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SLOW FOOD AND SLOW TOURISM: SAVORING ITALY'S BEAUTY?

"Lu cuntu nun metti tempu": time takes no time in a story. This is a Sicilian storytellers' formula that Italo Calvino reports in the second of his much-cited *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, the series of lectures that he was supposed to deliver at Harvard in 1985-86. Unfortunately, almost at the end of his endeavor and shortly before leaving for the United States, he died of a stroke. His second Memo – arguably the most poignant – is devoted to "quickness" and to its magic:

"I do not wish to say that quickness is a value in itself. Narrative time can also be delaying, cyclic, or motionless. In any case, a story is an operation carried out on the length of time involved, an enchantment that acts on the passing of time, either contracting or dilating it."

Quickness, however, is not speed. By praising the idea of conciseness, Calvino also implies its opposite: "the pleasures of lingering." This concurrence of speed and slowness can be seen as one of the several paradoxes produced in the bosom of most Western societies, one that Calvino brilliantly illustrates with the motto *Festina lente*, the old Latin tag that he uses for his conclusion: hurry slowly.

The search for such paradoxical harmony between quickness and slowness has been a constant goal of our contemporary food systems. "What is food?" wrote Roland Barthes in 1961. It is "[...] a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior [...] it signifies." For Lévi-Strauss (1958), food constitutes a language that reflects social structures and cultural systems, while Mary Douglas (1972) argues that the act of eating is a way to incorporate a series of nutritional codes through which individuals can define their place and participation within a sociocultural collectivity. What is crucial for every society, then, is to manage a set of common meanings to make sense of things and allow for communication and comprehension among individuals. To learn "the grammar of food" (Montanari 2006) eventually means to acquire the basic tools

to narrate stories and, as we know, "lu cuntu nun metti tempu." Yet: how can we combine the quick evolution of food disparity and the slowness of political action?

In "The Pleasures of Eating" (1989), Wendell Berry affirms that "eating is an agricultural act." With this statement the American writer-farmer-activist upholds the direct link between the food we eat and the agriculture that produces it. In the late 1980s, bewildered by the passivity of American consumers who bought "what they have been persuaded to want," Berry was one of the most attentive beholders of that alienation from food that many Americans were experiencing together with other eating disorders. The "industrial eater" was somebody who was deprived of the skill to imagine the connections between eating and the land, in short somebody who suffered from "cultural amnesia" in relation to food history (Fargione 2017). In those years, the Slow Food movement originated in Italy with the clear intention to contrast fast food and, particularly, McDonald's dominant role in its production of high volume, global standardized food at low cost. Carlo Petrini and a group of activists gathered "to defend regional traditions, good food, gastronomic pleasure and a slow pace of life" (Petrini 2013). The rise and evolution of the Slow Food movement with its distinctive motto "good, clean and fair" was a political reaction to an increasing sense of unease over contemporary foodscapes.

Due to its pivotal cultural role, slow food and gastronomy have recently been associated with slow tourism: people are more and more interested in the idea of devoting time to discover new territories and Italy lists among the first countries to visit. To be a "culinary tourist" or a "foodie" is generally tantamount to meeting and getting to know the communities who inhabit those regions, appreciating their culture and getting acquainted with their multiple expressions. Although food has always been one of the major assets of a touristic destination, the new combination of slow food and slow tourism has attracted more people willing to be involved in a material and symbolic experience where food, place, and identity are part of an inextricable whole of local resources, historical

specificity, and “authentic” traditions. But to say it with Meredith Abarca: “What does it mean to speak of the authenticity of culinary practice when traditions within all cultures are constantly changing?” (2004). The process of hybridization – both cultural and gastronomic – annuls the concepts of purity and stability.

Also, romantic foodies visiting Italy often ignore the dark side of Italian land working, especially in the southern regions where the seasonal work of fruit and tomato harvesting is often accomplished by Italian women or immigrants, mostly undocumented black Africans, living in ghettos, working for long hours and low wages, with no contracts and no health insurance, and subject to an illegal hiring system called *caporalato*, a sort of gang-master recruitment that evokes plantations and slavery. So, when faced with the idyllic myth of authentic “locally grown” slow food, we should question the implied pristine nature of the economic and political configuration of some forms of localism, together with their veiled protectionism. On the other hand, “food sovereignty” – the right of peoples to sound and culturally appropriate foods produced with sustainable methods – is rooted in grassroots movements that advocate a more ethical food system. Alternative networks such as Slow Food and GAS (*Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale* or solidarity-based purchase groups) have responded to this call, proving how collective agency can be effective in the building of new strategies of resistance and alternatives to contemporary global gastropolitics. What really matters for any “gastronome” is to learn how to catch the “eatimologies” (Scarpato and Daniele 2003) of the new hybridized visited places that a too fast eye cannot register: the original prints of previous steps, the interstices where memory is stored until they become a new old story to be told in the present time. Hurry slowly.

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Daniela Fargione: Former Fulbright Scholar at the University of Massachusetts where she earned her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature, she currently teaches American Literatures at the University of Turin. Her research interests include: environmental humanities; ecocriticism; the interconnections between contemporary American literatures and the other arts; theory and practice of literary translation. She is one of the two current Italian translators of Julian Barnes' works (Einaudi Editore).