GLOBAL HUMANITIES

Dining out

Editorial by
Frank Jacob and Francesco Mangiapane

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Editorial

Frank Jacob and Francesco Mangiapane

This issue of *Global Humanities* comes as an experiment.

We have been asking our community of scholars to engage in sketching a theory out of their own eventual predilection for a specific place where to dine out. More precisely, we were calling them to articulate an analysis of the complex configuration that constitutes the fascination of their "beloved" spot, by questioning the features and criteria that reveal relevant to their endorsement.

By indicating this route, we were aware of how difficult such a mission may have proven, since this predilection is very easily caught at work but quite hard to write down, requiring to heighten the awareness for volatile, elusive and unseizable assets. Such volatile means intersect in various ways, up to form a *je ne sais quoi*, a proper "atmosphere" whose formal mechanisms are difficult to describe but yet full of consequences.

By inviting our authors to give an account of what is "so special" on a specific spot we therefore aimed at revealing the general issue of how atmospheres get constituted and how they assume importance on a Semiotic of daily life.

It is already acknowledged how dining out – be it for a lunch break, a business dinner, a romantic meeting, or a solitary resolution – stands as a social daily life ritual filled with significance. Its celebration emerges as a moment of self-exposure where the social limen between public and private, individual and collective identity gets constantly negotiated. Such a socializing practice of daily life reveals its power through aesthetical means: endorsing a determined regime of good manners by choosing who to eat with, how to behave and dress, when and what to eat, and where to dine out results in a sensitive and intrinsically political asset, outcome of specific choices at the hand of the individual.

It's not a case that huge social challenges such as sustainability, ecologism, social justice, cultural heritage, and many others pass by the preference we might or might not accord to an actual dining venue. By showing ourselves eating in public, more generally, we take a position in respect of essential dichotomies such as the already mentioned Individual *vs* Collective, Public *vs* Private, and, henceforth, Identity *vs* Alterity, *Gemeinschaft* (community) *vs* *Gesellschaft* (society), Cosmopolitanism *vs* Localism, Social Commitment *vs* Disengagement, Fast *vs* Slow and many others.

Although the attempt that this issue will make may be considered successful only partially, as we have just received a limited response to our atypical call, we are very proud to present three very accurate analyses of different contexts and spots (Uruguay, Sardinia, New York). The quality and relevance of these works encourage us to insist on continuing to cultivate the field of a proper Semiotics of dining out.

Bodø, Norway and Palermo, Italy
May 2024

Cervecería La Pasiva
The 'Typical' Uruguayan Dining Out Experience

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Abstract. Cervecería La Pasiva is a Uruguayan chain of restaurants specialized in local fast food (minutas). This article studies how La Pasiva, both as a brand and as a place for the experience of dining out, functions as 'typically' Uruguayan. The article begins with an introduction of the analytical category of 'geocultural identities', which we deem useful to describe processes of collective identification linked to territories, either national or not.

Keywords: Culinary Practices, Geocultural Identities, National Identity, Uruguay, La Pasiva.

1. Introduction

Uruguay is a scarcely populated country (it counts with ca. 3.5 million inhabitants) located in the South of Latin America. If a survey were conducted among Uruguayans asking them to name a specific restaurant that represents or reflects their national identity, a vast majority would most probably answer: Cervecería La Pasiva. La Pasiva is a Uruguayan chain of restaurants specialized in *minutas*, the local/regional version of fast food, that is, dishes that are not complex to prepare and that are eaten without much ceremony, usually in everyday life contexts. Although Uruguayans would most probably identify steakhouses – *parrilladas*, in Spanish – as the typical *type* of restaurant, La Pasiva would be the most probable option when asked to identify a specific restaurant.

The language and references used in local newspapers evidences the social imaginary that surrounds La Pasiva chain of restaurants: "an icon of national gastronomy", an "emblematic brand", a "traditional gastronomic chain" that is "famous for its draft beer, its light frankfurters and its mustard (El País 2016); a "Uruguayan fast food and *minutas* chain" that has become "one of Uruguay's most emblematic restaurants" (InfoNegocios 2020); a restaurant that serves "Uruguay's most famous frankfurters" (Ruocco 2012a). TasteAtlas lists it as one of the 10 "best traditional restaurants in Uruguay[1]".

What is curious about our imaginary survey is that La Pasiva restaurants do not display signs or symbols that are overtly Uruguayan, nor do they engage in a nationalistic/folkloristic rhetoric, as would be expected from a restaurant that TasteAtlas classes as one of the country's best *traditional* restaurants. How do restaurants convey the semantic value of /tradition/? Through which textual configurations do individuals recognize a restaurant as being traditional?

La Pasiva is certainly one of Uruguay's most traditional restaurants. However, neither its gastronomic offer nor its brand identity display semiotic contents easily recognizable – thanks to cultural codification – as typically Uruguayan in historical terms. Figure 1 depicts La Pasiva's logotype. How does the wooden barrel of beer relate to Uruguayan culinary identity and history? What about the giant hotdog, consisting of a frankfurter in soft Viennese bread with mustard on its top? What does the kid's attire convey in nationalistic terms? Where does his attire originally come from, since it has no relationship with Uruguayan folkloric attires? To sum up, none of the visual elements included in the logotype are *typically* Uruguayan.

Moving onto the spatial dimension of La Pasiva's restaurants, it projects heterotopies. Following Foucault , heterotopies constitute "something like counter-sites,

a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault [1984] 1986, p. 24). As spaces for heterotopic experiences, La Pasiva's restaurants seem to reproduce the narrative of the multicultural melting pot – *crisol de culturas,* in Spanish –, which consists of a convergence of diverse and heterogeneous cultures of origin that serve as the source for a relatively homogeneous, brand-new culture. For over a century, the narrative of a society composed by immigrants coming from different cultural backgrounds has been dominant as an account aimed at explaining the foundations of Uruguayan nationhood. This narrative is still recurrent among intellectuals, in political discourse and in the more general public sphere.

In line with this hegemony of the discourse of multiculturalism, La Pasiva's menu mirrors the idea that poses that Uruguayan cuisine is not based on autochthonous products, ingredients, traditions and culinary practices that could be originally found in what nowadays is Uruguay's territory, but elsewhere (García Robles 2005). An observer unfamiliar with La Pasiva's restaurants will rapidly note how the brand proposes a *bricolage* of dishes that are located at the crossroads of (a) a blurred Central European imaginary – draft beer, homemade mustard, frankfurters and Hungarian sausages in Viennese bread –; (b) Mediterranean culinary traditions – different types of pizza and pasta, the local version of Genovese chickpea *farinata* (*fainá,* in

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1 Source: https://www.tasteatlas.com/uruguay/restaurants, last accessed on December 15th 2023.

Spanish), Spanish omelet and Armenian *lahmacuns* – and (c) some creations of a creole origin – mostly *chivitos*, a beef tenderloin sandwich filled with an exuberating amount of ingredients, usually credited as the Uruguayan national dish.

To sum up, La Pasiva, one of Uruguay's most emblematic and traditional restaurant brands, does neither express nor convey directly the idea of a Uruguayan identity, as discussed above when analyzing its logo: the wooden barrel of beer and the attire of the brand's mascot do not have any link with the Uruguayan social imaginary regarding its national identity. In fact, it is almost impossible to find draft beer stored in wooden barrels in the country! However, in a sense that is less visible, the brand experience does reflect some of the core tenets of Uruguay's national identity.

The call for papers that motivated us writing this essay asked authors to embed dining-out ventures into a theoretical framework and ask the following questions: Why are they so special? How do they work as a social machine? How do their location, their spaces, their clients, their settings make sense? How does such meaning get acknowledged in the public sphere? This article aims at making sense of La Pasiva's restaurants as places for dining-out experiences where Uruguayans (and also tourists) are faced with a *typical* food experience related to Uruguayanness, that is, the Uruguayan national identity.

To achieve this goal, the first section introduces the notion of 'geocultural identities' that we proposed in previous articles as a useful analytical category to describe semiotic processes of collective identification linked to the culturalization of territories, either national or not (subnational, transnational or supranational regions, cities, cultural landscapes, etc.). Then, with a focus in the Uruguayan case, we discuss the implications of talking about 'national cuisines' in semiotic terms, that is, the articulation of sense that links a national identity – constructed in discourse – to a series of ingredients, products, dishes and culinary practices. After the initial theoretical considerations, we move to the semiotic analysis. There, we first introduce La Pasiva and study its identity, history and role within the Uruguayan semiosphere, and then, we relate it to the idea of a Uruguayan national culinary identity.

2. Geocultural identities

Over the past three to four decades, semioticians have expanded the scope of their analytical interest and started embracing objects of study that allow them to understand how individuals make sense of the world, and not only of texts understood in a traditional sense. This is how semiotics saw the growth of studies of practices (Fontanille 2008; de Oliveira 2013), interactions (Landowski 2006; de Oliveira 2004), spaces (Giannitrapani 2013) and other phenomena that have an inherent social – and therefore, discursive – dimension. In this theoretical expansion, semioticians have surprisingly not visited the concept of identity as it would have been expected. Or maybe they did, if one considers the semiotics of forms of life as a type of semiotics of identity.

Nevertheless, the study of human collectives and collective identities has been an object of interest for semioticians like Eliseo Verón (1987) and Jacques Fontanille (2021). We have recently proposed a theoretical justification for a semiotics of collective identities, with a particular focus on what we have named *geocultural identities* (Montoro & Moreno 2021a; 2021b; 2022; 2023; 2024a; 2024b). These are more or less stable and coherent discursive configurations of sense and meaning that are anchored in a geographical materiality or fact, i.e., that take a geographical materiality or fact to be constitutive of a semiotic core that is used as the nodal point of a type of social discourse that binds people together. Geocultural identities imply that a culturalization of geography occurred throughout history, giving place to the emergence of a social discourse linked to that semiotic process. That is why we have maintained

the reference to the *geographical* and *cultural* dimensions in the name of the analytical category we propose; although these collective identities are cultural, the cultural aspects – symbolic, discursive, narrative, imaginary, etc. – are linked to a geographical reality that can be either physical, such as mountain ranges, rivers, cardinal points, climates or biomes – like tropical, temperate, or polar ones – or conventional, such as borders, states, provinces, municipalities, etc.

As we have argued elsewhere, an evident starting point to approach, study and classify geocultural identities is the national level. National identities are a type of geocultural identity, but not the only one: there are also subnational (linked to administrative or geographical regions within a country, to cities, to neighborhoods), supranational (linked to administrative or geographical regions that encompass countries in their totality, like continental identities) and translational (linked to administrative or geographical regions that go beyond the borders of a country, but that do not encompass national identities in their totality, like the Alpine or Mediterranean identities) geocultural identities, depending on where the boundaries of an imagined space/community are set. Nevertheless, in 2024, the nation remains the most frequent and globally scalable unit of segmentation and analysis to define collective identities.

A national identity like the Uruguayan is therefore a type of geocultural identity – that is, an articulated set of discourses, narratives, social imaginaries, etc., that people, both in-group and out-group, use for identification in collective terms – in which specific boundaries and a state apparatus normally coincide with the boundaries of the nation. The Uruguayan national identity is a geocultural identity delimited by the borders of the Uruguayan state and that is constructed at different levels, in particular by the Uruguayan state, but also in banal contexts (Billig 1995). This definition does not imply that only individuals living in the Uruguayan territory identify with that geocultural identity – actually, also foreigners might embrace it, as well as Uruguayans living abroad who nevertheless feel as belonging to it.

As the product of discourse, geocultural identities are accessible to analysts through textual configurations. These configurations are located in the dimension of the expression and conduct to a dimension of the content. It is in the dimension of the content where a given identity is located as a unit of meaning resulting from a cultural segmentation of a continuum. To mention some examples, the literary works included in the syllabus of mandatory education and the iconography included in banknotes and coins (Moreno 2022) serve as entry points to understand the configuration that the Uruguayan national semiosphere takes, thanks to the action of the Uruguayan state, as a discursive articulation anchored in a unit of meaning segmented in the plane of the content. The same happens with culinary practices, in particular with ingredients, dishes, traditions and restaurants considered typical of a nation (Montoro y Moreno 2024b).

3. National cuisines: the case of Uruguay

In recent years, semioticians have turned their attention towards culinary and gastronomic practices. From the perspective of a semiotics of geocultural identities, these practices are relevant since they can be read as manifestations in the plane of the expression of particular units of meaning tied to national identities to be found in the plane of the content. If we open the menu of a restaurant in a random city or country without knowing where that restaurant is located, it is possible to deduct the location thanks to the options available in the menu: if it offers *Käsespätzle*, *Schweinsbraten*, *Zwiebelrostbraten* and *Schnitzel*, the restaurant is probably located in the Alpine region (Southern Germany or Austria); if it offers as desserts *cannoli* and *cassata*, we are probably in Sicily.

The two examples – Alpine and Sicilian identities – are interesting because they are not cases of *national* identities. That is why a semiotics of geocultural identities cannot be limited to national identities only, and subnational (Sicilian), transnational (Alpine) and also supranational (like the European) identities must be taken into account. In any case, what matters is that through specific configurations of meaning that are perceivable in the plane of the expression (in this case, dishes, ingredients or flavors), it is possible to re-organize the plane of the content (i.e., a given collective identity) differently to the political divisions that (have) produce(d) the existing nation states. As a result, these new segmentations of the semantic continuum can produce new units of meaning linked to collective identities that are not *national* (Alpine cuisine/culture, Sicilian cuisine/culture, etc.).

