

FOOD VALUES: THE LOCAL AND THE AUTHENTIC

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ABSTRACT

Concern about the agro-industrial food system has generated movements, which reconnect producers and consumers, either through alternative distribution networks or through providing histories of each quality foodstuff. Although these movements share a romantic discourse, they have a range of objectives and a more complex relationship to the mainstream than first appears. The article analyses particularly the concept of authenticity, first in representations of food, then more widely as a value which links production and consumption. The material illustrates a wider analysis (in Graeber, Harvey) of the co-existence of monetary and non-monetary value in an economy dominated by the commodity form, and following from this sets out the different judgements, which have been made about the transformative political potential of these movements.

It is common to discuss the food systems of industrialised societies in terms of a dichotomy between the mainstream and the alternatives. These two models are found in the sociology of food and of rural development, as well as in the writing of activists in political movements. There are indeed

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important contrasts between different food chains in the way they organise production and distribution, and in terms of the cultural values, which run through them. At the same time, the contrast is over-simplified and confusing. The alternative movements attempt to re-establish practical and discursive links between production and consumption, in doing so they give these foods a history, one which is largely missing (and often for good reasons) in much of the food industry. This history is often constructed within a romantic discourse of the local, the traditional, and the authentic. However, the totalising character of this discourse hides the fact that the different qualities evoked for alternative foods do not in fact entail each other and may pull in different directions. Further, the mainstream and the alternatives do not constitute completely separate economic circuits; they shape each other and often overlap in highly significant ways. It is when we turn to the political dimension that the complex dynamic below the surface of these simple dichotomies becomes a much more serious issue. The labels "organic," "fair trade," or "local" do not in themselves reveal a great deal about the extent to which their producers have resisted or been absorbed by the corporate interests in the food industry, nor much about whether the values they embody are part of a radical or conservative political agenda.

This article is a first step in research on alternative food movements and the compatibility or dissonance between the different objectives they set themselves. It starts with a basic sketch of the agro-industrial food revolution and then uses examples from existing studies to explore the variety of alternative food politics, concentrating on the themes of the local and of quality. This leads into an analysis of the question of authenticity for consumers, which in turn opens up a much larger anthropological problem. How and why do consumers in a capitalist society attempt to gain access to values, which are defined in opposition to monetary value precisely through the spending of money? This is explored using recent work by David Graeber and the article concludes with a discussion of the political implications of the processes revealed.

FOOD CHAINS

The mainstream agro-industrial food system is the result of a number of processes:

- (1) A farming revolution that accelerates after 1945. This involves the replacement of rural labour by machinery, the use of oil-derived fertilisers to maintain soil fertility, the specialisation of farms and whole

regions in terms of monocultures, followed more recently by a series of biotechnologies (Goodman, Sorj, & Wilkinson, 1987). This highly mechanised, energy intensive, large-scale farming produces the raw materials for the food industry, often broken down into components – sugars, starch, oils, protein – and then reconstituted.

- (2) The development of a national, and then global, market in foodstuffs, which breaks many of the links between local diets and local agriculture.
- (3) The rise of transnational corporations in the food chain: upstream supplying fertilisers, machinery, seeds, trading the world's grains and edible oils; downstream manufacturing much of the food that we eat.
- (4) Supermarket chains, of which the largest is Walmart, sell more than three quarters of the food eaten in most of Europe and North America. Their rise in other parts of the world is spectacular: in the last decade they took control of 50% of the market in South America, and a similar process is under way in Eastern Europe and Asia.
- (5) Changes in consumption, both in diet and eating patterns. Much domestic labour has been transferred to an industrial setting with the rise of convenience foods. In addition, close to half of the average family food budget in the UK, as in the US, is spent in restaurants, bars, and on takeaways. Diets have changed, cooking has changed, and meals have changed, though in highly differentiated ways.

Note that the literature on mainstream food chains (e.g., Goodman & Redclift, 1991) analyses precisely the linkages between all these changes. These processes are interconnected, and this help us understand why France produces so much sugar beet, why so much migrant labour is employed in the packing sheds, why town centres get turned inside out, and why there are campaigns about school dinners.

