

A Taste for Ethics: Shifting from Lifestyle to a Way of Life

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Abstract

This thesis concerns contemporary food movements and practices in the UK, their relation to lifestyle and consumption on the one hand, and to “way of life” on the other. Recent attention to food practices has indicated a shift in consumptive behaviour: increased concern for the welfare of the environment, animals and people who work in the industry, as well as for the quality of food, have made labels such as “good”, “clean” and “fair” (associated with “quality”, “organic” and “fair-trade”) buzz-words in the industry. Through fieldwork (4 years’ participant observation as a weekend trader for a local fruit producer in Borough Market, London), theoretical engagement and media analysis, the thesis critically evaluates the privileged status that these terms are given and aims to differentiate the changes that benefit individual stylised living (lifestyles) from those which contribute to the betterment of society (way of life).

This thesis takes four sites in which ethical food consumption is emphasized: the Slow Food movement, supermarkets, farmers’ markets and the community garden; and critically evaluates their responses to these concerns in a theoretical context based on the cultural analysis of the everyday, drawing on thinkers including Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, Jacques Derrida and others. A different model for addressing questions of ethical consumption arises from each empirical study: every model is critically evaluated on the basis of a combination of theory and experiences drawn from fieldwork, revealing certain limitations which move the investigation forward to the next site – in this sense the thesis develops dialectically through particular cases towards addressing the general problematic of

ethical living in the everyday. It concludes by taking the model of a community garden, contextualised by a discussion of the commons, as an outline for addressing the problematic of ethical consumption in its widest social context, and as an indication of the possible direction of subsequent research.

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Synopsis

The chapters in the thesis alternate between narrative and analysis, with each section of narrative acting as a prelude to the next theoretical chapter. The descriptive chapters are taken from the notes I took during the fieldwork conducted in Borough Market over a 4 year period. Although these are generally presented in chronological order, in a few cases the sequence has been altered to better fit the theoretical and thematic development of the thesis.¹

Chapters 1 (Borough Market I) and 2 (Slow Journeys) set the thesis in the context of living in (post)modernity. Chapter 2 (Slow Journeys) introduces the Slow Food Movement and investigates its stated claim to bring pleasure and care together in a way that will change the way we produce and consume. In my analysis I have contextualized the movement as a response to “fast food” and “fast life” – a mode of being which I have compared to David Harvey's “time-space compression”. “Fast” production, in the sense discussed in this thesis, is taken to represent a model of mass homogeneous production. “Slow” is its opposite. The narrative chapter describes the haphazard beginnings of my fieldwork which came as an important reality check. The materials generated from my fieldwork directed the investigations which underpin this thesis.

¹ The fieldnotes were not initially intended to be incorporated into the body of the thesis; they were kept primarily as a memory aid for a first-time ethnographer. Thanks to my supervisors John Hutnyk and Peter Koepping, who encouraged me to use these materials, the process has changed my whole research project. The practice of recording these experiences allowed me to digest those events more fully as I relived them through writing; but sometimes the significance of those events became apparent only at a much later stage. The cultural anthropologist Michael Taussig, in his book *Law in a Lawless Land*, reflects on his practice of diary writing during his fieldwork on the *limpieza* in Columbia, writes, “It is not only a question as to whether the memories of true records of what happened. What is also important are the workings of memory and what such workings may reveal or stimulate” (2005: 152). He also compares rereading diary entries to “playing musical chairs ... with memory and the recording of memory, the one receding as the other steps forwards” (2005: 150).

Chapters 3 (Borough Market II) and 4 (Jamie at Home) take the case of a “celebrity chef”, Jamie Oliver, and examine, in particular, his show on home-cooking, *Jamie at Home*, to offer a reading of the way that the “home” of “home-cooking” is exploited – especially through the production of effects associated with the experience of nostalgia – the longing to return home. Svetlana Boym's reading of nostalgia opens up questions of hospitality, conviviality and of the British identity, which will be discussed with reference to Jacques Derrida and Paul Gilroy's work. The narrative in Chapter 3 (Borough Market II) opens up questions of foreign labour – in particular, the Polish workers who make up the main labour force of Chegworth Valley, an independent local producer in Kent.

Chapters 5 (Borough Market III, Slow Eating, Ginger Pig and Mute) & 6 (Lifestyle versus Way of Life) take examples of leisure activities and investigate their relationship to everyday life. The separation of activities into work, leisure and life contribute to a disjointed way of approaching the everyday. Leisure activities that share the same parameters as lifestyle place weekend activities outside the everyday, but as Henri Lefebvre points out (contra Deleuze)², an individual at work or at play is the same person and therefore must be approached in a unified way. The narrative tells the story of an argument I had with an owner of an organic bakery, as well as several other events I have attended in London. These incidents raise questions about the role of ideas and action, or theory and practice; the theoretical analysis develops these issues and sets up the parameters the thesis is to follow – the role of critique and praxis in everyday life and the move towards an “art of living”.