For semioticians interested in studying geocultural identities, considering practices such as those linked to cooking and eating (including those of dining out) can be enlightening since they can be interpreted as manifestations of something located at a deeper level – the national identity – that is expressed at a level that can be perceived empirically, described and analyzed. This applies not only to ingredients, beverages and dishes considered typical of a given geocultural identity, but also to practices linked to cooking, drinking and eating. In a restaurant considered *traditional*, it is reasonable to expect these differential practices and products to be present and, moreover, to be salient in the effect of sense that the restaurant proposes. This is the case in the many Italian restaurants and Spanish tapas bar located around the world, where a common thread is easily perceivable not only in the products that are offered, but also in the aesthetics of the restaurants (colors, decoration, music, attire of waiters, stories told, etc.).

Uruguayan national cuisine is quite simple to describe due to the lack of dishes that are autochthonous to the Uruguayan territory and, therefore, not shared with any other country in the region. Due to migratory reasons, the cuisine of the country is heavily influenced by Spanish and Italian culinary traditions. As Ángel Ruocco argues in the introductory chapter to one of Uruguayan chef Hugo Soca's cookbooks,

> The culinary history of Uruguay is the history of the country itself, but also of the countries its inhabitants come from. [...] Italian settlers – particularly from Genoa and Campania – brought along their pasta recipes and renewed and improved agriculture; Spaniards – from Galicia, Asturias and the Basque Country – widened the scope of eating possibilities in existence until then – mostly in the south of the country – with the introduction of preparations that included fish and sea fruits. They would also improve and enhance diary production. Those from Catalonia specialized in bakery and pastry. [...] Therefore, Creole cuisine [la *cocina criolla*] is an adaptation of the European recipes to our human, economic and agricultural reality, as well as of some of the preferences and practices both from the first native inhabitants of this region and of those Europeans that settled here along the different migratory waves (Ruocco 2012b, p. 16–17).

La Pasiva's gastronomic offer evidences this cultural shaping of the Uruguayan local cuisine by European traditions. However, it does not match in an evident way the social imaginaries of what is *typically* Uruguayan, which normally consists of traditions and practices originating in what nowadays is the Uruguayan territory, and therefore normally linked to the rural domain, like the *asado* (barbeque), as is discussed below. A key to understand to what extent a given restaurant may represent a national cuisine consists in examining whether that place offers a so-called national dish and which its symbolic positioning is within its more general gastronomic offer (for example: is it a dish featured or recommended by the restaurant in its menu?). Following this logic, thanks to cultural codification and the pervasiveness of social discourses linked to national identities, it is expected any Italian-themed restaurant in the world to offer pizza and/or pasta, American-themed eateries to serve burgers and soda drinks, and Japa-

nese-themed restaurants to specialize in sushi and ramen.

In the case of Uruguay, as well as other cultures linked to societies inhabiting the South American plains like Argentina, Paraguay, and southern Brazil, one of the most salient local dishes is grilled meat, locally known as *asado* in Spanish and *churrasco* in Portuguese. As the Uruguayan anthropologist Gustavo Laborde (2010) notes, in the turn from the 19th to the 20th century, *asado* began to be considered the favorite meal among the brand-new creole societies in Uruguay and Argentina. According to Laborde, its symbolic consolidation as the non-official national dish was already completed towards the decade of 1930. All over this transnational geographical region in which veal and calf meat is abundant, eating *asado* largely remained a social activity placed in private houses and barbecues, either in yards or in roofed grillrooms. However, apart from several *parrilladas* (steakhouses) dispersed in the country, Montevideo – Uruguay's capital city – currently concentrates one place where people gather in restaurants and eateries to enjoy *asado*: the Mercado del Puerto, located in the Old Town and a hotspot for tourists visiting the city.

Curiously, La Pasiva is unrelated to *asado*, one of the key meals and food rituals in Uruguay. However, this limitation does not impede the brand to play a prominent role among eateries that portray Uruguayanness in the domain of discourse linked to food. Which values of that so-called Uruguayanness does La Pasiva portray in its history and offer, both as a brand and as place for a dining out experience?

A possible answer can be found in Laborde's recent work on Uruguayan national cuisine. Laborde (2022) identifies three overarching culinary-discursive configurations throughout Uruguayan history. The first one emerged around a type of *creole* kitchen [*cocina criolla*] and was promoted at the end of the 19th century by urban elites with the purpose of recuperating from the past traditions that were considered local and typical of a broader, transnational region linked to the Rio de la Plata area (a transnational geocultural identity). The second culinary-discursive configuration, which became relevant in the first decades of the 20th century, was promoted by the newly created Uruguayan state and aimed at constructing Uruguayan national identity through specific dishes. This is the period of *Uruguayan* kitchen [*cocina uruguaya*]. Finally, a third configuration emerged at the end of the 20th century and is most visible in the first quarter of our current century. It is mainly touristic, located in the seaside resorts and coastal towns of Uruguay's South-East, and aims at recuperating ingredients that were used by the indigenous population of the country before the creation of the nation state. Laborde calls this discursive configuration *native Uruguayan kitchen* [*cocina nativa uruguaya*] This third type of discursive configuration has a contemporary, trendy element to it that does not make of it a good fit for a traditional, everyday life restaurant like La Pasiva.

4. La Pasiva, the 'typical' Uruguayan dining out experience

La Pasiva is different from most iconic brands, either global or local, that invest resources in public relations and marketing to create epic foundational narratives to share with their customers an appealing account of how they were born. Millions have heard how Coca-Cola was an accidental creation by a pharmacist from Atlanta, how two brothers partnered in Illinois to create McDonald's and sold the company to a young entrepreneur that escalated the business to its current global success, or how the son of a farmer near Louisville bought a pressure frying machine and created Kentucky Fried Chicken.

Conversely, not only little is known about how La Pasiva was created, but also many contradictory narratives coexist. Currently, La Pasiva does not count with an institutional spokesperson, does not have a corporate website and the Facebook page claiming to be the official on Facebook is not verified, has less than

1,000 followers and it has been inactive since 2018. There is a spread of social media profiles related to each specific restaurant and it is unclear to the general public which the exact business model is to license and franchise the brand – this issue has created some problems linked to complaints of inappropriate uses of the brand, especially abroad (mostly in Argentina and Spain).

The first restaurant of the chain opened in the 1960s next to Plaza Independencia, the most emblematic square in Montevideo. However, two versions about the origin of the name coexist. On the one hand, it is said that the name originates in the building that hosted it, which in its heyday used to be a barrack of battalion formed out of retired workers (*pasivos*, in Spanish) during the Uruguayan Civil War from 1839 to 1851 (Ruocco 2012a). Another version states that it was called as such because it was placed in an area enclosed by porticoes (*pasivas*, in Spanish), a rare feature in Montevideo's urban landscape.

In either case, the name rapidly disentangled from the type of food that was served in that original restaurant, and La Pasiva could be found in a wider geographical area of Montevideo's downtown, once famous for its historic cafés and restaurants, such as Café Brasilero, Café Sorocabana and Café Armonía, among others, where intellectuals and public figures used to gather. La Pasiva's first location was the same where Café Palace, one of these iconic cafés from Montevideo, operated previously. Such cultural legacy dealing with Montevideo's lifestyle from ca. the 1930s to the 1950s is visible today in many literary works and memorialist essays that celebrate such imprints (Burel 2017; Michelena 1998; Schinca 2003; Varese 2018).

In this sense, it could be argued that La Pasiva is part of a wider *mnemotope* – i.e., a vaguely defined landscape "consisting of topographical texts of cultural memory" (Assmann 1992, p. 44) – of a Uruguayan *golden era* of economic stability, progressive politics, a strong welfare state and a fast-growing urban middle-class that welcomed immigrants and offered them opportunities for achieving a better quality of life than the one they had in post-war Europe. Even if the peak of that golden era had already expired by the date in which La Pasiva was created as a business in 1963 (Real de Azúa 1964; Methol Ferré 1967), the fact of being part of that social atmosphere probably helped the brand to make it into the social imaginary of local businesses perceived as timeless, as if they had always been. This might explain why, differently to other iconic Uruguayan food chains and options, the conditions in which La Pasiva was created and grew were forgotten in collective memory (Connerton 2008).

However, there is a particular feature of its corporate story that echoes both Uruguayan hegemonic narratives linked to nationalism and La Pasiva's gastronomic offer: it assesses Uruguayan cuisine – and Uruguayanness, in general – as a local adaptation of traditions, recipes and ingredients brought by European immigrants. Following Laborde's identification of three culinary-discursive configurations, La Pasiva's offer goes in line with the second moment: that of the creation of a national, Uruguayan kitchen based on the inputs from different cultures around the world.

Curiously, while La Pasiva's brand identity, its spatial arrangements and some of its food offer reminds of a blurred Central European foodscape[2] at the level of *enoncé* – i.e., what is being said in the texts produced by a given semiosphere –, the empirical author (Eco 1962) behind such discourses – that is, La Pasiva's owners, who are those who actually produce those texts – is not of a Central European origin, but linked to a group of entrepreneurs who belonged to immigrant collectives that arrived to

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2 The notion of *foodscape* is understood here as "a process of viewing place in which food is used as a lens to bring into focus selected human relations" (Yasmeen, 2008).

Uruguay from both western and eastern European peripheries – namely: Galicia, in Spain, and Armenia.

This fact can also explain – at least partially – the discontinuity in identity that emerges from contrasting La Pasiva as *model author* (based on the perceptions that consumers have about who might have created those texts, its positioning in the overarching Uruguayan social imaginary, its unchallenged presence in the Uruguayan cultural landscape) and La Pasiva as *empirical author* (the authorship as the result of the actions of groups of people who actually produce a cultural text, as seen in its corporate profile and in the wider history of entrepreneurship as a vehicle for social recognition in a cultural melting pot like Uruguayan society). By contrast, ethnic-themed restaurants are characterized by highlighting continuity and conjunction between these two dimensions (empirical authorship and model authorship; level of *enunciation* and level of the *enoncé*), since *actually being* from the places that are discursively portrayed in the menu and the overall thematic manipulation is a requirement for the brand to claim authenticity and discursive coherence.

As opposed to La Pasiva's brand image, ethnic-themed restaurants specifically aim at highlighting its function as an exotic experience of Otherness. They tend to enact a kind of heterotopias (Foucault 1984), similar to fantastic accounts and remote travel destinations. Conversely, the heterotopies displayed by La Pasiva's project a kind of experience that Uruguayans might feel as the source of a portion of its *modern* national identity (Laborde's second configuration), but still far from the more trendy nativistic and indigenist configuration that recently became mainstream in Uruguayan recipes (Laborde 2022), and of the more pre-modern, folk-

loristics traditions that are usually placed in rural settings, far from Montevideo (Laborde's first configuration).

La Pasiva's disengagement with both exoticizing spaces and monolithic accounts of nationhood results in a clear prototype of the self-perceived narrative of Uruguayanness as a cultural melting pot. While symbolically re-constructing this melting pot, La Pasiva vaguely defines an imaginary linked to a transcultural Central European geocultural identity, because it avoids explicit identification with specific nations: different types of hot dogs (among them, a dark sausage called *húngara*, i.e., "Hungarian"), specialized types of pizza that are difficult to find outside Italy like pizza marinara (without cheese on its top) and *farinata* (chickpea flour pie, called *fainá*), *gnocchi* and other pasta, breaded cutlets in different servings, etc.

From the perspective of an outsider, La Pasiva's menu might be a case of *bricolage* of different culinary traditions. However, most Uruguayans would undoubtedly recognize any of these dishes as *authentically* Uruguayan. Among them, probably the best-known dish from La Pasiva, the *chivito* – a beef tenderloin sandwich created randomly in the early 20th century that is served with abundant ingredients like fried eggs, grilled peppers, lettuce, tomato, melted cheese, olives, bacon and mayonnaise – might be even considered as *exclusively* Uruguayan[3].

A significant part of social discussions of banal nationalistic nature around the globe focuses on food (Ichijo & Ranta 2016), especially on which nation can rightfully claim to be the creator and/or owner of a dish, recipe or ingredient that is culturally scattered over a wider area. The prominence of national identities within the encompassing category of geocultural identities is reflected by the fact

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3 Ruocco (2012b, p. 50) writes about the *chivito* that it is "such a typical Uruguayan dish that can be eaten at any bar or fast-food store, and each place has its unique way of preparing it. This sandwich was created just by change by a cook in Punta del Este City when once a client asked for a 'chivito' (which means that it had to be made with goat meat – *chivito*: young goat). There was no goat meat at the restaurant so the cook prepared it with beef instead. He sandwiched a beefsteak with ham, cheese, lettuce, tomato and mayonnaise. This was the 'chivito' born, so popular nowadays. And yet, such an easy dish is never made at home [...]".

that few people would see, for example, *dulce de leche* [sweet caramel] as a truly Latin American recipe rather than an *authentic* cultural manifestation of each individual nation that constitutes such supranational belonging (Argentina, Uruguay, Peru, Mexico, etc.).

In the case of Uruguay, a country whose culture and traditions are much similar to those belonging to a bigger and more salient neighbouring state like Argentina, these discussions are relevant: many Uruguayan emigrants who aim at setting up an *asado*-themed steakhouse overseas often brand it as Argentinean rather than as Uruguayan because Argentinean meats – and Argentina as a nation brand, in general (Anholt 2007; Arkenbout 2015) – are easier to recognize worldwide than the Uruguayan ones. For reasons like this, as part of its processes of (banal) nation-building, Uruguayans historically attempted to find an *exclusively* Uruguayan dish that Argentineans could not claim as theirs (Laborde 2022). If we understand a national dish as such – and not as the dish that is most consumed among population or more related to local traditions –, then *chivito* would clearly fit into that category. Specifically, La Pasiva's *chivito* is socially regarded as the prototype of its class within the Uruguayan foodscape. Proof of this can be seen on how Argentinean sport TV's broadcasters often flatter Uruguay during international football matches by expressing desires of visiting this coun-

try and tasting La Pasiva's *chivitos,* even with those comments not being evidently linked to a paid promotional campaign.

