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MANUSCRIPT

THE MAKING OF AUTHENTIC TORTELLINI. AESTETICIZATION OF ARTISANAL LABOUR AND ELITE UNIVORISM IN THE CASE OF LOCAL FOOD.

Abstract:

In this paper, I will look at two distinct Bolognese practices of tortellini –making as contrasting cases in the cultural production of traditional local food. The paper is based on ethnographic observation of laboratories in the city of Bologna, interviews with 'sfogline' [skilled workers] and with the 'Dotta Confraternita del Tortellino', a local association of amateurs responsible for the deposit of the traditional recipe in 1974. By analyzing two practices of valorisation of one product I will point out to different simultaneous enactments of aesthetic and moral values. Two contrasting aesthetics framings – the artisanal craftsmanship of skilled workers (sfogline) and the exclusive practices of elite gourmand (Confraternita) – revolve around tortellini. They will allow us to address two main theoretical issues: the construction of elite practices based on aesthetics at times of cultural omnivorousness, and the orchestration of aesthetics and moralities at different stages of the social life of a traditional food product.

Keywords:

food aesthetics, local food, omnivorousness, artisanal labour, morality, cultural intermediation.

1. *Introduction*¹

Since 2007, food expenditure in Italian families has dropped, while simultaneously accounting for an increasing slice of the family total budget. The economic crisis and austerity measures caused a contraction of food expenditures and an increase in bulk and hard discount purchases (Sassatelli, Santoro and Semi 2015). At the same time, however, food culture is voracious: quality and quantity of food on tables might be lessened, but the discourse on food has never seemed more abundant. The proliferation of food discourses infests the cultural industries, politics, and market strategies (Fischler 1979). From foodie blogging (Johnston and Baumann 2010) to food activism (Counihan and Siniscalchi 2014) from the patrimonialization of territories (Barham 2003; Fourcade 2012) to alternative food networks (Goodman 2003; Grasseni 2013) food has become not just 'good to think', but first and foremost 'good to talk'.

These global trends overlay upon Italian culture, already iconic for its worldwide distinguished food culture. Sociological and anthropological studies on material cultures and practices (Counihan 2004; Guigoni 2009) show how Italians manage their food culture toolkits creatively and with great expertise and affective intensity. Italian food studies across aesthetics, philosophy (Perullo 2006), semiotics (Marrone 2014), history (Capatti and Montanari 2003; Montanari 2012; Montanari 2016), anthropology (Guigoni 2009; La Cecla 2016), sociology (Sassatelli 2004), are analyzing a foodscape that produces complex cultural discourses around traditionalization and the establishment of authenticity. Italian customer appear to keep up with this complexification by being those, amongst Europeans, devoting more time to sourcing information about food (Censis 2015). Even in contemporary times of crisis and acceleration, Italians prefer food based on local ingredients, eaten at home with family, freshly prepared according to regional recipes handed down from generation to generation (Harper and Faccioli 2009), in short: traditional food. However, 'tradition' is yet another complex food discourse, is now constructed in a elaborate and reflexive way that often relies on complex schemes of certification and labelling (Evans and Miele in Halkier, Keller, Truninger and Wilska 2017).

In this paper, I will look at two distinct Bolognese practices of tortellini –making as contrasting cases in the cultural production of traditional local food. By analyzing two practices of valorisation of one product I will point out to different simultaneous enactments of aesthetic and moral values stemming from the same material object: the tortellino. Two contrasting aesthetics framings – the artisanal craftsmanship of skilled workers (sfogline) and the exclusive practices of elite gourmand (Confraternita) – revolve around tortellini. They will allow us to address two main theoretical issues: the construction of elite practices based on aesthetics at times of cultural omnivores, and the orchestration of aesthetics and moralities at different stages of the social life of a traditional food product (production by the sfogline, cultural intermediation by the store owners, valorization by the Confraternita)

Together with mortadella, the iconic food product most closely associated with Bologna is tortellini. Bologna has been the city most active in attempting to secure tortellini as a city brand. Any restaurant claiming to offer traditional cuisine must propose them as the flagship dish, any cooking class targeting tourists attempts to transmit the complex process of their preparation, while any gift shop is crammed with tortellini – shaped fridge magnets. Locally, many actors have been responsible for the construction of aesthetic value of tortellini. Currently many initiatives attempt to capitalize on such value and promote tortellini to a variety of targets. 'Anti –crisis' tortellini offers are promoted to attract potential buyers to the public bid for a bankrupt company, festivals, blind tastings and tournaments to declare the best tortellini are promoted by business associations, network of operators in the food sector and local newspapers, younger entrepreneurs sell take-away tortellini on the Internet, celebrity housewives establish cooking schools employing Italian-Japanese interpretersⁱⁱ.