² See Deleuze and Guattari (2004) *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*

Chapters 7 (Borough Market IV) and 8 (Inextricable Aesthetics) look at the relationship between supermarkets and farmers' markets through aesthetics and point out the inextricable relationship between these two models. These two chapters mark a change in my approach to “fast” and “slow” production, which at an early stage in my research I took to be more-or-less in binary opposition. My experience in the field has caused me to question such an opposition and made me more critical, for example, of farmers' markets – which I was initially drawn to as a representation of a “better” or “slower” model of production and consumption. The theoretical analysis concentrates on the notions of public and private consciousness and uses the work of André Gorz and Henri Lefebvre to understand the separation between individual activities and the wider social. This answers some of the questions raised in Chapters 5 (Borough Market III, Slow Eating, Ginger Pig and Mute) and 6 (Lifestyle versus Way of Life) and furthers the discussion of social atomization arising from the discussion of public/private consciousness.

Chapters 9 (Borough Market V) and 10 (The Practice of Everyday Life I: Gift, Tactics, Neighbourhood) begin by looking more closely at how Borough Market operates, especially at non-trading times. The practices of goods exchange among traders and scavengers that take place at these times, before and after normal trading hours, offer an opportunity to discuss the guile that individuals employ to beat the system. Marcel Mauss's work on the gift economy is useful in the discussion of the alternative economies that exist, while Michel de Certeau's writings – especially that on the *perruque* – adds flavour to the analysis of these little pockets of resistance. These little tricks that we (the market traders), play as individuals, create a temporary

environment where we feel at home in: recalling Chapter 4 (Jamie at Home) on nostalgia here we observe the production through the activity of individuals of a sense of neighbourhood (private) in an otherwise alien and foreign environment (public). This also sets up the beginnings of ways in which to think through the practice of collective politics.

Chapters 11 (Community Garden: Forest Farm Peace Garden) and 12 (The Practice of Everyday Life II: The Community Garden) conclude the thesis by revisiting some of the earlier themes discussed, via the work of a community garden in Hainault. The “good” “clean” and “fair” criteria stated by the Slow Food Movement broadly frame the discussion of the work of the Forest Farm Peace Garden, as they have done for the thesis as a whole. Through the community garden's response to these concerns, I revisit the following themes that have recurred throughout the thesis: the notion of “care”; the link between the individual and the social; the integration between work and leisure and the spirit of giving. Finally, I take the garden's strategic partnership with local authorities to demonstrate, in a small way, how a “way of life” can contribute to the struggle of the development of a collective politics, discussed with reference to Massimo de Angelis's work on the commons.

Introduction

Slow Food, a non-governmental organization (NGO), is a movement that evolved out of the food and cultural interests of Italian left-wing activists. In the mid eighties, they formed the Acrigola group which organised events and tastings, and published restaurant reviews and wine guides. The *Gambero Rosso*, which was a particularly successful Italian wine review, was published as an insert in the left-wing newspaper *Il Manifesto*. In 1989, McDonald's caused outrage when they opened a branch in the Piazza di Spagna in Rome, and protesters sat in groups slowly eating pasta to demonstrate their objection to the presence of a global fast food conglomerate (Petrini 2001). This incident hastened the formalization of the Slow Food movement which, according to the founder Carlo Petrini, is a “critical reaction to the symptoms of incipient globalization” (2001: 8).³ Slow Food's motto therefore states that it “aims to protect the pleasures of the table from the homogenisation of modern fast food and life” (slowfood 2007) and it pursues this goal by supporting food that is “good”, “clean” and “fair”. “Good” refers to food that tastes good; “clean” means that the process of production should not harm the environment, animal welfare or our health; and “fair” indicates that food producers should receive fair compensation for their work. The organisation has also elaborated on their manifesto pledge to address “people’s dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from, how it tastes and how (our) food choices affect the rest of the world” (slowfood 2007). I shall begin this thesis by looking at the Slow Food Movement, whose concerns with food production, distribution and consumption also broadly frame the areas of critique within which the research for this thesis has been undertaken.

³ A more detailed account of the history of Slow Food Movement can be found in Petrini 2001, 2006 and Parkins and Craig 2006.

Large corporate distribution outlets such as supermarkets have shown awareness of the sudden new wave of public concern over the issues represented by the Slow Food Movement, largely in relation to the production of food in mass quantities. In response to criticisms of food that is not “good”, “clean” and “fair”, every major supermarket chain has launched different lines that address each of these problems. In response to the concern regarding food that is not “good”, supermarkets have created quality ranges (Tesco’s Finest, Sainsbury’s Taste the Difference, Marks and Spencer’s M&S Food etc.) that boast of superior quality that matches that of artisanal produce; in response to the problem that mass-produced food is not “clean”, the organic ranges promise the absence of chemical pesticides that would otherwise contribute to environmental pollution, soil depletion and related health issues; addressing the question of “fairness”, “fair trade” ensures that third world producers are paid fair wages and that a part of the profit is re-injected into the local economy. While these changes reflect a certain acknowledgement of public concerns, they are superficial: firstly, the solutions offered address each problem individually and separately, which leaves the whole system of mass production unchallenged. The ways in which these institutions respond to the three concerns imply that “good, clean and fair” are merely isolated rather than related problems symptomatic of the system of production. These responses are limited by the fact that supermarkets are still governed and driven by the rules of the capitalist market and mode of production, to the extent that labels like “quality”, “organic” and “fair trade” have been to a large extent subsumed into the general strategies of marketing. These solutions therefore only translate into pseudo-choices for consumers who are left having to choose between quality, cleanness or fairness (i.e. to support the welfare of

the producers, workers or environment, and to pay extra for it).

