

# The Ideology of Slow Food

Luca Simonetti

*“Un Barolo Chinato sorseggiato assaporando una tavoletta speziata, o un Moscato Passito bevuto con un gianduiotto torinese, sono esperienze che lasciano una traccia nell’anima.”*

Carlo Petrini

## 1. Introduction.

At the 2008 elections in Italy, the programs of three major political parties – including the two center-left parties – mentioned, as goals to be pursued in agriculture, the development of “short supply chains (filiera corte)”, the introduction of the *farmer’s markets*, the struggle against biopiracy, the contrast to the abandonment of rural areas, and the support to organic farming<sup>1</sup>. All such goals have been vigorously supported for many years by *Slow Food* (“SF”), and their adoption by the Italian political parties is good proof of SF’ importance.

In this paper I intend to study<sup>2</sup> the ideology of SF. “Ideology”, in this case, means not only a systematic view of the world, but also a false conscience, socially determined, which conceals the true nature of social relations and processes.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. What is SF.

Founded in 1986 by Carlo Petrini (it was then called ArciGola), SF became an international association in 1989: today it counts around 90,000 members, with offices in seven countries and followers in 130, divided in approximately 800 Convivia (in Italy they are called Condotte) which are the basic organizational units (coordinated by a Convivium Leader, they organize courses, tastings, dinners, travels, promotions etc.). In Italy SF owns a publishing house, prints two magazines, operates a service company (SlowFood Promozione S.r.l.); it has created, together with public and private bodies, various no-profit entities (such as the “Fondazione SlowFood per la Biodiversità”), an University for gastronomic studies, a Wine Bank, the Mother Earth (“Terra Madre”) Foundation, and so on. It also organizes the so-called Presidi<sup>4</sup> (devoted to the preservation and defense of rare foods) as well as events such as the “Saloni del Gusto”, Cheese, SlowFish etc. It is a true multinational<sup>5</sup>, capable of raising financing on a huge scale, of concluding cooperation agreements with governments and big corporations, and of mobilizing politicians and prominent personalities<sup>6</sup> of the most different political opinions<sup>6</sup>.

SF mentions as its main goals the following:

---

<sup>1</sup> The PdL program, e.g., spoke of “*reduction of the passages from the field to the table of agricultural products*” and of the “*diffusion of markets managed by the agricultural producers*”; the PD program of “*promoting the good agriculture*”, “*promoting the diffusion of organic farming*”, “*finally enacting the law on the labelling of the origins of raw agricultural products*”, “*favoring the short supply chain and a direct relationship among agricultural producers and consumers*” and “*intensifying the controls against ‘agricultural piracy’ and food frauds*”; lastly, the SA program mentioned “*sustaining the EU moratorium against GMOs and not allowing tolerance [sic] for the contamination of seeds*”, “*opposing the abandonment of rural areas and defending the rural landscape, promoting the direct sales by farmers and the ‘short supply chains’, painstakingly sustaining organic farming and typical products*”, and finally “*promoting the involvement of the young in agriculture*”.

<sup>2</sup> Through the examination of a wide group – over 100, only the most significant of which are mentioned in the bibliography – of writings by authors of the movement.

<sup>3</sup> The former is the “weak” meaning of ideology, the latter is the “strong” meaning, according to the definition by Bobbio, p. 114-115. See also Stoppino, p. 512.

<sup>4</sup> On which see particularly Fonte (p. 16 ff.). See also Walter, p. 2 ff.

<sup>5</sup> It is so defined by Petrini 2001a, p. 63. See, for an instance of its popularity in the US, *The Economist* 2008.

<sup>6</sup> On the agreement with Brasil see Donati, p. 238 ff., who mentions also the fund raising of 2.6 million of Euro for the financing of Terra Madre 2004. On the agreement with Coop, see Fonte, p. 8 ff.

- placing the right emphasis on the pleasure from food, and learning how to appreciate the different recipes and tastes, to recognize the various places and skills of production, and to respect the rhythms of seasons and of the *convivium*;
- sustaining the education of taste as a good defense against bad quality and food frauds, as well as against the standardization of our meals;
- safeguarding the local cuisines, the traditional productions, and the vegetable and animal species at risk of extinction;
- sustaining a new model of agriculture, less intensive and cleaner;
- defending biodiversity and the right of the people to “*food sovereignty*”<sup>7</sup>.

### 3. Origins and opposition to fast food.

SF was created at the end of the Eighties, by a group of people replete of a “*snobbish distaste for that consumerist and TV-addicted Italy*” and of a desire to “*contain this invasion of barbarians*”<sup>8</sup>. Its origin dates back to an episodic reaction to the appearance in Italy of the first *fast food*<sup>9</sup>, but it was from the very beginning opposed not to a mere food model, but to an entire culture: “*fast food was backed by a new culture and a new civilization having one value only: the profit. Pleasure is totally incompatible with productivity, since the time spent in its pursuit is subtracted from production.*” Thus in the “manifesto” of SF one reads that modern civilization did start under “*the signs of dynamism and acceleration*”, taking the machine as a model for the man himself, and velocity as “*dominant ideal*”. SF proposes to “*defeat the virus of fast*”, opposing to the “*dynamic life*” the “*easy life*”: “*May suitable doses of guaranteed sensual pleasure and slow, long-lasting enjoyment preserve us from the contagion of the multitude who mistakes frenzy for efficiency*”. This is SF’s “*modest proposal for a gradual as well as progressive recovery of man, both as an individual and as a species, in the long delayed environmental clearance, in order to make life liveable again, starting from the elementary desires*”; and the proof of this idea is easy: “*the fast-rhythm efficientists are mostly stupid and sad: it suffices to look at them... It is under the sign of the snail that we shall recognize the lovers of material culture and those who still love the pleasure of slow enjoyment*”<sup>10</sup>. Many things in this text are remarkable: e.g., the trivialization of the glorious Braudelien concept of *civilisation matérielle* (hastily and mistakenly identified with the life’s pleasures); the firm conviction that ‘productivity’ is “*totally incomptible*” with pleasure<sup>11</sup>; the scorn for the “*dominant style of communication*” which, however, finds nothing wrong in conforming to this “*barbaric style of communication*” by coining beguiling slogans and names<sup>12</sup>. But the most interesting points are others. Firstly, the description of the client of *fast food* (a “*barbarian*”, “*stupid and sad*”, the product of “*a new culture and a new civilization having one value only: the profit*”, and even victim of a “*virus*”), which recalls almost literally the descriptions of the “de-humanised” man, devoted to the pursuit of low, materialistic, or even diabolic aims, which many traditionalist authors have handed down. Moreover, the identification of speed – or better, of frenzy – as a fundamental characteristic of modern life (of the “industrial civilization”) is also a well known *topos* of the critique of modernity, dating back to the first reactions to the Industrial Revolution<sup>13</sup>, and which is today echoed by numerous Italian intellectuals.<sup>14</sup> In the terms

<sup>7</sup> See the SF website, at the address [http://www.slowfood.com/about\\_us/eng/mission.lasso](http://www.slowfood.com/about_us/eng/mission.lasso)

<sup>8</sup> Petri and Padovani, p. 92.

<sup>9</sup> The first McDonald’s restaurant opened in Illinois in 1955, while the first in Italy opened in Bolzano in 1985: Petri and Padovani, p. 90-91. On the opposition to *fast food*, see Miele and Murdoch, p. 13 ff.

<sup>10</sup> See the whole text in Petri and Padovani, p. 93-94.

<sup>11</sup> Which obviously excludes both the pleasure one can find in labour and the fact that nearly all pleasures—from watching a movie to visiting a cathedral, from reading a book to taking a ride – is a product of labour, one’s own and others’. Perhaps it is not superfluous to observe that for SF the word “productivity” has not a constant meaning, and still less the technical meaning it assumes in economics: often it means simply ‘production’, other times ‘productivistic obsession’.

<sup>12</sup> Besides the invention of the name ‘SF’, there is the choice of the word “Presidio”, debated at great length: Petri and Padovani, p. 142.

in which this position is normally expressed, it is clearly weak<sup>15</sup>. Lastly, the equation of modernity to the worshipping of the machine model<sup>16</sup> is also a *locus classicus* of the critiques to the Industrial Revolution.<sup>17</sup> In all cases, we are dealing with positions historically connoted as reactionary.

It is above all striking that SF ignores the fact (well known to historians) that “fast food”, i.e., food rapidly bought and eaten out of one’s home, has always existed, from ancient Rome to Medieval China, from XVII century France to pre-Columbian America: on the contrary, what is very recent and typical of the modern bourgeois civilization is precisely the meal slowly consumed at the familiar desk – save for limited circles of privileged people<sup>18</sup>. It is therefore wrong to consider fast food as a modern phenomenon.

SF’s hostility to fast food is, actually, due to “cultural” reasons, as on the other hand its founders themselves admit: precisely, fast food would upset the “*mores*’, *the ‘customs*’, *the complex of habits and behaviours followed by a people, with no law to have established them. Fast food with its planetary standardization has totally erased these traditions, these ‘mores*’, *as regards eating*”, and it would by consequence, and in the etymological sense of the word, be “*immoral*”. Even admitting “*(but it is not true) that consumers of fast food get the same pleasure from them than others get from a glass of Barolo or from a dinner in a merry company*”, SF would nonetheless object: “*how could we renounce to habits, rhythms, cultural layers which form our history, our identity, without incurring the risk of barbarizing?*”<sup>19</sup> But the argument of “immorality” is contradictory: in fact, if what upsets the consolidated social habits is “immoral”, then the immorality would end once the new habits has become in turn consolidated (“immoral”, if ever, would be the old ones). Moreover, it is mistaken to attribute to the Italian popular tradition customs which until very recent years have been typical only of a limited group of affluent people (since speaking of rich meals, of healthy and tasty food, and of dinners in a merry company for the peasants of pre-IIWW Italy is nothing more than a wild fantasy).<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> In Italy, already Gasparo Gozzi satirized the tyranny of clocks (Gozzi, p. 82-84). References, from the *Dark Satanic Mills* of William Blake to W. Morris and beyond, would be countless. It is sufficient here to quote Zolla 1959, p. 10 ss.

<sup>14</sup> Among which one of the most representative is Franco Cassano.

<sup>15</sup> The slow/fast opposition is a constant of human action, and according to the various fields of activity each epoch can prefer the one or the other. Nor it is sustainable that ‘slowness’ be exclusive only of the archaic or pre-industrial societies and ‘speed’ only of the modern industrial civilization: velocity was always sought after – only think to the “swift-footed” Achilles and to the “fast ships” of the Achaeans in Homer -; and, on the other hand, complaints on the tragic consequences of velocity are very old: Plato deemed that in a well-governed city the sea (the ‘fast’ means of communication of the Antiquity) had to be forbidden because it was a source of vices. In general, on the role of the Mediterranean Sea as a fast mean of communication and exchanges, see Horden and Purcell, p. 123 ff.

<sup>16</sup> Petrini 2005a, p. 81.

<sup>17</sup> Quotations would be endless. It will be sufficient to mention Carlyle, wherein the famous passage on the Age of Machinery (p. 46-47: “*Were we required to characterize this age of ours by any single epithet, we should be tempted to call it, not an Heroic, Devotional, Philosophical, or Moral Age, but, above all others, the Mechanical Age. It is the Age of Machinery, in every outward and inward sense of that word... Nothing is now done directly, or by hand; all is by rule and calculated contrivance... On every hand, the living artisan is driven from his workshop, to make room for a speedier, inanimate one. The shuttle drops from the fingers of the weaver, and falls into iron fingers that ply it faster... Not the external and physical alone is now managed by machinery, but the internal and spiritual*”) is strikingly similar to the words of Petrini cited in the previous note. See also Zolla 1964, especially p. 17.

<sup>18</sup> Laudan 2001, p. 38-39.

<sup>19</sup> Petrini 2001 a, p. 35.

<sup>20</sup> Anyone wanting to have a realistic idea of the kind of “dinner” the peasants “enjoyed” in pre-war Italy can find interesting descriptions in Sarti, pp. 186 ff., 195 ff., in Rösener, p. 222 ff., or in Capatti e Montanari, p. 333-334. It would also be useful to look at one of the many paintings on this subject, from Annibale Carracci to Le Nain, or even Van Gogh. It must be added that, sometimes, SF itself seems not unaware of the kind of life that Italian peasants led up to recent times: see e.g. Petrini 2005, p. 214. But this does not prevent SF from believing legends on an alleged “peasant generosity”, *ibidem*, p. 240-241 (to belie which, it shall suffice to read classic books like *Pinocchio*).

#### 4. SF and the counterculture.

The major weakness of this kind of criticisms of fast food is that they are based on the conviction, often implicit, that the consumption of a certain product (comics, photo stories, quiz games, or *fast food*) cannot really be enjoyed<sup>21</sup>, or cannot have a rational justification; the success of that product, therefore, shall be due to the propaganda (mass media, advertising), to mass conformism, or to the decay and barbarization of culture. But the premises of the argument are unsound. The first idea is not only elitist<sup>22</sup>, but also unproven; on the other hand, it is strictly connected to the second idea, i.e. that a given consumption can be *objectively* irrational (which is contradicted by the fact that a good's utility is mostly subjective). These two biases prevent SF from recognizing that *fast food*, like other mass products, attract many consumers not because of their lack of culture or of the daze induced by the media and advertising, but because they offer goods of *fast consumption* and at a *low price* for people without much time and/or money. These are, one should say, quite reasonable motives, and which by themselves are capable of wholly explaining the success of fast food<sup>23</sup>: if other catering operators existed which were capable of providing better food equally faster and at a competitive price, we would certainly see a spectacular decline in the popularity of the present *fast food* (but, on the other hand, we would have created other *fast food*). In turn, the fact that *fast food* are essentially crowded by low income or young people creates obvious effects on their image (so, *fast food* shall have an image of places at the same time 'youthful' and *cheap*)<sup>24</sup>, with no need to assume decay and barbarization.

The position of SF is a clear heritage of the counterculture and anticonsumerism of the Sixties and Seventies, as it is also the case of many other contemporary social movements (the so-called "critical consumption", the "fair trade", the Purchase Groups, etc.), which recently have attracted the attention of sociologists.<sup>25</sup> And it is possible that SF's deep hostility towards "uniformity" and "standardization" of the modern food industry be rooted here.