These developments have generated a series of political conflicts, centring on five main issues: the environment; the fate of small farmers; the direction of global trade relations; the rise of corporate power throughout the chains; and food quality. If the processes set in motion by agro-industry are all connected, the social movements, which have grown up around the alternatives inevitably tend to concentrate their strategies on one objective: fair trade, the livelihoods of small farmers or the existence of so-called food deserts in inner cities. As a result other parts of the chain are obscured and the impact of these movements is sometimes paradoxical, especially in terms of political economy. The best example of this is organic farming and the best ethnography is Julie Guthman's (2004a) study of Californian organic agriculture, which dominates the US market. She shows

that most organic fruit and vegetables is produced on large estates, using intensive methods and migrant wage-labour, is trucked across the continent and mostly sold in supermarkets. What such studies document, is the way mainstream agribusiness can incorporate and appropriate much of the profit, and the values, of the alternative food sector.

At the cultural level a different set of issues emerge. The social movements that produce and promote alternative foods generally have a polarised and totalised set of representations which define their attributes and aspirations in opposition to the agro-industrial food complex. They say non-sustainable, intensive and polluting agriculture produces junk food, *malboef*, fast food. You do not know what is in it, where or how it was produced, it is full of additives, reconstituted. It breaks all the links between production and consumption. By contrast these movements advocate a reconnection, in very different ways, between production and consumption, or producers and consumers. This reconnection is conceived in terms of an opposition between first, a personalised set of economic relations as opposed to the impersonality of the market, and secondly, in terms of a contrast between food, which is artificial or adulterated, and the genuine or authentic. Culturally, this reconnection takes place in a kind of pre-set discursive field, that of the natural, the organic, the local, the rooted, the distinctive, the authentic, this field being precisely that of the romantic tradition. The field is established in opposition to “modernity,” it opposes quality to quantity, diversity to singularity, favours metaphors of the timeless, of the circular and recycling to those of innovation and progress. Because the field is “pre-set,” the terms can become synonymous, or at least immediately evoke each other (the “local” is “authentic”). This merging of terms makes the alternative movements appear to be as connected, and to address all the same issues, as the mainstream food chains to which they are opposed. The central sections of the article explore this discursive field, starting with one term – the local – that seems to me strategically important, and then move to the question of authenticity, a concept that provides a conceptual link between consumption and production. The final sections examine the co-existence of monetary and non-monetary values in this field of consumption, and then the different political perspectives on food movements that arise when we bring production back into the analysis.

THE LOCAL

Concern with the local is a central theme in many alternative food movements, and one of the ways of reconnecting the producers and the

consumers. There is a spectrum of projects, they overlap and often appear inseparable, but as we move along the spectrum we find the objectives in fact shift quite radically.

- (1) Some alternative food movements promote local produce for environmental reasons. The environmental movement has a very wide agenda in relation to farming practise, but what matters most in terms of a policy of “buying local” is the quantity of non-renewable energy used in food transport. We buy food from the other side of the globe because it cannot be produced locally, or because it can be produced cheaper elsewhere, or because we want it out of season. In addition, supermarkets have created a complex distribution system, which adds to “food-miles.” Food happens to be a particularly profligate user of energy, by buying local we address part of the energy question, but nothing else is guaranteed about the food itself.
- (2) Localised food systems may be part of a political project to construct local economies outside the capitalist system. In the older versions, such as the rural anarchist programmes, food was always the most central part of such an economy. In addition, the concept of the locality was not a de-politicised fuzzy notion like the contemporary one of “community.” To the contrary, it was sharpened by class politics, as in the Spanish anarchist understanding of the *pueblo* (Pratt, 2003, Chapter 3). These movements predate what we call environmentalism, although the growth of concepts of local sustainability in counter-cultural movements from the 1960s onwards means that the two strands have become increasingly fused and enrich each other. Again, nothing is specified about what you get to eat, beyond it being local, though nowadays it is likely to be called organic and you may have to grow it yourself. The more general claims (especially, in the US) that the localisation of food systems can promote environmental sustainability and social justice are critically discussed by Du Puis and Goodman (2005).
- (3) Food sovereignty is a project developed in the alternative global movements. The *Via Campesina* and its component parts (not least the *Confédération Paysanne* led by Jose Bove) are committed to the right of each society to establish its own food supply system. These movements share with the preceding ones a concern with the environment, but it is combined with other issues not mentioned so far. One is the impact of the WTO on economies in the south; a second is a concern with the impact of agro-industry and global markets on small farmers, their livelihoods and knowledge. This is predominantly a small farmers’ movement.