Tortellini are a kind of ring-shaped filled pasta: a filling based on pork loin, cured ham (Prosciutto di Parma), mortadella, parmesan cheese, egg, and nutmeg, is enclosed by egg pasta. They may be served in broth as a first course. Tortellini can thus be seen a 'matrioska' of ingredients already infused with symbolic value: mortadella actually competes to the title of most distinctive food of the city, while Parmesan cheese and

cured ham are products certified under various schemes of denomination of origin. Egg pasta is itself another symbol of the area. Something apparently as simple as mixing egg, flour and water is the object of study of many cooking schools. Competitions are regularly held where amateur contestant – increasingly foreign – race to roll the smoother and larger layer of pasta. However, the most precious ingredient of tortellini is the labor required to produce them. The time consuming skilled work required to prepare tortellini accounts for the largest part of the final retail price: artisanal tortellini are sold in a range of euro 37 –42 per kilogram. This makes tortellini an exclusive and high –priced commodity.

By following the social life of tortellini, this case dual case study allows us to address common trends in contemporary food markets as they are enacted in their various and often contradictory enactment.

1.1. *Methodology*

This research is based on ethnographic observation of food events (festivals, markets, pasta rolling competitions), laboratories and amateurial or semi –professional cooking schools in the city of Bologna, document analysis, interviews with 'sfogline' [skilled workers], with the 'Dotta Confraternita del Tortellino' [Learned Brotherhood of Tortellino], with cooking schools managers and teachers and with privileged informants from the local artisanal food industry.

For the purpose of this paper, data was mostly drawn from observation in pasta fresca laboratories, interviews with store owners and sfogline, from interviews with Confraternita's members and document analysis. Five pasta fresca laboratories were selected, each representing a different example of artisanal practice: one was recently opened by young entrepreneurs, one was run by non –local (i.e. not originally from Bologna) store owners, one doubled as a cooking school, two were well –respected, old, traditional family stores. Each store was first visited once as a paying customer, a second time for the observation, a third time for follow up interviews. Despite the variety of backgrounds of these business, the data collected for the purpose of this paper did not revealed remarkable differences.

Interviews with the Confraternita members were conducted thanks to the intermediation of the local Chamber of Commerce (also interviewed). Out of four members interviewed, only one allowed the dialogue to be transcribed. Due to the unforeseen difficulty in accessing the field, data on the Confraternita was supplemented by desk research. Document analysis, in particular, was conducted researching the pages of *Il Resto del Carlino*, the local conservative newspaper, which has the most extensive coverage of the Confraternita and tortellini –related news.

2. *Tortellini and the aesthetics of traditional labor*

Artisanally, tortellini are produced in 'pasta frescaⁱⁱⁱ' laboratories by 'sfogline'. Most artisanal laboratories are not bigger than a private kitchen and do not have (or have but do not display) special equipment. Sfogline – even when wearing white professional uniforms – do each wear their own personal and unique apron. A radio is often broadcasting Italian tunes in the background. The cramped spaces feel crowded, as sfogline chat unremittingly over orders calls.

In order to make a tortellino, egg pasta needs to be rolled in thin layers and cut into 3 cm squares. A dab of filling is posed on each of the squares, which are then closed forming a triangle first and then giving them, with a characteristic and swift movement of a finger and the other hand, their classic shape. Size is a crucial matter: tortellini should be small, yet artisans must find a balance between size and pasta-to-filling ratio. A too small tortellino will taste blunt due to lack of filling, a too large tortellino will lose its important aesthetic marker of exclusivity, which is also the signal of a higher amount of manual labor: 'you got to be able to hold seven in one spoon' [gastronome, tortellini expert]. In artisanal laboratories, in restaurants, in 'gastronomie'^{iv} and 'pasta fresca'^v, only a few of the production tasks can be automated. Machinery available for automation, which the industry of the area did invent^{vi}, are expensive and bulky: rarely they can be fitted in the cramped and small artisanal laboratories placed in the medieval city centre. Moreover, machinery forces various technical limitations on production: both the filling and the pasta needs to be prepared in such a way that does not jam the machine, yielding a less smooth and flexible product.

Automation forces to renounce the visual discontinuity which is the valuable aesthetic marker of artisanal production. In fact, the construction of quality in adjudicating the value of tortellini, ultimately rests on the valorization of manual artisanal labor, not in its embodied form, but for its final visual yield:

You can have the machines but still you have to have somebody there to look after the machine, to put flour in it, to watch over it. Imagine we keep the ingredients the same, if you work them with machines how much will it save you? We're in the order of 20-30 cents per portion, it's just not worth it. Doing it by hand it's what gives you discontinuity in the product, here is thicker, there is pressed more... if you look at a photograph of tortellini in a plate, they are all different [Confraternita's brother].