Such roots in anticonsumerism and counterculture also become apparent also because of SF's conviction that the future may be modified and guided by the consumption choices of the individuals. "*In a world wherein the 'sensorial deprivation leads us to the blunting of our faculties of hearing, seeing, touching, tasting and sniffing', the training of the senses becomes an 'act of resistance against the destruction of taste and against the annihilation of knowledge'. It becomes a true political act, because it is starting from the mechanisms which regulate the transmission of stimuluses and the factors of conditioning that one puts himself in a position such as to manage and control reality ... The gourmet, from this viewpoint, may see himself as a privileged one who can distinguish and who, through his choices guided by a sensitivity immune to the distractions of the industrial civilization, can direct the future. The recovered sensoriality is the main, almost primitive tool towards the orientation of political action against a system in which the machine has risen to the role of only master*"<sup>26</sup>. The ingredients of counterculture are all present here: the blunting of the senses and of the conscience, the "transmission of stimuluses", the "conditioning", the deception carried out through the repression of the "senses", can be defeated recovering what the "System" wants to cancel, i.e., exactly, our primitive sensoriality: and by this return to spontaneity, genuineness, authenticity, one makes not a simple act of individual protest, but a truly political act, even a revolutionary act. Thus the circuit is closed: he who wants good food is not a selfish

<sup>21</sup> "*Critics have a tendency to dismiss popular taste, to imagine that people couldn't really like McDonald's food or really enjoy listening Celine Dion*": Heath and Potter, p. 239. The problem is studied with unparalleled finesse by Williams 1961, p. 363 ff.

<sup>22</sup> On this point see in particular Heath and Potter, p. 108: "*Whenever you look at the list of consumer goods which (according to the critic) people don't really need, what you invariably see is a list of consumer goods that middle-aged intellectuals don't need. Budweiser bad, Scotch single-malt good; Hollywood movies bad, performance art good; Chrysler bad, Volvo good; hamburgers bad, risotto good and so on... Consumerism, in other words, always seems to be a critique of what other people buy*".

<sup>23</sup> Jones et alii, p. 302 ff.

<sup>24</sup> See again, on this point, Heath and Potter, especially pp. 244-245.

<sup>25</sup> See moreover, in Italy, Sassatelli; Ceccarini; Leonini and Sassatelli.

<sup>26</sup> Petrini 2005a, p. 80-81.

pleasure-seeker, but, provided he is seeking ‘non-industrial’ food, he is operating politically for the subversion of the System. It is a privileged political act, done by those who “can distinguish” and, thanks to their senses “immune from the distractions of the industrial civilization”, know also how to “direct the future”.

The intrinsic logic of these positions<sup>27</sup> requires that, since the needs to consume are induced by mass production, the same needs must be standardized and uniform, homogeneous, precisely like the products one is led to desire<sup>28</sup>. The consumption society, in fact, is seen as a system of rigid, inflexible uniformity; by consequence, non-standard acts of consumption are considered in themselves as politically radical acts. Here starts the theory of the *rebel consumer*<sup>29</sup>, that is, of the man who, through his ‘individual’, autonomous consumption style, can subvert the System.

History has confuted this theory. The list of the things that, in the past fifty years, have been declared ‘subversive’ only to be swiftly adopted by the majority (smoking, long hairs, bikini, jazz, scooters, tattoos, heroin, marijuana, postmodernism, organic food, rock, punk) is impressive; however, none of the ‘subversions’ which their supporters expected did occur. Therefore one should ask “*how many times can the system be subverted without any noticeable effect before we begin to question the means of subversion?*”<sup>30</sup>. But the melancholic observation that counterculture and anticonsumerism are ineffective in order to overthrow the System is still only a part of the truth. Consumer needs are not at all standardized and uniform; on the contrary, consumerism is driven not by a desire of uniformity, but by one of distinction; an acknowledgment which dates back Veblen and Bourdieu<sup>31</sup>. It is for this reason that anticonsumerist positions are so easily “exploitable” or recoverable by the System (a fact which countercultural theorists incessantly complain of<sup>32</sup>): because non-standard consumption confers distinction<sup>33</sup>. In other words, no such thing as a “subversive” consumption exists. On the contrary, anticonsumerist and countercultural positions, diverting the attention and passion of people from the democratic institutions and from the drafting of truly effective reform policies, have facilitated the birth of a vociferous but practically ineffective radicalism<sup>34</sup>.

Even a quick examination of the kinds of individual behaviours praised by SF confirms the above. Having personal, trust and long-lasting relations with producers and suppliers<sup>35</sup>, as well as spending one’s time at the table in merry company, are costly and time-consuming activities: therefore they are positional (or luxury) goods, reserved to people possessing money and leisure. As a consequence, they shall confer distinction and shall be more and more requested – and this is the typical destiny of the status-conferring product, such as the house in downtown, the big car or the

<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., Baudrillard.

<sup>28</sup> Standardization is in fact seen as “*natural consequence of the contemporary industrial logic*” (*Dizionario di SF*, entry “Territorio”), and fighting it is an original goal of SF (“*the movement was founded in the name of the defense of the right to the pleasure deriving from good food, against the standardization of tastes*”: *Dizionario di SF*, entry “Ecogastronomy”). See also *Dizionario di SF*, entry “Biodiversità”). For a truly extreme position see Capatti 2004.

<sup>29</sup> Heath and Potter, p. 110-111.

<sup>30</sup> Heath and Potter, p. 152.

<sup>31</sup> For a comprehensive synthesis of the discussion on the limited influence of advertising upon consumption, see Sassatelli, p. 161 ff., especially p. 168 ff., as well as on the tendency of advertising to exploit the desire of distinction rather than the desire of conformity (p. 165 ff.)

<sup>32</sup> It is famous the analysis of the capitalism’s capability of “exploiting” the protests in Boltanski and Chiapello, especially pp. 241 ff.

<sup>33</sup> Heath and Potter, p. 101-102.

<sup>34</sup> “*At best, countercultural rebellion is pseudo-rebellion: a set of dramatic gestures that are devoid of any progressive political or economic consequences and that detract from the urgent task of building a more just society. In other words, it is a rebellion that provides entertainment for the rebels, and nothing much else. At worst, countercultural rebellion actively promotes unhappiness, by undermining or discrediting social norms and institutions that actually serve a valuable function. In particular, the idea of counterculture has produced a level of contempt for democratic politics that has seriously handicapped the progressive left (not least, by refusing to acknowledge the distinction between compromising and ‘selling out’)*”: Heath and Potter, p. 69, as well as p. 329.

<sup>35</sup> Greco and Scaffidi, p. 96, 98-99.

expensive painting, and which must not be confused with the victory of a revolutionary cultural model.

It must also be added that, in a developed world in which the quantity of available food has long since ceased to be a problem, distinction is conferred by food quality; thus the foods whose quality is commended by SF are at the same time “authentic” and “sophisticated”, and they also are elite products.<sup>36</sup>

On the other hand, the fact that non-standard, “critical” consumption etc. (whose “conduct codes”, by the way, bear a striking resemblance to the thought of John Ruskin<sup>37</sup>) produces effects which are exactly contrary to the intention – that is, it drives, instead than limiting, consumerism, thus creating nothing else than new market niches<sup>38</sup> – is perhaps unavoidable also for another reason. The anticonsumerist, “critical” consumerist, and “fair trade” movements, etc., are intrinsically divided between a will to effectively change the existing economic behaviours, and therefore to obtain *effectiveness*, and a desire to publicly show their *identity*, an aim which leads to a series of behaviours imagined as pure and uncompromising: the first tendency brings to seek ways to collaborate with sectors of the ‘normal’ economy, the other one leads to avoid any contacts, in order to protect themselves from the risk of “contamination” or “selling out”.<sup>39</sup> But the real psychological motive of the members is the drive to the construction of the self, to self-gratification, in other words a need of identity; and therefore it is likely that the same drive induces the critical consumers – and the SF follower is one of them – to make choices more and more symbolical, more and more capable of giving an identity.

### **5. Gluttony and guilt.**

The centrality of pleasure, openly claimed by SF, has many a time raised the suspicion that the movement be only a band of gluttons; in many instances SF has been forced to “defend” itself from such “charge”.<sup>40</sup> It is a crucial issue for the whole strategy of the movement. In fact, SF did always claim also for the politically ‘progressive’ side the right to gastronomic pleasure, traditionally considered as a value of the ‘right’: “*for the first time the left associations approached the issues of wine and conviviality, claiming also the right to pleasure. Which, instead, appeared to be reserved only to high bourgeois who had practised it before: supercilious doctors, lawyers and journalists, intent only to put a noble mask upon their guzzling*”.<sup>41</sup>

At the same time, it is interesting that SF protests not being a minority, a niche (a worry which, as we saw, echoes that of the ‘critical’ consumers to ultimately represent only another segment of the market), and that “*quality products*” must not necessarily remain a prerogative of “*a minority of middle-aged consumers, affluent and pleasure-seeking*”<sup>42</sup>.

In the first place, however, it is difficult to understand why being a glutton, a “gourmet”, should be an insult. Historically, the gluttons have arisen from the decline of the “dualistic” food culture, in which on one side (for the great majority) there was penury and hunger, and on the other side (for a

<sup>36</sup> Miele and Murdoch, p. 2, 15.

<sup>37</sup> See, for instance, Ruskin, p. 171 ff.

<sup>38</sup> Roos et alii, p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> Ceccarini, p. 98 and *passim*; Leonini and Sassatelli, p. 106-107 and *passim*.

<sup>40</sup> Petrini 2005a, p. 46. See also Petrini and Padovani, p. 15 ff. and the entries “Piacere” and “Gourmet” in the *Dizionario di SF*.

<sup>41</sup> Petrini 2001a speaks e.g. of a “*persistent equivocation which equates communism to Franciscan spirit*”, p. 12; of a preconception which makes the left look at the ArciGola members as a “*confraternity of funny people and gluttons*”; and of the necessity to defend themselves from those who consider the gluttons as supporters of a “*purely hedonistic and politically ‘reactionary’ position*”, *ibidem*, p. 12, 13, 21.

<sup>42</sup> Petrini, 2001a, p. 61, p. 149. Or also: “*We noticed that the pressures of the market and the loss of biodiversity ... would lead to a reduction of the gastronomic resources of Italy. We realized... that the famous pepper from Motta di Costigliole was being replaced by the fat greenhouse cousins imported from the Netherlands. To eat a soup of Badalucco beans one had to get a leg-up. The 1996 congress taught for the first time that a new market could develop: some then, and still today, call it ‘a niche’, a word I do not like. Actually the consumers who want to know what they eat are quite a lot. These years have shown that such ‘niche’ is wider and wider*” (Petrini and Padovani, p. 124).

few) there was plenty and display of food, with in the middle another minority (mainly religious) considering as a virtue abstinence from food<sup>43</sup>. And gluttony could emerge and flourish only in affluent and egalitarian societies, in which conspicuous banquets were replaced by quiet dinners of friends, transforming cooking from a public to a private affair, like a midway between ostentation and ascetic renunciation.<sup>44</sup> Gluttony is, after all, an hobby like all others, enjoyable and innocuous. Moreover, even assuming that not all the purchasers of “quality products” are “middle aged” and “pleasure-seeking”, one thing is certain: they all are affluent<sup>45</sup>, because the products promoted by SF are luxury products. And as such, they are necessarily destined to a minority. This point - the *necessity* of such minority destination - must be stressed, because SF accurately omits it. On the one hand, the emphasis the movement puts on hand-crafted production and on local dimension implies a limited production<sup>46</sup>, with obvious consequences upon prices; and it is not by chance that SF itself imposes quantitative limits on producers.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, it is the structure itself of the ‘quality good’ which makes it a product which owns ‘quality’ only inasmuch it is opposed to the ‘mass’ or standardized production; it is precisely for this reason that the ‘quality’ good appears and is capable to confer status and distinction – attributes it would immediately lose were it adopted by the majority.

Here and there, even SF admits this<sup>48</sup>. On the other hand, SF states explicitly that “*adequately paying quality products is sacrosanct*.”<sup>49</sup> This is, actually, the same idea of ‘justice’ of the movement: “*justice is obtained by respecting the man – the peasant, the artisan – and his work... Paying them the just remuneration through fair prices in the most desperate cases*”<sup>50</sup>. But then, why not admitting what is evident?

The reason is simple: SF has not only the ambition to promote in the world good cooking and good wine. It also wants to reach a public which, besides being affluent, feels guilty for this, and wants to do something to soothe this embarrassment<sup>51</sup>. The masterstroke of SF lies exactly in having found a synthesis of the genuine desire to eat well and the need of being ‘on the right side’, in other words in having reconciled food and engagement. And this is why the movement is forced to disown the glutton, which is an intrinsically *disengaged* character. The “political” program of SF – which should enable its members to feel at ease with its own conscience - consists in changing the food habits, and the modes of food production, of the whole world’s population. It is clear that, in front of a such an immense task, the actual nature of the foods whose consumption is promoted by SF (*luxury products*) becomes rather embarrassing and must therefore be shaded off as much as possible. How could one seriously claim to feed the world with the Colonnata lard, the Zeri lamb, the Ustica lentil or the Tortona strawberry (not to speak of the gilded hunchbacked tench of the

---

<sup>43</sup> Laudan 2004, p. 134; Laudan 2001, p. 40 ff.; Montanari, p. 89 ff; Capatti and Montanari, p. 339

<sup>44</sup> Laudan 2004, p. 134; Capatti and Montanari, p. 339, p. 330.

<sup>45</sup> The latter is a point which, although only with reference to SF USA, was empirically verified by Gaytàn, p. 99 ff.

<sup>46</sup> See Fonte, *passim* and especially p. 21, which underlines how the same concepts of ‘local production’ and ‘proximity’ would be useless in case of a significant increase in offer. This was, by the way, the idea underlying the French “Terroir” system, which unsurprisingly is also the acknowledged model of SF: see Laudan 2004, p. 138 (“*by proclaiming that certain foodstuffs or meals were inextricably tied to particular places and to mythic histories, the promoters created scarcity and high prices*”).

<sup>47</sup> Limits to quantity are systematically imposed by SF upon the products which are to enter the Ark of Taste (Arca del Gusto): see Rule 4 in SF’s website, at the address <http://www.fondazione Slow Food.it/ita/arca/criteri.lasso>.

<sup>48</sup> See Petrini and Padovani, p. 127, p. 177, and also p. 132, p. 144, p. 176, as well as in Petrini 2005a, p. 130-131.

<sup>49</sup> See *Dizionario di SF*, entry “Qualità”.

<sup>50</sup> Petrini 2005a, p. 144. Similarly Greco and Scaffidi, p. 199.