The Slow Food movement is one of the key organisations taking a stand against mass production and consumption. Its “good”, “clean” and “fair” slogan signifies a recognition that problems seen in food production, distribution and consumption today are related to each other as well as belonging to the wider problems of global capitalism. Fast food outlets that became popular in the post-war years and expanded with 20th century capitalism became the symbols of today’s unethical consumption. While the golden arches of McDonald’s became the symbol of “fast” capitalism, Slow Food made the snail their emblem to celebrate “slow” and all that it represents. “Slow” values local and diversified production over mass and homogeneous production; it promotes quality cooking instead of ready-to-go foods, and above all, it puts forward the idea that consuming locally and seasonally could be a way to counteract certain phenomena brought about by global capitalism: homogeneity, alienation and cultural imperialism. Incorporating the “good, clean, fair” concerns into their philosophy, the movement lives up to its manifesto by teaming up with local producers to create projects that promote these values and which attempt to repair the damage caused by “modern fast food and life”. The Ark of Taste for example, rediscovers, archives and promotes varieties of produce or recipes that have been lost due to commercial standardization, health and safety regulations and limitations imposed by distribution outlets. Local *convivia* organise activities and workshops to promote the importance of taste education. Slow Food also organises large-scale salons (the most well-known being *Salon de Gusto*) providing regional and international platforms where producers and consumers can come together to facilitate exchange and understanding. For Slow Food, they believe that by being

informed about how food is produced and by actively supporting those who produce it, consumers become “co-producers: a part of and a partner in the production process” (slowfood 2007).

Members or followers of the Slow Food Movement stand apart from other gourmets by situating themselves as eco-gastronomes, claiming that the palette and the planet cannot be separated. The strength of the Slow Food movement lies in their way of introducing strategies with which to think through and enact the combination of pleasure and ethics. This is the first model discussed in this thesis in which the link between the individual and the social is clearly marked. The advantage of Slow Food’s status as a movement is that it makes the organisation less hierarchical, allowing for members to organically generate an agenda that is relevant to their locality. However, as the thesis will illustrate, this has also become one of the key disadvantages: the values upheld by Slow Food have been constructed broadly enough to be interpreted in quite different ways, which risks undermining the connection between pleasure and ethics. The example of the Slow Food London *convivium* appears to have privileged the pleasure of the palette *over* the responsibility for the planet. The social transformative potential of the movement has been compromised, reducing it for the most part to a sort of middle-class social club. Moreover, Slow Food has to a certain extent itself become a brand, producing effects similar to those of “organic” and “fair trade” labelling in supermarkets; “slow”, together with its associated motto of good, clean and fair, has been, directly or indirectly, through association with its stated values or ethics, appropriated into a brand that can be equated to the “fast” mechanisms of the capitalist mode of production. Finally, in introducing a membership scheme, Slow Food continues to be

rather exclusive, restricted to a certain demographic group and in the case of London at least, does not appear to have the intention of encouraging wider participation.

Following the examination of the Slow Food Movement itself at the beginning of the thesis, I move on to investigate another paradigm that operates according to similar criteria to those of Slow Food and is also held to be part of today's "good food movement". Farmers' Markets are outlets for local farmers to sell their produce. While this is not always the case in Borough Market, the Chegworth Valley apple company, at whose stall I conducted my fieldwork, does grow and sell its own fruit produced on its farm in Kent. Local production answers at least two of the major problems of mass production: firstly, by remaining small-scale and independent, such producers do not have to adhere to the rules imposed by mass distribution outlets. One of the results is that more varieties of produce are grown organically, which echoes the concerns of Slow Food and its work to preserve and promote biodiversity. Moreover, large distribution outlets or wholesalers that provide for supermarkets have strict regulations concerning the appearance and size of produce. Chegworth Valley, which used to provide for supermarkets, realised that a lot of fruit went to waste or at least could not be sold at its premium due to the fact that it did not meet the supermarket requirements of size and weight. By securing their own distribution outlets at farmers' markets, Chegworth Valley sidestepped the problems of having to produce according to aesthetic criteria and focused on producing for taste. This also echoes the Slow Food Movement's "good" criterion. Secondly, since local production does not need to produce in large quantities to satisfy large distribution outlets, the majority of such independents compete to produce the highest quality, and in order to do this grow their food largely without the use of chemical pesticides. An advantage

of being local is that the final produce does not have to be transported from one part of the world to another, reducing carbon emissions from unnecessary transportation, satisfying the “clean” factor. Keeping the production local also limits the problems associated with outsourcing: exploitation of other, often poorer countries' natural resources and labour. Local production from these points of view maintains the importance of pleasure in relation to ethical practices; the pleasure is derived not only from consuming ethical, good quality food, but often also from the experience of shopping in local markets. These places, with their vibrant atmosphere, open up a space for interaction in the local community; Borough Market in particular offers a space for varying levels and kinds of exchange in the heart of London. For regular shoppers, markets can become a neighbourhood, a site where individuals take up positions in a network of social relationships; for occasional visitors, it offers a site for social activity, leisure and entertainment; for traders, it represents a space of work and play. Customers, visitors and traders contribute to the establishment of this interactive space in which the values of “good” “clean” and “fair” are promoted.