In this quote we can find a clear example of the move towards aestheticization in food discourses (Miele and Murdoch 2002), where aesthetic characteristics are explicitly indicated as markers of quality. When invited to isolate the one distinctive trait that authenticate the product as 'worth it', one member of the Confraternita pointed not to taste, not to the origin of product, not to a past experience, not to price tags, but to an aesthetic marker.

Such aesthetics can only be guaranteed by manual labor. Sfogline are personnel specifically employed to carry out that rather qualified task of filling and closing the tortellini pasta. Store managers cheerfully allow tourists photograph or video record the sfogline while immersed in their hypnotic, frantic yet rhythmic, task of preparing the traditional filled pasta. Such tourist moments and their objectifications as souvenirs of the local are part of a grass-root marketing of the 'authentic' experience of Bologna as a city of taste. They allow to bypass the commonplace stereotype of food 'made in Italy', offering consumers and foodies a further localizing focus for the refinement of their taste disposition.



Figure 1: Sfogline showing off their products [credits: CNA Bologna]

Producing 'pasta fresca' is a gender segregated line of job^{vii}: even at the amateur level, one of the most popular pasta rolling competition is entitled 'Miss Tagliatella', a prize not many males have ever had the honor to achieve.

Gendered perspectives on food studies have highlighted the complex relationship between femininity and food preparation and consumption (Cairns and Johnston 2016). Alongside discourses disciplining the female body and its relationship with food intake (Bordo 2004), as well as structural analysis of the oppressive nature of unpaid domestic labor (Dalla Costa and James 1973; Hook 2010), a very common aesthetics framing women in food discourses is the idealized domesticity of the mother, nurturer, and protector of family, tradition and nature (DeVault 1991). An idealized figure that doesn't spare women professional cooks (Harris and Giuffre 2015).

Prevailing in the field of tortellini production is the domestic aesthetics framed within the history of a traditional festive preparation. Indeed, tortellini being a time – consuming preparation, it was traditionally carried out by more than one person, namely the family's women gathered for seasonal or Sunday celebration. In tourist promotional materials, the very same domestic ladies are often juxtaposed to the sexualized narrative regarding the shape of tortellino as being originally figured out to simulate Venus' navel. However, sfogline's embodied aesthetics is far distant from contemporary food porn and closer to the markers of authenticity work identified by, amongst others, Johnston and Baumann (2007). As they claim (2007: 184), 'food with a face' is a very common discursive strategy for constituting gastronomic authenticity, and most of my informants proved aware of the added symbolic value of employing sfogline and having them 'on display', carefully orchestrating the backstage and stage of their stores.

However, price economy and symbolic value often clashed in the field observed: while elderly sfogline might be sought after because they can be employed off the books and on call, and at the same time adding cultural value to those store (the majority, indeed) that have an open space, perhaps the most sought after sfoglina in Bologna is a migrant woman in her 40s, from Moldova, once a professional nurse, who can fill and close the spectacular amount of 1.3 kg of tortellini per hour, which will be later sold up to 42 euro per kg.

Despite the symbolically charged environment, working as a sfoglina, indeed, is not as easily glorified by workers themselves. This is basically a piecework: sfogline known as the faster are more easily employed. Most sfogline work as freelancers, many receive their salaries of parts of them off the books. It is also an intermittent, on call, seasonal

job, that can be reconciled with reproductive labor or with a pension, but characterized by high levels of precarity. The job is also physically very demanding. Long hours are required during seasonal peaks: 16 hour –shifts are not uncommon when Christmas orders pile up, and most of the elderly women I interviewed suffered from repetitive strain injuries. Store managers are aware of the physical challenge of the job, in what appears as both recognition and reinforcement of the peculiar specialization of sfogline, whom are meant – almost fated – to do tortellini and tortellini only:

I do them [tortellini] sometimes, I'm not as fast as them of course, but still.... And I tell you, I, after one hour of making tortellini, I'm done, I just can't.... it's a terrible thing, terrible, believe me, it's the rhythm, the position, the concentration. I mean, last week I did lasagne. I started out on Friday morning and finished on Saturday morning, non stop, all night. And, beside some sleepiness I fought off during the night, the morning after I felt ok, really. But with tortellini.... I don't know how they do it [store owner].

During my observation, most of the sfogline invited me to participate and close some tortellini with them (a skill they were shocked I did not possess despite the gender assigned to me at birth), but could I barely fold the pasta in two. However, despite my appalling performance, the addition of another voice in the chat was always welcomed, as the sense of community emerged powerfully and was recognized as important by many professional sfogline working in stores:

We are like sisters, really. When you spend all this time together.... I like that I can share, you know, the little problems and preoccupations of life, what happens in the family, and things like that, and we always help each other, always are there for the others, we've known each other since so long now [sfoglina].