- (4) “Food system localisation,” as it is called in the technical literature has other virtues, which have become the subject of research and rural policy making. One is that the best way to increase farmers’ income is by cutting out the commercial middlemen and selling direct to consumers. This is Fair Trade by another name. To that end there has been the growth of farmers’ markets, farm shops, box schemes, and initiatives to constrain local councils to source food for schools or hospitals locally. In the US, there are initiatives on community-supported agriculture (Hinrichs, 2000) where groups of townspeople contract with local farmers for food supplies over the year. It combines with other objectives, such as environmentalism and can be extended further by creating markets for local specialities, gastronomic centres, wine routes, or museums of rural life, which all valorise local specificity, and hopefully create rural development.

Food system localisation benefits farmers, but also gives value-added to consumers. People, or at least some people some of the time, clearly value direct contact with those who produce their food. Rural sociologists have rediscovered Karl Polanyi and discuss this in terms of an embedded economy. Such supply routes are more personal: you can see where the apples grow and where the chickens lay their eggs, and the honest hands of the farmer who made it all happen. The “value-added” of all this is fascinating and needs further research. At the same time these are still market transactions, and we should be cautious in assuming that the relationship between customers and producers, however embedded and personal, necessarily create that elusive commodity, trust. In the Italian villages where I used to live, farmers and shopkeepers only had local customers, so who else could they dupe? That is why villagers thought supermarkets were such good news.

- (5) The last of these discourses and projects around food and the local requires more discussion: it is the connection between locality and quality. It is hard to present the other four without referring to quality, since almost all food considered high quality (Parma ham or Rioja wine) has a territorial designation. As a result it is easy to reverse the equation and assume that local produce immediately connotes good quality, a logical fallacy encouraged by marketing techniques.

The designation of food by geographical indicators and their regulation is largely a European phenomenon, and was developed first and most rigorously in France. It emerges in the early 19th century in relation to wine, with the use of labels, which specify location of origin, culminating in

the French 1855 classifications of growths (*cru*). This built on the concept of *terroir*, an elastic term, which starts with the technical notion of a terrain with its physical characteristics, geology, soil, slopes, microclimate, all contributing to the distinctive taste of the wine. Then it broadens to include the skills and knowledge which have gone into transforming this terrain, and eventually the very character and culture of its inhabitants. The categorisation of *terroir* then extends from wine to a range of other foodstuffs such as cheese, hams and chestnuts. These become reified as historical treasures and their number and popularity are booming. Their significance and political connotations are contested. Apparently in France, it is routine to accuse anyone who celebrates the peasantry and rural traditions with reviving the rhetoric of the Petain era (Barham, 2003, p. 132) and this may be unfair. It is nevertheless striking that this uncompromisingly romantic construction of people, culture, place, landscape, and tradition should reach its most elaborate expression in the avowed society of the enlightenment.

This French construction of the link between *terroir* and foodstuffs was gradually borrowed by other countries, though it remains primarily a phenomenon of the European Mediterranean. In 1992, the EU enacted a regulatory frame, which certified and authenticated products with a guaranteed or protected place of origin, and this subsumed and incorporated national legislation (Barham, 2003; Grasseni, 2003, p. 264). The regulations create International Property Rights, which cover a rising proportion of world trade in foodstuffs, and have created major tensions within the WTO. Locally, each of these products has generated a considerable publicity machine financed by the consortium of producers, flanked by chambers of commerce, the tourist industry, and that sub-species of writers who will compose puff for any foodstuff in exchange for a square meal. These products generate an elaborate body of writing, much of it transferred to labels, all of them hymns to the notion of quality. The formats are standardized: this is a special kind of foodstuff, unique to a locality, where some plant varietal or animal has reached perfection, thanks to the climate and skill of the farmers. And of course all this is steeped in tradition, since history plays the same role in the stories about this food, as do poppy growers in Hobsbawm's theory of nationalism.