There is a tendency among authors that applied Bourdieu's idea of *field* to food discourses (Ferguson 1998; Goody 1982; Laborde 2017) to distinguish *culinary* from *gastronomic* fields: while the former tend to focus on activities solely related to domestic cookery, the latter bring them closer to more complex social institutions defined by methods of preparing, ways of serving, role positioning, and other issues related to dining out and restaurant experiences. As Laborde (2017, p. 17) reminds us, "the consolidation of a gastronomic field in Uruguay is a work in progress that requires [...] a sizable set of critical and bold consumers". Taking this distinction into account, *chivito* clearly belongs to the gastronomic field because, differently to how *asado* is normally consumed, Uruguayans tend to consume it in the frame of a dining out experience and, to that regard, it is one the few dining out experiences that are discursively credited as *truly* Uruguayan.

5. Makings sense of La Pasiva

The experience of dining out in La Pasiva may vary significantly depending on the specific restaurant chosen because, among other reasons, its business model does not codify strictly the brand's usage nor many quality standards. If it is possible, then, to speak of a semiosphere (Lotman 1990) around La Pasiva, and we could identify at its peripheries those restaurants that are located either in cities from inner Uruguay or even its overseas experiences, like the unsuccessful attempts of setting up La Pasiva's restaurants for Uruguayan expat communities in cities like Buenos Aires, in Argentina, or Vigo, in Spain. In both cases, La Pasiva did not count with enough support by Uruguayans in the diaspora and/or interest by non-Uruguayans to make them profitable. On the contrary, the semiotic core of such semiosphere would be identified in the series of La Pasiva's restaurants that lies on 18 de Julio Ave-

nue – Montevideo most important avenue –, which makes this brand mirror similar notions of centrality than those that Uruguayan nationhood proper has: a country that is both administratively and culturally concentrated in its capital city, Montevideo, a capital city whose semiotic core is symbolically placed in the downtown along its main avenue, 18 de Julio. Alternatively, other set of restaurants that are considered authentic to the symbolic core of La Pasiva are those located inside shopping malls in the capital city.

There was a transition in Montevideo's spaces of consumption (Cervelli & Pezzini 2007) in the 1990s and 2000s by which dominance from historical *galerías* (inside street shops in the fashion of long galleries) in the 18 de Julio avenue passed to closed shopping malls, mimicking a cultural tradition originated in the United States. Before the construction of Montevideo's the first shopping facilities in the 1990s, the *galerías* constituted the undisputed buying excursions, reason why eating at La Pasiva was generally framed as part of a wider narrative programme related to leisure, like going to cinema or theatres, or the last stage when going shopping, or just for a weekend stroll with the family, as it happens with many cafés and restaurants in European cities, where people still visit the centre for leisure purposes.

Even though La Pasiva's gastronomical offer is varied in its origins, most dishes have in common that they are simple and easy to prepare. They are known as *minutas*, as mentioned above, which are a local version of fast food. However, this sense of belonging related to local food helps La Pasiva's minutas to be exempt of the criticism that fast food created by multinational companies operating in Uruguay, like McDonald's, Burger King or KFC, usually receive. On the other hand, its nationwide presence as a solid brand among Uruguayan consumers makes of La Pasiva's gastronomic offer a more commoditized experience – yet nationally scalable, and therefore prone to be linked to national belonging – in

comparison with lesser, more localized options for eating *minutas*, like traditional bars dispersed in the neighbourhoods or *carritos*, the local version of street food trucks, although lacking any type of trendy connotation.

La Pasiva's spatial arrangement enables sitting either at the bar – close to the kitchen – or in tables. Differently to other options of fast food that tend to use furniture created using industrial materials, like plastic or aluminium, La Pasiva tends to present wooden tables, seats covered with wool and a bar made of marble. In fact, one of the historical restaurants of the chain – placed in downtown Montevideo – was famous for having a gigantic wooden beer barrel in the wall.

Fig. 3. A *carrito* (food truck) located nearby 18 de Julio avenue, in Montevideo. Source: photograph taken by the authors.

If the *chivito* is the most important main course for La Pasiva, hot dogs and draft beer make the experience of eating in this chain so distinctive and constitute a key element in its discursive staging of a blurred Central European heterotopia. Interestingly, hot dogs are known in the whole region of the South Cone (Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, and Paraguay) as *panchos* due to a derivation of the toponym with which they are more formally regarded (*frankfurters*) that resembles the common name Francisco, which is normally nicknamed Pancho. Then, the "pancho de La Pasiva" as part of the dining out experience is not limited only to an average hot dog in a Vienna bread but constitutes a textual configuration that links ingredients with spatio-temporal dimensions. To begin with, its simplicity

makes of it the easiest dish to serve. Indeed, customers usually ask waiters for hot dogs even before they come to table as if it were an appetizer. Furthermore, there are a uniqueness and a reputation that La Pasiva's craft mustard gained along the decades: La Pasiva's mustard is placed in tables in yellow plastic jars that resemble little beer barrels (Fig. 4), a token that became indissociable with the brand over time. As many successful brands have their own "secret ingredient", La Pasiva's mustard is probably one of the best kept secrets in Uruguayan gastronomy.

Fig. 4. La Pasiva's famous mustard barrel-shaped container. Source: Facebook.

It is also worth noticing the nature of some interactions that take place in La Pasiva's restaurant, especially in the communication between waiters and cooks, who are behind the bar, but partially visible to the customers. It does not seem that the company deploys an enunciative strategy for neither hiding nor exposing food manipulation, but it clearly enables this kind of operational exchanges to be heard by customers. As a matter of fact, a vast majority of clients would probably admit that listening to these informal exchanges would contribute to the brands' claims for authenticity and the overall experience of eating in a Uruguayan restaurant. This is not uncommon in other bars or restaurants that serve *minutas,* so it constitutes a wider code for understanding interactions in informal, everyday dining out places.

Like in every other code, it is possible to note the configuration of a specific language that borrows metaphors, slang terms and idioms from other popular, non-formal domains. For example, while in football discourses in Uruguay a "line of three" ("*una línea de tres*") would undoubtedly refer to the tactical position by which a team lines up its defence with three players (instead of four, for example), the exact same phrase travels to the gastronomic field when in La Pasiva and other similar restaurants waiters deliver an order to kitchen based on a standard combination of the three more usual types of pizzas: a Marinara pizza (without cheese, called in Uruguay as plain "pizza"), a regular pizza (called in Uruguay "mozzarella") and a Genovese-like *farinata* (known in Uruguay as *fainá*).

By becoming a place of gathering of different people, it is not strange for La Pasiva to also become a highly symbolic place in episodes of national euphoria when, for example, Uruguayans meet to watch the matches of the national football team, or more intimate celebrations like birthdays and anniversaries, among others.

The experience of dining out at La Pasiva arranges a series of manifestations of sense and meaning that explicitly addresses the presence of *foreigner* traditions that arrived in Uruguay together with European immigrants (diversified origins of food, furniture and the Central European overall atmosphere that the brand attempts to evoke, etc.). But it is also true that, while it places this social imaginary related to the Otherness at the level of *enoncé*, it appears as encompassed within a wider set of interactions and interpersonal relations that socially reinforces – at the level of *enonciation* – a marked belonging of La Pasiva as part of Uruguayan traditions, for it stresses values like spontaneity, informality, transparency and humbleness, all argued to be constitutive of the Uruguayan way of being (at least in discursive terms).

6. Concluding remarks

The aim of this article was to approach La Pasiva using the lens of geocultural identities. Ruocco (2012b, p. 17) uses the

following quote by Umberto Eco to refer to the Uruguayan culinary identity: "Each culture absorbs elements from cultures near and far, but it is characterized by the way it incorporates those elements". The Uruguayan case is not an exception to this idea. As we hope to have shown in this article, as a chain of restaurants that is popular among Uruguayans, La Pasiva reflects this logic of sense as well. Much more could be written about the restaurant chain, its products, the interactions that occur within it and its role within the Uruguayan semiosphere. We are satisfied if the reader is convinced by our reading of this chain through the lenses of geocultural identities and, in particular, if s/he is now curious to visit Uruguay to eat in one of La Pasiva's restaurants to experience the sense-making logic behind it directly.

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Dining by the Sea
Il Moletto Ostricheria Grill

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Abstract. The paper investigates a specific ethnographic context, a restaurant in central-eastern Sardinia located on the seashore, facing an isthmus that delimits and at the same time opens to the infinity of water. Such configuration gives form to a space in which food and place become central and blur into each other in a continuous sensory renegotiation. The food served gets, therefore, substantiated through the place in which is consumed while the place, in turn, fills it with meaning.

Keywords: Food, places, restaurants, emotional spaces, Sardinia.

1. Introductory Remarks

In recent decades, the vast and multifaceted interdisciplinary literature on food, nutrition, and food practices has primarily focused on the processes of food production, exchange, preparation, and consumption, food-related languages and rituals, and, increasingly, food-related fears, the media dimension of the gastronomic world, and culinary identities[1]. Scholarly debate, particularly in the Social Sciences, has also focused, albeit sparingly, on the role of consumers in their favorite food consumption

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[1] To mention only the classics: Barthes 1961; Bourdieu 1979; Douglas 1972, 1984; Fischler 1990; Goody 1982; Harris 1985; Lévi-Strauss 1958, 1962, 1964, 1968; Mintz 1996; Poulain 2002. If not otherwise stated, all translations are by Francesco Caruso.

spaces, in particular on restaurants[2], as public places where convivial practices are structured, imaginaries refashioned, experiences created, and differences emphasized. In *Dining Out. A Sociology of Modern Manners* (1989), Joanne Finkelstein was among the very first to investigate the public dimension of food consumption, eating-out behaviors or, on a more general level, non-canonical ways of food consumption in different societies. In doing so, she has elucidated the behavioral complexity that is produced within restaurants, the polysemy of food in the public sphere, the consumer's pleasure in dining out, and the social value of dining venues: the modern restaurant as a "diorama of desire", as she puts it. In studying the restaurant, consideration has been given to food and its emotional, evocative power, the relationship between food and local sourcing, the traditional or innovative quality of the menu offerings, how a particular food is served, and the price charged. On the other hand, little attention has been paid to the restaurant as a place, as an ambience evocative of a specific atmosphere, that is, its location, which we believe plays a critical mediating role in the relationship between food and consumer and between consumers themselves. Today, the location of a restaurant, trattoria, tavern, or other establishment in a renowned location with a spectacular view and narrative potential is a value that increasingly guides the patron's choice. In fact, when it comes to dining out, one of the most pressing concerns is: where to eat? If one assumes that a dining experience is usually pre-planned by the diners and oriented toward the consumption of one type of food over another, the place where one spends the evening defines a discursive space in which communication can be both agreement and conflict. In addition to one's personal experience, online reviews can help those who want to know if a particular restaurant is good, if the

service is efficient, if the quality-for-price ratio is optimal, and whether the location meets the consumer's tastes.

On a more specific level, it may happen that the person who has proposed to dine together has already decided where to eat. This decision has to be shared, accepted and pondered: the chosen establishment is thus a location chosen in advance. Whoever has elected it is familiar with it, loves it, and therefore attaches to it a value that extends beyond the food sphere, because it reflects personal desire and taste.

It is no longer only the food that is a sign and becomes language, but also the location: they both engage in a dialog, communicate with each other, with others and about others or at least about those who think of that space as an individual identity place. Both are symbolized: the food takes center stage next to the location and in doing so defines a complex symbolic field. Finkelstein writes:

> when we elect to dine out at a specific restaurant with particular companions we are manifesting a moral posture, an expression of what we consider to be personally pleasurable, socially appropriate and generally appealing. In a wider sense, embedded in all our choices and actions is a view of what we consider to be the proper and good society. To see dining out as part of this perspective is to see it as an event of much greater sociological interest than if we see it primarily as an idiosyncratic expression of the individual's private proclivities (1989, p. 110).

To be sure, the choice of a restaurant can be determined by current fads or influenced by reviews published online or in trade magazines, but it still reflects a subjective opinion and judgment, even more relevant than the decision on what to eat when "limited" by a menu or tradition. What happens in a restaurant parallels what happens in a theater with the actors and the audience playing their roles against a well-defined backdrop. The restaurant, too, is crisply designed,

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2 For further reference, see also: Appelbaum 2012; Beriss, Sutton, ed. 2007a; Capatti 2009; Finkelstein 2014; Pitte 1999; Quellier 2022; Segalla 2016; Spang 2000.

for it conveys and evokes specific feelings, which explains seeking for a specific location which can be romantic, homely, friendly, formal, etc. It has to arouse feelings, fulfill desires, affect moods.

A restaurant's location transcends its physical space and defines a symbolic space that

> suggests a specific relationship with the surrounding space and with the others: it may be a formal or informal, private or public, homely or not. This enables me to anticipate or visualize in advance my place, my role, what is expected of me, what I might do at the table or in the presence of others. In short, the context allows me to glimpse at a whole apparatus of prescriptions and suggestions. However, in this space, both social and symbolic, the prefiguration of the situation equally depends on the spatio-temporal framework. Indeed, a candle-light dinner does not have the same dramaturgy as a quick meal with coworkers; much less do the same codes apply in the two cases, in terms of how to dress, what to say, what to do, and how to behave (Boutaud 2011, pp. 14-15).