Thus, while the ingredients themselves and the final results were rarely the most pressing subject matter of sfogline conversations, the sense of commonality and the importance of being together emerged as the most immediate moral consequence of the artisanal mode of production. In the aesthetic cultural appreciation of sfogline's work, their being together is meant to resonate with the ideal of domestic production, when all women of a given family would gather around a table and prepare tortellini for the entire family. Moreover, multiplying the set of hands preparing tortellini will secure even more effectively the important marker of visual discontinuity, as each worker impinges her own personal style on the pasta, increasing the discontinuity of the final product. However, in the narratives and practices of workers themselves, being together is mostly important in order to endure the hardships of a job that is demanding and precarious.

According to their discourses, sfogline's practices and aesthetics are framed within a coherent moral landscape. Their gendered aesthetic of domesticity is the result of a mode of production characterized by small working spaces, long – lasting and intimate relationships, homogeneous age and working – class composition, and the hardship of long hours of labor endured together. Under the consumer gaze, too, the gendered aesthetic of domesticity is linked to a specific mode of production, yet in this case the

mode of production is romanticized. In the cultural valorization of artisanal labor, aesthetics is conflated with morality: the public, commercial spectacle of domesticity is meant to guarantee the authenticity of the product.

3. Cultural intermediation and price economy in artisanal entrepreneurship.

Artisanal pasta fresca laboratories and stores that employs sfogline act as intermediaries in the field of food cultures consumption, and can be thus seen as the middle point between production, consumption, and operations of cultural valorization. Store owners bear the responsibility to make decisions on the organization of production, including employee recruitment, procurement management, technological advancements in the production process. On the other hand, they are also engaging in forms of cultural valorization of their products, for example by designing promotional activities. Most notably, they operate the pay desk counter and interact on the front-end of the store with customers. Store owners mediates between the production side and customers. Thus they can be seen not only as entrepreneurs and employers but also as cultural intermediaries in this field (Bourdieu, 1984; Featherstone, 1991; Ocejo 2012; Maguire and Matthews 2014). Most of them are involved in local initiatives of networking (Sassatelli and Arfini 2016) and in promotional opportunities with an educational twist. My own request of access to the field was often granted with curiosity and, I would add, as a chance to promote their business, acquire information about competitors, represent the excellence of their professional practices, as well as an opportunity to educate one more person on the food culture of pasta fresca. In general, they showed a great degree of reflexivity when dealing with contemporary food cultures. In the overcrowded space of traditional gastronomy market, many owners acknowledged the 'omnivorous' attitudes of their customers, who may 'after it [tortellini as first course] have chicken curry [as second course]' [gastronomia owner]. Similarly, filling lasagna with vegetables appears a practice often accepted to meet the growing number of vegetarian customers. Further distancing tradition, one store owner among my informants was thinking about ways to make tortellini compatible with Islamic dietary laws using a bresaola (a dried salt beef typical of the Valtellina area in Lombardy) and veal filling (traditional tortellino filling is an all pork recipe). In order to meet the demands of an increasing competitive food market and attract new wealthy customers – be it vegetarian hipsters or tourists from the United Arab Emirates – my informants proved to possess a very flexible 'cultural toolkit' (Swidler 1986). However, once again removing the material conditions of production, variations to the tradition were made avoiding reference to price economy in favor of betterment of taste, innovation within tradition, democratization of consumption, and local food promotion among 'non –traditional' customers (youngsters, foreign tourists).

In the operations of aesthetic valorization of tortellini and its romantic ideal of domestic production any reference to the cost of labor tends to be effaced. In the realm of artisanal production, however, tortellini are, as one of my informants – owner of a pasta fresca shop – told me, 'a debt': expensive ingredients and the cost of labor do not allow for sizable margins of profit, especially if one considers that for sanitary reasons tortellini, even when sold fresh, still need to be partially dried (thus reducing their weight). The selling price must be set accordingly, making tortellini a high priced^{viii} commodity that invites sporadic, ritualized consumption. However, it is still important for

any pasta fresca or gastronomia shop to produce tortellini, because, as one owner related, 'it is our business card, if you nail it [the tortellini], they [customers] will be coming back, even if they'll buy pasta e fagioli^{ix} from then on'.

The aesthetic judgments and corresponding moralities expressed by store owners, while able to orchestrate and stage traditional, 'homemade' aesthetics, mostly pointed towards modern qualities such as technical efficiency and safety.

Consider the following account of what constitutes success according to one store owner. As I entered the 'gastronomia' of V., celebrated as a bastion of traditional bolognese cuisine, she welcomed me with a summary of her professional biography: 'You know when I bought this shop 20 years ago what I got? One tiny fridge, and it didn't even have the freezer compartment! Now look at this: I got 14! 14 refrigerators!'. She cheerfully opened various sized freezers orderly stuffed with frozen preparations, proud of her market achievements and yet promptly specifying 'But you haven't seen any of these [frozen foods], ok?'