Cristina Grasseni (2003), for example, has provided some rich ethnography of the emergence of Valtaleggio cheese in the mountains above Bergamo. She shows how the marketing of this cheese is tied into the sale of a landscape through the use of romantic images of mountainsides and wooden barns. As she puts it, by buying the cheese you are buying the landscape,

partly because you are allowing the continuation of the farming practices that produce it. The marketing material actually tells us that these farmers have chosen to stay up on the high Alps for our benefit, so that they can continue to provide us with this very special cheese and allow us to wake up and smell the new mown hay. As with countless other products, the narrative tells us that we are consuming the product of a unique and traditional farming system, surviving in a sea of mass production. Mainstream food manufacturers themselves often tap into the same imagery: the pasta giant Barilla launched a huge advertising campaign suggesting that its wheat was sourced from a rural world of smocks, sickles and windmills. The reality is more complex than that, and not just because most Valtaleggio cheese is produced down in the valleys using milk from stall-fed cattle.

Through this kind of ethnography we can see more clearly what is going on with the concepts of locality and tradition. These speciality products are not survivals as such; they are generated out of sustained commercial activity, state regulatory systems, and international trade agreements. Nor are we dealing with a localised food system except in a very restricted sense, and certainly not one which has survived from some pre-capitalist era. This is, at best, one item in an older farming or culinary system that has been selected out by the market. Such items gain their meanings and their value, from being simultaneously inside and outside the commodity form. Initiatives around quality foods present us with a polarised opposition between an industrialised food system and a more traditional world, but if we counterpoise them to the experience of peasant economies then this opposition appears less radical and more complex. A further example will clarify the point. The *pecorino* cheese of the Val D'Orcia is famous in Italy, but only ever constituted one part of the local farming and culinary practices. The rest of the local system is largely abandoned and unlamented, whether the rough wine or the hard labour of trying to produce vegetables on baked clay soils. When the local food economy broke up in the decades after the Second World War, many kinds of cultivation and animal husbandry became uncompetitive and ended; most food was no longer produced locally. But something did survive: paradoxically, grazing sheep on the land that had been marginal. The local is what the market leaves after it has filtered out everything else.

These issues emerge very clearly in the Slow Food Movement, which was founded in the northern Italy in the late 1980s, and has since spread round the world. It began as an offshoot of the left-wing recreational and cultural circles, ARCI, publishing a food supplement in *Il Manifesto*, a radical newspaper. Its objectives are the celebration of local agricultural traditions

and cuisine, protecting consumers and advocating conviviality. Although the starting point was the vindication and preservation of good accessible local food, a middle ground between *haute cuisine* and junk food, it has certainly moved to the glossy end of the spectrum, and the guides seem aimed primarily at tourists.

The Slow Food Movement recognised early on, that the wine trade of Burgundy was better organised than that of Piedmont because of the French concept of *terroir* and its regulatory frames. Through it, they sold not just wine, but a whole world. The *terroir* concept, translated as *territorio*, was borrowed, and frames activity around the valorisation of Barolo wine, cheeses, speciality-cured meats, or threatened breeds of Tuscan pigs. Once again *territorio* is not just a geographical concept, it is also a cultural one: “How is it possible to renounce the practices, the rhythms, the layers of cultural sediment that make up our history and our identity without running the risk of turning into barbarians”? (Petrini, 2001, p. 33). In fact the concept of *territorio* explicitly blends with a representation of Italy, as the land of a thousand bell-towers (*campanili*), each with its distinctive identity and culture. We need to remain critical of the political direction of such movements. Whatever the intentions of founders and the bulk of supporters, all these celebrations of bounded localities, culture, tradition, pedigree, and *terroir*, provide a perfect terrain for the articulation of homelands and anti-immigrant rhetoric, and it is not surprising that right-wing neo-populists come sniffing round the food stands (cf. Du Puis & Goodman, 2005, p. 363).