<sup>51</sup> An eloquent confirmation thereof may be found in this passage: “*If one looks at what positive effects the passage to biological cultivation of coffee have had on the small Mexican producers, for example (especially in connection with the fair trade), one, in addition to enjoying a cup of excellent biological coffee, gets the positive feeling to have considerably improved, by his purchase choice, the life conditions of small farmers in far countries*” (Geier, p. 74).

Pianalto di Poirino or the Saluzzo white hen), washing all that down with a bottle of Barolo or Sciacchetra<sup>52</sup>?

## **6. Food: right, culture, and education.**

Refusing the traditional negative connotation of the glutton implies a positive redefinition of the pleasures of the table. For instance, it is claimed that the pleasure “*preached*” by SF “*is not an hedonistic act which is an end in itself*” but it has to be combined with “*awareness and responsibility, study and knowledge*”, because “*gastronomic pleasure, without a didactics and methodical knowledge, is halved*”. On the other hand, gastronomic pleasure is “*the premise for recovering slow and harmonious rhythms of life*”, since at the origins of the evils of modern civilization there is a break, which it is urgent to mend: the breking off “*of the couple pleasure-health*”, which has consisted in the expulsion “*of pleasure from the universe of positive – ethical and political - values and on its replacement with excess.*”<sup>53</sup>

Here we find clearly expressed the idea that pleasure plays a crucial role in the definition of a new society (which by the way is another clear evidence of SF’s direct descendance from the counterculture of the Sixties and Seventies). It is also striking the presentation of pleasure in terms of right, which is one of the Leitmotive of the movement, already explicitly contained in the founding manifesto of SF. By consequence, for SF, “*if pleasure is a moral right, an education, then an aesthetic of taste becomes necessary, even unavoidable, to guarantee it*”.<sup>54</sup> Such conclusion, however, is by no means necessary. Firstly, the fact that pleasure be a right is not at all self-evident, as it will be shown as soon as one tries to articulate such principle a little less vaguely. There are many pleasures: are all of them rights? And if the pleasure of wine is a right, who shall be entitled to drink of the rare and costly bottle of the best wine? If then we pass to the necessity of education, things don’t change. What is needed in order to grant everybody a right is that such right be affirmed and recognized by the law: in order to own a right to instruction, or to employment, or to house, etc., one does not need “education”, one needs that the law enacts them, that the institutions protect them, and so on. To sustain that education is sufficient to grant everybody a right is nonsense<sup>55</sup>.

Probably realizing the weakness of this position, SF adds another argument: that “*food is culture*”. It is necessary “*to give back centrality to food*”, so that food and its production recover “*their just centrality among the human activities*”; and it is necessary to do so starting from the principle that “*food is the main factor for defining human identity, since what we eat is always a cultural product*”.<sup>56</sup> That food is a cultural product is certain; but the argument proves too much. If being a “cultural product” is what renders an activity “the main factor for defining the human identity”, then all other human activities are such a “main factor” as well (from literature to dressing, from architecture to politics), and by consequence the centrality of food should be argued otherwise.

In all cases, SF promotes a capillary education, starting from the “*first years in the life, the ones in which tastes and distastes are formed*”<sup>57</sup>; and in fact, SF’s ‘educational’ initiatives are multiplying<sup>58</sup>. The aim of such education is ambitious: making “*less easy to drown in the chaos of fast life*”, calling to teach “*the masters of material culture*”, thus turning upside down “*an ideology which has always put the body and its needs into a second place after abstract knowledge*”. On the other hand,

<sup>52</sup> V. Laudan, 2004, p. 138, and *passim*.

<sup>53</sup> Petrini, 2001a, p. V, 46, 26 and 24.

<sup>54</sup> Petrini, 2001a, p. 74.

<sup>55</sup> On this see also Donati, p. 234: “*The principle of pleasure as right for all is noble, yet the argument somehow fails to hold water. Undoubtedly many would benefit from eating better, eating less or eating together more regularly but whether the pleasure offered by the ‘anthropological surplus’ of food bears any relevance to a ‘great family of consumers’ is questionable. After all, an anthropological surplus necessitates a preexisting surplus – of food, social success, leisure time and financial security – that is far from irrespective of class*”.

<sup>56</sup> Petrini, 2005a, p. 21 and 32.

<sup>57</sup> Petrini, 2001a, p. 75, 78.

<sup>58</sup> See them listed in Petrini 2006.



*“the increase and diffusion of ignorance on food matters is a social plague which leaves plenty of room to the most dangerous rascals”, and “the transmission of this knowledge... is one of the necessary requirements for rebuilding a civility ... If the idea that food education is as necessary as learning to read and to write takes no root, then it shall become impossible to plan the development of clean resources, to defend biodiversity and gastronomic resources”*<sup>59</sup>. The goal to be pursued in education should be that of *“staying well’ with themselves and with the others, of reaching a somatic and ‘libidic’ equilibrium”*. In short, a sort of home-made version of the Greek and Renaissance ideal of equilibrium between spiritual and physical faculties, not devoid of a badly concealed distrust for written culture<sup>60</sup> (admittedly, striking in a movement so prolific in books, magazines, journal articles etc.).

However, the very idea of an education of taste is ambiguous, not the least for its effectiveness (there are many instances of people who after having tasted *foie gras* returned to fried chips or who have tasted Barolo but continued to prefer CocaCola).<sup>61</sup>

## **7. Gastronomy and science**

From the necessity to educate the taste only a few steps lead us to a not less daring idea: that gastronomy is a science. “Gastronomy”, for SF, does not simply mean ‘eating well’: firstly, because saying so would mean to share *“the commonplace which looks at the history of nutrition – economy and subsistence – and at the history of gastronomy – culture and pleasure – as separate”*, and secondly *“because in so doing one takes into consideration only a small fraction, perhaps the less noble, of the complex system of ‘roots’ which are at the basis of our food”*. However, to the great annoyance of SF, the view of gastronomy as a science is not widespread<sup>62</sup>. On the contrary, according to SF, not only gastronomy is a science, but it is even a *“complex science”*, a sort of super-science which includes all others, since it studies aspects of nature and culture which are within the scope of each particular science.<sup>63</sup>

However, paradoxically, science – the true science – is watched with extreme suspicion by SF: because it is *“reductionist”* and *“quantitative”*, because it *“denies that some senses may serve to the interpretation of reality”*, because it is allied to *“productivism”*, and because it refuses to recognize *“equal dignity”* to the *“traditional knowledge”*. What is necessary is avoiding to *“establish new hierarchies”*; on the contrary one should *“let all types of man’s progresses coexist, in order to ‘go ahead’ with courage and the will to look always backward, before losing all orientation and triggering irreversible processes leading to the loss of all our resources. The producers of good, clean and fair food (most of them peasants), those who are not yet irreparably marked by the breaking of the umbilical cord with the earth, possess a knowledge which cannot be learnt at school, which cannot be calculated by mathematical formulas, but which is the result of a symbiotic relationship with the creation which many among us on this Earth have lost”*<sup>64</sup>. This is a vision of

---

<sup>59</sup> Petrini, 2001a, p. 79- 81.

<sup>60</sup> *“The Workshops are a return to the senses and the critical spirit against the authority of the book and the merchandise, of the printed chronicle and of the advertisement. Within the workshops taste is developed in its truest capacity. Of a pleasure which becomes knowledge and of knowledge which becomes pleasure”*: Petrini, 2001, p. 80. See also Petrini 2007, p. 1; Capatti 1997, *passim*; Scaffidi and Masini, *passim*. Where it has to be noted the (implied, and never discussed) conviction that the knowledge transmitted through writing could not “become pleasure”, too.

<sup>61</sup> Laudan, 2004, p. 141. The same author, *op. cit.*, p. 137, suspects that the insistence on the education of taste is an answer by SF to the fact that too few people appear to be sensible to the fascination of the ‘local’, ‘traditional’, ‘quality’ food promoted by SF.

<sup>62</sup> Petrini, 2005a, p. 37-38.

<sup>63</sup> See Petrini, 2005a, p. 51-52: gastronomy is the *“reasoned knowledge of all that refers to man insofar as he feeds himself, it helps to choose because it helps to understand what quality is. It helps people to enjoy a learned pleasure and to learn an enjoyable knowledge... knowledge is a right of all men, but also a duty: gastronomy is education”*.

<sup>64</sup> Petrini 2005a, p. 181 ff. Sometimes, the question is put in terms of social ransom for the lower classes: *“This means to attribute equal scientific dignity to the knowledge of those lower classes which were always marginalized and excluded in popular, ethnic, folkloristic corners”* (Petrini 2004). As if the place where

doubtful coherence: for example, the idea that science must be evaluated and discussed on the basis not of its methods or results but on the basis of the practical goals at which it is or can be employed is untenable (in addition to recalling irresistibly the traditionalist critiques of science);<sup>65</sup> and also the description of modern science as reductionist and merely quantitative is neither well-grounded nor particularly original, since it, too, is a part of a rather old fashioned controversy. Not to speak of the irrationalistic distortion to which SF submits the traditional knowledge of peasants and artisans, as if it were not also transmitted through education (although not written) and through communication, but instead through contact or magic (the “*symbiotic relationship with the creation*”).

In sum, this obsession for cultural recognition is loaded with a great suspicion for science, which SF is always ready to doubt of<sup>66</sup>, distinguishing apodictically between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ science (or technology)<sup>67</sup>, or adopting in a totally irresponsible way scientific theories and making a flag of them<sup>68</sup>, even years after the same theories have been radically confuted, or totally distorting their meaning. A strange mix of uncritical belief in scientific theories and of uncritical disbelief in scientific method.

Two examples will suffice to illustrate this peculiar attitude.

One example are the *food miles*, a measure of the environmental impact of food transport. SF rests on a famous English research<sup>69</sup> which tried to assess the real cost of food, not included into the sale price (in particular, the cost of the pollution deriving from production and transport activities). However, it is unlikely that the authors of the research would share the extremism of SF’s conclusions.<sup>70</sup> Certainly the subsequent researches do not; but unfortunately SF studiously omits any reference to the new literature on the topic, and refers to *food miles* as if they were uncontroversial and unequivocal data. The truth is quite different<sup>71</sup>, to the point that a restructuring of the sector leading (as it is required by the theory of the “short supply chain”) to a greater number of local suppliers could reduce the total distance to be covered, but such advantage would be more than offset by the use of smaller vehicles only capable of carrying a smaller load and therefore by the necessity to make more travels<sup>72</sup>; so that Oxfam has decided to invite consumers “*not to fall for the food miles fantasy that promises to save the planet but threatens to make life worse for thousands of poor farmers around the world*”: “*rejecting foods on the grounds of how far they have travelled oversimplifies the issue, unfairly punishes farmers from poor countries, and may even*

---

science comes from might be more relevant that the validity of its methods or of its conclusions; and as if the condition of the poor could be improved by teaching them something different from what is actually true.

<sup>65</sup> If one blames science because its discoveries might lead to disasters, then for the same reason one should condemn eating, since it might lead to indigestion. This approach is intrinsically reactionary because it leads to deem that science, in itself, is an evil (and, necessarily, it leads to the further conclusion that science, and knowledge in general, must be the privilege and the burden of a few wise men). The inescapable conclusion was famously expressed by Maistre, p. 303 : “*la science resserrée est un bien; trop répandue, c’est un poison*”. For a modern example, see Zolla 1964, p. 17: “*No science, unless it is a secret one used only by a caste of priests who understand it to be as dangerous as the fire, and master the art of renunciation, may stop creating devices which wear out man’s faculties ... It is obvious for the masses that Science in itself be good. Science is instead the Evil, when it turns to things other than the spiritual health*”.

<sup>66</sup> E.g., regarding GMOs: “*Nothing other than the law can protect us from an invisible presence of GMO products in our food ... since science did never take the time to justify or to ask permission for its experiments*”: Petrini, 2001a, p. 108-9.

<sup>67</sup> See e.g. Capatti 1997.

<sup>68</sup> See, typically, the certainty with which SF widespread uncertain data as those regarding the loss of biodiversity in the entry “Biodiversità” of the *Dizionario di SF* (“*During one century at least 330.000 vegetable varieties have extinguished and continue to extinguish, at the rhythm of one in six hours. Each year 17 millions of forests disappear*”). See on this Laudan 2004, p. 141.

<sup>69</sup> Pretty, Ball et alii.

<sup>70</sup> Petrini, 2005a, p. 124. On this point, however, SF’s opinion is very common in Italy: see e.g. Coldiretti 2008 a and 2008 b.

<sup>71</sup> Smith, Watkiss et alii.

<sup>72</sup> So much so that another study (of 2007) concluded that “*a consumer’s 10 km shopping trip to purchase one kilo of fresh products will generate more carbon dioxide emissions than the airborne transport of 1 kilo from Kenya*”: Saunders and Hayes, p. iv.

lead to higher emissions. For example, growing roses in artificial conditions in Holland and transporting to the UK produces almost six times more carbon than growing them in the warmer climate of Kenya and flying them in”<sup>73</sup> (in fact, energy efficiency is a function of the undertaking’s dimension, also in agriculture).<sup>74</sup> Not to mention that putting so much emphasis on *food miles* is incongruous if, at the same time, SF promotes the consumption of Italian typical products: unless one, absurdly, pretends that they should be consumed only locally (the Sciacchetra only in the Cinque Terre, the red onions only in Tropea, etc.).

Another good example of the confused attitude of SF towards science is biotechnology, and particularly GMOs. Officially, SF on GMOs “follows a strategy of prudence and caution from an health perspective, and of obstruction from a qualitative viewpoint”<sup>75</sup>. But notwithstanding its repeated assertions of wise caution (“we don’t accept being accused of Luddism and obscurantism”<sup>76</sup>), the truth is that SF is stubbornly opposed to GMOs resting upon arguments of no scientific validity<sup>77</sup> if not, sometimes, on paranoia<sup>78</sup>. Actually, SF’s position is an adamant refusal: “it is necessary to refuse the genetically modified organisms. I do not wish here to discuss whether they are or not dangerous to human health (...); I do not want here to dwell upon considerations of an ethical character (...) and neither do I wish to develop many arguments on their convenience for farmers (...).”<sup>79</sup> But how can one, without addressing the merits of the arguments against the GMOs, conclude that they must be banned? Our perplexity is increased when we read explanations like this: “GMOs are not sustainable from the environmental viewpoint ... GMOs are the ‘perfect’ product of industrial agriculture, the summa achieved in the quest for the ‘perfect variety’: more resistant, more productive, the ideal one-crop farming. But even without taking into account considerations of environmental compatibility (...), they are the top product of a productive system which upsets all principles of naturalness. The system is wrong: GMOs are the maximum expression of a way to conceive agricultural production which has no more a reason to exist because it is unsustainable from all viewpoints”<sup>80</sup>. Apart from the fact that the “scientific” data quoted by SF are groundless or irrelevant, when they are not simply contradictory<sup>81</sup>, it is apparent

<sup>73</sup> Oxfam.