The significance of the place where food is shared often incorporates a restaurant's history, and a restaurant's name itself tells a story, anticipating in part what the diner will find there. Christoph Ribbat (2016) cautions that when studying a restaurant, in addition to the food served and the work involved, one should also consider the ambience, the establishment per se and all that it evokes. In fact, a person dining out does not just fulfill physiological needs and pleasures but chooses to eat a meal in a public place, according to a ritual and based on a social script followed by the actors involved. The ambience intentionally affects the diner's consciousness and conditions their desires. Therefore, serving delicious food is not enough to substantiate a restaurant's reputation: "ambience is the ornament of mood, the physical realization of a state of mind. The diner extracts from the physical character of the restaurant the elements for temporarily reshaping his/her consciousness" (Finkelstein 1989, p. 60).

In this perspective, the purpose of this essay is to define the role that a restaurant's location plays in the experience of dining out. This role has an emotional dimension, it signifies something, that is to say, it is invested with meaning; it is created and mediated as a cultural expression and thus contributes to defining one's sense of self as well as their individual identity. Within this framework, this essay focuses on a specific ethnographic context that is both emblematical and exemplary of the relationship we are investigating, namely a restaurant on the coast of central-eastern Sardinia. The establishment is located opposite to an isthmus holding back the water and simultaneously opening up to it, creating a space where food and place take central stage and their boundaries blur in unceasing sensory renegotiations. In other words, the food is imbued with and signified by the place where it is served. Through fieldwork carried out in recent years, the analysis of online content, and the conduction of semi-structured interviews, this essay aims to demonstrate that certain places where certain food is served are decisive factors in the diner's choice more than the food itself.

2. Dining by the Sea: Il Moletto Ostricheria Grill at Capo Comino

As a kid, I used to come here to get ice cream after an afternoon of diving off the pier with my brother, sister, and cousins. Once a year, my father and I would organize a "crossing", swimming from the last stretch of beach to the Ruja Island in front of us [...]. The scenery hasn't changed a bit. Crystal clear seawater with Tavolara in the background. To the left, the clear profile of Montalbo, the limestone massif dominating the towns of Lodé, Siniscola and Lula. Behind, on the mountain, the old lighthouse at Capo Comino (there, too, I remember fantastic afternoon hikes ending up with my mom's well-deserved caramelized pineapple cake). The snack bar hasn't changed much either. The shack remains the same, though I don't think they are permitted to build so close to the sea anymore. But now there is a lovely veranda with French doors that are always open, from which you can step out and find yourself just a few meters from the water, amidst the bushes, immersed in the fragrant Mediterranean scrub.

Nowadays you don't go to Moletto to get ice cream, but to taste Stefano Gatto's specialties, the chef who inherited the place from his grandma and over time has turned it into an oyster restaurant. Initially serving only ap-

petizers and meat or fish courses, traditional Sardinian dishes with a modern twist are now available. I was there at the beginning of August. I had two aperitifs (the bartender's inventions, the myrtle cocktail and the pompia cocktail), two appetizers (raw shrimp caught at Caletta and tuna tartare), octopus soup (a pleasant surprise), fried shrimp in *carasau* bread, house dessert, and lemon sorbet. Sciala, a fantastic Vermentino wine by Vigne Surrau, which won an award at Vinitaly this year, accompanied the food. Final bill: 101 Euros and worth every cent (Serra 2017).

This is the account of Il Moletto Ostricheria Grill, a restaurant in Capo Comino, a seaside resort, written by journalist and writer Elvira Serra in the *Corriere della Sera*. What Serra describes, based on her personal recollections, is what anyone who has visited or continues to visit such an evocative place would describe, albeit less poetically. The *moletto* is a small stretch of beach named after a series of concrete cubes that were intended to serve as mooring points for small boats but are now used as diving boards. It is certainly not the concrete blocks that make the place enchanting. In fact, their presence would be quite discouraging if our gaze were not captured by the majestic dunes on the left, the red island – separated by an isthmus that frontally almost delimits the familiar land from the unknown sea –, the newly built lighthouse on the right, whose imposing figure and night light guards and makes visible that stretch of coastline; and again, by the very white sand, the crystal clear sea, the mountain and the old lighthouse overlooking the bay; and the profile of Tavolara island in the distance. Serra describes a restaurant that has made a name for itself in recent years, but even she falls in the trap of talking about the location first, for that location *is* the restaurant. Il Moletto Ostricheria Grill might be one of the many mid- to high-end restaurants populating the central-eastern coast of Sardinia, notable for their fresh and locally-sourced ingredients and whose menu offerings are inspired by local traditions. However, Moletto stands out precisely because of its location, confirming that in our case study place and food are in-

extricably linked and, more importantly, barely distinguishable.

The restaurant is located on a thoroughfare that provides access to several beaches, in a large space with no other establishments or houses, and you have to get there on purpose: this implies that people go to that stretch of coast and that restaurant for a reason. Il Moletto Ostricheria Grill is built on a raised platform, allowing a panoramic view of the sea. Large windows run around the length of the restaurant so that as you are dining you can enjoy the aesthetic pleasure brought the scenery and admire the surrounding region, from where chef Stefano Gatto supplies his ingredients: "dish, location, and scenery blend together and express the same culinary philosophy, deeply pondered, cunningly orchestrated and effectively communicated" (Giannitrapani 2014, p. 282).

One might wonder whether diners go for the location or the food. As will be discussed further below, ethnographic research has shown that a restaurant's location and offerings form a synergistic attractor. Many people are already familiar with that beach and restaurant; many who enjoy the view will eventually decide to stop and eat, and others will come there after browsing review websites that recommend precisely the location and food. The food and the environment create a multi-sensory dimension in which flavors, sounds, colors, and fragrances allow for the establishment of links between food and the surrounding landscape. Locations are increasingly being designed to impress customers, capture their attention, excite their senses, and take them to a different dimension. Sensory thematization can revolve around a variety of values and Il Moletto Ostricheria Grill, for example, invests in the empathic relationship between the diners and the location. On the other hand, looking at a specific place triggers a sensibility that highlights an esthesic affect

that characterizes our "pre-reflective" state of presence in the world, the immediacy of our participation in it. Which is what happens

when our sentient body is anchored in the *here* and *now* of a concrete situation that is nonetheless subjectively experienced. At this stage, there is no reflective mediation, but rather a *pathic* impression and an *empathetic* reaction which vary depending on whether there is a connection (meant in a broader sense towards those beings and elements whose presence is perceived) or a distancing (dislike) (Boutaud 2011, pp. 180-181).

Il Moletto Ostricheria Grill – a seasonal restaurant usually opened between mid- to late April and September or October –[3] is recognized and recognizable, and is a place with a history. In the words of its current manager and chef, Stefano Gatto:

> Moletto was born with my grandfather who bought it in the 1980s from a gentleman who was leasing it. My grandparents managed it for nearly 20 years, but at first it was just a snack-bar with a cane-brake. I took over in 2004, after taking several cooking classes and having a life-changing experience in 2003: I worked for Mrs. Rita Denza at Gallura restaurant in Olbia, which obtained a Michelin star that very year. From there, I got to know all the seafood, oysters, shellfish, in short, all the ingredients, and it was from there that I got the idea of opening a restaurant in Capo Comino with an oyster bar as its main core. That's why it's called Moletto Ostricheria Grill. In 2004, I opened a place that still had the feel of an oyster bar, and two years later, I opened the restaurant. I began with a 160-Euro grill bought at the mall: it was the only money I had with me. Initially, I'd serve raw food, such as carpaccio. Tuna carpaccio with fennel and pecorino Sardo cheese is a menu item that has been available since 2006. I've always gotten my seafood from a trusted fisherman who catches it in the bay (interview of 20 October 2022).

The chef and restaurant promote local food because they feel confident about its quality but also because they support the local economy and culture. In doing so, Il Moletto Ostricheria Grill annually renews its ties with the local community, fishermen and consumers, promoting and advertising, besides seafood, also lo-cally-grown products. The items on the menu reflect these connections. Among other dishes available, the "All Day Dining" option includes Siniscolese pompia oysters, revolving around a typical citrus fruit from Siniscola; a "Puddu" cold-cuts platter with meat from Oliena, where the emphasis is on a specific producer and place; and the cheese "L'armentizia" from the eponymous dairy establishment in Sanicola. Appetizers include potato and Santa Lucia cuttlefish cappuccino, with fish caught at the neighboring fishing village, or the raw shrimp caught in La Caletta, another seaside hamlet. The main courses include: fresh oregano octopus soup from La Caletta; Olbia mussel soup with bread croutons; and mixed bean soup and Siniscola pecorino cheese; the fried *paranza* from Capo Comino; turbot filet with Olbia mussel sauce; but also tuna dishes like tuna carpaccio with fennel and Siniscola pecorino cheese or "Puddu" pork bacon tuna with bell pepper salad. Even cocktails are locally inspired: the mirtle-based Lansky and the pompia-based Thiniscole. Based on the food it serves, Moletto belongs to a specific category of restaurants with clear ties to the territory where they are located and to a distinct culture, but it does not shy away from having a more globalized and even exotic dimension as it offers sushi aperitifs or sush-mix and sashimi-mix dishes. At Moletto's typical and exotic aspects are not conflicting but rather complementary instances.

As a result, the restaurateur sells an experience that goes beyond creating flavor and plating food. Ingredients are transformed into flavorful dishes to satisfy senses and establish a continuity between producers, chef, and diners. The dishes are described, and their quality and local origins are praised; they are displayed and even publicized to attract customers' attention, but are always paired

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3 Here I am reporting what the manager told me: «During the pandemic and even in 2022 we didn't open for the usual 5-6 months because the wage bill had become unsustainable. If you keep the restaurant open until October you lose money, while in winter we don't open because there is no tourism. Moletto could operate in the winter as well, but the winter clientele doesn't exist» (Stefano Gatto, interview of 20 October 2022).

with the spectacular setting in which they are served: the food taken per se, "even if outstanding, cannot provide recommendation enough to dine at a particular restaurant" (Finkelstein 1989, p. 55).

As Stefano Gatto argues:

> People come to Moletto for the food and the place, looking for something a little different. Moletto dining is truly an experience. The location is beautiful and relaxing. The sunsets are spectacular there: there is no light from the nearby villages, so you can enjoy the fascinating sky. The dunes, the sand, the islet, the nearby lighthouse, the extremely long beaches, and the crystal clear sea. The food and the place are the highlights. You eat well there. I travel a lot, even abroad, I teach courses, and the food served at Moletto can only be found in high-end restaurants. Its cuisine is simple but flavorful. The fish is not treated in any way, and the ingredients are exceptional. Organic ingredients and an essential menu. The location contributes for at least half of the overall experience. The dishes that keep customers coming back are the tuna carpaccio with fennel and pecorino cheese and the super-popular seafood *fregula*, but our customers' favorite, which they immediately associate with Moletto, is the raw catch of the day and the pane Guttiau fried shrimp. We also have a small selection of meat dishes (Interview of 20 October 2022).

Many patrons of Il Moletto Ostricheria Grill share the same thoughts. "Beautiful location", "unique view", "wonderful location," "super atmosphere," "breathtaking view," "spectacular panorama". But "I only go there for the sunset," "they are blessed with a beautiful view," and "only the location is worth a visit" – are some of the comments on TripAdvisor that highlight how the place is central to the experience of diners at Moletto. The ratings expressed on the well-known review website reflect the views of the people I had the opportunity to interview[4]. This is what a regular patron of both the bar and the restaurant told me: "I usually spend the month of August in Cape Comino and frequently go to Moletto in the afternoon on my way back from the beach for a drink, or in the evening with my husband for dinner. It's a peaceful and relaxing spot by the sea; the food is good, the fish is fresh, and there's a spectacular view and an unforgettable sunset" (F. G., Nuoro, interview of 22 October 2022). And also: "I don't go to Moletto very often because it's a bit pricey, but it's still a regular stop every summer. Having a glass of wine by the sea at sunset and eating seafood dishes that I wouldn't eat in my everyday life remains an annual summer fixture" (L. M., Sassari, interview of 22 October 2022). And again: ""I always go to Moletto, even in the winter when I fly back to Sardinia and the place is closed. I've never eaten at the restaurant simply because it hasn't happened; I always hit the bar for drinks but the main reason I go is obviously the location" (G. G., Turin, interview of 23 October 2022).

The restaurant, then, is satisfying on many levels, as it offers the "sensory pleasure of eating, the aesthetic delights of gastronomy, the novelty of inhabiting different locales and the social satisfaction of watching others and being watched by them in return" (Finkelstein 1989, pp. 106-107). Moletto has a diverse gastronomical offering targeting different customers: morning and afternoon beachgoers; patrons looking for light dinner/drinks by the sea who can choose a simple aperitif accompanied with oysters, sushi, or fried shrimps; gourmands who are served with sophisticated and elaborate dishes prepared with locally-sourced ingredients. The ambience possesses a romantic charm, and patrons who frequent this restaurant are most definitely seeking an intimate, seductive moment. As one expects the restaurant to fulfill a desire, food alone cannot meet such an expectation for experience and emotions. The spectacular quality of the location thus enters the diners' daily lives, and they can then fulfill their desire in that very restaurant.

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4 «While it has disrupted the discourse of food criticism by allowing anyone to have a say on a hotel or restaurant», TripAdvisor «can also be understood as a technological reinstatement of some of the "collectivist" and "bottom-up" trends that have long been present in this type of discourse» (Marrone 2014c, p. 48).