Similarly, store owners put great pride and attention in maintaining the shop clean and orderly:

'You know which is the most important day of the week for us? It's Thursday!
'Because you can rest?'^x

'No no, we're here! Every Thursday we clean the shop, we boil water and use it on the [wooden] boards and rolling pins, and tools, we check the fridge, everything. In twenty –five years I'm doing this job, I've never had a [sanitary] problem. The morning after when we enter the shop, and everything is spotless and in order, you can say we're ready for the big days [Friday and Saturday]!'

Food safety concerns are prompted to pasta fresca stores in particular due to the instable nature of the main ingredients used, such as raw eggs. Those employing raw meat for the filling of tortellini meet even higher safety standards, to the point of investing in brand new tools and machinery, such as this artisan, owner of a recently opened store:

'We bought everything new, absolutely, you don't want to go cheap on these things. We're working delicate materials, you want to stay safe, you don't know how things were used before and you certainly don't want to use chemicals [detergents] on your [wooden] tools. Plus, we invested in renovating the walls, the paint job, the floor, it wouldn't look nice to have old instruments'

The material aspects of tortellini production thus seems to point far away from the romanticized version of its symbolic valorization, and the sustainability of the 'tradition' within small, artisanal practices, seems threatened rather than supported by the invention of tradition (Hobsbawm 1983). However, judgments shared by store owners did not simply dismiss aesthetics in favor of rational price economy, but rather infused with aesthetic judgment the most technical aspects of the job, precisely those that are effaced by the elitarian cultural valorization of tortellini and of their traditional 'domestic' preparation.

3. The credentialization of tortellini

Alongside the variety of recent cultural events around tortellini making and city branding, the first actor in the cultural field of tortellini dates back to 1963, when the Dotta Confraternita del Tortellino [Learned Brotherhood of the Tortellino] was founded, aiming at securing tortellini firmly within the tradition of local culinary culture. With the Confraternita practices, tortellini travel a long way: from the cramped spaces of artisanal laboratories to the polished rooms of high-brow restaurants, from female only to male dominated spaces^{xi}, from the hands of precarious workers to the mouths of wealthy aristocrats, from secluded kitchens to public spectacle, from worn out aprons to glorious draperies. The Confraternita's aesthetics is certainly in stark contrast with the one embodied by the sfogline. The Confraternita's elitarian practices separate production and consumption not only in aesthetic terms, but ultimately on moral grounds. Recent trends in food cultures attempt at bringing production and consumption closer, be it in the form of short foodchain buying schemes or open kitchen restaurants. The Confraternita, instead, distances itself from the scene of production by crystallizing the process of production into a notary deed and by embodying a blatantly different, wholly opposite aesthetics. This separation and contrast serves a functional ranking that consolidates the moral superiority of the taste of this elite group.

As I entered the historical mansion of Count C.G., active member of the Confraternita, I could better understand why the association's Statue requires the bi-annual dinner of the Confraternita to be 'prestigious, of high quality and very well refined'.



Figure 2: Serving in white gloves and refined *mise en place* at the Confraternita's dinner [Credits: Mazzanti Media]

While public represented as engaged in an operation of cultural valorization, in practice the Confraternita is not engaged in promotional activities. It doesn't strive to promote

events, partnerships, lobbying or educational initiatives, or any of the plethora of cultural initiatives many local gastronomic associations are so heavily investing in. The Confraternita rather cultivates a culture of exclusivity. The very foundation of the Confraternita appears muddled with pre-existing conflicts in the local aristocracy, politics, and with upper mobility aspirations of local entrepreneurs in the medium-scale food industry. I was not able to properly disentangle these politics due to the unexpected difficulty of access to the field and information. A post-interview note can give a sense of the culture of boundary making the Confraternita is engaged with:

I asked the Count if they ever do join initiatives with X [local amateur gastronomic association] because I had the sense they 'don't get along' very well... vague tone. He commented to his nephew 'she understood the matter already!' ... allusive tone. I did not succeed in having him further elaborate. The conflict is acknowledged but the matter still remains obscure [personal note].

From public records and documents analysis one can learn that the association was founded in 1965. The founding members were a group of upper class foodie, entrepreneurs and aristocrats, concerned with the declining quality of the city cuisine, and worried about public polemics hosted on the pages of the local conservative newspaper, *Il Resto del Carlino* about the origin of tortellino, with Modena being the fiercer contestant. Instrumental in the foundation and promotion of the association's activity was the manager and owner of the largest local mortadella industry^{xii}, who was also member of another prominent gourmand association (the 'Accademia Italiana di Cucina' [Italian Cuisine Academy]) and promoter of one of the first amateur pasta rolling competitions, the 'Mattarello d'Oro' [Golden Rolling Pin].