<sup>74</sup> Schlich and Fleissner.

<sup>75</sup> Petrini, 2001a, p. 104.

<sup>76</sup> Petrini and Padovani, p. 256.

<sup>77</sup> One question, e.g., is the alleged possibility that GMO fields might “contaminate” the fields nearby: a possibility which, firstly, is in contradiction with the repeated claims that GMO seeds are ‘sterile’, and secondly it is irrelevant (the long-distance spread is very rare, and anyway this risk exists for all kinds of long-distance spreading plants, not only for GMOs). Or the commotion (or rather, psychosis) on the so-called ‘gene flow’ (see e.g. in Rifkin, *passim*), wherein transgenic plants are attributed the capacity to transfer the ‘added’ genes to other plants: apart from the fact that this event was never observed, one should also ask why (i) this transfer, were it possible, should occur only for GMO plants, and (ii) why it should occur only for the ‘added’ genes and not also for the other, ‘natural’ genes. For a comprehensive refutation of the main commonplaces on biotechnology, see Poli, p. 219 ff.; Lomborg, p. 342 ss.; Sala, *passim*.

<sup>78</sup> “In order to know the effects of the introduction into the ecosystem of these new species we must wait for decades, but multinationals like Monsanto or Novartis were in a hurry and did not bother to ask for permission before starting experiments which did soon yield huge profits. Worse still, the nations which did not open doors to their products are presently the target of a systematic contamination, accidental or not, which shall soon falsify all ‘Gmo free’ certifications, even if made in good faith” (entry “Ogm” of *Dizionario di SF*). A text like Shiva 2001 piles up almost all urban legends on GMOs. See also the debate between Petrini 2001 b and Dompé.

<sup>79</sup> Petrini, 2005a, p. 119.

<sup>80</sup> Petrini, *op.loc.ult.cit.*

<sup>81</sup> *Groundless*: e.g. the claim that the existing GMOs be ‘sterile’, thus forcing “the peasants to yearly purchases of seeds” (Petrini, 2001a, p. 108): the GMO products currently marketed are not sterile (see Sala, p. 129-130, wherein also the opportune distinction between ‘sterile’ and ‘hybrid’ seeds; see also Poli, p. 139 ff.). *Irrelevant*: this is the case of the fear that, through GMOs resistant to certain parasites, stronger parasite species may evolve; of the fear that transgenic cultivations may multiply out of control and invade other species’ habitat, overpowering them and thus also reducing biodiversity; of the possibility that GMO lands be “polluted for more than thirty years”, with impoverishment and risk of desertification of the soil (Petrini, 2001a, p. 106-107), all objections which are applicable to not-GMO cultivations as well. *Contradictory*: see

that the ultimate reasons for SF to oppose GMOs – i.e., their “unnaturalness” and their “unsustainability” – are ideological: the former, because the concept itself of naturalness in agriculture is meaningless, and the latter because one cannot conclude that a given practice is unsustainable simply by assuming this conclusion.

### **8. Natural, industrial, and traditional agriculture.**

In the SF “system” a crucial role is played by the critique of industrial agriculture and by the praise of the “traditional” one (although the distinctive characters of the latter remain always vague<sup>82</sup>). To start with, the history of Western agriculture is seen by SF as a gradual but continuous and, ultimately, fast and unstoppable, passage from ‘naturalness’ to ‘unnaturalness’<sup>83</sup>. Unfortunately, however, the concept of ‘naturalness’, if applied to agriculture, looks very problematic. In fact, if none of the plants grown by man exists in nature<sup>84</sup>, and if “*the history of agriculture has been the history of mankind until the nineteenth century*”<sup>85</sup>, it is unavoidable to conclude that agriculture is – like most human activities – an artificial intervention upon nature, an alteration thereof, even a violence (which required, for the antiquity, appropriate forms of compensation, like rites of expiation and purification). Something deeply artificial, in other words; and the conscience of the intrinsic unnaturalness of agriculture is a constant in Western culture<sup>86</sup>. This does not mean, obviously, that since all agricultural activities are ‘unnatural’ all of them are admissible; it does mean, however, that ‘naturalness’ cannot be the watershed between what can and cannot be done in agriculture, because ‘naturalness’, in agriculture, does not exist.

On the contrary, for SF agriculture became ‘unnatural’ only very recently, with the *green revolution*, i.e. with the triumph of chemistry (fertilizers, pesticides) and of “*inputs which are foreign to millennial ecosystems*”<sup>87</sup>, and with the renunciation to growing and breeding only the “*native varieties and races*”, which, being “*inserted into the ecosystem which saw their birth and evolution, are the guarantee for the conservation of that ecosystem*”. But, in the first place, do actually exist such things as “*millennial ecosystems*” and “*native varieties and races*”? Petrini and SF are shocked that today the square peppers of Asti are replaced by a Dutch variety, and in the place of their peppers the Asti farmers grow tulips, which according to SF would be one of the “*paradoxes of the agriculture combined with the so-called globalization: peppers which cross boundaries and mountains in exchange for tulips; products which are a symbol of two lands, grown at more than a thousand kilometers of distance, thus upsetting two agricultural traditions which rendered them typical and, evidently, well inserted in their original ecosystems*”<sup>88</sup>. Unfortunately, however, since peppers arrived to Europe from America in the sixteenth century (as in the same century tulips arrived to Europe from Turkey), in this case there was no “upsetting” of agricultural

---

e.g. the claim that GMOs are at the same time sterile and capable to reproduce beyond control: Petrini 2001a, p. 106 e 108.

<sup>82</sup> “*What we like to define as ‘new agriculture’, is a productive philosophy which relies on quality, biodiversity, respect for the environment, for animal welfare, for the landscape, for the health and the pleasure of consumers. An agriculture both environmentalist and gourmet which abandons once and for all the suicide parameter of quantity*” (entry “Presidio Slow Food”, in *Dizionario di SF*).

<sup>83</sup> Petrini, 2005a, p. 22.

<sup>84</sup> Diamond, p. 158 ff.

<sup>85</sup> Grigg, p.15.

<sup>86</sup> Thus Leopardi could write: “*a greatest part of what we call natural, is not, but is instead rather artificial: that is to say, cultivated fields, trees and other plants cared of and arranged in rows, rivers fastened between certain borders and dressed to a certain way, and similar things do not have the condition nor the appearance they would naturally have...; it is an artificial thing, and much different from what it would have been in nature*”: p. 181. And Cattaneo wrote that “*agriculture is an act of civilization, not of barbarity. Agriculture comes from the cities*” (p. 77), and that “*agrarian industry is a part of the commercial life of the peoples, it does not rise from natural ingenuity, by bucolic inspiration; but it comes in time from the institutions and the laws which open to capitals and to industry access to the lands*” (p. 76). It is perhaps not superfluous to specify that the word ‘industry’, used by Cattaneo, does not have the modern meaning.

<sup>87</sup> Petrini, 2005a, p. 22. See also Petrini 2006, p. 7.

<sup>88</sup> Petrini, 2005a, p. 5-6.

traditions nor any product “*well inserted in their original ecosystems*”; in any case, it is difficult to see why introducing a new variety was good in the sixteenth century whereas it would be an heresy or a “paradox” today. A sixteenth century SF would have prevented, among other things, also the birth of the famous Asti pepper soup!

The truth is that there are no agricultural products “*well inserted in their original ecosystems*”, for the simple (but good) reason that there are no “original agricultural ecosystems”. The products of agriculture and breeding are, from time immemorial, the most “globalized” on earth<sup>89</sup>. And yet, SF insists: “*the liberty [or food sovereignty] means producing our food in harmony with what is around us. In Burkina Faso, in San Francisco, in Bra, in Mongolia*”<sup>90</sup>. But this ‘harmony’ is an ambiguous and unhistorical concept, an artificial construction.

“Naturalness” is also as little defined as much often it is evoked<sup>91</sup>. For example, it is considered as a *condicio sine qua non* of food quality: “*quality of a food product is the greater the more that product is natural. Natural is not equivalent to organic: we are speaking of a system, not of a certified method of production. Natural means not employing additives, preservatives, flavorings, technologies of production which upset the naturalness of the processes of working, breeding, growing, etc.*”<sup>92</sup> However, using the concepts of natural ‘systems’ or ‘processes’ to define a ‘natural product’ is a mere vicious circle (one would have in any case to define a ‘natural system’ or ‘process’, and this is not that easy). The unavoidable result is that SF finds itself lost within labyrinths of distinctions so subtle as to eclipse even the Jesuitic casuistry mocked by Pascal<sup>93</sup>.

SF’s critique of modern industrial agriculture is based also on other premises. The main one is that, notwithstanding the increase in the extension of cultivated land, in the use of fertilizers, of water consumption, and of pollution, the food produced is not yet sufficient to feed all.<sup>94</sup> On the contrary, agro-industry “*in some way gave us the illusion that the food problems of mankind could be solved*”<sup>95</sup>. Therefore, since the solution of the world food problems is an ‘illusion’, one would conclude that those problems cannot be solved and that one must stop all efforts and return to the

---

<sup>89</sup> “*Today, when seeds are transported over the whole globe by ship and plane, we take it for granted that our meals are a geographic mishmash. A typical American fast-food restaurant meal would include chicken (first domesticated in China) and potatoes (from the Andes) or corn (from Mexico), seasoned with black pepper (from India) and washed down with a cup of coffee (of Ethiopian origin). Already, though, by 2,000 years ago, Romans were also nourishing themselves with their own hodgepodge of foods which mostly originated elsewhere. Of Roman crops, only oats and poppies were native to Italy. Roman staples were the Fertile Crescent founder package, supplemented by quince (originating in the Caucasus); millet and cumin (domesticated in Central Asia); cucumber, sesame, and citrus fruit (from India); and chicken, rice, apricots, peaches, and foxtail millet (originally from China). Even though Rome’s apples were at least native to western Europe, they were grown by means of grafting techniques that had developed in China and spread westward from there*”: Diamond, p. 185-6. Other details in Grigg, p. 160 ff.

<sup>90</sup> Petrini 2006, p. 7.

<sup>91</sup> Not that there have been no attempts in this direction. See e.g. Perullo, who however does not go beyond the obsessive repetition that the concept of ‘naturalness’ (never defined, save for generic references to the concepts of ‘limit’ or ‘finiteness’ of the human existence: that is, to concepts which need themselves to be defined) is not an ‘unhistorical’, conservative or even reactionary concept. Or see Scaffidi and Masini, p. 27, who burst into a revealing tirade upon the man/nature relationship: “*The conceptual substratum of this definition must not be overlooked: the man, evidently, is considered as other than nature, non a part of it. It is the legitimation of that man-nature opposition which produced so many evils starting from the Enlightenment*”. A critique of the Enlightenment could not be lacking...

<sup>92</sup> Thus the entry “Qualità” of the *Dizionario di SF*. It is odd that SF admits the complexity of the concept of ‘quality’, only to use, to define it, that (immensely more complex) of ‘naturalness’!

<sup>93</sup> See, e.g., this passage: “*The use of the barrique is a cellar technique, which does not alter the wine’s naturalness. But a thickener, which alters the biochemical values of the grapes produced in that particular year, is a natural proceeding? Is it still only a cellar technique? Someone may say that also thinning out the vines means altering the seasonal course of farming. But having admitted once and for all that we are not speaking of returning to the pure state of nature, that we are still speaking of an interaction of man with nature for food aims, we believe that thinning out is natural and therefore can produce quality wines, while thickening cannot*”: *Dizionario di SF*, entry “Qualità”.

<sup>94</sup> Petrini, 2005a, p. 24-25. See also *ibidem*, p. 18-19; Petrini and Padovani, p. 167 ff.

<sup>95</sup> Petrini, 2005a, p. 20.

old ways. But SF explains neither how could we get back to the previous situation, nor how could we (once we got back to the previous situation) feed the world population, which certainly is no more what it used to be in, say, 1750. The focus of SF's attention is in fact another: "*food and its production must recover their just centrality and the criteria guiding our actions need be rediscussed. The problem in fact is no more the quantity of food produced, but its complex quality ... The goal is to concretely improve the life of all, but without being imposed a model of development no more compatible with the planet's needs*".<sup>96</sup> But if the question is no more the "quantity of food produced", why the *green revolution* was "a disaster"? And, reciprocally, how could one claim to "concretely improve the life of all" without having solved the problem of hunger? And why hunger – used as a dialectic weapon against the GMO supporters<sup>97</sup> as well as against modern agriculture – is then hastily forgotten to raise hymns to the quality of life (but whose life)? It is difficult not to share the impression that, beyond hollow declarations of principle, SF is totally devoid of interest for the actual inequalities in the access to food, and is only interested into tastes and cooking traditions<sup>98</sup>.

Actually, about how to increase farm production, SF has very few suggestions to offer<sup>99</sup>. Which is not surprising, since SF is convinced that the hunger problem is not due to underproduction<sup>100</sup>. This, however, is in contradiction with the claim that the *green revolution* has been unable to solve the hunger problem. Because either the production is equal to the needs, and then it is not true that modern agriculture is a failure; or else production is insufficient already today, and it shall be the more so in the future, and then it becomes very urgent to explain how to increase it, and what kind of agriculture should replace the present one (and how to feed people without recreating either a mass hunger or the "two-tier" food system typical of pre-industrial societies)<sup>101</sup>. But the only clear thing is that SF wants to stop the industrial agriculture (which it calls "*a pure contradiction*")<sup>102</sup>: what we need is to "*de-industrialize agriculture*"<sup>103</sup>. Once again, it is necessary to refuse all which is "*unnatural*", which "*introduce an unsustainable artifice within the dialectic relation between man*

<sup>96</sup> Petrini, 2005a, p. 20-21.

<sup>97</sup> "*Another mystification of the GMO dei ex machina is that these cultivations help defeating hunger in the world. But it is not equal to the complexity of the problem to consider <<hunger>> as it were a problem of production without taking into account the opposite logic which inspires the world agriculture. By the subsidies to production, in fact, excesses of production have been favored, and we cannot feed all the people in the world because of a problem of distribution. It is always and only the money – and the lack thereof – that maintains a regime of exploitation and underdevelopment*": Petrini, 2005a, p. 108. Apart from the fact that it is unclear why "*the money – and the lack thereof*" would not be a "*problem of production*", too (wherefrom shall the money come, if not from production?), it is to be noted here the characteristic method of asserting first the complexity of a problem in order to accuse of oversimplification the solutions proposed by others, and immediately thereafter to suggest another solution which is even more simplistic. In fact, SF does not venture to indicate how to solve the problem of unequal distribution: and actually it is so "complex" that its solution, in a reasonable time, is nowhere to be seen; on the contrary, biotechnologies are already capable to provide solutions which are technologically adequate to the problem of increasing production, both nowadays and in the future (when, due to the increase of population, increasing production shall become an absolute necessity: see, for the necessity of doubling production up to 2050, Mazoyer and Roudart, p. 22).