By evoking a soft, romantic atmosphere, the décor also contributes to arousing emotions. The wooden structure enclosed by large windows stands out in Moletto's indoor hall, interplaying with the white of the chairs, tables, and table linens to create an understated, elegant look. The exterior is populated with white tables and sofas that slope down towards the sea and are lit in the evening by spotlights placed along the shoreline and reflecting the light on the water, conjuring up the relaxing, romantic, and enveloping atmosphere characteristic of Moletto. In this sense, the restaurant's "architectural" features define it because they are integrated and communicate a coherent meaning. To some extent, the striking natural scenery that surrounds Moletto shapes its identity, and their mutual relationship is emphasized by the furnishings and distribution of the space, designed specifically to highlight that connection and arouse expectations. As a result, the gastronomic and spatial dimensions intertwine and convey feelings as well as meanings. A well-designed restaurant is one in which "the architecture foreshadows the food, without overpowering it, and, conversely, a well-designed dish is one that integrates well with (and alludes to) the place in which it is served" (Giannitrapani 2014, p. 280).

The ambience and décor are just as important as the dishes that are served, and in this context, advertising also plays a crucial role. Above all, social media convey an image of Moletto that is enticing and alluring, and once again what stands out are the food and the location[5]. Finkelstein has observed that diners discuss the pleasures of eating out when they find the details of the restaurant location to be pleasant, along with service provided, quality of the décor, restaurant reputation, and atmosphere:

> If we can see how the ambience of the restaurant has little to do with the consumption of foods but a great deal to do with the preparation of the diner's mood and his/her subsequent responsiveness to the transactions of dining out, then we can understand how the abstractions of pleasure, entertainment and desire have been merged with material conditions such as the style of the cuisine, its price and the service offered to the diner by waiters and restaurateurs. In the restaurant, one is not only consuming foodstuffs but one is also becoming the consumer *par excellence* (Finkelstein 1989, p. 28).

The pairing food/place, as mentioned, involves all the senses. First and foremost, sight, for the aesthetics of the visual aspects concerning the plating of the dishes, the colors, the architecture and shape of the spaces. Then hearing, for the acoustics of the restaurant: noises from the kitchen or the hall, but also the noise of the diners or the sound of the sea, as in the case study examined in this essay. Smell, taste and touch also transcend the mere materiality of the food in order to stimulate a mentalistic process that grasps, decodes

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5 Review websites prove to be crucial in this process. A quick visit to the TripAdvisor site has revealed that Moletto received numerous criticisms during the 2022 season, nearly destroying the reputation the restaurant has built up over time. The majority of the negative reviews focus on the service, the food quantity-for-money ratio (and, in some cases, the quality-for-money one), and the outdoor furnishings of the bar. «In this pervasive sanctioning logic, where likes and ratings allow for hurried evaluation of services, products, and people, judgment becomes, in a cyclical movement, a form of manipulation of future experiences (positively evaluating a restaurant means directing a possible patron there). Thus, a process based on the so-called "tyranny of small decisions" takes place, in which a potentially harmless personal opinion, if disseminated, relaunched, shared, and amplified, becomes a powerful system of world hierarchization and an engine of landscape change – in our case, the landscape of foodservice. Influencers' posts guaranteeing the quality of a particular eatery or TripAdvisor rankings can be critical in determining success (and failure) in the world of food consumption» (Giannitrapani 2021, p. 24). When prompted on the matter, chef Stefano Gatto told me: «Considering the cost of the ingredients, staff, and the meticulous work that goes into the dishes, I believe our prices are reasonable. On the other hand, we can definitely improve the service significantly. It's average. I'd give it a 6 out of 10, no more than that» (interview of 20 October 2022). A regular customer added: «Every year, I return to Moletto because the location alone entices me. This summer [2022], I found the prices to be a little high in comparison to the offerings, particularly the wines, and the service to be less atten-

and expresses the context: e. g. the atmosphere created by the food and its local origins, that is, by its being an an expression of a place, of that specific place. Restaurants are "highly sensory environments" (Beriss, Sutton 2007b) and with the food served, the service offered, the décor displayed, and the price charged, they can orient ideologies and shape and redefine identities. Restaurants are sensory places because they are places of relaxation, desire, pleasure, and conviviality, and thus perform a role in creating, communicating, and refashioning an ideology (see Counihan 2020, p. 113).

3. Conclusions

In this essay, Il Moletto Ostricheria Grill has been used as a paradigmatic case study to investigate the importance of the food/place relationship in a patron's restaurant experience, or, in other words, to examine the role of the location as a primary function of the dining out experience.

A restaurant is, first and foremost, a place. It is not a neutral setting in which the ritualization of the act of eating occurs, but rather one of its critical factors. Dining at a specific location stimulates the patron's sensitivity by structuring it as an experiential moment – something that transcends the mere being seated in a restaurant and eating certain food. The food and the setting are appreciated for their extra-ordinary quality and ability to disrupt the ordinary flow of daily life occurrences. Of course, one's personal inclinations to live this type of experience take on a significant role: the intensity and reflectiveness that inform a customer's relationship with *that* particular experiential moment, in fact, mark the pleasure of dining out, sharing food with the other(s), using a language made of codes and signs that cannot be expressed with words. Dining out is, as Finkelstein pointed out, a social event in which people engage to obtain pleasure. Not only that, but having that experience entails

> a dual process of reflection (*observing oneself* do something or act in some way) and hedonic learning (savoring emotions, feeling pleasure). It is a phenomenological moment that is first understood (contained and felt) as a pure actual experience, free of purpose: it is savored in and for itself, and has a dual temporal dimension: an absolute present as well as a memorable time (Boutaud 2011, pp. 183-184).

It is no coincidence that many diners take photographs and selfies to preserve the physical memory of the experience that the pairing food/place elicits. In this regard, "the aura of the restaurant becomes integral to the pleasure of dining out. The event comes to be enjoyed as a form of entertainment and a part of the modern spectacle in which social relations are mediated through visual images and imagined atmosphere [...] This is a far remove from the sensations of ingestion" (Finkelstein 1989, p. 2).

But why do some locations draw more attention than others? Fads and trends, fostered by advertisements and social sponsorships are one obvious explanation. Another is the more basic need to meet people and form or renew bonds, to occupy leisure time by seeking the pleasure of dining out in a familiar setting but with its own distinct identity. But eventually you choose a restaurant because you know you can create, renew, and share emotions *there*. The place (or places) where one eats makes present a sense of belonging, which is "reinforced by the act of sharing. These locations are infused with stories and memories of previous visits. Narratives establish habits and preferences while attesting to one's place in the world. What would the fashion of places allow if not this experience of self-discovery and belonging?" (Franchi 2009, p. 62).

As previously stated, secondary literature has largely ignored these issues.

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tive than usual. I'll return, as I do every year, because the food is good and the location spectacular» (S. G., Florence, interview of October 23, 2022).

Similarly, food guides do not highlight the role of a restaurant's spatial dimension in conveying meaning and communicating specific identities. Mention is made of the ambience, the location, and the visuals but the emphasis is on the menu, the ways of communicating the restaurant or the plating of the food. But "we, as customers, prefigure a certain way of running a restaurant first and foremost through our perception of the environment. It is your first impression of a place that determines whether you will stay or leave" (Giannitrapani 2014, p. 269).

On the other hand, and primarily, the manager or restaurateur builds a certain type of clientele through the restaurant location, and consumers are no longer eaters of food but seekers of an experience, of values, of identity. Restaurants have evolved into identity places, complex devices designed to provide a gastronomic experience. For the long time you are sitting at a table, you are not only savoring good food, but also an atmosphere, and an idea that has been thought in advance and is now presented to you (see Griffero 2016).

In the age of "gastromania" (Marrone 2014a), there is a growing desire to enhance the sensory dimension of eating, which transcends the materiality of food and/or environment, transforming the need to eat into an experiential occasion, defining the way we fantasize about taste. The places associated with food prove to be crucial in such an experience:

> on the path from the sensory to the sensible, we can hardly stop at the esthesic experience without noticing its *aesthetic* extension. What enchants us through signs is not solely due to sensory immersion caused by the pressure of the environment (emphatic signs) or the diffuse, multisensory impression (pathic sensations). Enchantment also presupposes a sensitive relationship with the surrounding environment, which can be one of agreement, trust, or connivance: the desire to be entranced is channeled through a relationship of *empathy*. One feels at ease, wants to participate in the gustatory or convivial experience, and thus contributes to its success (Boutaud 2011, p. 188. See Finkelstein 1989).

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My Favorite Coffee Shops
An Autoethnographic and Photographic Essay

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Abstract. What makes a coffee shop a favorite, most people would suggest such things as the taste or quality of the drink itself and accompanying food offerings such as bagels or croissants. Others might suggest the importance of cost or the excellence of the service. Still more fussy others would refer perhaps to the elegance of the shops' interior or exterior appearance, and the comfort of the chairs and tables. For me, although these are all crucial aspects that create the ambience, scene, or even the habitus of the coffee shop, it is the feeling that I get upon entering the place. In this autoethnographic visually-enhanced essay I will focus on the similarities of coffee shops in urban Brooklyn, New York and bucolic Litchfield, Connecticut.

Keywords: McDonaldization, Habitus, Sociability, Simulation, Visuality

1. Introduction

In the 1980's most situation comedies on American Television were introduced with an appropriate theme song. One of the most popular shows was *Cheers*. Its theme song, "Where Everybody Knows Your Name," captured the sense of camaraderie between the characters who regularly frequented an iconic local tavern in Boston.

The following is a distillation of the lyrics from the "Theme from *Cheers*", written by Gary Portnoy and Judy Hart Angelo:

Making your way in the world today
Takes everything you got
Taking a break from all your worries
It sure would help a lot
Wouldn't you like to get away?
Sometimes you want to go
Where everybody knows your name

And they're always glad you came
You want to be where you can see
The troubles are all the same
You want to be where everybody knows your name[1].

In my experience, after only a few weeks of frequenting even a coffee shop chain like Starbucks the regular staff seems able to anticipate your order. Perhaps they are trained to do so as a matter of efficiency. At less corporate, more intimate local venues, after friendly exchanges, regular staff are also liable to greet you by name. It is this real or imagined sociability that for many people, like myself, evolves into patron loyalty.

1.1. History, Theory and Geography of My Coffee Shop Routines

Going out early in the morning to buy the newspaper, and to read it at a conveniently located coffee shop, is a ritual that I have practiced ever since the birth, infancy, toddler, and pre-teen stages of my three daughters, being the practice of reading the morning newspaper in the peace, quiet, and comfort of my own home during the morning hours a less than optimal choice. Since about 1970, I have carried this morning ritual far and wide as I visited cities around the world for conferences and research. In this essay I will focus on my "regular" daily coffeeshops in two very different locations of the United States.

In my half-century-long experience of sampling coffeeshops, I have inductively inferred that like restaurants, coffeeshops in the United States of America fall within a range between two broad categories of food purveyors – Fast and Slow. As will be elaborated upon later in this essay, these two types fit nicely within Pierre Bourdieu's notions of Tastes of Necessity and Luxury, as well as George Ritzer's McDonaldization thesis. Without the

need of deeper discussion here, the most commonly used hyphenated term, "Fast-Food", is defined as "relating to, or specializing in food that can be prepared and served quickly", as in a *fast-food* restaurant. The food itself is: "designed for ready availability, use, or consumption and with little consideration given to quality or significance[2]". On the other hand, "Slow Food," is defined as "Luxury food that has been prepared with care, using high-quality local and seasonal ingredients[3]". It should be noted in regard to Slow Food, that it is also a global movement[4].

1.2. The Ideal Coffee Shop: The Viennese Coffee House (*Der Weiner Kaffeehaus*)

As to a model of luxurious coffee shops with which all lesser coffee shops can be compared, I suggest the Viennese coffee house which UNESCO added to the intangible cultural heritage list for Austria. As described by *Visiting Vienna* tourism website:

> Perhaps the one truly defining element is the absence of any pressure to order more or move on. The staff will leave you more or less in peace until you ask for another drink or the bill. You can sit there for hours having bought a single coffee. (And some people do). Even if the place is full and the queue outside seems intimidatingly long. The coffee houses even encourage this behaviour with another little tradition. Somewhere inside each one is a rack, table or stand covered in newspapers for you to borrow. So… forget yoga, meditation, weekend retreats, and time management courses. If you really want to relax, all you need is a Viennese café and your reading glasses. (Of course, you may attract an inquiring look or two at some point. And most of us understand that this wonderful aspect of coffee house life should not be abused). This congeniality and leisurely approach to the day turned Vienna's cafés into legendary meeting places for artists and actors, poets and politicians, writers, intellectuals, and revolutionaries[5].

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1 Lyrics taken from *Songfacts*: https://www.songfacts.com/facts/gary-portnoy/where-everybody-knows-your-name, last accessed December 6, 2022.

2 See https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fast-food, last accessed December 6, 2022.

3 See https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/slow-food, last accessed December 6, 2022.

4 See for example Slow Food International https://www.slowfood.com/, last accessed December 6, 2022.

5 See https://www.visitingvienna.com/eatingdrinking/coffee-house-experience/, last accessed December 6, 2022.

As might be expected, coffee shop businesses large and small attempt to simulate this model. During my international travels, I have visited many Viennese and Viennese-style coffee houses in Austria, Germany, Hungary, Poland, and The Czech Republic. There are also a few in New York City; most notable is Cafe Sabarsky at the Ronald S. Lauder Neue Gallery Museum for German and Austrian Art which is a reasonably opulent visual simulation replete with a rack of newspapers[6]. I have eaten there several times, and it is in great demand usually requiring reservations well in advance. This overcrowding of the *Weiner Kaffeehaus* simulation however destroys the congeniality and leisurely characteristics of the original.