Slow Food, like the other movements is not in fact advocating a localised food system, but a patchwork of specialities: wine from Piedmont, sheep’s cheese from Tuscany, almonds from Sicily. Their existence is made possible only by a wider market, since they are either exported or consumed by galloping gourmets: either the food or the consumer must travel. This does not entirely mesh with the general antagonism to industrial society, something gently acknowledged as a dilemma in their writing (“The Difficult Voyage,” Petrini, 2001, pp. 54–59). Even within Italy and amongst long-term supporters of local specialities and local cuisines, there are strong criticisms of the Slow Food Movement, the regulation and the commercial interests which turn all these practices and experiences into commodities (Veronelli & Echaurren, 2003). The Slow Food dilemma is generated because of the concern with authenticity. Unlike Kropotkin, for example, who put some of his energies into sharing knowledge about growing food within the European allotment systems, Slow Food and movements like it are concerned with those specialities which can be produced nowhere else on earth.

Most of the comments so far do not apply to the UK, since few products make the link between territory and quality of the kind embodied in EU regulations. Britain has a “Last of the Summer Wine” country, but no *terroir* of the West Riding. It is generally assumed that this is because British farming was industrialised earlier and more completely than anywhere else in the world, and local specialities were destroyed in the process. Angela Tregear’s study qualifies this argument and in the process throws further light on the issue of authenticity.

Britain does have speciality foods named after the place they are produced or traded, starting of course not with Cheddar cheese but with Stilton. Although generally unprotected by European DOC regulation, on a small scale they flourish and grow, like Cornish Yarg, a cheese invented in the 1970s and named after Mr. Gray, who simply spelt his name backwards (Tregear, 2003, p. 101). Tregear’s argument is that these products are not survivals from a peasant era, but derive from the interaction of traditions and innovations in the new era of mass markets. For example, it is in the 19th century that many farm animal breeds and fruit cultivars are first created or identified and specified: from Jersey Royals to societies for the preservation of Aberdeen Angus cattle (2003, p. 96). The Victorian concern with race and pedigree carried over into the animal and vegetable world.

This study broadens our understanding of the linkages between food, place and quality by looking beyond the more familiar DOC regulatory scheme, and at a longer historical period. Tregear draws attention to the interaction between different production modes rather than a linear agricultural history, and she suggests that artisan production can be as important as *terroir* in the delineation of quality. When we turn to why all this is happening, we reach something of an impasse. She says, “Permeating such activities is a concern for *authenticity*” (2003, p. 96, her italics), and this is stimulated by the development of markets. We now need to think about what exactly is this concern for authenticity, and what precisely the relationship between authenticity and markets.

AUTHENTICITY

The concept of authenticity evokes a range of meanings – that which is original, genuine, real, true, true to itself. As so often in these matters we get the sense of a self-confirming semantic field, and also that we will only get a handle on it by spelling out what it is defined against, what precisely is inauthentic and artificial? The short answer is that it is defined against

modern, “mass” culture. There is a long history to these themes and to their political representation. In the early 19th century Britain is threatened by commerce, a debased business, run by men who only know value-for-money. Then industrialism pursues the chimera of progress with its infernal mechanisms for moving goods and people round the world at ever increasing speed. At the end of the century Ruskin is still leading a campaign against the way Britain is being destroyed by the building of railways.

The concept of authenticity is central in almost all present day research on quality food, and we find it in many other studies of consumer culture. Authenticity is widely evoked in the analysis of antiques, art objects, vintage cars, and certain kinds of tourism, but not in discussion of kitchen cabinets or washing powder. This immediately suggests that we are in Bourdieu’s world of *Distinction* (1984). The consumption, possession and knowledge about these goods constitutes one kind of cultural capital and are imbricated in a process of differentiation: the creation and reproduction of social boundaries. At one level this is a very valuable kind of analysis, even if this is not always going to play-out the way it does in metropolitan France, and peasant understandings of food fall outside the analytical frame provided by most of the literature on consumption. However, there is something else which slips through the net. It is true that these areas of consumption provide the ground for a particular kind of social differentiation; they are different from the display of chunky gold jewellery, for example. That said where does their appeal lie? Is it arbitrary, in the sense that these are just signs whose meanings are exhausted once it is shown how they are incorporated into class differentiation or is there something else, intrinsic to their real or supposed properties? If there is, we have to look for it in the sphere of production.