Bologna, 1960s: with the economic boom and a reconstructed country, foreign tourists began to rediscover Italy, on the well established Milan – Venice – Florence – Rome – Naples route. The Grand Tours of that time were traveled by bus. Tourists traveling from Venice would make a quick stopover in Bologna, have lunch and proceed towards Florence. At that time, the highway was still under construction: the alternate route is a steep, winding road across the Apennines. That would result in too many passengers throwing up the tortellini in broth. The tour operator asked the famous restaurant who served tourists at that time to come up with an alternative to tortellini in broth. 'Cesarina', nowadays considered one of the bastions of highbrow bolognese cuisine, came up with a very successful 'tortellini con la panna' (tortellini with cream), something that later became the ultimate culinary blasphemy, an epitome of how *not* to serve tortellini.

Bologna, 1974: 73% of Bologna's citizens approve the referendum for introducing the law on divorce, neofascist terrorists blow up a train in a station nearby the city, the first Italian free radio is founded in a caravan on the Bologna hills. The same year, the 'Learned Brotherhood of the Tortellino' registered the 'authentic recipe' of the filling of tortellini in a deed executed before a notary on December 7th, 1974. The District Magistrate of Bologna and the Mayor signed the document, that was deposited at the local Chamber of Commerce.



Figure 3: A brother in full robes and paraphernalia [Credits: Confraternita].

The initiative of the deposit of the recipe was meant to mobilize legal and para-legal codes. The Chamber of Commerce was chosen as the deputy authority not for a substantive reason, but rather for the circumstances of social capital connection and for a convenient aesthetic resonance. Indeed, Chambers of Commerce in Italy are delegated to compile a 'Customs and Traditions' document, that can be used by mediators in controversies, when cases cannot be decided due to a lack of available legal regulation:

The 'Customs and Traditions' document contains very archaic agricultural norms, like right of passage on farmland, stuff like that. They knew we compile this document and though our office could be the right place to deposit the recipe [Chamber of Commerce clerk].

The deposit of the recipe however does *not* have any normative power whatsoever, and it is a purely symbolic operation. Moreover, the codification itself is not without ambiguities. The recipe, proposed by a bolognese housewife, was chosen after a public consultation promoted on the pages of *Il Resto del Carlino*, and does list the basic ingredients, while remaining vague on the preparation. For example, a recurring dispute in the construction of the tradition of tortellini regards whether the filling should be cooked or raw: eventually a 'brother' of the Confraternita explained to me be that the filling is neither cooked nor raw, but – *pace* Levi –Strauss – 'browned'. Even the blasphemous tortellini with cream is actually admissible, provided that one does not use industrial cream, but the one 'just skimmed from the milk', because such was the cream used by Cesarina back in the days. Finally, even the vexed question of the origin of tortellini got settled in 2007. The place of origin of tortellini was declared to be Castelfranco Emilia, a small town exactly halfway Bologna and Modena, that used to be under the administrative borders of the province of Bologna, was moved to the province of Modena in 1927, but it is still currently under the religious administration of the Bishopric of Bologna. The diplomatic solution seems to hold and the matter appears settled, for now.

In a previous research on local food (Sassatelli and Arfini 2015), we used the notion of credentialization, expanding on the concept of information asymmetry within a

cultural framework, to speak of branding attempts that aim to provide more than hard data useful to enlighten the rational actor but of little symbolic effect. The Confraternita's actions attempted to secure a credential for tortellini:

We wanted to set a legitimate point of reference, to be able to say 'this is the original recipe, period', so that if in – say 20 years – we start putting rosemary in them, we can say: sorry, that's not the traditional way of doing it. Who knows maybe it will taste good, I'm not saying that interpretations can't be done, you can do whatever you want, but we're not interested, we're only interested in the tradition [Confraternita's brother].

The passing acknowledgement to variations to the tradition conceded here works as a reinforcement and as a constitutive outside for the moral ideal promoted: the superiority of traditional tortellini. The Confraternita's repertoire thus appears to reclaim a form of univormism, by legitimizing a form of authoritative historical continuity supported by the aesthetic codes related to the law, the promulgation of official acts, the sovereignty of jurisprudence, the timelessness of the canon.