<sup>98</sup> Donati, p. 233 ff.

<sup>99</sup> Petrini, 2005a, p. 25. The vagueness of SF on this point is well highlighted by Laudan, 2004, p. 142: "*So we are left with the fact – puzzling at first sight because of the socialist or communist background of the SF founders- that SF has nothing to say about the plight of the hungry worldwide*".

<sup>100</sup> An idea stressed also in the entry "Fame" of the *Dizionario di SF*: "*an hunger which we have already understood not being a problem of production, but of distribution; and also of reduction of consumption*". SF often declares its goal as being that of replacing quantity with quality: it is better eating less but better (see Petrini's interview with the *New York Times* of 7.26.2003, quoted in Sassatelli and Davolio, p. 15: "*We're too used to cheap food. And we need to be eating better-quality food, but less of it. There are problems of obesity because people don't understand that... So the goal is not to make it cost less. The goal is to eat less*").

<sup>101</sup> Laudan, 2004, p. 142.

<sup>102</sup> Or as an "*absurd idea*": Petrini, 2005a, p. 23.

<sup>103</sup> Petrini 2005a, p. 117, p. 118, p. 119.

*and earth*”: to eliminate pesticides and chemical fertilizers, to renounce to intensive agriculture, to limit ourselves to native races and varieties. This could seem a portrait of organic farming, but it is not<sup>104</sup>. What SF is thinking of, instead, is rather a “traditional” agriculture, meaning a mere repetition of pre-existing methods and techniques<sup>105</sup>, which, although it does not exclude in principle all innovation<sup>106</sup>, is nonetheless embedded into a social- cultural-economic structure considered as immutable. The idea itself of a “traditional” agriculture, moreover, like that of a “natural” one, is wrong (since the history of agriculture is a succession of revolutions and innovations almost uninterrupted<sup>107</sup>).

We are facing therefore the paradox of a movement which refuses industrial and intensive farming because they could not solve the hunger problem<sup>108</sup>, only to put in its place an agriculture which would produce still less, or (if one wished to maintain approximately the actual level of output, although insufficient to feed the world population in the next future) would cause enormous environmental damages due to the necessity of deforestation on a huge scale<sup>109</sup>.

### **9. Sustainability and critique of growth.**

Given the simplistic way in which it employs the concept of naturalness, it is not surprising that SF doubts of the necessity of growth<sup>110</sup> for reasons not more solid. Its theory is based upon catastrophic data (collapse of biodiversity, exponential increase in consumption: “*the earth could feed 10 billion people eating as the Indians, 5 billion following the Italians’ diet, but only 2,5 billion of individuals with the food regime of the US citizens*”<sup>111</sup>), which however, contrary to what SF believes, are not evidences, but hypotheses, which recently have been much criticized<sup>112</sup>.

Lacking a consensus on the “limits to growth”, to take for granted, as SF does<sup>113</sup>, the hypothesis that our system is “*a capitalism which can be translated into the most extreme and egoistic individualism, into the debasing, up to the wasting, of all common goods. Goods as land and water,*

---

<sup>104</sup> “*Also the farming which makes no use of chemical products can be unsustainable if it is inserted into the agroindustrial system of food production. If it adopts a way of thinking which is reductionist and uniquely aimed at profit, which takes in no account the environmental costs, which does not respect the life of the earth and of the men who populate it. De-industrializing agriculture requires a new relation between man and nature*”: Petrini, 2005a, p. 120.

<sup>105</sup> *Dizionario di SF*, entry “Agricoltura”.

<sup>106</sup> SF defines the environmental-friendly agriculture as “*all those practices, traditional and new, which tend to produce maintaining as much as possible unchanged the ecosystem and the fertility of the soil as well as reducing pollution and water consumption*”, entry “Agricoltura” of the *Dizionario di SF*. “*Food innovation, for ages identified with the industrial process, suggests a conservative vision of the world, based on repetition of consumptions, on an abstract concept of health, on a quality which is more and more helped by gadgets, by popularity tests, by marketing, by advertising ... Tradition instead... represents one face of modernity: it requires patience, a new design of the production processes and the recovery of different skills,, paradoxically appearing as the true innovation in the food field*”: *Dizionario di SF*, entry “Tradizione/Innovazione”.

<sup>107</sup> See e.g. Mazoyer and Roudart, p. 411 ff.

<sup>108</sup> “*In such a scenario, with 820 million people in the world starving, the choice of intensive and industrial agriculture does not appear as the best solution. It becomes instead a way to further impoverish the planet*”: Petrini and Padovani, p. 150. See also Petrini 2005a, p. 115.

<sup>109</sup> “*Organic farming... can be an option for some inhabitants of the rich countries, out of an homage to the freedom of choice, but cannot solve the problems of poor countries or the competitiveness problems of the rich ones. Its main weakness is that it is an << extensive agriculture >>: low output from a great surface, the contrary of an <<intensive agriculture >> (the biggest possible output form the smallest possible surface). The necessary option is, instead... intensive agriculture... The extensive agriculture would need a great increase of the land, and this is impossible*”: Sala, p. 109. See also Poli, p. 152 ff.

<sup>110</sup> “*From 1960 through 2000 the world population has doubled, while the food production has grown of 250%. Today in the world we are six billion, and, again according to FAO, food production would be sufficient for 12 billion people. But in front of these data, could one still speak of ‘development’?*”: Petrini 2005a, p. 20.

<sup>111</sup> Petrini and Padovani, p. 150.

<sup>112</sup> Grigg, p. 21 ff.; Tietenberg, p. 299 ff.; Turner, Pearce and Bateman, p. 54 ff.

<sup>113</sup> Petrini and Padovani, p. 168.

*like peace and happiness*<sup>114</sup>, is only an apodictic position, based, moreover, on the distortion of elementary data and concepts. For instance, it is by no means certain that the “common goods” be endangered by the ‘capitalism’, since it is easy to reply that, on the contrary, only the economic and technological progress produced by capitalism guarantees a better protection of those goods, and has even generated, in the conscience of the majority, the sense of their importance and of the necessity to protect them. Moreover, there is a fundamental confusion on the meaning of common goods (*commons*), which is not a synonym of exhaustible resource, but indicates all those goods which are at the same time *non-excludable* and *rival in consumption*. Thus, diamonds and oil are not commons, differently from, e.g., beaches or water (or the wild beasts, like sea fishes). The reason why commons are facing the risk of exhaustion or excessive consumption (a case known in economics as the *tragedy of the commons*) is not the immorality or egoism of consumers, but the impossibility to limit the access to those goods; it follows – although this conclusion has never been drawn by SF – that one way to limit consumption of the commons is to privatize them. Nor one gets out of mere vagueness until one has been clearly explained what of more “sustainable” should replace capitalism. SF instead swings between anticonsumerist positions (*downshifting*, fair trade)<sup>115</sup> and obscure references to the “*right of people to take care of their own nutrition and to freely and democratically decide the kind of agriculture they prefer*”: which ideas are as superfluous (because nobody denies this right, and actually one may wonder why SF disputes the fact that decisions in the contemporary world are taken democratically) as practically contradicted by SF’s adamant conviction that only one way is possible: “*peasant agriculture becomes fundamental in order to strengthen the struggle against GMOs, and for biodiversity, food sovereignty, keeping the farmers alive, the occupation of lands, the protection of the environment, the struggle against the agro-chemical and agro-food multinationals*”.<sup>116</sup>

#### **10. A new kind of development: the food communities and Mother Earth**

If SF’s idea of “sustainability” remains vague, by necessity also its attempts to describe a new kind of sustainable development cannot be well defined: sustainability is incapable, being in itself undefined (as is “naturalness”), to define a process. And in fact, SF is obliged to introduce a new paradigm to describe the desired new economy/society.

The Terra Madre (Mother Earth) movement should represent an example of “*a truly sustainable development, unconnected to the idea of economic growth at all costs, but connected to the idea of human growth, to the diffusion of a common good which offers to us a less gloomy future and quality food for all*”. This new development should create “*new alternative values: gratuitousness, an economy independent from money, an economic evaluation (not monetization) of non-material goods and of specific abilities, innovative and sustainable rules for the distribution of products, an extended right to mobility, a reciprocal enrichment based on different human experiences, a new dignity for traditional knowledge and for peasant life*”. To do so “*we cannot but rely upon the new technologies*”<sup>117</sup>. Firstly it is to be noted that SF remembers industry and progress only when it needs them, but is ready to quickly forget their existence once they have delivered. The technological progress is also considered as given, independently from what Marx once called the relations of production: SF does never wonder how could a society of small farmers survive, what institutions it would create, how would it obtain the needed capital, and how could it experience a technological progress. This system (which, however, SF does never describe) “*can and must work because it is the way to progressively correct some macroscopic distortions of our food system*”: where it is to be noted the inadvertent passage from the normative plan to the descriptive one,

<sup>114</sup> Petrini, 2005a, p. 183.

<sup>115</sup> For a telling example, Petrini and Padovani, p. 150-151.

<sup>116</sup> Petrini and Padovani, p. 168.

<sup>117</sup> Petrini 2005a, p. 201, 209.



which reflects<sup>118</sup> the typical contempt of the ideologist for reality, which has the bad defect not to fit in the system.

In this new world, it would eventually emerge (we are not told how nor why: perhaps ‘naturally’, like a plant grows from the seed) a “*predisposition to gift, to gratuitousness*”, which would assume “*an economic value, although not expressed in money*”, a “*logic of gratuitousness under which there is no true utilitarian exchange, but a reciprocal gift, of knowledge, of hospitality, of opportunities, of tastes, of views of the world and of education. It is a giving without asking, but being assured to get back because we are on the same level, with the same dignity and the same predisposition to let other people grow up, being aware of the existence of limits and taking care not to trespass them only in order to gain money and lose humanity*”<sup>119</sup>.

From this tirade one gathers that the great novelty of SF is nothing else than the return to a primitive society - those, that is, studied by Mauss, Malinowski, Finley or Godelier -, in which institutions such as the *potlatch* and the gift represent the basis of the socioeconomic system (although, one must add, without excluding all kinds of exchange)<sup>120</sup>. It was, as we today know after decades of interdisciplinary studies<sup>121</sup>, a kind of society which not only suffered of a systematic scarcity, and in which the very concepts of capital and productivity were ignored, but also a society which, as well as all other pre-industrial ones<sup>122</sup>, far from being more ‘human’ and ‘generous’ than the modern one, were on the contrary based upon robbery, violence, and systematic exploitation of nature and other people, not to mention their proclivity to peculiar institutions such as slavery. But SF ignores this vast debate, as well as it does not know (when it invokes a return to “*gratuitous hospitality*”<sup>123</sup>) that a great lawyer of the nineteenth century had indicated, in the passage from the ancient ‘hospitality’ to the modern hotel an enormous progress in human history, and another one expressed this same progress in the famous formula “*from status to contract*”<sup>124</sup>.

The ‘new’ concept of development of SF is paradoxical also for another reason: according to SF, in fact, “*no one can be saved if he is not allowed to know, to realize that he, too, owns material wealth*”. In other words, one is ‘saved’ only once one realizes that there is no need to be saved. “*Goal of the future Presidia of SF in the underdeveloped areas shall be to recover and spread the traditional knowledge, so that it becomes the engine of development and welfare. Note: the <<poor>>countries are actually rich in an extraordinary heritage of vegetable and animal species, in ancient local knowledge, in unexploited human potentialities*”<sup>125</sup>. There are, therefore, no such things as poor countries: the secret of development lies not in producing more food, more water, more instruction, more hospitals, more drugs, more roads, more healthy houses, in a word in the *development*, but simply in convincing the underdeveloped countries that they are not underdeveloped. Admittedly, this solution is as simple as ingenious. On the other hand, continues SF, there are ecosystems “*based on animal species which allow a community to live prosperously*”<sup>126</sup>. But how? Thanks to the recommendation in the SF guide (*Food Planet*), and to the

<sup>118</sup> Petrini 2005a, p. 210. It is difficult not to think of the ironies of Marx and Engels, pp. 84 ff., on Bruno Bauer’s philosopher who walked “*sure of his victory and victorious*”.

<sup>119</sup> Petrini 2005a, p. 243.

<sup>120</sup> See Latouche 2006, p. 44: “*conviviality reintroduces the spirit of gift into the social commerce beside the law of the jungle and brings back the philia, the Aristotelian friendship*”, wherein also a praise of the Middle Ages (“*its economy, certainly important, is deeply ‘embedded’ into the social framework, to repeat the expression of the great anthropologist Karl Polanyi*”, p. 46).

<sup>121</sup> A debate made – starting from the rediscovery of the Marx’s manuscripts on the *Forms which precede capitalist production*, and stimulated by the work of K. Polanyi – by anthropologists, historians, archaeologists, classicists, economists, philosophers etc. An interesting survey of the debate can be found in Carandini, especially pp. 208 ff.

<sup>122</sup> As it has been documented, among others, by Cipolla, p. 31 ff. (see in particular this passage, ibidem, p. 35: “*in those centuries gift and robbery as an alternative to exchange were economically more relevant than the exchange itself*”).

<sup>123</sup> Petrini 2005a, p. 17. See also Capatti 1996.

<sup>124</sup> We refer, respectively, to R. von Jhering, *Der Zweck im Recht*, and to Sumner Maine, p. 130.

<sup>125</sup> Petrini, 2001a, p. 102-103. Explicitly in the sense of the text is Cassano, p. 67.

<sup>126</sup> Petrini, 2001a, p. 66.

subsequent notoriety of the place within the “*glutton community*”. Thus, the survival and prosperity of the ‘traditional’ community presupposes the existence of rich consumers and, consequently, of the developed countries (and one should also ask how this situation could be supported by SF, which is a fierce critic of transports and tourism, which both destroy ecosystems and traditions)<sup>127</sup>.