There are considerable limitations to farmers' markets: in England at least, these markets are markedly more expensive than supermarkets. Despite not having formal restrictions on who can go to the market, the participatory space remains effectively exclusive to those who hold greater financial power. The demographic group that shops regularly at Borough Market appears little different to consist broadly of the same people who choose to become members of Slow Food. While independent local producers might contribute to biodiversity by growing more sustainably and less commercialized varieties of crops, they are nevertheless still a business bound by the rules of the economic market. As discussed in Chapter 8 (Inextricable Aesthetics), it

would appear that these businesses merely operate according to a different set of criteria. In terms of the “fair” factor, while local production might appear to avoid the problem of outsourcing, the agricultural businesses nevertheless depend heavily upon migrant labour: these issues have not been given the critical attention that is required.

From supermarkets to Slow Food to farmers' market and local production, each paradigm responds in varying degrees to the problems of “good” “clean” and “fair” food production, distribution and consumption. The examination undertaken in this thesis also suggests that the relationship between these various models (for example the link between farmers' markets and supermarkets) is not as distinct as it first appears. The final model I examined is the community garden, which perhaps offers the beginning of ways in which to think through the limitations of other models previously discussed. While this might seem to answer some of the problems raised, it should be noted that it is by no means the ultimate solution and that community gardening is certainly not presented here as an exemplary case study to illustrate how “good” “clean” and “fair” food can be produced.

Theory

Throughout this research, the triviality of everyday consumption, framed by a focus on the micro-practices of eating, provides a series of starting-points for introducing the different dimensions of the larger social critique. Each case study reveals certain advantages and disadvantages that move us forward and beyond the limitations of the previous models discussed. To a large extent, this method represents a dialectic approach in both the research process itself and the way I have presented my findings and analysis in this thesis. The theoretical analysis undertaken in this work identifies that the shortcomings that each model reveals are, to different extents and varying degrees, the results of their disjointed or partial attempts to answer the problems of living in (post)modernity. To this end, the theories I employ assist in identifying the areas of critique and ways in which to begin to think through a more unified approach. While the concept of “everyday life” in this work is an area that allows for social critique to be made, it also represents a space that holds the potential for social transformation. The following is a brief summary of how these theoretical approaches seek to establish the link between the individual and the social.

The French social scientist Michel de Certeau argues that individuals are constantly creatively employing subversive tactics that poach from the dominant order in everyday life. The strength of his work is that it makes the discussion of the mundane possible by articulating these “minor” practices within a wider social context. As such, de Certeau uses the term “science of the singular” to denote “a relationship that links everyday pursuits to particular circumstances. And only in the *local* network of labour and recreation can one grasp how, within a grid of socio-economic

constraints, these pursuits unfailingly establish relational tactics...” (1988: ix emphasis in original). The subtle logic of de Certeau’s focus is that individual actions are never purely individual (or singular in de Certeau’s terminology), and that the key of relational tactics is the link between the individual and the social; while the methodology of examining individual practices might imply a return to individuality, the analysis focuses on the operational logic of how these relations interact.

The French structuralist Michel Foucault, in his work *Care of the Self*, engages in a similar mode of theoretical reasoning. Foucault takes the ancient Greek theme of *heautou epimeleisthai* (to attend to and care for the self) to illustrate that the exercises individuals *practice* in order to cultivate the soul have wider implications for the social. Activity devoted to the self, “is not an exercise in solitude but a true social practice” (1990: 50) because it is done vis-à-vis the group to which the individual belongs. Foucault concludes that “care of the self” represents

the development of an art of existence that revolves around the question of the self, of its dependence and independence, of its universal form and of the connection it can and should establish with others (1990: 238).

The theme of an “art of existence” was also discussed in a similar manner by Henri Lefebvre, as elaborated in Chapter 6 (Lifestyle versus Way of Life). The crux of Lefebvre’s *Critique of Everyday Life* is alienation: not only in labour, work and leisure but also in theory and practice. Without what he calls an understanding of a “totality” of society and mankind, he argues that practice, knowledge and theory

would become scattered into fragmented studies which

replicate exactly the [problematics of] division of social labour ... no more than the equivalent of a hypercritical self-destructive attitude ... in less favourable cases, the fragmented studies and disciplines dissolve into myriad isolated empirical facts (2002a: 180)

He develops the idea of an “art of living”: a dialectic approach, bringing practice into a reflective mode of thought that in turn transforms the condition of human living, and which through this would form the beginning of a “world-becoming of philosophy” (2002a: 23). The “art of living” would contribute to the development and intensification of an individual’s life, an aspect also mentioned by Foucault (see 1990: 53); living as a form of art for Lefebvre implies a human reality “both individual and social” (1991: 199).

Both Lefebvre and Jacques Rancière make the distinction between “genuine” art or “true” arts as opposed to an inauthentic piece of art. For Rancière, the latter means a piece of art that is based on its mimetic quality and is manufactured (not ‘produced’, in Rancière’s terminology) for its own sake. Art for art’s sake is, for him, no different to other forms of labour. It merely represents and reconfigures the distribution of these activities (2004: 45). Although discussed in different contexts and terminology, it could be argued that Lefebvre’s concern with fragmented activities and Rancière’s critique of an aesthetic cult (art for art’s sake) both point to the lack of a link to a wider social or “totality”. Certainly, in Rancière’s discussion of “true arts”, he has

made clear that a true form of art has to have an effect upon the mode of being of individuals and communities (2004: 21).