Authenticity is a quality attributed to a range of foods and cuisines. In the material above two main themes stand out. First there is food specific to a location; secondly these food products are the result of a craft process. These two themes are normally found together and both rest on an appeal to tradition: this food is the product of a continuous and collective endeavour, it predates industrialised food systems and its value derives from that opposition. In some cases, as with the French elaborations of *terroir*, these linkages between place, people, knowledge and food build into a full-blown conception of a bounded local culture, a claim as over-blown as those of any nationalism.

When analysing farming practise in Tuscany, I used the term “quality” to describe the way some features of the production process are drawn into the

value of a commodity after it is marketed (Pratt, 1994, pp. 154–165). The term authenticity carries many of the same connotations, it signifies that some feature of the production process is known, we know where it comes from, what it is made of, who made it. We know its origin, and have conversations about it. We do not have those kinds of conversation about our kitchen cabinets or about the work of the packers who assembled our mixed salad. In addition to the conversations we have labels, which are essential in providing consumers with information about the production process when direct contact with the producer is missing. Only the label can authenticate the foodstuff as organic, fair trade, or a regional speciality, and it is central in a whole apparatus of knowledge and connoisseurship. It appears to provide a benign and transparent link between two worlds, but in the concluding remarks we shall see both that it provides the framework for the extraction of “monopoly rent” and that different political processes may derive from a process of authentication.

For some writers, the issues of authenticity and consumption lie at the core of the condition of modernity:

I use the term consumer in opposition to the aesthetic ideal of a creative producer. I want to reflect on a condition in which very little of what we possess is made by us in the first instance. Therefore to be a consumer is to possess consciousness that one is living through objects and images not of one's own creation. It is this which makes the term symptomatic of what some at least have seen as the core meaning of the term modernity. This sense of consumption as a secondary relationship takes on particular importance within an ideology, which espouses...the aesthetic ideal of authenticity through creation.... Within such a dominant ideology the condition of consumption is always a potential state of rupture. Consumption then may not be about choice, but rather the sense that we have no choice but to attempt to overcome the experience of rupture using those very same goods and images, which create for many the sense of modernity as rupture. (Miller, 1995, pp. 1–2)

The argument builds into a critique of approaches which privilege forms of culture, which predate the encroachment of global capitalism and ignore the creativity of those whose everyday lives unfold in a world of “mass” consumption (cf. Peters, 1999). Authenticity is a quality of the rooted and ancient, not of the modern, while culture is precisely that which money cannot buy. More specifically the quotation above suggests that in a world where we do not make the things we live by there will be a sense of rupture, since we may still associate authenticity with creation through production. Miller argues that we attempt to overcome this rupture through creativity in the sphere of consumption. His approach is itself based on a rupture, which

leaves little room for understanding how the organisation of production shapes consumption. However the point here is to suggest the possibility that consumers may also try to recapture the aura of authenticity through consuming goods, which are valued precisely because their connection to the world of production is known. In that sense, authenticity is not a survival from some prelapsarian world of peasants and artisans, but precisely a shadow cast by an economy organised around exchange value.

In order to take this any further, we need to say a little more about value. David Graeber's starting point is to posit value as the importance actors give to their creative acts, which then become congealed in objects, localities, relationships (2001, p. 45). This is a relative importance: *how much* energy is invested in particular activities. He adds that this creativity is embedded in some larger social whole (2001, p. 67, p. 254), so stressing that there is collective importance and recognition given to this creativity. The values are often embedded in institutionalised or ritualised forms, and a dialectical relationship emerges between these structural forms and individual desires. This also means that establishing value in a society is a political process. One important point that emerges in Graeber's long dialogue with Marx and Mauss is that fetishisation in its most general sense is not unique to a market economy. Value has two moments, the creative action or energy, and the "congealed" result of that action, stored in objects and localities. An actor looking at a valued object, a shell necklace, an heirloom, objectifies, reifies, the creative energy, which has gone into its making or which it symbolizes. The examples Graeber uses are precisely those categories of goods, which are termed "valuables" in anthropological analysis and it is not clear whether the analysis holds more widely. However, he does also suggest that:

Collectively, human beings create their worlds, but owing to the extraordinary complexity of how all this creative activity is coordinated socially, no one can keep track of the process, let alone take control of it. As a result we are constantly confronting our own actions and creations as if they were alien powers. Fetishism is simply when this happens to material objects. (2005, p. 428)