The basic unit of this new kind of “development” would be “*the rural community with its rites, its feasts, its social relationships, its agricultural practices, its beliefs, [which] is not only the topic of an anthropological analysis, but can influence politics, economy and sciences with extraordinary and unexpected results*”. Such rural communities are composed of a population of fishermen, peasants, dairymen, cooks and innkeepers<sup>128</sup>. Called “*food communities*”,<sup>129</sup> they should be the elementary units from which we should start anew: “*food communities have a strategic importance in designing a new society, a fair and united society. The communities, in fact, are based on feeling, on fraternity, on the refusal of egoism. They bind in the work the destinies of women and men engaged in defending their traditions, their cultures and their farming*”<sup>130</sup>.

Actually, it isn’t that difficult to become a member of these ‘communities’: in particular, one does not need to produce anything. In fact, “*consuming is difficult today, even more than producing*”, and “*‘Consumption’ can no more hide what is actually its true meaning, that is, tear, wear, destruction, progressive exhaustion. Therefore, starting from the words, we must change our attitude. Consumption is the final act of the production and distribution process: it is to be seen as such, and no more as external to the process. The old consumer must therefore begin to feel somehow a part of the productive process, understanding it, influencing it with its preferences, supporting it in case of difficulty, refusing it when it is wrong or unsustainable. The old consumer, today a new gourmet, must begin to feel like a co-producer. Liability of the producer shall be to accept it as such, in order to create a new community of intent, a new productive community with food at its center (which in fact we shall call food community), the food as its only and fundamental value*”<sup>131</sup>: here the similarity with a famous page by Ruskin is striking<sup>132</sup>. Note that the whole passage, like other similar ones<sup>133</sup>, is weakened by the complete misunderstanding of the relations

---

<sup>127</sup> This point is correctly noted also by Laudan, 2001, p. 42-43 (“*If we romanticize the past, we may miss the fact that it is the modern, global, industrial economy... that allows us to savor traditional, peasant, fresh, and natural foods...Culinary Luddism, far from escaping the modern global food economy, is parasitic upon it*”: by the way, the author defines “culinary Luddists” the supporters of the return to ‘traditional’ foods and tastes and critics of the “Culinary Modernism”).

<sup>128</sup> Petrini and Padovani, p. 169.

<sup>129</sup> Defined in detail in Petrini 2005a, p. 178. See also Capatti 2006, p. 6.

<sup>130</sup> Petrini and Padovani, p. 203.

<sup>131</sup> Petrini 2005a p. 178, as well as p. 165-166.

<sup>132</sup> Ruskin, p. 144 (“*Consumption absolute is the end, crown, and perfection of production; and wise consumption is a far more difficult art than wise production. Twenty people can gain money for one who can use it; and the vital question, for individual and for nation, is, never ‘how much do they make?’ but ‘to what purpose do they spend?’*”).

<sup>133</sup> “*Consumption has no more something in common with production*”: Petrini, 2005a, p. 167, or p. 169. A similar misunderstanding is also present in many contemporary movements of ‘critical consumption’: see on this Sassatelli and Davolio, p. 6, who speak of a strategy of “*re-embedding consumer practices in the local natural environment, in communal social relationships and in the production process*”. For an interesting analysis of some contemporary restatements of the relations between production and consumption see Sassatelli, p. 135 ff. (with reference particularly to De Certau and Miller). It is difficult not to recall the words of the *German Ideology*: “*This is on the other hand the exact way of reasoning by which all noblemen, priests, rentiers, etc., have always demonstrated their productivity*” (Marx and Engels, p. 515); or still: “*When one starts from the production it is necessary to worry oneself with the real conditions of production and of the productive activity of men. But when one starts from consumption it is possible to content oneself by declaring that today we do not consume <<humanely>> and stating the principle of the <<human consumption>>, of the education to the true consumption, and the like, without dwelling even the shortest moment on the real life conditions of men and on their activity. We must also observe, lastly, that precisely the economists who start from consumption are reactionaries and ignore the revolutionary element contained in the competition and in the great industry*” (Marx and Engels, p. 517).

between production and consumption. Consumption is not the ‘final act of the productive process’: it is simply the other face of production (we produce so that others may consume, we produce what others consume, and we consume what others produce), the one cannot be separated from the other: the addition of a ‘personal knowledge’ is wholly superfluous and, in most cases, impossible. What is the ‘wrong model’ envisaged by SF is a mystery (if someone kills a cow and sells me a steak, this is ‘consumption’ whether I buy the steak in a supermarket or in a ‘food community’); but if there is one, surely it lies in the conviction that a vague “*feeling somehow a part of the productive process*” be sufficient to magically transform the consumer into a ‘co-producer’. Not to mention that it is unclear why such a relation of ‘co-production’ should exist for food but not for all the other products one purchases (between the TV broadcasts and the TV watchers, between a supermarket and its clients, between a washing machine and its purchasers, between the telephone company and its users...).

We are dealing, in sum, with pure rhetorical exercises, void of substance: idealizations of an imaginary past, of which one selects only the appealing features, systematically forgetting all others. Thus, the idea of a return to the “*jeffersonian ideal of a government ruled by the values of a nation of farmers*”<sup>134</sup> is greeted with enthusiasm, but forgetting that one of those values was slavery; and when SF praises the “*traditional role of the women in the food chain*”<sup>135</sup>, one should also remember that such role has submitted women to a gravely subordinated condition for centuries, and that the emancipation of women in the developed countries occurred precisely by overthrowing that traditional role<sup>136</sup>. And so on.

### **11. The invention of tradition and the oblivion of history.**

The recovery of tradition, which is the ‘alternative’ development proposed by SF, is “*an idea of slow development*” based upon “*the crossing of agricultural and touristic realities, with a modest residential expansion but also with some industrial presence, with a peculiar interpretation of tradition, in addition to a constructive centrality of landscape*”; the “*defence of slow territories can be obtained only slowing down the growth in favour of a qualitatively better development*”<sup>137</sup>.

Behind us, says SF, there is “*a treasury: the key allowing us to begin again, slowly, to build a rural world functional to our real needs, which are not the accumulation of new wealth, but its redistribution ... The treasury is the ‘slow knowledge’, living in the arms and hearts of million of peasants clung to their land, in the hands of cooks near to the world of agricultural production, in the traditions of people who need to improve their condition starting from their status, and not completely disowning it, throwing it away*”.<sup>138</sup>

But within the very concept of tradition lies a serious difficulty. Many and intense changes have occurred, e.g. in tastes and food habits, and SF is not unaware of this; but still it proclaims its intention to “*keep alive and fruitful*” food traditions.<sup>139</sup>

However, food “traditions”, as well as the roles or the social level of a given cooking practice, can be extremely different in space and time<sup>140</sup>. Hypostatizing them, taking them as given once and for

<sup>134</sup> Petri and Padovani, p. 208-209.

<sup>135</sup> It is noteworthy the emphasis by which Petri 2006, p. 6, invites to “*maintaining the century-long and fundamental role of the women in the food chain*”. Interesting also the anecdote told by Petri 2005, p. 74.

<sup>136</sup> On which see Allen and Sachs, *passim*, especially p. 15 ff., and Walter, p. 9-10: both authors highlight how the home cooking of the past was (and still is in some parts of the world) a burden of the women, thus prevented from access to other jobs, and how this is “*a key component of their exploitation, oppression, and, accordingly, their resistance*” (Allen and Sachs, p. 15)

<sup>137</sup> Petri and Padovani, p. 135-137.

<sup>138</sup> Petri 2005a, p. 189.

<sup>139</sup> Petri and Padovani, p. 114.

<sup>140</sup> “*The link between food consumptions and lifestyles, defined in relation to the social hierarchy, continues with different modalities in the most recent centuries (...) Symbols are a cultural product and they change from an epoch to another as well as from a society to another, at the same time as the changes of practical behaviours of society and of individuals. ... Similar phenomena are occurring under our eyes, with inversions of meaning (due to the passage from the society of hunger to the society of abundance) which lead, for*

all, instead than considering them as the result of a long transformation, i.e. as an historical product, is a purely ideological operation: “*It is a form of <<folkloric revival >>... i.e., one way in which contemporary society <<recovers>> the past overturning their meaning: a perfectly legitimate operation if done with the awareness of creating a new culture; a ambiguous and misleading operation, if one tries to smuggle it as a simple repetition of the past*”<sup>141</sup>. And this leads to a series of reversals of the historical truth. For instance, it leads to believe that ‘natural’ foods have always been widespread in the past, whereas, on the contrary, they have been always seen with suspicion since they were considered unwholesome (at least until the birth of the modern methods of industrial conservation and the rise of the modern hygienic-sanitary and transport methods)<sup>142</sup>. It leads to imagine that ‘localness’ and ‘seasonality’ were the traditional attributes of the healthy and tasty food, whereas, on the contrary, local and seasonal food were left to the poor, and, on the contrary, the rich diet of the privileged few included food of the most diverse origin<sup>143</sup>. It leads to believing in the existence of local ‘traditional’ cuisines whereas actually they, as well as most of the ‘traditional’ recipes contained in our cooking handbooks, are a most recent phenomenon, not prior, and even normally subsequent, to the Industrial Revolution<sup>144</sup>. Or it leads, finally, to think that genuineness and pleasantness of the food were a prerogative of the country, while, on the contrary, the city has always been the place where food was more abundant and more tasty<sup>145</sup>. From this viewpoint, SF perfectly fits in that ‘pastoral’ ideology of the country which R. Williams has shown to have emerged in the Eighteenth-century England: through an arbitrary cut of times and places, the nostalgic discourses on an allegedly uncontaminated ‘nature’ have been developed by the bourgeoisie in order to create visions of pastoral-idyllic lifestyles, which actually did never exist and whose only function was to idealize “*a deep desire for stability, served to cover and to evade the actual and bitter contradictions of the [present] time*”, as well as “*to promote superficial comparisons and to prevent real ones*”<sup>146</sup>.

The invention, by SF, of an ‘unhistorical’, ‘mythical’, and ‘romantic’ past, has been also noticed by many<sup>147</sup>.

In particular, it is striking the oblivion of history and the misunderstanding of the present documented by Gaytàn among the members of SF USA. These people ascribe cultural value only to food traditions originating far away from the USA in space or time; complain of the absence of ‘traditions’ in the USA and are busy in ‘creating’ new ones under the shape of “*particular cultural moments*”; impute the end of the meals with the family to the fact that the woman “*now she doesn’t want to be a stay at home mom; she wants to have a career. Then who does the cooking?*”; denounce the lack, in the USA, of European artisans (“*so, in this country you have poor people without the artisan background*”), and therefore invoke support to the artisans as a way to “*restoring culture*”. In other words, they employ “*recycled discourses from the past*” and “*operate within a new global collective imaginary that draws from an established hierarchy of culture, [so that] they are almost always limited by the boundaries of the elite hierarchies on which they rely*”, and thus they “*exclude Non-European and urban working-class expressions of culture from articulations of resistance*”, so that their political use of the “*global collective imaginary*” is “*riddled with*

---

*example, to consider as signs of high cultural and social quality products traditionally viewed as poor and rural ones, such as the inferior cereals, millet, rye, barley, spelt, once connected to images of peasant hunger and opposed to the corn of the rich, which, in turn, is today refused by the diet of the élite*: Montanari, p. 103-104.

<sup>141</sup> Montanari, p. 104. On the point see Hobsbawm and Ranger (Eds.), especially p. 6 ff.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. Laudan, 2001, p. 36-38; Montanari, p. 21 ss., 65 ff..

<sup>143</sup> Laudan, 2001, p. 38; Montanari, p. 23 ff., 109 ff. It is also sufficient to recall a famous literary example, the dinner of Trimalchio in Petronius.

<sup>144</sup> See Montanari, p. 114-115. Laudan, 2001, p. 39, adds: “*Not only were many ‘traditional’ foods created after the industrialization and urbanization, a lot of them were dependent on it*”.

<sup>145</sup> Laudan, 2001, p. 39; Capatti and Montanari, p. 101.

<sup>146</sup> Williams 1973, p. 45, 54. The likeness is convincingly argued by Gaytàn, p. 11 ff.

<sup>147</sup> Among which Jones et alii, p. 303; Roos et alii, p. 7.

*paradoxes and ironies*<sup>148</sup>. This vision of tradition is purely mythical; above all, it does not recognize “*the conditions of inequity or oppression often inherent within the preservation of tradition- whether they are socio-economic differences limiting access to education and opportunity or a gender tradition in which the labor of women in the kitchen bears the responsibility for maintaining harmony in the family home and preserving the cultural traditions of society*”.<sup>149</sup> A “*nostalgic*” approach of this kind “*does little to challenge the logic of imperialism that has shaped the exploitative nature of global capitalism*”. Far from seriously operating towards changing the present state of things, SF ends by “*fetishize cultural differences and sentimentalize struggles for cultural or economic survival*”<sup>150</sup>.

## 12. A new man.

And yet SF attributes miraculous virtues to its dream of a new society and economy, to the final triumph of its ‘food communities’: even the birth of a new humanity.

SF wants in fact to create a more pleasant specimen of human being, described at great length.<sup>151</sup> He is “*an attentive consumer, full of curiosity, wishing to be personally engaged and to learn, a regular customer of restaurants and cellars... He participates in events like the Tavole Fraterne [Brotherly Tables], projects to bring help to some parts of the world plagued by wars, famines, misery, because the gourmet of the 2000, who grew up together with Arcigola Slow Food, must possess two essential qualities: generosity and the respect for the human environment*”; “*a person who, at the table as well as in his everyday life, shows a peculiar style of behaviour in which curiosity and tolerance, self-consciousness and willingness, slowness and competence combine. A sagacious consumer, who is capable of influencing not negligibly the orientations of the inns, as their managers have perfectly understood*”.<sup>152</sup> To summarize, this ‘new man’ is a consumer. Nothing is said on his social rank, his job or profession, his practical life. And precisely this complete overlooking of the sphere of production is significant.

What is certain, is that he is a person well equipped with leisure time<sup>153</sup> and rich, since he is a regular haunter of restaurants and inns (also since, as we already know, it is a principle of the movement’s philosophy that agricultural producers must receive an adequate remuneration), participates in philanthropic events, etc. He is, moreover, a member of a “non-exclusive elite”: an oxymoron, which shows the width of SF’s wishful thinking<sup>154</sup>- even more so since this ‘elite’ should have, as its greatest ambition, nothing less than “influencing” (albeit “not negligibly”), the “orientations of the inns”.