4. Brothers in broth

The Confraternita is now composed by gourmands, but it adopts visual, ritual, and narrative codes that are a mix of goliardery and freemasonry (including honorific titles, coats of arm, seals, decorative robes, etc). Both aesthetic traditions carry heavy symbolic, political and moral codifications associated with secrecy, elitism, conservative moral codes, and right wing political orientation. Such symbolism is consistent with the group shared attitude perceived as that of 'nice people, but very jealous, they are peculiar indeed, maybe I shouldn't say.... But... they are a like, little bit freemasonry you know?' [Chamber of Commerce clerk]

The Confraternita's aesthetics here again goes in contrast to most trends characteristics of contemporary cultural omnivore, including what Johnston and Baumann call the 'casualization' of restaurants (2009: 21). Like the court nobility studied by Mennell (1985), the Confraternita engages in a certain kind of culture in food consumption as an indicator, rather than a determinant, of its social position. Its explicit attention to high –brow aesthetics is essential in reclaiming, contrary to the nouveau rich foodie who is regarded a status seeker byproduct of leftist counter-cuisine, their entitlement to authenticate the tradition.

Beyond the embodiment of such elitarian aesthetic, in fact, the Confraternita is not interested in promoting the tortellino industry and even not invested in the promotion of consumption of traditional food itself. Judgment on the proliferation of apparently similar cultural initiatives – such as festivals or cooking events focused on tortellini – and the possibility of creating synergies among like –minded cultural actors is, likewise, quite stern: 'those [cultural events] are all thingy one does if one has two cents and knows one alderman, to get the ball rolling at times of crisis' [Confraternita's brother]. Nowadays, the province of Bologna is one of the most certified areas in Europe, with 15 DOP and IGP products, and 27 between organic and traditional products (as certified by the Italian Ministry of Economic Development). However, when one – old and highly respected –

gastronomia shop in Bologna claimed its tortellini were 'approved' by the Confraternita, the association reacted boldly to the offense, warning any shop against utilizing the Confraternita's seal as a marketing device.

Distancing the Confraternita's field of action from branding market economy effects is a careful refinement of its moral boundaries, complemented by another contrast: a distancing from the political landscape, meant as both local politics (which, in the case of Bologna, is historically characterized by a hegemony of left and centre –left wing formations) and as a more general reference to the role of the democratic institutions and the State. Indeed, during our encounter, one member of the Confraternita even frowned upon the reception of an national official recognition of the cultural value of the association, granted by the then –President of the Italian Republic Giorgio Napolitano in person, because, he [President Napolitano] is 'not one of our kind' – referring to Napolitano's history of a left –wing politician with a background as a once prominent figure of the Italian Communist Party – and because the association 'is not a political thing' [Confraternita's brother].



Figure 4: Appointment of a new brother [Credits: Mazzanti Media].

Naturally, membership to the association is not easily granted (two out of three applications are rejected), access to the field itself has proved more difficult than anticipated, and the climate of secrecy was reinforced by the requests to keep interviews off the record. The Confraternita seems to not enable any trickle down effect, not embody a cultural intermediary, but stands out as an example of valorization of certain moral value in food consumption predicated on the utmost importance of aesthetic markers.

5. Conclusions

By nature, humans are omnivorous. This is, on the one hand, an evolutionary advantage, because survival is not dependent on limited varieties of food. On the other

hand, it entails a risk, because one can be exposed to poisonous food. The biological basis of this 'omnivorous paradox' (Poulain 2005) can easily be transposed into the realm of culture: foodstuff and food cultures are abundant, yet so is the social risk of managing them.

In contemporary western society, not only accessibility to food varieties itself has increased as the result of production intensification and transport logistics, but food discourses around consumer choices have, too, reached a level of complexity that can put actors in front of unmanageable dilemmas. Actors can now embrace a variety of food cultures, each bearing its symbolic and moral values. In times of crisis, we are asked not only to make sense and reconcile a number of cultural discourses around food, but also to manage their corresponding food practices on a budget.

The 'omnivorousness' (Peterson and Kern 1996; see also Johnston and Baumann 2007; Warde, Wright, and Gayo-Cal 2007) thesis points out to a relatively novel practice of distinction (Bourdieu 1984) in which taste is expressed over a broader engagement with a variety of cultural products. High status taste is thus signaled not by a snobbery exclusionary attitude, but rather by a democratic appropriation of a variety of tastes and openness to cultural diversity. If the snob expresses taste by liking the 'right product', the omnivore expresses taste by liking the 'right mix' of products. The distinctive marker of the high status of the omnivore is thus the capacity for inclusion, rather than the privilege of exclusion.

If contemporary distinction mechanisms of the elites rest on omnivorousness, the proliferation of food discourses can certainly provide grounds for experimentation and appropriation. A contemporary foodie can have, as one of my informants said, 'chicken curry after tortellini' and be able to justify such selection with an appreciation of different food cultures and the expertise in different tastes. Food consumption can also easily intersect discourses on inequality, welfare, localism, history, the environment, health, and so on, multiplying the possibility of consuming different cultural discourses and sustaining different values.