1.3. Matters of Taste

Pierre Bourdieu might argue that upscale coffee shops are productions of "Symbolic Capital", which he defined as "the collection of luxury goods attesting to the taste and distinction of the owner" (1977, p. 188). Bourdieu's *Distinction* between the taste of "necessity" and the taste of "luxury" also helps understand how a range of such establishments become attractive to more and less advantaged consumers of goods, and services (1984, p. 174–5). In this regard, I have looked for, and found, visible symbolic expressions of class position and aesthetic tropes in many other types of commercial establishments such as restaurants and good emporia. To paraphrase Bourdieu: Habitus is the learned set of preferences or dispositions by which people orient themselves to their social worlds (Bourdieu 2002, p. 27. Also, Edgerton and Roberts 2015, p. 195). These aesthetic distinctions also work as barriers between social divisions. In sum, Taste is a:

> [...] systematic expression of a particular class of conditions of existence, i.e., as a distinctive life-style, by anyone who possesses practical knowledge of the relationships between distinctive signs and positions in the distributions – between the universe of objective properties, which is brought to light by scientific construction, and the no less objective universe of lifestyles, which exists as such for and through ordinary experience (Bourdieu 1984, p. 174–5).

I first encountered the idea of the coffee shop as a semiotic of gentrification in Roland Atkinson's "Domestication by Cappuccino or a Revenge on Urban Space?" (2001, also 2003), which owes part of its title to Sharon Zukin's description of the revitalization for Bryant Park, New York City as "domestication by cappuccino" (1995, p. 4). The renaissance of that urban place included a fashionable café. The ten-acre public park was once dubbed "Needle Park" as a favorite for drug users. A *New York Times* article by John Leland, "A New Harlem Gentry in Search of Its Latte", adds support to the notion of coffee as gentrification cache as he wrote:

> What is the relationship between home and a good cup of coffee? On first reckoning, coffee (or tea) organizes space and movement; in the brewing of a serviceable cup, a house becomes a home. Yet there is also a public way that coffee shapes the sense of home, even from down the block. If you sketched the foot traffic around a cup of expresso, for example, you might see the pattern of intersecting lines that Jane Jacobs described in her 1961 book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961). ...The appearance of amenities here, similarly, both reflects and facilitates the real estate boom (F6) (Leland 2002).

Atkinson also discussed the commodification and the theming of spaces for the general public that tames them down and, more importantly, I think, erodes the sense that they are open to all (2001, p. 4). In this regard we might ask: "How is a public space visibly open to all?". Just as a pleasant scene or an attractive sign invites one to come inside, the same appearances may simultaneously repel or make another observer feel unwelcome. The simplest analogy for this might be a rich or a poor person reading the menu

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6 See https://www.neuegalerie.org/cafesabarsky, last accessed December 6, 2022.

posted outside a coffee shop before deciding to enter.

1.4. Fordism, Taylorism and McDonaldization of Coffee Shops

At base, coffee shops are modern urban amenities. As economic enterprises, therefore, they are subject to what Max Weber described as the rationalization of modern life resulting a dehumanizing "iron cage" of uniformity. (Weber 1958, 1964, Kalberg 1980). Fordism, and Taylorism have their source in from Weber's theorizing. Their main elements are detailed technical divisions and the precise measurement of time needed for particular tasks. In the process, the mental is separated from manual work as workers perform simple, repetitive tasks with short job-task cycles. In Marxian terms, these practices alienate workers from the product of their labor; and not incidentally justify low-pay and benefits (Hudson 2009). Relatedly, George Ritzer defined McDonaldization as "the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world" (1993, p. 1). These principles include efficiency, predictability, calculability, and comprise the rationality of McDonaldization (Ritzer 1993, p. 24. Also Ritzer 1998). Fast food shops are designed to limit the interaction between customer and staff. This service efficiency increases profit-making in the allotted time frame and, in essence, dehumanizes cultural eating practices.

Ritzer's postmodern analysis also leans on Jean Baudrillard's notions of *simulacrae*. (Baudrillard 1983, 1998, 2021a) We can apply this notion to the simulated and scripted interactions, or perhaps meaningless sociability, between patrons and service staff which are commonly observable in most chain coffee shops such as Starbucks and Dunkin' Donuts. In this regard, the value of scripted communications between food service workers and customers has been subject to scientific analysis (Chan & Sagaran 2018). Similar staff training takes place at the other end of the spectrum, as upscale shops try to simulate the aura of the *Weiner Kaffeehaus* (Vienna Coffee House).

Some of these luxurious coffee shops could be seen as what Jean Baudrillard (1983), called a "third order of simulacra" that are found in the postmodern age. As opposed to representations previously discussed as the product of reality, these representations are prior to and determine the real. The postmodern inability to distinguish between reality and the simulacrum results from a number of factors or forces, especially the current media culture that not only relays information but also interprets it for the receiver (Baudrillard 1983). This formulation helps to understand the value of Baudrillard's societal condition of "hyperreality" in which we cannot distinguish realities from their simulations (Baudrillard 1998). As we will see later in this essay, patrons and staff can subvert the generally Fordist-Taylorist-McDonaldization aims of fast-food shop owners to maximize profit by limiting wasteful interactions between them, by forming teams and engaging in performances that can imbue meaningless routines of sociability with more meaningful social and psychological contents.

1.5. Taking People Out Of The Picture

The extremes of rationalization of the food industry in automation and robotization are designed to eliminate the human element; except for customers. I remember in the 1950s having a coffee at a Horn and Hardart Automat. Coffee was self-service and as the food was prepared by people, it was only a simulation of "automatic". As described by Michelle Cohen:

> Sleek steel and glass vending machine grids displayed sandwiches and main dishes as well as desserts and sides, each in their own little boxes, square and even, clean and well-lit. You put a coin in the slot, opened the door and removed your food – which was reportedly quite good, as the founders took terrific pride in their craft. For some, it was the idea of choice, and the satisfaction of seeing exactly what you were about to select; the interactive aspect of putting a coin in the slot and unlocking a world of mac-and-cheese goodness; the mysterious disembodied hands whisking a hot meal into

a tiny cubby from behind closed doors. It was like a magic show-with food (Cohen 2016).

Today there are a few totally automated, robotic, eating places. They are especially featured in Japan which has a major problem of labor shortages.

> At lunchtime, the Sushiro restaurant near Tokyo's Ogikubo train station is packed with families, couples and business people, but one thing is missing: staff. Instead of receptionists, diners use a touch panel to find a table. At their seats, they navigate a tablet to order from a menu spanning some 130 items including sushi, ramen noodles, fried chicken and hot coffee. The dishes are delivered directly to the table via a conveyor belt. A self-serving register awaits them on their way out (Suzuki and Nagumo 2018).

Similarly, in the Hong Kong Genki Sushi restaurant where "Finally, you can go to a nice restaurant and order, eat and pay for your food without the inconvenience of interacting with humans (Staff Author 2020).

1.6. Pꜱʏᴄʜᴏʟᴏɢɪᴄᴀʟ Oᴡɴᴇʀꜱʜɪᴘ

Despite trying to eliminate the vestiges of human agency, businesses simultaneously try to simulate the feeling of being at home through design and psychological marketing research. For example, Vahagn S. Asatryan, and Haemoon Oh (2008) suggested methods for creating strong customer relationships by psychologically stimulating a sense of belonging. Their "psychological ownership" (PO) model is a state in which individuals feel as though they own the places they frequent. PO is important because loyal customers are willing to purchase more, pay higher prices, and offer positive word-of-mouth recommendations to others. Obviously, customer willingness to pay more is critical. They note a study that:

> [...] found that affectively committed customers are more likely to pay premium prices for the same benefits provided by service companies. Such an emotional attachment is consistent with the notion of psychology of mine. PO assumes protection of the object and willingness to sacrifice to maintain the relationship. Thus, feelings of PO may motivate an individual to

incur higher costs or pay premium prices to maintain the relationship with a particular target of PO such as a restaurant. Customers who feel attached to and bonded with their PO objects are more likely to spend more for the benefits derived from those objects (Asatryan and Oh 2008, p. 369).

1.7. Tʜɪʀᴅ Pʟᴀᴄᴇꜱ

Ray Oldenburg argued that coffee shops and other third places are important for civil society, democracy, civic engagement establishing feelings of a sense of place. First places are homes. Second places are workplaces and examples of third places are churches, cafes, clubs, public libraries, bookstores and parks. As anchors of community life, they facilitate and foster creative interaction (Oldenburg 1991). Georg Simmel would refer to these scenes as opportunities for meaningful sociability in one's home away from home.

Benedict Smith focused on coffee shops as third places. He noted Vice President of Coffee Enterprises, Spencer Turer's observations that coffee shops, diners, and taverns face common problems: "It's difficult, because to be an effective third place, coffee shops have to entice customers to stay for a while. However, once they've enticed the customer, these places need to make money. The problem is that people often sit over a single drink for hours in coffee shops and most businesses can't operate successfully in this way" (Smith 2021). Unless, pointed out by Asatryan and Oh (2008), customers are willing to pay a premium for the luxury.

Smith adds that Starbucks was founded on Oldenburg's theory of the third place. Its CEO Howard Schultz had been impressed by his experience in espresso bars in Italy and thought he could simulate it in America. According to Smith, Schultz said in an interview: "Starbucks serves as a third place between home and work, an extension between people's lives, at a time when people have no place to go". However, since expanded to more than 32,000 locations it no longer embodies the third place "community spirit" in the same way (Smith 2021).

1.8. Design and Ambiance

Steven Buckley argues that coffee shop ambiance is as important as the coffee:

> Today's coffee shops promote relaxation and lounging. Provide stylish couches and comfortable chairs for those that wish to enjoy their beverages while reading or working on their computers. Wi-Fi (wireless Internet access) installations are mandatory in coffee shop settings. The use of dark woods to convey a feeling of earthiness is also recommended. Be careful not to use light fabrics or colors that are easily stained by coffee anywhere in your store. Add background music and attractive shelving (for retail coffee product sales) as the finishing touches to an enjoyable coffee-drinking environment (Buckley 2023).

The ironic title of Gerald Zaltman's "Rethinking Market Research: Putting People Back", epitomizes the scientific management approach to simulating places "where everybody knows your name". He outlines the use of physiological measures such as electroencephalograph (EEG) measures, skin reactance, vocalics, pupillography, positron emission tomography (PET) scans and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI):

> These have created new opportunities to measure with far greater precision than previously possible, mental events that were not amenable to ready observation until recently.
> New technologies expected in the next few years, coupled with the rapid accumulation of knowledge about brain structure and functioning, promise even more exciting opportunities to act on several of the premises discussed at the outset of this article (Zaltman 1997, p. 432).

Finally, as to marketing research through surveys, interviews, and observation sessions, Lisa Waxman found the top five characteristics of the ideal coffee shop, some of which were quite visual, included cleanliness, aroma, adequate lighting, comfortable furniture, and a view to the outside (Waxman 2006, p. 55). In a related vein, Halawa and Parasecoli developed an analytical framework for studying the emergent cultural formation around eating and drinking that can easily be applied to coffee shops. Their work is especially relevant given their focus on what they call "Global Brooklyn" and my own focus here on local Brooklyn (Halawa, Parasecoli, 2019).

2. Putting People Into The Picture
2.1. Dramaturgy and Scenes

Rather than think of workers and customers in coffee shops as cogs in a wheel to be manipulated to maximum profit, we can think of them as social actors who have agency. Employing his Dramaturgical Method, Erving Goffman would describe and analyze social scenes in coffee shops as "performances" (1959, p. 15). Customers and staff are the actors as well as the audiences who organize their routines around the expectations of each other. These performances or "social fronts" (*ibid.*, p. 26) can include more than one routine. Goffman also notes that some routines are "socialized" or "...molded and modified to fit the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is represented" (*ibid.*, pp. 34–35). This allows for differential cultural or idiosyncratic contents. For example, beyond the language difference, getting *un caffè* in a Naples bar is very different from getting one in a Brooklyn coffee shop. Customers and staff become "teams" (*ibid.,* p. 79), who cooperate, or attempt to cooperate, to stage the single routine.

Other important aspects of team performances are intended to control behavior and unmeant gestures in order to prevent incidents and embarrassments (*ibid.*, pp. 208–37). It is also important in keeping the actors prepared for the unexpected problems of the performance. This "dramaturgical circumspection" includes preparing carefully for the show and choosing a proper stage and performers. Finally, there is "tact regarding tact," which is the moral obligation of the audience for the performers to ignore mistakes and anomalies. Such practices provide tangible and intangible benefits for all team members. Tangible benefits for me as a customer are better service, and occasionally less cost. For staff it is regular and larger tips. The intangible benefits for both sides of the exchanges are recognition and friendship.

Another useful approach to understanding coffee shop performances of staff and customers are theories of "scenes". Alan Blum was the first social theorist to develop the concept of a "scene" paying attention to their inner experiences and dynamics. "In everyday life we speak regularly about scenes, and it is in such ways that the scene first appears to and for us. Then we ask, what are we talking about when we address the world in these ways, is there a persistence underlying this diversity?" (Blum 2003, p. 165).

In "Scene Thinking," Benjamin Woo, Jamie Rennie and Stuart R. Poyntz (2015) contend that scene thinking can do important work for the cultural analyst.

> They are typically understood as loosely bounded social worlds oriented to forms of cultural expression. They provide systems of identification and connection, while simultaneously inviting acts of novelty, invention and innovation. Scenes are set within the fabric of everyday life but also function as an imagined alternative to the ordinary, work-a-day world (2015, p. 287).