Marcel Mauss, argues that gifts are rarely unconditional, but exist within “systems of exchange”. In the context of his own analysis of various primitive “gift” systems, the cycling gift system *is* the society – such systems, he says, are “total’ social phenomena” (2006: 3). The obligation to receive or to give in return represents a bond of alliance and commonality, which is why the failure to comply is “tantamount to declaring war” (2006: 16). In her foreword to *The Gift*, Mary Douglas makes this it more explicit by saying that “the theory of the gift is a theory of human solidarity” (2006: xiii).

The brief summary above illustrates that perhaps Foucault, Lefebvre, Rancière, Mauss and de Certeau share a common ground or at least a general direction in their approach to everyday life: despite using different terms, the recurring notions of solidarity and community and references to a wider social, indicate that these thinkers share the belief that the link between the individual and the social has been weakened and that the transformative potential of the everyday can be recovered by re-establishing the connection between the two.

For de Certeau and Lefebvre in particular, everyday life is seen to be an accumulation of singular actions as well as the potential site for alternative and resistant practices. De Certeau's “science of the singular” is helpful in identifying the multiple and heterogeneous ways in which individuals negotiate and create their own meanings across a vast and shifting plateau of forces and relationships. This

particularity is revealed in the forms rather than the contents of an individual's actions, hence his insistence on focusing on *practice* – ways of doing, making and operating. For de Certeau, everyday tactics are what individuals have at their disposal to subvert the established order. These mundane activities become significant when articulated within the grid of socio-economic constraints. These singular activities establish “relational tactics (a struggle for life), artistic creations (an aesthetics), and autonomous initiatives (an ethic)” (de Certeau 1988: ix) which combined represent the extraordinary nature of the everyday.

Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* also takes both the generalities and the specificities of everyday life into account, for him, “the specific does not preclude the formal, and the particular does not preclude the general” (2002a: 180). The “specific” could be understood as equivalent to de Certeau's “singular” and is used in reference to the particularities in the way individuals perform in everyday life; the “formal” practices in Lefebvre could be seen as parallel to the “proper” in de Certeau, where rules of institutionalized production govern individuals' actions. The study of both the specific and the formal and the determination of their inter-relations combine to give a set of tools both “flexible” and “precise” (2002a: 180) with which to approach everyday life. For Lefebvre, that is what he means by a “totality”, not as a unified form of social reality, but rather the weaving of the binaries to create ways of analysis that neither obliterate nor abandon the general or the particular.

If the practice of everyday life is at once singular, heterogeneous and multiple, then part of the difficulty for a researcher consists in how to identify the elusive logic of a social practice without having to resort to binary oppositions; in other words, how to

maintain the tension between the apparently opposing elements. De Certeau's answer, as we have just seen, was to produce a "science of the singular", a formulation I will discuss further in the body of this thesis. Yet at this initial stage it is perhaps worth briefly setting out what is meant by this approach, since it has had a significant influence on my own methodological approach. The "science" of de Certeau's phrase indicates an overall structure – much like Lefebvre's "totality" – while "singular" denotes multiple different activities. Ben Highmore writes,

...describing de Certeau's approach to the everyday is to see it as attempting to outline a *grammar* of everyday practices that will attempt to keep alive the specificity of operations while recognising formally similar modes of practice" (2002: 14 emphasis in original).

In a similar manner, Lefebvre's concept of totality provides a structure or a frame of reference within which to understand the workings of everyday life. This notion is not to be confused with a totalitarian view of culture. He compares it, rather to a democracy: in such a political system, partial groups are forever scheming and devising ways to confront each other, yet these rivalries do not destroy the totality – in fact they participate in the creation and preservation of that totality. For Lefebvre, human activities are similar to political parties in a democracy in that each activity strives to become total and in doing so tries to subordinate other activities. In striving for totality, each activity is the result of a momentary totalization yet their limitations also become apparent at this point: "the structure contains within itself the seeds of its own negation: the beginning of destructuring" (2002a: 182). So for Lefebvre, the

totality is not the dominance of one activity over others, but is itself the product of the combination of each activity's own constant struggle for totality. Borrowing Highmore's turn of phrase, the struggle is what "keeps it alive". For Lefebvre, the drive towards totality is a dialectic approach, it is in his own words, a "creative struggle" (2002a: 183), for when each activity strives towards totality, the endeavour will already have made explicit its virtues and limitations until the next activity comes along. This process is not unlike the methodology of this thesis where each examination reveals the benefits and limitations of the model and set of practices under investigation, and in doing so, moves the search forward and beyond that model towards the next. Lefebvre reminds us that this process will continue "until such time as everyday life becomes the essential work of a praxis which has at last become conscious, every endeavour will lead to a new alienation" (2002a: 183). He also makes clear that without the insistence upon the struggle towards totality, "theory and practice accept the 'real' just as it is, and 'things' just as they are: fragmentary divided and disconnected." (2002a: 181).