The ideological nature of this image is clearly shown when, coming to the impact of the “long supply chains” on the food prices, SF promotes not legislative reforms, but a mere reform of habits, a moral reform: “*the utilitaristic and individualistic spirit of the merchant... must be corrected into a more altruistic way, or at least in a communitarian direction*”. Thus, e.g., in order to eliminate the ‘speculation’, it would suffice that the trader “limits” himself in his quest for profits, up to the point, when necessary, to step aside; naturally, the forms of commerce which SF considers are the “*little shops and other forms of direct, vis à vis commerce*”; and, within the frame of a general “*reduction of intermediation*”, the trader should guarantee “*a control of prices, which should be fair both for*

---

<sup>148</sup> Gaytàn, pp. 13, 16, 17, and 18.

<sup>149</sup> Donati, p. 235-236.

<sup>150</sup> Donati, p. 236, 239.

<sup>151</sup> Petrini, 2001a, p. 17, p. 20.

<sup>152</sup> Petrini, 2001a, p. 54.

<sup>153</sup> However, to this SF could object that “*as to leisure time, no age has ever had so much at its disposal as the present one: longest weekends and reduced working hours*” (Petrini, 2001a, p. 25). Which is certainly true, but only in the developed countries; this on the one hand confirms that the model of man which SF envisages beholds to a minority of the world’s population, and on the other hand, that SF presupposes, in order to reach its goals, the existence of a ‘rich’ world which did economically develop precisely following the principles and methods SF abominates.

<sup>154</sup> Drastic Laudan, 2004, p. 143.

*the sellers and for the buyers*<sup>155</sup>. This is not only a simplistic position (very common also in the movements of ‘critical consumption’ of the present or the past)<sup>156</sup> It is also typical of the reactionary thinking, in fact, to believe that there can be something like a ‘fair price’, or even a ‘fair’ distribution of the product among the different factors, in itself<sup>157</sup>, that is, abstracting from the actual relations of production, as it is also typical of the reaction to believe that a ‘moral reform’ can by itself only change the structures of production<sup>158</sup>, as if the ‘fairness’ of the exchange were an external character of the exchange, an eternal and immutable feature, and capable of being applied to the exchange at will.

SF’s recovery of the ‘rural’ values includes – this, too, is typical of a certain contemporary Italian ideology – sobriety, moderateness, thrift, all of which are characteristically seen as moral qualities, as refusal of excesses, or, better, as a return to the idea of the limit<sup>159</sup>, in turn conceived as capable in itself to determine the optimal dimensions of the economic activity, if not as a basic principle of the civil community itself. And so one comes to the point of trying to distinguish between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ (or even ‘criminal’<sup>160</sup>) consumption practices. It is to be added, however, that SF’s adoption of passwords (sobriety, moderateness, sense of limits) typical of those movements of critical consumption for which the term ‘frugal hedonism’ has been coined<sup>161</sup> sounds disconcerting, given the centrality that SF gives to the quest for food pleasure; therefore, it is not casual that such movements look at SF (with which they sometimes share some goals) with suspicion.<sup>162</sup>

### **13. Food and engagement.**

A significant part of SF’s activity consists of the protection of wine and food specialities “at risk of extinction”; hence events such as the “Arca del gusto” (Ark of Taste).<sup>163</sup> Naturally, the name makes one think of a “*conservative spirit*”; but, Petrini explains, “*in truth, none of us believed in the ‘old little world’, but all led us to think it was better ‘to defend’, because, when the deluge is at the gates, the only safety is the Ark*”. SF wishes to present itself like a movement in struggle for food biodiversity and against standardization<sup>164</sup>. The defense from standardization turns smoothly into a defense from globalization: “*the food expresses everywhere cultural distinctions, it is the first way to identify a people. This is why one must defend that heritage from globalization*”: and thus, at the 2000 Salone del Gusto the battles of José Bové, the ‘Seattle people’ and the campaigns in favour of the *fagiolo zolfino* unite<sup>165</sup>. Then it follows a critique of the present ‘system’, in which “*the equilibrium between the local and the global dimension has totally disappeared*”, in which “*those who decide what is in our dishes are no more ourselves, are no more the cooks, are no more our trusted shopkeepers, but the rules of the global market: so we export lattuce towards the same countries from which we import it, we give up the richness of a diet in accordance with the seasons in order to consume tomatoes in January rather than thistles and turnip greens; we tolerate that Sicily oranges pass by logistic platforms located in the Netherlands to arrive to the market nearby;*

<sup>155</sup> Petrini 2005a, p. 231, p. 234.

<sup>156</sup> In particular with reference to the ‘ethical’ role of the trader, see Ruskin, p. 28-30 and 33.

<sup>157</sup> A very clear example is, once again, Ruskin, p. 85.

<sup>158</sup> See e.g. Lamennais, p. 55 (“*If you wish to work to destroy poverty, work to destroy sin, firstly in yourselves, then in the others, and serfdom in the society*”) and Sedlmayr, p. 347 (“*Instead of improving the epoch, all should improve themselves, their own I. Then all will arrange, because the epoch consists of a plurality of individuals*”).

<sup>159</sup> Petrini 2005a, p. 248, p. 125-127. On this point particularly Cassano, e.g. pp. XXVIII ff.

<sup>160</sup> Greco and Scaffidi, p. 83 ff., p. 90.

<sup>161</sup> V. R. Sassatelli, “L’investitura politica del consumatore: modelli di soggettività e mutamento sociale”, in Leonini and Sassatelli, p. 145 ss. Also Sassatelli and Davolio, p. 7.

<sup>162</sup> See Sassatelli and Davolio, p. 7.

<sup>163</sup> “*An Ark for safeguarding the quality production from the deluge of standardization and its wasting effects. Against the macroeconomic logic, it proposes to return working in a regional dimension, to reinvent ways of production and offer*”: Petrini 2001a, p. 89 (see also p. 92).

<sup>164</sup> The engagement against standardization becomes, somehow, also a struggle against globalization, at least against the ‘bad’ one, the existing one: *Dizionario di SF*, entry “Globalizzazione”.

<sup>165</sup> Petrini and Padovani, p. 153.

*we are no more capable to renounce to the 'privilege' of eating Chile cherries in December and so on. Who gains from this situation? Clearly not the peasants producers and not the citizens consumers, as we know too well*<sup>166</sup>. One may ask how could a system survive beyond the short period if it is good for neither producers nor consumers, and why eating out of seasons, which was once the privilege of kings and noblemen and is today at all pockets' reach, should be despised, and last but not least, why all such things should be "clear".

Apart from the oversimplification and imprecision of many of these alarms, nobody shall deny that it is more than reasonable, and even praiseworthy, to preserve a food or a processing method; but SF pretends to disguise a crusade aimed at saving rare products - which in the pre-industrial economy found few purchasers due to their high prices, and which therefore can succeed today only insofar as it has emerged, thanks to the industrialization and the economic development, a sufficiently large and rich group of consumers interested in purchasing them<sup>167</sup>- as an operation which should, somehow, restore the pre-industrial and rural culture (a culture which, by the way, did never exist in the terms in which SF imagines it). This implies a total misunderstanding of the real situation, in which it is the very existence of the modern industrial society to make it possible, by creating a market, to preserve the rarest and most costly products; in which, in other words, it is not the limitation of the market, but instead its expansion, which grants their survival; in which it is not the reduction of consumption, but its increase, which enables us to preserve the varieties and races at risk<sup>168</sup>.

But the ideological disguise cannot hide the real nature of this enterprise, which is commercial promotion<sup>169</sup>: "*on the Ark we should embark only products with a commercial future, capable of obtaining superior prices because they have excellent organoleptic quality*".<sup>170</sup> It is, in sum, a marketing operation, aimed not only at attracting a youthful public, but also at revolutionizing the traditional social classification of the *gourmet*. The new "leftist gluttons" shall be affluent people, too (mostly, again, doctors, lawyers, journalists, etc.), but they shall no more feel 'guilty' because they wish to eat well: in fact, they shall combine the love for good cooking with the political 'engagement'. We are facing one defined generation: "*Thirty-years-old men tired of politics, disenchanted by those plastic years, defeated by the post-68 reaction*"<sup>171</sup>. Petrini and SF have precisely the ambition of satisfying a need already present in their public: "*the left, too, wants to eat well*"<sup>172</sup>. In short, since the beginning SF aimed at uniting good food with political engagement through a skilful connection to the critique of the mass and consumption civilization, and in particular to the anticonsumerist movements (which afterwards, in later years, became the "critical consumption" movements).<sup>173</sup> This is the real program of SF. And to this goal the entire ideology of the movement is oriented.

---

<sup>166</sup> Burdese, p. 18.

<sup>167</sup> This is certainly not unknown to SF. "*In sum it is an important bet: it combines ancient and marginalized skills and a new class of consumers, disposed to pay the fair price for obtaining quality and organoleptic excellence, responding to the environmental protection and to food safety*" Petrini, 2001, p. 101 (or also p. 59). See also Geier, p. 74, or Fort, *passim* (who, repeating the Disraeli metaphor of the 'two nations', argues that today the 'two nations' are, one, the people who enjoy food freedom – "*those who care about what they eat, go and seek quality products, study carefully the cooking columns and cook at least thrice a week*" -, and the other one, those 'without rights', who buy ready-cooked or frozen food: in other words, on the one hand there are those who own leisure and money, on the other hand those who do not), or finally Sardo, p. 16.

<sup>168</sup> This point is also stressed by Laudan, 2001, p. 43.

<sup>169</sup> On which see also Laudan, 2004, p. 138 ff.

<sup>170</sup> Petrini, 2001a, p. 96.

<sup>171</sup> Petrini and Padovani, p. 26. Moreover, the New York Times (cited with evident approval by Petrini himself) spoke thus of the 'Saloni del Gusto' of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1998: "*Started by a group of leftist intellectuals disillusioned with politics and disgusted by the success of fast food, the manifestation has become lately very popular in Italy and Europe.... The Italians become indignant only for questions of food*": Ibidem, p. 133.

<sup>172</sup> Petrini 2001a, p. 12; also p. 73.

<sup>173</sup> Petrini and Padovani, p. 96.

#### **14. The ideology of SlowFood.**

Petrini has often claimed that “*the massified agriculture promoted by multinational companies, poverty and hunger are neither of right nor of left*”<sup>174</sup>. Perhaps this is true, but what does distinguish right and left are the solutions envisaged for those problems. The solution proposed by SF (essentially, the return to a traditional, pre-industrial, extensive or even subsistence farming) do not look very promising. Also strikingly in contrast with that goal is SF’s attitude of critique and refusal of the technical and scientific progress, and of science itself (which should abandon all pretensions to hegemony and accept a dialogue between equals with the ‘traditional knowledge’), as well as of economic growth.

Moreover, the same concepts used by SF to criticize the modern agriculture and industry – those of naturalness, sustainability, and of tradition – appear, as we have seen, inaccurate, devoid of a concrete historical content and, ultimately, unworkable.

We have already spoken of the theoretical weakness of the distinction between slow and fast societies; let us now stress two points. *First*: the portrait of the “low man” is that of a well-to-do person rich in money and leisure time. The way this man became what he now is does not interest SF. The fact that the means which allow the “slow man” to exert his taste, his senses, his love for ‘slowness’ can originate, as they do, precisely from the “diabolical” activities of velocity, industrialization, standardization, in sum of capitalism, this is something that SF does not even notice. And SF does not realize that such a way of life cannot be affordable below a given level of income, and as such it cannot therefore be the basis for a “new model of development”, since it, on the contrary, presupposes the development precisely as already occurred. This removal of the real, concrete processes, this total oblivion or misunderstanding of the historical processes, is a typical feature of ideology as it is defined since Marx’s times<sup>175</sup>. *Second*: attributing to the pre-industrial, backward or even primitive societies, the slowness and the leisure to think, to cultivate human relations, etc., is a pure mystification. The developed societies are precisely those which can afford to “lose time”, because the gains in productivity (another foul word, for SF) allow them to produce more output in less time. The traditional, pre-industrial, ‘underdeveloped’ societies are exactly those which devote most of their time to the production of their subsistence, those most obsessed with production, as well as those which exploit most mercilessly the natural resources and endanger the environment<sup>176</sup>. But also this point, although not totally unknown to SF<sup>177</sup>, is systematically omitted in its attempts to elaborate a theory.

The result, then, is fatally the denigration or negation of progress, together with the praise of the “little” local communities and the re-evaluation of atavistic traditions. This is not a novelty, either: the reactionary thought, from Herder on, has always insisted on the necessity of a strong connection with places, since only in the local dimension the traditions may survive, and because only the linkage to the concrete, to the particular, can protect the institutions of traditional society from the attacks of rationalism. But the paradox is that the ‘traditions’ envisaged by SF, i.e. the local (and especially culinary) traditions, are very recent phenomena, resulting from the disappearance of the peasant pre-industrial civilization and, at the same time, they are ideological attempts at replacing them with idyllic-pastoral peasant civilization and countryside which are, instead, totally fictitious. The goal of this operation is, historically, to placate the anxieties of the new hegemonic class transferring back into a distant past the ideals of peace, quietness, harmony it could not find in the present. Admittedly, the idyllic time recalled by SF (and which, in those terms, did never exist) was

---

<sup>174</sup> Petrini and Padovani, p. 157, or also 255.

<sup>175</sup> This is the ‘strong’ meaning of ideology, according to the already recalled distinction by Bobbio, p. 114-115.

<sup>176</sup> The references would be thousands. It will suffice to quote Cipolla, p. 87 and *passim*.

<sup>177</sup> See this passage, already cited: “*as to leisure time, no age has ever had so much at its disposal as the present one: longest weekends and reduced working hours*” (Petrini, 2001a, p. 25). Wherefrom shall such time savings come, if not from the very productivity increases allowed by the modern industrial and technical revolutions?



a past in which class and gender differences were enormous, in which social mobility was practically nonexistent<sup>178</sup>, in which most of the population lacked sufficient food, and that the end of this system – deeply unjust and oppressive - is due precisely to the victory of that technical progress and that economic growth which SF considers as the root of all evils.