When we turn to the distinctive features of market economies, Graeber stresses that they are organised in terms of there being one value, with money being the measure of everything, hence everything is "convertible." He then adds that we talk about values in the plural in those contexts relatively insulated from the market – the church, home or

museum (2001, p. 78). From a similar perspective Fine argues that:

Money has the effect of homogenising exchange in the sense that all goods are measurable against one another in the single dimension of money. Whilst commodities necessarily have different use values, they almost appear to lose them in being set against money. In the market everything has its price. As Simmel (1900, p. 134) puts it, money forces an extraneous standard upon things, a standard that is quite alien to distinction. (Fine, 2002, p. 30)

There is a second, and more familiar, strand in the commentary on commodity fetishism (as opposed to fetishism in general): that in our economic world we do not just objectify labour, the labour itself is alienated. Here too Graeber seeks to extend the social significance of this reality:

When workers agree to work for wages, they place themselves in a position in which for them, money is the end of the whole process. They perform their creative, productive actions in order to get paid. But for Marx this is of special significance, because the value that the money represents is, in the last instance, that of labour itself. What's happening here goes well beyond the fetishization of commodities. And it is even more fundamental to the nature of capitalism... Money represents the ultimate social significance of their actions, the means by which it is integrated in a total (market) system. But it can do so because it is also the object of their actions: that's why they are working: in order to receive a paycheck at the end of the week. (2001, pp. 66–67)

Graeber has a great deal more to say about money and its unique capacity to store value, and also about the ideology of the market with its highly individuated notion of human desires (e.g. 2001, p. 257). His analysis opens up an intriguing question. If in market societies money is a measure, a medium and above all an end in itself (2001, p. 66) and value-for-money dominates what we conventionally call the economy, how do other values co-exist with this monetarised realm and its rationality of quantification and self-interest? Graeber points out that in our view of society, market principles can be balanced by family values, altruistic charity (2001, p. 257), but he views these as just “two sides of the same false coin.” The phrase is at odds with the celebration of creativity elsewhere in the book and suggests pessimism about the possibility of building alternatives out of these non-commodified spaces in everyday life. Others have expressed a similar pessimism about the effective autonomy of independent producers (artisans or petty-commodity producers) in a capitalist economy (Fine, 2002, p. 51; Guthman, 2004c).

The ethnography on quality food shows another conjunction, the attempt by consumers to realise values which are precisely defined against the economism of value-for-money through the spending of money. Like the valuables of a gift economy these goods have a unique history (at least in

relation to mass goods) of congealed action. By contrast, as Graeber says, money offers a frictionless surface to history. Sutton (2004, p. 377) glosses this, "Money is generic, typically it has no history. More importantly it lacks all specificity in the present, but could be converted into anything in the future." We tell stories about these goods, and they are precisely stories about who, where and how they were made, and as such they are marked off from other consumption items where the fact that we are buying the labour of others is invisible. In that sense too, authenticity may be the shadow cast by exchange value. This spiral in and out of the commodity form is not unique to quality food. It is a theme in analyses of tourism (Greenwood, 1989; McCannell, 1999), and from another direction in the analysis of art: Peters (1999) following Walter Benjamin (1955), remarks that the Mona Lisa only became authentic once it had been copied. Similarly, there was nothing authentic about a farmhouse loaf when we all lived in farmhouses.

POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

This article has explored the non-monetary values found in alternative food movements, and it has done so from the perspective of consumption. It has emphasised a romantic discourse, which values objects because of their connection to the past and to the act of creation. In the case of food (which is ingested) everything which comes between us and the food's origins creates artificiality or pollution. I have suggested that this is very much a *reaction* to the real and perceived trends within the "mainstream" food industry, and partly because of that, there is a tendency to misrepresent the relationship between the two. The alternative food chains are not simply survivals from a pre-industrial age, they emerged in parallel with the revolutions in farming and processing; their values (such as "organic") are not those of a peasantry, but emerge as a counterpoint to industrial agriculture and commodification. I have also indicated that a simple opposition between a commercial, disenchanted world, dominated by value-for-money, and an alternative domain of the natural or the holistic obscures the complex relationship between the two, where money-value is often precisely the guarantor of quality or authenticity.