In this sense, the works of both Lefebvre and de Certeau make clear that the answer, or at least the journey towards discovering the answer to everyday life does not lie in the tension between binaries such as specific and general, theory and practice, partial and total, but in the continuous struggle of working the space that exists between these polarities. For both theorists, everyday life is a work in progress. Their work is useful, but requires development. Even if each attempt is destined to fail with regard to any "ultimate" goal, the process will have brought other aspects of the everyday into critical attention which may enable transformation. This perspective is what Lefebvre would have called a "world becoming of philosophy".

Chapter 1: Borough Market I

27th April 2007

After two and a half years of researching, reading and writing about Slow Food, it was time I took my half-baked ideas into the field. Borough Market had always been a point of reference when it came to food in London, but as a field to investigate how qualities associated with “slow” is manifested in everyday living, I was afraid that it might be too easy a choice. As “the most important retail market for fine foods” (boroughmarket 2007), it was no surprise to see the extensive collection of fine cheeses, fruit and vegetables, meat and fish. Situated in the area of London Bridge, it is London's oldest market, dating back to the times of the Romans; today, it is a paradise for local food lovers (known as “foodies”) and tourists alike.

I had been visiting Borough Market regularly since I moved to London: the noise, the colours, sight and smell of great food had always made it a wonderful place to visit at the weekend. I had always been the kind of visitor that wandered through the market tasting the produce of all the stores without ever making any purchases. The quality of the food on offer was undoubtedly the finest but it also came with a price tag to match. Not surprisingly, my humble student budget would not allow for such extravagances even though they might be related to the subject of my research.

Borough Market's homepage stated that “the trustees and traders of Borough Market believe that everyone has a right to eat well” (boroughmarket 2007), a phrase reminiscent of Slow Food's philosophy “everyone has a fundamental right to

pleasure” (slowfood 2007). The emphasis on “everyone” was appealing; however, a quick examination of my own wallet suggested that the beliefs of the trustees and traders did not match the financial reality I knew as a student. Eating well, in this context, was limited to those who could afford to do their grocery shopping in Borough Market, making the idea of “good” and “slow” living hard to locate beyond the well-stocked kitchen of bourgeoisie.

Ethnography Day 0: I was somewhat reluctant and oddly nervous about going to the market for my first day of hands-on research. Most traders opened for business on Friday, which was generally a quieter day of commerce than Saturday. Most “serious shoppers” would do their grocery shopping then to avoid the tourist crowd but it was probably also because of that perceived seriousness (in contrast to the atmosphere I was accustomed to as a member of the Saturday crowd) that I felt slightly anxious. I finally mustered up the courage and made a start by wandering around the quieter corners of the market. I was pleasantly surprised to find a product which I recognised from my aunt’s kitchen: the Chegworth Valley apple juice, which she bought regularly from her local farmers' market in Twickenham. I approached the stallholder who introduced himself as Ben and he explained that his family ran their stalls at weekly markets at various locations. I asked about the varieties of fruit they stocked and sold and learnt that their Chegworth farm in Kent grew 23 types of apples as well as a variety of soft fruit in the summer months. I was also told that they used to supply supermarkets but no longer do so.

I decided it would be interesting to research a local farm in the UK and revealed my identity as a researcher. During our conversation, Ben had a quiet reserve about him,

not unfriendly but rather distant. He agreed to help, but the sense of distance permeated the rest of the conversation. It was agreed that I would go back the following morning for a full interview. I left Borough Market feeling relieved and excited about the prospect of an interesting case study, but also with a nagging feeling that I might not be able to gain Ben's trust for the interview.

I went back to my office and visited the Chegworth Valley website to familiarize myself with the company. While browsing through the pages, I came across a paragraph where they spoke of their prior experience of collaborating with supermarkets:

Initially we sold our fruit to the supermarkets and major wholesalers who unfortunately put us under continual price pressure and were only concerned with the shape and size of the fruit. Bizarrely they had no interest in the taste or smell of our fruit or by what farming methods or chemicals had to be used in order to produce fruit to their unnatural specification.
(chegworthvalley 2009)

They went on to say:

We realised this was not why our family had become farmers. We passionately wanted to produce real fruit with the best possible taste and smell and fruit not full of harmful chemicals. We also wanted to deal directly with customers

who had a passion for real food and drink and would prefer to support smaller producers rather than the big food manufacturers and supermarkets who some feel have devalued the great produce available in England.

(chegworthvalley 2009)

I was excited by this discovery – could Chegworth Valley's stated passion for real fruit be an example of the “slowness” in production I was looking for? Could this be a case that would exemplify an ethical approach on the part of the producer? Could the decision to terminate contracts with supermarkets be read as a decision informed by and based on care? Ben mentioned that supermarkets only wanted apples of a certain weight and that they had to be two-thirds red and one-third green. The insistence that apples should not be selected by their appearance but by taste was a noble claim, but at what cost?