In this work I tried to describe the main “myths” at the basis of SF’s ideology: those of nature, tradition, and limit, the critique of progress, the suspicion for science, the praise of the traditional role of women, the connection with the land and the places – the list itself sounds eloquent. The stratagem which allows SF, as well as other contemporary political ideologies, to present this position as ‘progressive’ consists in connecting the critique of economic development, of the scientific and technical progress, and of industrialization – a critique which is in itself very ancient, since it accompanied the Industrial Revolution from its onset – to the critique of imperialism and of ethnocentrism on the one hand, and on the other hand to the critique of consumerism and mass culture (the latter being a position very close to the contemporary most conservative Catholic culture).<sup>179</sup> The closeness to the anti-progressive positions of thinkers such as Ruskin, Carlyle or William Morris has been noticed even by sympathetic observers.<sup>180</sup>

Like all philosophical- political positions, also the reactionary and conservative ones have important truths to say, and are capable of incisively criticizing the weaknesses and superficialities of progressivism, and therefore they are capable of activating that beneficial dialectic which is, at the same time, the basis and the justification of politics. But all dialectic presupposes, in order to be fruitful, that one party does not disguise itself as the other one and does not claim, absurdly, to play the other’s role. If SF contented itself to appear as a movement of gourmets, no harm could be done. But if one claims that SF knows the secret formula for protecting biodiversity, solving the problem of world hunger, and even for creating a new sustainable growth, then there is really a danger that “*the best for the few is the enemy of the good for the many*”. As long as there are in the world people who starve, the way to help them is not to abide by the culinary and agricultural traditions, but to change them.<sup>181</sup>

The fact that a movement like SF – anti-progressive, antiscientific, worshipping the traditional societies, fond of the little, stratified and perennial communities in which the place of each is eternally fixed and immutable, uncaring and ignorant of history and of the reality of the relations of production, and thus incapable of seeing the inextricable contradictions and historical fictions which build up this vision – might be considered today, in Italy, ‘left’, is something which deserves a close study and should create, in all those who care for the future of our country, more than a passing worry.

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Allen, P. and Sachs, C.

2007 “Women and Food Chains: The Gendered Politics of Food”, *International Journal of Sociology of Food and Agriculture*, vol. 15(1), also at the address [http://www.ijfaf.org/archive/vol15\(1\)-07/articles/1%20-%20Allen%20and%20Sachs%20Final.pdf](http://www.ijfaf.org/archive/vol15(1)-07/articles/1%20-%20Allen%20and%20Sachs%20Final.pdf)

Andrews, G.

2007 “Qualche idea per cambiare il mondo”, *Slow* n. 56, p. 54-57

Baudrillard, J.

1970 *La società dei consumi*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2008 [*La société de consommation*, Paris, Denoel]

---

<sup>178</sup> A kind of society which e.g. Cassano, p. 8, praises (describing it as “*forms of life immobile, slow, stratified... where instead of the magnificent protections of technique there are those, as magnificent, of religions*”).

<sup>179</sup> It is not by mere chance that Scaffidi and Masini, p. 35, refer to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*...

<sup>180</sup> See e.g.. Andrews: SF “*does not propose a mere contrast between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’*” (p. 54), but rather an original “*rediscovery of tradition*”, a tradition which is nothing else than “*an innovation which succeeded*” (p. 56). The same author notices that SF is promoting an ideology which combines (without “*contradictions*”, the author optimistically says at p. 57), the “*traditions of right and left*”.

<sup>181</sup> Laudan, 2004, p. 143.

Bazzi, A. and Vezzoni, P.  
2000 *Biotechnologie della vita quotidiana*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2003

Bobbio, N.  
1962 *Saggi sulla scienza politica in Italia*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1977

Boltanski, L. and Chiapello, E.  
1999 *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*, Paris, Gallimard

Burdese, R.  
2008 “Zero positivo”, *SlowFood* n. 33, p. 18

Capatti, A.  
1996 “Elogio dell’ospite”, *Slow* n. 3  
1997 “Provare per sapere”, *Slow* n. 5.  
2004 “Un altro turismo è possibile”, *SlowFood* n. 8, p. 15  
2006 “Alimentazione e libertà”, *Slow* n. 53, p. 6-9

Capatti, A. and Montanari, M.  
1999 *La cucina italiana. Storia di una cultura*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2006

Carandini, A.  
1979 *L’economia della scimmia*, Torino, Einaudi

Carlyle, T.  
1829 “Segni dei Tempi”, in Idem, *Pagine scelte e discorsi*, Torino, Paravia, 1921, p. 44-55 [Signs of the Times]

Cassano, F.  
1996 *Il pensiero meridiano*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2005

Cattaneo C.  
1852 “Dell’agricoltura inglese paragonata alla nostra”, in Idem, *Opere scelte*, vol. IV (*Storia universale e ideologia delle genti*), Torino, Einaudi, 1972, p. 48-78.

Ceccarini, L.  
2008 *Consumare con impegno*, Roma-Bari, Laterza

Cipolla, C. M.  
1974 *Storia economica dell’Europa preindustriale*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2002

Coldiretti  
2008a “Petrolio: Coldiretti, ecco top ten cibi che sprecano energia”, at the address [http://www.coldiretti.it/docindex/cncd/informazioni/286\\_08.htm](http://www.coldiretti.it/docindex/cncd/informazioni/286_08.htm)  
2008b “Earth Day: Coldiretti, ecco decalogo taglia emissioni e petrolio”, at the address [http://www.coldiretti.it/docindex/cncd/informazioni/299\\_08.htm](http://www.coldiretti.it/docindex/cncd/informazioni/299_08.htm)

Diamond, J.  
1997 *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, London, Vintage, 2005

Dizionario di SF  
s.d. At the address [http://associazione.slowfood.it/associazione\\_ita/ita/dizionario](http://associazione.slowfood.it/associazione_ita/ita/dizionario)

Dompé, S.  
2001 “Per curare i prodotti tipici”, *Slow* n. 22

Donati, K.  
2005 “The Pleasure of Diversity in Slow Food’s Ethics of taste”, *Food, Culture & Society* 8(2), 227-242

Economist, The  
2008 “Revolutionaries by the Bay”, *The Economist* 13/19 settembre 2008, p. 52

Fonte, M.  
2005 “Slow Food Presidia: What do small producers do with big retailers”, at the address <http://www.rimisp.org/getdoc.php?docid=3721>

Fort, M.  
2006 “Due nazioni”, *Slow* n. 54, p. 8-15

Gaytàn, M. S.

- 2004 "Globalizing Resistance: Slow Food and New Local Imaginaries", *Food, Culture, & Society*, 7(2), 97-116
- Geier, B.
- 2006 "Bio: locale, regionale, globale?", *Slow* n. 55, p. 70-77
- Gozzi, G.
- 1761 "L'utilità degli oriuoli", in Idem, *Scritti*, Milano, Istituto Editoriale Italiano, s.d., p. 82-84
- Greco, S. and Scaffidi, C.
- 2007 *Guarda che mare*, Bra, SlowFood Editore
- Grigg, D.
- 1982 *The Dynamics of Agricultural Change*, London, Hutchinson
- Heath, J. and Potter, A.
- 2005 *The Rebel Sell*, Southern Gate Chichester, Capstone, 2006
- Hirschman, A. O.
- 1991 *Retoriche dell'intransigenza*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1992 [*The Rhetoric of Reaction. Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy*, Cambridge Ma., Harvard Un. Press]
- Hobsbawm, E. J. and Ranger, T. (Eds.)
- 1983 *L'invenzione della tradizione*, Torino, Einaudi, 1987 [*The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge Un. Press]
- Horden, P. and Purcell, N.
- 2000 *The Corrupting Sea. A Study of Mediterranean History*, London, Blackwell, 2006
- Jones, P. et alii
- 2003 "Return to traditional values? A case study of Slow Food", *British Food Journal* 105(4/5), 297-304
- Lamennais, F. R. de
- 1834 *Parole d'un credente*, Torino, Utet, 1948 [*Paroles d'un croyant*]
- Latouche, S.
- 2004 *Come sopravvivere allo sviluppo*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2005 [*Survivre au développement*, Paris, Mille et une nuits]
- 2007 "La saggezza della lumaca", *Slow* n. 56, p. 44-46
- Laudan, R.
- 2001 "A Plea for Culinary Modernism: Why We Should Love New, Fast, Processed Food", *Gastronomica* 1, 36-44
- 2004 "Slow Food, The French Terroir Strategy, and Culinary Modernism", *Food, Culture & Society*, 7(2), 133-149
- Leonini, L. and Sassatelli, R. (Eds.)
- 2008 *Il consumo critico*, Roma-Bari, Laterza
- Leopardi, G.
- 1827 "Elogio degli uccelli", in Idem, *Operette morali*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1976, p. 179-186.
- Lomborg, B.
- 1998 *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, Cambridge, Cambridge Un. Press, 2007
- Maine, H. Sumner
- 1861 *Diritto antico*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1998 [*Ancient Law*, London, Dent]
- Maistre, Joseph de
- 1811 "Quatre chapitres sur la Russie", in *Oeuvres complètes*, Lyon, Vitte et Peroussel, 1884, Vol. 8
- Manniche, J.
- 2007 "Knowledge dynamics and geographies in the food and drinks sector", at the address <http://www.regional-studies-assoc.ac.uk/events/lisbon07/papers/Manniche.pdf>
- Mazoyer, M. and Roudart, L.
- 2002 *Histoire des agricultures du monde*, Paris, Seuil
- Marx, K. and Engels, F.
- 1846 *L'ideologia tedesca*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 2000

- Miele, M. and Murdoch, J.  
 2001 “The aestheticisation of food: taste, time and typicality”, at the address <http://www2.ucsc.edu/globalinterns/cpapers/MurdochMiele.pdf>
- Montanari, M.  
 2004 *Il cibo come cultura*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2007
- Oxfam  
 2008 “Oxfam warns of danger of ‘food mile’ fantasy”, at the address <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/applications/blogs/pressoffice/?p=1061>
- Perullo, N.  
 2006 “Ritorno alla natura”, *Slow* n. 55, p. 12-15
- Petrini, C.  
 2001a *SlowFood. Le ragioni del gusto*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2003  
 2001b “Cautela e prudenza”, *Slow* n. 22  
 2004 “Dialogo fra regni”, *SlowFood* n. 4, p. 18  
 2005a *Buono, pulito e giusto*, Torino, Einaudi  
 2005b “Figli di Brillat e Terra Madre”, *SlowFood* n. 10, p. 16  
 2006 “Sovranità alimentare”, *Slow* n. 54, p. 6-7  
 2007 “Mettiamo in banca le nostre radici”, *Repubblica* 12.4.2007, p. 1  
 2008, “Il Sessantotto visto dalla terra”, *MicroMega* 1/2008, Supplemento, *Sessantotto: Mito e Realtà*, p. 66-67
- Petrini, C. and Padovani, G.  
 2005 *SlowFood Revolution*, Milano, Rizzoli
- Poli, G. (Ed.)  
 2001 *Biotecnologie, conoscere per scegliere*, Torino, UTET
- Pretty, J.N., Ball, A.S., Lang, T. and Morison, J.L.L.  
 2005 “Farm costs and food miles: An assessment of the full cost of the UK weekly food basket”, *Food Policy* 30 (1), 1-19
- Rifkin, J.  
 1999 “Senza assicurazione”, *Slow* n. 13
- Ritzer, G.  
 1998 “Slow Food vs. McDonald’s”, *Slow* n. 10, also at the address <http://editore.slowfood.it/editore/riviste/slow/IT/10/ritzer.html>
- Roos, G. et alii  
 2007 “The local in the global - creating ethical relations between producers and consumers”, at the address <http://aof.revues.org/document489.html>
- Rösener, W.  
 1993 *I contadini nella storia d’Europa*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2008 [*Die Bauern in der Europäischen Geschichte*, München, C. H. Beck]
- Ruskin, J.  
 1860 *Unto this Last*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1923 [*A quest’ultimo*, Torino, Marco Valerio, 2003]
- Sala, F.  
 2005 *Gli ogm sono davvero pericolosi?*, Roma-Bari, Laterza
- Sardo, P.  
 2006 “Dialogo di un curioso e di un venditore di patate”, *SlowFood* n. 17, p. 16
- Sarti, R.  
 1999 *Vita di casa. Abitare, mangiare, vestire nell’Europa moderna*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, [2006]
- Sassatelli, R.  
 2004 *Consumo, cultura e società*, Bologna, Il Mulino
- Sassatelli, R. and Davolio, F.

- 2006 “Politicizing food quality. How alternative is the Slow Food vision of consumption?”, at the address <http://www.suscons.ulg.ac.be/IMG/ArlonPapers/davolio%20Politizing%20quality%20how%20alternative%20is%20slow%20food.doc>
- Saunders, C. and Hayes, P.
- 2007 “Air Freight Transport of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables”, Research report No. 29, at the address [http://researcharchive.lincoln.ac.nz/dspace/bitstream/10182/248/1/aeru\\_rr\\_299.pdf](http://researcharchive.lincoln.ac.nz/dspace/bitstream/10182/248/1/aeru_rr_299.pdf)
- Scaffidi, C. and Masini, S.
- 2007 “Impariamo dagli hackers”, *Slow* n. 56, p. 24-35
- Schlich, E. and Fleissner, U.
- 2005 “The Ecology of Scale: Assessment of Regional Energy Turnover and Comparison with Global Food”, *The International Journal of Life Cycle Assessment* 10, 219
- Sedlmayr, H.
- 1973 *Perdita del centro*, Milano, Rusconi, 1974
- Shiva, V.
- 2001 “Un miracolo?”, *Slow*, n. 22
- 2005 *Il bene comune della Terra*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2006 [Earth Democracy]
- Smith, A, Watkiss, P., et alii
- 2005 “The Validity of Food Miles as an Indicator of Sustainable Development”, *Defra AEAT Paper*, at the address <https://statistics.defra.gov.uk/esg/reports/foodmiles/final.pdf>
- Stoppino, M.
- 1983 *Ideologia*, in Bobbio, N., Matteucci, N. and Pasquino, G. (Eds.), *Dizionario di Politica*, Torino, UTET, p. 512-524
- Tietenberg, T.
- 2004 *Economia dell’ambiente*, Milano, McGraw-Hill, 2006 [Environmental Economics and Policy, Pearson Education Inc.]
- Turner, R. K., Pearce, D. W. and Bateman, I.
- 1993 *Economia ambientale*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2005 [Environmental Economics. An Elementary Introduction, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Un. Press]
- Walter, L.
- 2008 “Slow food and home cooking: Toward a relational aesthetic of food and relational ethic of home”, at the address [http://www.suscons.ulg.ac.be/IMG/doc\\_Definitive\\_schedule.docin](http://www.suscons.ulg.ac.be/IMG/doc_Definitive_schedule.docin)
- Williams, R.
- 1961 *Cultura e rivoluzione industriale*, Torino, Einaudi, 1997 [Culture and Society 1870-1950, London, Chatto & Windus]
- 1973 *The Country and the City*, New York, Oxford Un. Press, 1978
- Zolla, E.
- 1959 *Eclissi dell’intellettuale*, Milano, Bompiani, 1971
- 1964 *Storia del fantasticare*, Milano, Bompiani, 1973
- 1971 *Che cos’è la tradizione*, Milano, Adelphi, 1998