In contrast to seeking authentic familiarity in local scenes, Clark, et al employed scene thinking to the value of Starbuck's corporate authenticity where you feel sure to get the same, reliable service everywhere, and:

> [...] that because it was corporate it would be run efficiently, you wouldn't have to chitchat with the employees, you knew that both the employees and you would be held to and judged by objective standards, and there would be no surprises. If you've felt this, then you've had some sense of what it means to have an institution authenticated by its corporateness. Conversely, if you've ever felt an aversion to walking into Starbucks – not because you disagree with its politics or you don't like its coffee, but just because its distance, impersonality, and incessant profit-maximization make you queasy – then you've felt what it means for corporateness to indicate a form of inauthenticity. Corporateness can thus put a stamp of authenticity on a business that can be as reassuring as knowing that the business is local (Clark et al. 2006).

Another important theoretical concept for understanding performances and scenes is "sociability", the super-rationalization of which, such as scripted customer-client relationships, makes it meaningless. As to meaningless sociability Georg Simmel writing on "The Sociology of Sociability," refers to the special sociological structure of art and play which are performed for their own sake.

In the same sense one may speak of an impulse to sociability in man. To be sure, it is for the sake of special needs and interests that men unite in economic associations or blood fraternities, in cult societies or robber bands. But, above and beyond their special content, all these associations are accompanied by a feeling for, by a satisfaction in, the very fact that one is associated with others and that the solitariness of the individual is resolved into togetherness, a union with others (1949, p. 254). In contrast, Simmel adds, being cut off from this life results in "... an empty nature suspended in the air" (1949, p. 261).

3. The Performances, Routines and Scenes at My Favorite Coffee Shops

3.1. Park Slope, Brooklyn

There are many levels of scenes. Here, as will come later in reference to coffee shops in Litchfield, Connecticut, is a broader district-wide scene that provides the setting for the local coffee shops in the district. *StreetEasy* is a high-end real estate listing platform for both rentals and sales. It describes Park Slope At a Glance:

> Park Slope has a tranquil, easygoing vibe and can almost feel suburban. Strollers and children of all ages are a constant presence on sidewalks, as are shoppers patronizing local boutiques and dog walkers heading up to the park. Residents are Brooklynites through and through and tend to be socially conscious, artistically minded, and committed to their community. At night, a casual restaurant scene comes alive. For anyone looking for a night out, there are plenty of beer gardens and

wine bars to patronize, especially in the South Slope, but don't go looking for dance clubs[7].

Streeteasy describes Park Slope's mood as "laid-back", "[...] a place where you get to know your neighbors", and where in nearby Prospect Park "Kids, bikers, runners, dogs, and residents of all ages can be found enjoying its 526 acres of green space[8]".

The most powerful indicators of gentrification revolve around race and social class in the form of data about income, home values, apartment rents, and educational attainment. Within the primary ZIP Codes for Park Slope (11215 and 11217) in 2020 the population Park Slope's population was 44,321. About two-thirds of the population was White, while less than about forty percent of New York City as a whole was White. In 2020, the Median Household Income in the primary ZIP Codes for Park Slope was about $130,00, which was more than double that for the United States. Further elite status is indicated by the fact that three-quarters of Park Slope residents aged 25 and above earned Bachelor's Degrees which is more than double the rate in United States. Another indicator of luxury is housing costs. Furman reported that in 2019 the Median Gross Rent in Park Slope/Carroll Gardens was $2,400 and the median sales price of 1-family buildings was $3,113,000[9].

3.1.1. The Connecticut Muffin

The most frequent, almost exclusive, venue for performing my coffee shop routine in Park Slope is the Connecticut Muffin which I have patronized for more than thirty years. The Connecticut Muffin company is owned and run by an Egyptian-American family and there are five more iterations in other upscale Brooklyn neighborhoods. Mine is locat-ed on Bartel-Pritchard Square which is adjacent to Prospect Park. The 526-acre park was designed and constructed in the second half of the 9th century by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux. It is a premiere destination for Brooklyn visitors and residents alike. As with most upscale eateries in the area, the signage and outward appearance is designed to convey a sense of luxury (See Figure 1). The inside appearance mirrors the outside, and offers upscale products such as specialty coffees and teas, a fancy espresso machine, an attractive array of desserts, and a coffee grinder that customers can use to freshly grind its expensive, signature special blends (See Figure 2). The coffee shop is about a quarter-mile from my home. On most days, I leave my house at about 6:30 AM and buy *The New York Times* at a local grocery store owned by a Palestinian-American. Then I walk to Prospect Park for a slow, two-mile jog, with a friend. We end our run at the coffee shop at about 7:30 AM.

My daily coffee shop visiting routine was curtailed during the strict New York State-wide COVID-19 Lockdown from March 7 to June 24, 2020 ordered by Governor Andrew Cuomo. During this period which only "essential businesses" were allowed to operate. These were limited to Communications and Information Technology, Financial Services, Health Care, Personal services, Retail stores that sell products necessary for health and safety, such as food, sanitation supplies, and products to maintain habitability, Food supply chain, and Transportation[10].

The pandemic had a lasting effect on the routine. Before the lockdown, my fellow team members (the staff) at Connecticut Muffin saved a ceramic cup especially for me behind the counter. Even before the lockdown, other customers were not served hot beverages in such

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7 Source: https://streeteasy.com/for-sale/park-slope, last accessed April 27, 2022.

8 See https://streeteasy.com/for-sale/park-slope, last accessed April 27, 2022.

9 Data for this section was gathered from the US Census FactFinder, and the American Community Survey (https://furmancenter.org/neighborhoods/view/park-slope-carroll-gardens, last accessed April 27, 2022).

10 Source: https://ballotpedia.org/Federal_definitions_of_essential_and_non-essential_businesses_during_the_coronavirus_%28COVID-19%29_pandemic,_2020, last accessed April 27, 2022.

a cup because the owners had switched from ceramic cups and glassware to paper and plastic cups to save on expenses. Also, when I restarted my routine after the lockdown, not only were we required to wear masks and unable to sit inside for several months, but, as a further precaution, the cup was no longer offered me. I must add that the taste of coffee suffers greatly when it is drunk from paper or foam cups as compared to ceramic or porcelain vessels.

At Connecticut Muffin, there are usually only two staff members behind the counter (See Figure 3). Although there is little Fordist specializations as to tasks, only one of the staff members has cash register duty. However, the designated cashier shares all the other tasks as well when needed. These other tasks are making hot and cold drinks, preparing sandwiches, soups, and restocking as well as cleaning inside and outside spaces. Over the three decades during which I have been patronizing Connecticut Muffin the staff members have been either Latino (Mostly Mexican) or Middle Eastern-Americans.

At the time I arrive in the morning, the coffee shop is seldom overcrowded. Nearby are entrances to the subway as well as Bus stops. Most customers come only for take-out service but there is ample seating for those patrons who have the time and inclination to linger (See Figure 4). Everyday, there are also a few customers who sit at tables with laptop computers connected to the Internet. I questioned a few and found, that they were working remotely. Many of the professionals in Park Slope had worked remotely during the Lockdown and some continue the practice.

When I enter, I call out an *Hola!* as most of the workers are Mexican Americans who usually seem pleased for my efforts at learning their native language. Much of our daily banter takes place in Spanish. The owner of the coffee shop is an Egyptian-American Muslim and if he, or one of the Muslim staff is there, I offer a "*Sabah al-khair*," to which they reply *Sabah al-noor*." *Hola, Sabah al-khair*

and *Sabah al-noor* are Spanish and Arabic phrases morning greetings respectively. My running partner and I then take up our usual table near the window before going to the counter to pay. In most coffee shops, placing ones reading material on the table or clothing item on a chair is the culturally accepted way of claiming a private space (See Figure 5).

Since I am a "regular," the staff knows what I want so there is no need to "order" verbally. My daily order is a medium-sized coffee with hot milk and a well-toasted ciabatta roll, with no butter (*sin mantequilla*). I must note that the milk for my coffee is steamed at no extra charge, and although there is no table service, if there is a delay because of a larger than usual crowd, my toast is brought to me at my table even though I often suggest that they merely throw it to me (*tiramelo*).

Recently, one of the newer Mexican-American workers has been saying *Provecho!* when giving me my ciabatta roll. The common phrase in Spanish is *Buen Provecho,* but Mexicans more frequently simply say "*Provecho!*" the term has a meaning similar to the Italian *Buon Appetito*! Without having to order, there is no need to do anything else but pay with my Connecticut Muffin Gift Card and leave a generous cash tip. We sometimes exchange enquiries about our families. For example, two of the young female workers have children. One was a recent birth and the young mother has taken time off from work to care for the infant. To celebrate the birth of their children, I gave each a gift of something my wife Suzanne had knitted for them. I also give a cash gift to the staff for Christmas. When I leave, we exchange *Mañanas* and if the owner, or other Muslim friends, are there I add *Ma Salaama!* I must add, as to familiarity, my daughters Karen and Kristin often come to the shop on their way to work at local schools, and on several occasions I have brought my grandchildren to the shop and introduced them to the staff and owner (See Figure 6). Of course, there are other regulars at Connecticut Muffin, some of whom

have become part of the scene by sharing greetings, banter, and occasional conversations about life and politics.

Fig. 1. Connecticut Muffin, Outside Appearance, 2022. Photo Credit Jerry Krase

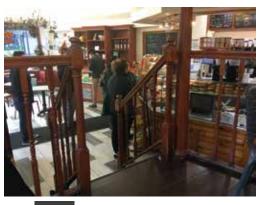**Fig. 2.** Connecticut Muffin, Inside Appearance, 2022. Photo Credit Jerry Krase

Fig. 3. Connecticut Muffin, Staff, 2022. Photo Credit Jerry Krase

Fig. 4. Connecticut Muffin, Seating and Line, 2022. Photo Credit Jerry Krase

Fig. 5. Connecticut Muffin, My Table, 2022. Photo Credit Jerry Krase

Fig. 6. Connecticut Muffin, Jack, 2015. Photo Credit Jerry Krase

3.1.2. What do Coffee Shops Look Like in Park Slope?

The visual surveys that follow of coffee shops in Park Slope, Brooklyn and Litchfield, Connecticut, clearly demonstrate the impacts of marketing and design studies even on small scale, local coffee shops. It seems that the research has also affected how they describe their shops. However, even large-scale national chains such as McDonalds, Dunkin' Donuts, Starbucks have tried to simulate some of these luxury features without, however, compromising profitability. Since coffee shops are an icon of upscale, gentrified urban neighborhoods, it is not surprising that a *Google* search for coffee shops in Park Slope resulted in large number along on its main commercial street of 7th Avenue.

My neighborhood of Park Slope, Brooklyn is a good example of that commercial semiosis as coffee shops have proliferated as the area evolved from merely gentrified in the 1980s to Super - to Hy-

per-gentrified in the 2020s. As might be expected, there is also a related Bourdieusian "necessity" to "luxury" hierarchy of coffee shops which also mimics the rationalization of making and serving of comestibles, as well as their pricing. In Park Slope, the range of coffee shops is from the low-end Dunkin' Donuts to higher-end Poetica. In between, are Starbucks which offers a few couches, armchairs, and free Wi-Fi to customers and Connecticut Muffin. Over the decades, I have visited most of these coffee shops. Service at both Park Slope's Dunkin' Donuts and Starbucks takes place via modified assembly lines where one staff member takes the orders and others prepare and place the order for pick up. The difference is in terms of relative degree of decor and price. It is important to note that the highest level of coffee shops in Park Slope, such as Poetica, there is a trained "barista" who prepares the coffee from a very expensive coffee machine and who might make their personal signature symbols in the cappuccino foam. I am familiar with this personalization of service because my grandson Leander Letizia is a barista at an upscale coffee shop in a different neighborhood (See Figure 12). Expressions of genuine familiarity between customers and staff are also more likely to be observed in the higher end, less assembly line, coffee shops where staff has more time to interact with customers and can expect higher gratuities. As we have seen, in this regard, corporations, such as Starbucks, have investigated ways of simulating this sociability discussed.

This is how Poetica describes itself:

UNCOMMON GROUNDS
From the farm to your latte, our beans are meticulously selected from around the world. Whether you sip a classic drip or our signature drink, The Poetica, we aim to inspire with every drop.

AN URBAN OASIS
Step inside our warm, cozy cafés and let the world slip away. Relax in our lush, shaded yard under the blue Brooklyn skies. Let us be your

nook, a home away from home where you can work, gather, and unwind. [11]

It is easy to see how upscale coffee shops in very urban Park Slope are not only visually similar to each other as to the Taste of Luxury, but, as will be shown later in this essay, to those in very rural Litchfield, Connecticut.

Fig. 10. Colson Patisserie Outside Appearance, 2023. Photo Credit Jerry Krase

Fig. 11. Colson Patisserie Inside Appearance, 2023. Photo Credit Jerry Krase.

Fig. 8. Poetica, Outside Appearance, 2023. Photo Credit Jerry Krase.

Fig. 9. Poetica Inside Appearance, 2023. Photo Credit Jerry Krase

Fig. 12. Leander Letizia's Barista Signature 2023. Photo Credit Leander Letizia.

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11 https://www.poeticacoffee.com/, last accessed April 27, 2022.

Fɪɢ. 13. Vᴀʀɪᴇᴛʏ Cᴏꜰꜰᴇᴇ, Oᴜᴛsɪᴅᴇ Aᴘᴘᴇᴀʀᴀɴᴄᴇ, 2023. Pʜᴏᴛᴏ Cʀᴇᴅɪᴛ Jᴇʀʀʏ Kʀᴀsᴇ.