28th April 2007

As agreed with Ben the previous day, I arrived at his stall at about 9:30 on Saturday morning. The market was already busy with shoppers with wicker baskets and shopping bags, some already half-full. I was anxious to talk to Ben before it became too busy, but when I arrived he was nowhere to be seen. Two blonde men were lifting heavy crates of bottled apple juice and were stacking them behind the shop front. I asked one of them where Ben was and he replied, using gestures, that he was away but would be back shortly. I then asked where they came from. The two workers were from Poland, I introduced myself and reciprocated my cultural background and

said I was Chinese. One of them started to talk excitedly about Chinatown and I tried to communicate my enthusiasm for the good food that was on offer there. About 20 minutes later, Ben walked back to the store looking slightly stressed. We exchanged greetings and as on the previous day, there was a sense of distance between us. It turned out that one of his Saturday staff would not arrive until 11am; it was already 10am and the market was getting busy. It was therefore understandable that he asked me how long my interview would take as customers were already busying themselves with choosing apples.

I was sympathetic to his situation and offered to help out for an hour until his staff arrived. He hesitated but politely declined and asked me to stand next to him by the till so that we could talk while he served his customers. By then there was such a steady stream of people that it was almost impossible to conduct the interview, but I was pleased to note that most of the people who came by in the morning were regular customers and they all made comments on how much better the new stall was. Ben then explained to me that they used to be in the Green Market (a part of the market located near the Southwark Cathedral) where the stall was much smaller, but that it was pleasant there because the traders of the neighbouring stalls were all very friendly. A middle-aged couple (Peter and Lindsay) stopped for a chat before they started their shopping, I enquired about their shopping habits and realized that by standing alongside Ben, I was in a perfect position to gather information. Shoppers would direct their attention first to Ben but would include me in their conversation; meanwhile Ben would address his customers but also fill in the gaps of information for me. The three-way conversation relieved some of the sense of distance between Ben and me but as soon as the shoppers left, the uneasiness would return.

It was not until about half an hour later, between snippets of conversation and customers buying apples that the ice finally broke. A French family came along, looked around the shop and tasted some of the Braeburn and Egremont Russet apples that were on the tasting plate. The man from the group, presumably the father, asked Ben in French whether or not those apples were organic. Ben looked slightly confused and I politely stepped in and explained that although the apples were not labelled organic, no pesticides were used in the process. The answer seemed to satisfy the family and they continued with their shopping. Ben then turned and said “you speak French?” That little useful interruption opened up questions about my life and work and it gave me a better opportunity to explain my interests in his farm.

Customers were by then coming in continuous waves, and as the morning ebbed away, so did the regular customers: the leisurely but purposeful shoppers who stopped for chats gave way to excited families with guidebooks in hand and cameras that snapped constantly; there were also couples that wandered hand-in-hand from stall to stall; groups of friends laughed and moved around sampling all the tasters that were on offer. Ben's attention was, by that time, completely absorbed by the steady flow of customers that queued to pay for their apples and juices. One of the Polish workers was busy filling up the tasting cups with the apple and beetroot juice while the other busied himself with restocking the juices on the shelves.

I went over to the tasting booth to see if I could help: customers were firing questions and Patrick tried to explain that he did not speak English. I tried to handle the questions as best I could. Most people were interested in the curious blend of apple

and beetroot. Luckily for me I had read the story of that particular blend on the website. It had come about when a customer brought in her recipe, and the family found it delicious and started producing this variety. In the 5 hours spent that day at the stall, I heard several similar exchanges of recipes. One recommended adding ginger to the blend; another customer who grew up in an apple orchard in New Zealand asked about ways of combating black spots on apples. At various times of the day, people seemed to have stopped to take the time to talk about apples.

By mid-afternoon, I was serving tasters, answering queries, selling apples and struggling to calculate the prices in my head. Who said Slow Food was slow? I could barely keep up with the questions fired at me while I added up the prices and packed the produce in carrier bags. The rush was almost overwhelming but at the same time exhilarating. Ben thanked me for my help and I offered to work if ever he needed more staff in the stall. I left with two bottles of juice in my bag, happy that I had made a good contact and learnt about apples, but hoped that my input would not cost anyone their jobs.

5th May 2007

The following Saturday I went again to Borough Market and, like the previous week, Ben took advantage of the quiet morning to run his errands. I saw two workers there this time, neither of whom I recognized. I had a terrible feeling that I might have caused the Polish workers to lose their jobs. I observed the two workers chatting away as they stocked up the display – they appeared more like students on a part-time job than farmhands but I decided it would be better to wait for Ben before I

jumped to conclusions. As I idly waited for him to return, I observed a little more closely the people around me. There were regular shoppers, who were the more prepared and arrived with their panniers or carrier bags to do their weekly shopping; there were others who I could only presume lived in the area, and who strolled up in their jogging trousers with purse in hand to pick up a few ingredients that were missing from their larders. I was pleasantly surprised to see the couple with whom I had spoken the previous week. They recognized me and made their way over to where I was standing. After exchanging polite greetings, they asked whether I came every week to do my shopping. At that point, I decided it would be best to explain my “ulterior motive” for being in the market, but they did not seem put off by the fact that I was a researcher – in fact they seemed intrigued and put down their panniers to find out more about my project. Peter and Lindsay were very engaging and I tried to find out more about their lifestyle. They travel from St. Albans every Saturday to do their weekly shopping in Borough Market. Well aware that they were not shopping in their local community, they were nonetheless happy to say that St. Albans was one of the only places in London without the presence of a supermarket chain. When asked if they thought Borough Market was an expensive place to shop, they answered that it was perhaps more pricey than other places but felt that it was an important lifestyle choice to spend more on food than on other material goods. They added that there were many ways of finding good quality produce at reasonable prices. For example, there were inexpensive cuts of meat not available in a supermarket that a butcher would be happy to cut and prepare – it was a matter of knowing what to buy and where to buy it from. They also mentioned that, having done their shopping in the market for years, they felt somehow attached to the place: there was a sense of familiarity with the community of other local shoppers that was

unique to Borough Market. For example, Ben's mother used to run the Chegworth Valley stall, and they knew her well; over the years they had met most of the family and the sense of familiarity that developed over time made the experience and place unique.