The alternative food chains attempt various kinds of reconnection between the worlds of production and consumption. Some connections are organisational: self-provisioning, the preference given to small farmers and producers whose supply lines are "direct" or "fair," and the embedding of market relations. Others are more "discursive," the conversations about how

and where the food was produced, elaborating knowledge and expertise which may be based on direct experience, or crucially on labels, which constitute such an emblematic and enigmatic link between two worlds.

If we turn the perspective round and examine the alternative food chains from the point of view of production and distribution, then we encounter a much more heterogeneous reality. This is particularly important if we are concerned with the transformative potential of these movements in relation to corporate power, or in relation to class or social justice. In this context the categories “organic” or “DOC” reveal nothing, and it is essential to distinguish between those quality foodstuffs that have provided some autonomy in the way people gain their livelihoods and those that have been produced and/or sold by the major corporations. The highly exploitative labour relations that provide us with so much of our “cheap” food may equally be found in the quality sphere. There is a further need to investigate the way in which the intensive capitalist production of quality foods impacts on the space for smaller independent producers with a wider social and political agenda, an issue which Guthman (2004a, 2004b) opens up in relation to Californian organic agriculture.

When we turn to the labelling and regulation of foodstuffs similar issues emerge. What may appear to the consumer as a reconnection to the world of production is usually a much more complex process. The labels, and the conversations about authenticity, provide a very variable and sometimes tenuous connection to the world of rural labour, they may continue to reify that labour, and they certainly do not achieve an end of commodity fetishism *per se*, if that labour is alienated (cf. Bernstein & Campling, 2006). Labels and the branding of goods are also classic ways in which market niches and higher prices are secured. We do not know *a priori* who in the chain benefits: whether those higher prices reflect higher production costs, greater returns to labour, or increased profit taking. Guthman’s conclusion is that “While labels are necessary to set ethical commodities apart, they allow protest to be conflated with consumption choice, by giving centrality to the commodity as vehicle of social change, they resurrect the fetishism of commodities by the back door” (Guthman, 2004b, p. 235).

These comments on the values generated through the production of quality foodstuffs (and their labels) constitute a paradigmatic example of Harvey’s analysis of monopoly rent, which occurs where there is “exclusive control over some directly or indirectly tradable item which is in some crucial respects unique and non-replicable” (Harvey, 2001, p. 395). There is a tension between uniqueness and tradability, or as expressed above, a spiral in and out of the commodity form. “If monopoly rents are to be

realised then somehow has to be found to keep commodities or places unique and particular enough to maintain a monopolistic edge" (2001, p. 396). Harvey's exploration of the ways monetary value is extracted from such objects (including wine and *terroir*) focuses on cultural discourses, since "claims to uniqueness and authenticity can best be understood as distinctive and non-replicable cultural claims" (p. 399). "The problem for capital is to find ways to co-op, subsume, commodify and monetarize such differences just enough to be able to appropriate monopoly rents therefrom. The problem for oppositional movements is to use the validation of particularity, uniqueness, authenticity, culture and aesthetic meanings in ways that open up new possibilities" (2001, p. 410). Movements built around this kind of activity and validation constitutes one of Harvey's "spaces of hope."

For that and other reasons I do not want to end this article on a pessimistic note. It is undoubtedly true that many different aspirations are found in the alternative food movements, that the pursuit of one of them may, despite appearances, do nothing for the others, that not everything is on the label. It is also true that this is a field full of paradoxes, that romantic visions are tied hand and foot to that which they oppose, that the search for alternative values can lead to higher prices and profits; quality may be dissolved back into money. These mismatches and paradoxes reveal, amongst other things, precisely the issues that concern Graeber, the dominance of the commodity form and the way it attempts to recolonise the alternative spaces that emerge. Nevertheless, that does not mean the terrain should simply be abandoned. These movements have revealed to a wider public a great deal about the agro-industrial food system outlined in the introduction and provided a constant critique of its operations. They have also, here and there, to a varying extent, evaded capture and conducted a series of experiments in how to build alternatives. A key political issue is how these experiments are articulated and connected.

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