The elitarian practices sought after by the Confraternita rest against this backdrop and gain their status effects precisely by insisting on their univorous practices. With its univorous culture, the Confraternita is an example that stands out from the current scenario of gastropolitics, which is increasingly tainted by the recuperation and valorization of critique (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999) by wholesale distribution. Perhaps, if confronted with the neoliberal valorization of food quality (Bukowski 2015) promoted by once alternative actors such as, for example, Slow Food (Sassatelli and Davolio 2010), the kind of cultural and social practices that the Confraternita engages with are relatively harmless and allow us to appreciate how food aesthetics operates as it tries to disembed itself from both politics and the market.

The Confraternita, by its insistence on exclusivity, by refusing involvement with lay matters such as cultural promotion or market value, and, of course, by its exclusive focus on the tortellino, is a contemporary example of the persistence of univorousness and its still effective distinctive effects. Against the backdrop of proliferation of discourses on food and on tortellini themselves, elite practices can emerge as such by reclaiming exclusion and the pre-emption of market, politics, material labour in its embodied gendered reality.

The Confraternita's insistence on aesthetic markers is its primary tool to consolidate a whole set of moral dispositions: pomposity, historical prerogative, legal authority and, ultimately, entitlement to proclaim better judgments in manners of taste.

On the contrary, those directly responsible for the production of the subject matter, i.e. the sfogline, do not claim any moral authority over the authentication of the best taste. However, their aesthetic of domesticity is the necessary element that the Confraternita attempted at crystallizing with the para-legal deposit of the traditional recipe of the tortellini. The data presented here allows us to picture a chain of cultural production of aesthetics that proceeds from the domesticity of the sfogline to the pomposity of the Confraternita: crucial elements in this chain are the intermediation by store owners as well as the exclusionary politics of the Confraternita, which allows the elite group to preempt food politics and price economy. This paper does not address the role of consumers other than the 'brothers', and this is the main limitation of this study. Further research is needed to inquiry how the consumer gaze, and the tourist gaze in particular, resonates (or not) with the foodscape presented here. No matter how short local food chains can be in terms of procurement, the cultural chains they produce can certainly go a long way.

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ⁱ [Acknowledgments note redacted for blind peer review].

ⁱⁱ The wide variety of cultural appropriation of tortellini extended even to the transgender community. Forgoing the existing frame resonance and political alliance between queer and animal liberation movement, organizers of the 6th European Transgender Council incorporated Tortellini in the event logo which read 'I love Tgeu', the 'o' being a tortellino.

ⁱⁱⁱ Pasta fresca are artisanal laboratories selling pasta-based preparations to be cooked. The offer varies according to regional variations, and in a city like Bologna may include, beside tortellini: lasagne, tagliatelle, tortelloni, passatelli, zuppa imperiale. Most pasta fresca shops prepare not only the pasta itself but also the fillings of any stuffed preparation (like tortellini or lasagne).

^{iv} Gastronomie are delis selling ready made portions of traditional preparations, as well as cheese and cold cuts.

^v Pasta fresca are artisanal laboratories selling pasta-based preparations to be cooked. The offer varies according to regional variations, and in a city like Bologna may include, beside tortellini: lasagne, tagliatelle, tortelloni, passatelli, zuppa imperiale. Most pasta fresca shops prepare not only the pasta itself but also the fillings of any stuffed preparation (like tortellini or lasagne).

^{vi} Together with the industrial method of canning foods, invented in 1862 to inaugurate the export of mortadella targeting the overseas markets of Italian immigrants, and with the slicing machine, an innovation that allowed saving time in retail commerce (see Roversi 2002).

^{vii} A structural constrain reinforcing such gender segregation is the fact that pasta fresca artisanal laboratories are often small and cramped and wouldn't fit the gender separated spaces (such as bathrooms and cloakrooms) required by workplace regulations.

^{viii} Tortellini prices are high not only on an absolute scale, but also relative to any other preparation that can be purchased in pasta fresca and gastronomia shops.

^{ix} Pasta with beans, a dish that associates cheap vegetable proteins with pasta - making it a possible single course meal - is the most common example of a traditional cheap meal.

^x Stores selling food preparations, such as bakers, butchers, pasta fresca, being open on Saturdays are closed on Thursday.

^{xi} While female family members join the dinners of the Confraternita, being appointed a 'brother' is, as the title implies, reserved to males only.

^{xiii} It is worth noting that mortadella is not only an ingredient of tortellini, but also one of the industry that first recognized the marketing value of brands, seals and locality: canned mortadella was one of the first products to exhibit on the packaging logos and the medals received at Universal Expositions, and already in 1661 Cardinal Giacomo Farnese in Bologna signed a decree that sanctioned anyone attempting to counterfeit mortadella (Trombacco 2004).