Fɪɢ. 15. Sᴛᴀʀʙᴜᴄᴋs, Oᴜᴛsɪᴅᴇ Aᴘᴘᴇᴀʀᴀɴᴄᴇ, 2023. Pʜᴏᴛᴏ Cʀᴇᴅɪᴛ Jᴇʀʀʏ Kʀᴀsᴇ.

Fɪɢ. 14. Hᴜɴɢʀʏ Gʜᴏsᴛ, Oᴜᴛsɪᴅᴇ Aᴘᴘᴇᴀʀᴀɴᴄᴇ, 2023. Pʜᴏᴛᴏ Cʀᴇᴅɪᴛ Jᴇʀʀʏ Kʀᴀsᴇ

Fɪɢ. 16. Sᴛᴀʀʙᴜᴄᴋs, Iɴsɪᴅᴇ Aᴘᴘᴇᴀʀᴀɴᴄᴇ, 2023. Pʜᴏᴛᴏ Cʀᴇᴅɪᴛ Kʀᴀsᴇ.

Fig. 17. Dunkin' Donuts, Outside Appearance, 2023. Photo Credit Jerry Krase.

Fig. 18. Dunkin' Donuts, Inside Appearance, 2023. Photo Credit Jerry Krase

3.2. Litchfield, Connecticut

The rural upscale town of Litchfield, Connecticut presents a significant con-trast to urban Park Slope, Brooklyn, New York. The tourist website *Visit Litchfield* describes it in this way:

> Welcome to scenic, historic, and lifestyle amenity rich Litchfield, Connecticut, named a top small town destination by Smithsonian Magazine and a Top 20 weekend getaway in New England by Travel + Leisure for our rich history, scenic beauty and nature preserves, outdoor activities, shopping, dining, signature community events, and great people!
> May be "on the map" nationally, but Litchfield's charm also derives from our status as a Connecticut hidden gem, in part because many of our favorite things can seem a bit hidden; close by and popular, but also special and private[12].

In 2020, the town had a population of only 1,280 with a median household income of $97,500 which is considerably higher that the state average of $83,572. Like Park Slope, the largest ethnic group in Litchfield, CT are Non-Hispanic-Whites (79.7%). The absence of minorities is also indicated by the fact that none of the households reported speaking a non-English language at home as their primary shared language. However, my own observations of workplace and shopping scenes in the area is that there are many "Latino-looking" workers and shoppers. In 2020, the median property value in Litchfield, CT was $330,000, which is considerably higher than the $286,700 state-wide average[13].

3.2.1. Dunkin' Donuts

My second most frequented coffee shop is a local franchise unit of the "Dunkin' Donuts" national chain that is nestled in a nondescript shopping mall parking lot in Litchfield, Connecticut (See Figure 17). As opposed to Connecticut Muffin, the outside and inside appearances evoke more of Boudieu's "taste of necessity" as opposed to luxury (See Figure 18). In addition, the Dunkin' Donuts sign is as recognizable as McDonald's "golden arches." It is about a ten-minute drive from my vacation home where I

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12 https://visitlitchfieldct.com/
13 Data for this section were gathered from: https://datausa.io/profile/geo/litchfield-ct and https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/CT,US/PST045221, last accessed April 27, 2022.

spend most summers and many weekends. Although the town of Litchfield is very upscale and features more upscale places like Park Slope's Connecticut Muffin to have coffee in the norming, such as "At the Corner" (See Figures 23 & 24) in the town center and two more modest others, Meraki on the local highway (See Figures 25 & 26) and Espresso 59 in the town center (See Figure 27), none are open early enough in the morning for my excursion which begins before 7 AM each day. On the way to Dunkin' Donuts, I stop at a nearby gas station to buy the New York Times. My interaction with the Bangladeshi countermen begins with "good morning," How are yours, thanks after I pay with a credit card and I add Ma Salaam before driving across the highway to the shopping mall parking lot.

The service inside Dunkin' Donuts is more Fordist than the Connecticut Muffin as the normal process is for people to stand in line and place their order with the cashier who enters it into a computer from which message are sent to others to select and package food items like donuts. A message is also sent to another worker who prepares other food such as toasting, buttering, and heating other items such as previously prepared eggs, sausages, etc... All the food items are then placed on a counter at the far end of the counter for pick up. (See Figures 21 and 22) Usually someone calls out the item such as "large black!". In contrast, at Starbucks and other more upscale, but still fast-food coffee shops, familiarity is implied because workers ask the customer for a name which they write on the paper cups before filling. Emptying refuse bins, cleaning of the inside and outside of the space is usually done by the worker with the least seniority.

Although it is a franchise that often employs seasonal workers such as high school students, over the past three or so decades I have gotten to know most of the supervisors and long-time staff. However, as the interactions are more limited due to the physical structure of the place, which at times, such as school

days, is also very busy, we don't know each other's names. Despite this lack of familiarity, we have in sense conspired to develop a routine that undermines the dehumanizing rationality of the intended McDonaldization.

Usually when I enter Dunkin' Donuts during the summer months, there are few other patrons. However, there are very long lines on school days, but I am seldom there during the school year. In every case, customers (students, teachers, workers, state police officers, etc) place their orders and take them out to their cars. When I enter, I am carrying my own large "BOSS" emblazoned coffee mug, I go quickly to my favorite table near the window and claim it by placing my newspaper on the round table top (See Figure 23). Because my cup is so noticeable, it was my entree to the team behind the counter. At first, after several consecutive days of handing it over to be filled, first the workers and then a manager, commented upon it and we began a regular exchange of greetings and occasional small talk, depending on how long the service line was. After a few weeks, in most cases I was recognized as I entered and by the time I got to the counter they have already started preparing my usual order as they take my cup and fill it with a medium refill of "midnight" (dark roast), one creamer on the side, and one slice of sour dough bread toasted with no butter. Most often the toast is in the toaster before I order it. I use the use Dunkin' Donuts phone app to pay and always leave a generous $1 cash tip.

Over the years my choice of bread for toasting has changed a few times but never the coffee. Since I am not in Connecticut year-round, sometimes there are new workers who don't know me, but I still don't have to order as one of the regular (year-round) staff or manger intervenes. It is during the summer months when I am a daily patron at Dunkin' Donuts and I am able to get to know the seasonal workers better. In several instances, I have been able to provide educational advice to high school and college stu-

dents, and some staff who are parents. It is when there is a lull in customers and I am waiting for my order at the end of the counter, that we have the opportunity to talk about our families. Apropos of family, several workers have upon occasion brought their children to the shop. Dunkin has a cozy seating area but I seldom see anyone sitting there other than the workers friends or children. I must note here that I did not ask the staff to pose for photographs as it seemed to me to be more of an imposition than at Connecticut Muffin in Brooklyn.

As at Connecticut Muffin, if I am unable to pay for any reason, such as forgetting to bring my walle, the cashier will tell me "next time," or even "forget about it." Even the manager has afforded me this kindness. Of course, I am not the only one who gets special treatment at Dunkin' Donuts. Every work day there is a group of about ten men who exit from their pickup trucks and vans and occupy one or two tables. They are also recognized and greeted by the staff as they enter at the same time throughout the year. They and staff also seem to know each other's names and have longer bouts of friendly bantering and teasing. As to sociability, being an outsider, especially a liberal New Yorker who reads the *New York Times* alone at his table in rural Connecticut is not conducive to friendly relations with these very politically conservative workmen. My acceptance to this group took several months of smiles and polite "hellos" before they responded and now give me friendly greetings.

Of might be expected, the COVID-19 Pandemic had an impact on my Litchfield coffee shop routines. Similar to Governor Andrew Cuomo in New York, on March 20, 2020, Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont signed an executive order directing Connecticut businesses and residents to "Stay Safe, Stay Home." Non-essential businesses were ordered to close and were subject to fines if they did not comply; individual citizens were not subject to fines for violating the order. The state began reducing the restric-

tions earlier than New York State on May 20, 2020. Prior to the reopening, large clear plexiglass shields were hung across all the once open counter spaces. After the gradual reopening, no sitting inside was allowed and masking was required for both staff and customers at Dunkin' Donuts. (See Figure 24) However, many of the Pandemic-skeptical customers did not comply with the mask mandate, and due to their familiarity, if not agreement with their skepticism, with them the staff did not scold them. When sitting inside was allowed, tables were spaced more widely and I couldn't hand my cup to a worker to fill my cup until summer 2022 when pandemic restrictions ended.

FIG. 19.   DUNKIN' DONUTS, OUTSIDE APPEARANCE, 2022. PHOTO CREDIT JERRY KRASE.

FIG. 20.   DUNKIN' DONUTS, INSIDE APPEARANCE, 2022. PHOTO CREDIT JERRY KRASE.

Fig. 21. Dunkin' Donuts, Customers Waiting for Pick-up during Covid-19, 2021. Photo Credit Jerry Krase

Fig. 23. Dunkin' Donuts, CT BOSS Cup and New York Times at Table, 2022. Photo Credit Jerry Krase.

Fig. 22. Dunkin' Donuts, Dunkin' Donuts, Placing Order, 2022. Photo Credit Jerry Krase.

Fig. 24. Dunkin' donuts, Yes We're Open, 2021. Photo Credit Jerry Krase

3.2.2. What do Upscale Coffee Shops Look Like in Litchfield, Connecticut?

Fig. 25. Google Map Coffee Shops near Litchfield, Connecticut, as accessed in January 10, 2023

On its website, Visit Litchfield.com provides a list and descriptions of "Our favorite cups of coffee ...and more!"

> Gourmet coffee, espresso drinks, teas, home-made baked goods, sweeter treats, and desserts are what we crave (right?) during pit stops when enjoying all Litchfield has to offer over the long Labor Day weekend (or anytime). Fortunately, the town is blessed many great choices, each with a distinct personality and all worth discovery and return visits[14].

Included in the list are Espresso59, At the Corner, Toast & co. and Meraki. As to the lesser "taste of necessity," it is important to note that Dunkin' Donuts is not included as a "favorite."

On another Connecticut tourism site, Lisa Simmons describes Espresso59 as:

> This Tiny café In Connecticut Is Hidden In The Hills And Has Everything Your Heart Desires.

We love Starbucks as much as the next person, but don't you sometimes miss the little old-fashioned cafes that have largely been taken over by corporate ownership? Something about a locally-run coffee shop is special. We are lucky enough to still have quite a few locally-owned cafes in Connecticut, and one of the best is Espresso 59. Tucked away in the beautiful Litchfield Hills, this coffee shop features stellar hot and cold drinks, pastries,

gelato, and more. Next time you need a quick sweet treat, stop by and check out their offerings! (Simmons 2022).

Fig. 26. At the Corner, Outside Appearance, 2023. Photo Credit Jerry Krase.

Fig. 27. At the Corner, Inside Appearance, 2023. Photo Credit Jerry Krase.

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14 See https://visitlitchfieldct.com/our-favorite-cups-of-coffee-and-more/, accessed January 20, 2023

Fig. 28. Meraki, Outside Appearance, 2023. Photo Credit Jerry Krase.

Fig. 31. Toast & co, Outside Appearance, 2023. Photo Credit Karen Krase.

Fig. 29. Meraki, Inside Appearance, 2023. Photo Credit Karen Krase.

Fig. 32. Toast & co, Ordering Window, 2023. Photo Credit Jerry Krase.

Fig. 30. Espresso59, Outside Appearance, 2023. Photo Credit Jerry Krase

4. Concluding Remarks

I have written a great deal on both autoethnography (2018) and visual essays (2021b) and hope that in this visually-enhanced autoethnographic essay of my favorite coffee shops, that I have demonstrated how customers and staff are able to escape Max Weber's dehumanizing "iron cage of rationality" by collaborating with each other to develop subversive routines that undermine the profit-driven goals of Fordism, Taylorism, and McDonaldization in their more recent forms. Admittedly, elements such as the cost and quality of the food and the exterior and interior designs add

to the ambience, scene, or even the habitus of the coffee shop. However, for me it is the feeling of being at home that I get upon entering the shop. It is a place so where everybody knows MY name – even if they really don't – or where the familiarity is not merely scripted "meaningless sociability." In order to make this article, more than a memoir, I anchored the contemporary upscale coffee shop scene to what I believe is its historical model in the Viennese Coffee House (*Der Weiner Kaffeehaus*). I also reviewed and integrated efforts to employ more and less recent scientific management research to simulate physical and social spaces that would effectively stimulate patrons' feelings of being at home. The theoretical underpinning of this analysis has been provided by Jean Baudrillard, Alan Blum, Pierre Bourdieu, Erving Goffman, Ray Oldenburg, George Ritzer, Georg Simmel, and Max Weber. Their ideas have been synthesized to provide depth to the simple recounting of the routines and performances by customers and staff, as well as the similarities and difference of the visual appearances of chain and upscale coffee shops in one of Brooklyn, New York's gentrified neighborhoods as well as exurban Litchfield, Connecticut. Finally, as gentrification seems to be a common element in discussions of coffee shops, as emergent forms of eating and drinking around the world (Halawa, Parasecoli, 2019), I would like to refer the reader to a few of my own publications that visualize the subject. (cf., for instance, Krase 2020).

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Dining out – be it for a lunch break, a business dinner, a romantic meeting, or a solitary resolution – stands as a social daily life ritual filled with significance. Its celebration emerges as a moment of self-exposure where the social limen between public and private, individual and collective identity gets constantly negotiated. Such a socializing practice of daily life reveals its power through aesthetical means: endorsing a determined regime of good manners by choosing who to eat with, how to behave and dress, when and what to eat, and where to dine out results in a sensitive and intrinsically political asset, outcome of specific choices at the hand of the individual.

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