local cultures and economies. Insofar as culinary traditions insist on a rhythm of life different from that of the fast life, they also link Slow Food's concerns about taste and pleasure to those of other Slow organizations and activists. This broader set of campaigns and organizations, and the economic and cultural power they are attempting to develop, no doubt give Petrini and his allies hope that the Slow can indeed inherit the earth.

## NOTES

1. It should be noted that within classical social movement theory, "identity" is a somewhat underrepresented term. Classical social movement theory is typically psychological in its approach and assumes that social movements are a form of aberrant collective action that results from psychological strain, stress, or disaffection (Buechler 20). Within these theories, it seems fair to suggest that identity is an individual formation that necessarily registers psychological disaffection prior to the emergence of any collective action.

More recent theories have focused more squarely on the concept of collective identity and the role of social movements in fostering collective identity formations. Frame analysis, which sees individual identity and movement identity in a complex series of negotiations, is possibly the most identity-conscious of these theories (41–42). Nonetheless, it runs the same risk of ignoring identity formation as a central strategy within social movements. Both Steven Buechler and Hardt and Negri noted the rise of the "cultural" social movement, which is devoted less to direct action and political intervention and more to interventions in the cultural sphere (48). Buechler notes that these "new social movements" focus more deliberately on fostering collective identities as a resource for social action (47). Work remains to be done, however, on the various strategies that political and direct-action social movements adopt in order to build collective identities among their adherents.

2. It should be noted that despite my argument about the real subsumption of the food industry within global capitalism, Hardt and Negri do not endorse the food politics advocated by Petrini and Slow Food. Hardt and Negri assert that arguments against the production of GMOs look alarmingly like arguments for purity and authenticity; instead, they argue for more democratic deliberation about the role GMOs play in our lives (*Multitude* 183).

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I have never been satisfied with the conventional first-year assignment asking students to “evaluate” a text. While it is certainly productive to have them establish criteria, which they then use as a basis for assessing a text, I nevertheless find that they are already pretty good at these tasks. I want them instead to be confused about how even to approach an object when they lack obvious criteria. I want them to be stumped, to have to struggle. Under those conditions, the possibility of learning has great potential. And so I teach *Iron Chef*.

The original Japanese television show *Iron Chef* is one of the programs that significantly increased Food Network viewership (a fact that is potential fodder for analysis itself) and epitomizes a hybrid genre. My students do not know what to make of it, and therefore it is difficult for them to establish criteria with which to evaluate it. *Iron Chef* is part cooking show (food is prepared and served); part game show (the two competing chefs have sixty minutes to create several dishes based on a theme ingredient, and one chef is judged the winner); part sports competition (it takes place in “Kitchen Stadium” with cheering spectators); and part education (Doc Hattori and others supply information about cooking terms, food history, and food-related customs). At the same time, the “challengers” choose their competitors, the Iron Chefs, who are “marked men” who must “fight back.” Announcer Fukui-san claims, “If ever a challenger wins over the Iron Chef, he or she gains the people’s ovation and fame forever.” The Iron Chefs are gladiators, soldiers, heroes, celebrities, chefs. There’s barely a generic aspect that is not complicated in some way. As a general rule, my students come away from viewing *Iron Chef* puzzled, stunned, but most importantly, intrigued. Whether they enjoyed the show or not, the majority of them suddenly have a lot to say, and a cacophony of questions and comments erupts.

*Continued on next page*

I teach two episodes of *Iron Chef*, most commonly “Codfish Battle” and “Potato Battle.” While a single show confounds genre (and shocks and awes), the second provides evidence to answer the sometimes sarcastic, sometimes serious question my students have of *Iron Chef*: “Why?” “Culture,” Chairman Kaga reminds us, “is what shapes cuisine.” Culture—analytical cultural comparison, anyway—can help students to answer the question in a significant way. In “Potato Battle,” Vancouver Chef Michael Noble enters Japan’s Kitchen Stadium and instantly the East-meets-West theme is set up. Ohta, the floor announcer, skeptically asks Iron Chef Morimoto about the combination of beef and potatoes he is using. Morimoto responds, “I can’t believe you asked me that; this is a golden combination.” The dialogue allows students to plainly see another cultural perspective. While meat and potatoes are not such an odd amalgamation here, my students have been less convinced by the judges’ eagerness to try the Egg Custard with Soft Codfish Roe or the Codfish and Foie Gras Spring Roll. None of the Japanese spectators viewing the battle have any difficulty with the challenger removing veins from the roe, yet our Western classroom has erupted with “eeews” and laughter. Similarity also abounds, indicated by a sea of student nods as a Japanese judge comments, “I will not eat it,” when referring to Iron Chef Sakai’s Soft Roe Ice Cream. When asked about the Canadian versus American cuisines, Chef Noble comments that while the roots are the same, Canadian cuisine is more “sophisticated and, frankly, on a different level.” Morimoto counters that he “knows of no Americans who would go out of their way for Canadian food.” International pride, patriotism, and the quality of local varieties of rice, sake, and other ingredients are defended vehemently throughout each show. Why is there, after all, Iron Chef Japanese, Chinese, French, and Italian, but others (Mexican and Indian are among my favorite cuisines) are conspicuously absent? The apparent ranking even of something as universal as food prompts my students to consider hierarchical distinctions in complex ways. Here’s another hierarchy for you: I teach the original Japanese version, not *Iron Chef America*. The Japanese approach this show with such intensity and seriousness. It’s brilliant. (That, too, is a cultural difference my students and I might think about.) And so for their evaluative writing assignment, instead of explaining how a show is “good” or “bad,” the complexity of *Iron Chef* elicits more sophisticated inquiries. How do the producers play with genre? What might the popularity of the show say about American, Japanese, or other cultures? How are they represented on the show? How does *Iron Chef* represent a shift in television or cultural conventions? What has changed in mainstream television and culture since its airing?

If you do find yourself teaching *Iron Chef*, I suggest bringing food to class, especially if you opt for an episode akin to “Potato Battle.” The hunger aroused from the amazing dishes photographed in such detail will no doubt distract your students from analysis. But according to my students, if you teach an episode akin to “Codfish Battle” . . . well, leave the actual food for another day. *Allez Cuisine!*

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