Ben came back shortly after they left, with sandwiches in his hand. I waited patiently while he finished chatting with a customer before approaching. The distance he had showed previously was gone and he greeted me amiably, explaining that his sister was here to help. Russ, whom I had replaced the previous week, was a musician in a band and worked in the market every Saturday. The two Polish workers were only asked to come up to London when the market stall was short-staffed – their permanent job was on the farm in Kent. There were about fifteen workers employed as permanent workers in Chegworth Valley, most of whom were Polish. The apple-picking season started in September when up to thirty more workers would be employed. When asked about their pay, Ben explained that these seasonal workers were paid piece-rate which meant that they were paid for each bin of apples picked rather than for the hours spent picking, so their salary would depend on how fast they picked. A fast picker for example would be able to fill a bin in an hour. Bramley apples, which are bigger in size, would fetch around eight or nine pounds per bin. Discovery apples or Cox's would fetch ten or eleven pounds per bin. If these workers picked an average of 2 bins every 3 hours, it would be equal to around 5 to 7 pounds an hour which met the requirement of minimum wage in England, but was still low for such a physically demanding job. Reminded of the blog that Ben's father David had started on the website, I remembered an entry dated around the end of the previous apple-picking season, where he said that the workers wanted to stay but

knowing that the money that would last them a week in the UK could last the family a lot longer in Poland, they all left. Although I was not surprised to hear of seasonal workers, it was still of concern to learn that the cost of buying a locally grown apple depended on the sweat and labour of Polish workers who lacked job security.

Ben was more relaxed with two staff on the till. I took advantage of this time to learn more about apples. The apple-picking season usually began during late summer and lasted until the beginning of autumn; different varieties cropped at different times. The Braeburns and the Conference pears that were in stock today were picked last year. I was of course surprised to hear this; being a city person, my knowledge of markets and fresh produce was decidedly romantic, fuelled and corrupted by the media: surely apples sold in Borough Market must have been picked the day before? Apples, I learnt, can be kept in storage at 1.5C degrees for up to a year; the waxy substance is a secretion from apples after they are picked and forms a natural protective barrier for the fruit. I was also curious about the black spots which had been brought to my attention the previous week by the girl who grew up in an orchard in New Zealand. They are called scabs, Ben explained, a form of mould that grows on the skins of apples, usually in the areas where the leaves touch the fruit. They could be treated with sulphur, which is tolerated under EU law, but Chegworth Valley chose not to do this in order to preserve the health and safety of the workers. Ben himself has driven the tractors around the farm that sprayed sulphur over the crops and told me that one could be ill for days breathing in the sulphur. I mentioned that I had never seen an apple in a supermarket with scabs. They are of course not tolerated according to corporate standards: when Chegworth Valley was supplying supermarkets, not only were apples required to be of a certain size, shape and colour

but they also had to have no bruising or blemishes. An apple that is bought by a supermarket has to be perfect to look at. Supermarkets have an extremely expensive and sophisticated system that scans each and every apple: if they do not meet the standard they are rated as second class. A perfectly shaped and sized apple grown, picked and delivered from a farm is sold to supermarkets at 23p a piece. Those that do not match the first class standard are sold at a lower price for juicing. The rejects are then sold to wholesalers, a lot of them going to the Covent Garden market in London. 23p an apple does not leave much of a profit margin for the producers, and that may be entirely dependent on the weather. 1999, as Ben recalled, was a particularly bad year when frost came very early in the autumn and the family almost lost their entire crop. The government in the UK does not provide any help or subsidy to fruit growers.

Distribution outlets such as Tesco and other supermarket chains dominate much of the retail market; it has been reported that one in every seven pounds spent by British consumers goes to Tesco's (Wallop 2007). It would appear that competition is tough for smaller independent producers. Chegworth Valley has been lucky to find a niche in the market producing juices. They run their market stalls in farmers' markets in various locations: Borough Market in London Bridge, the farmers' market in Twickenham, Islington, Blackheath, Hackney, Marylebone, Queens Park and Kent, and recently they have opened one in Sloane Square. The resurgence of farmers' markets that we see in London at the moment has in fact opened up more outlets for these farmers to sell their produce but unfortunately they are often in the rather expensive or "posh" areas of London.

26th May 2007

At 8:30 this morning, my mobile phone rang and I reached out groggily to pick it up, wondering who would be calling me at this indecent hour. I was surprised to hear Ben apologizing profusely over the phone and asking if I had time today to help out, as his other assistant Russ had called in sick again. I jumped at the opportunity and quickly got ready for my first full day of work at Borough Market.

I arrived and the reserve that had permeated our first meeting was now completely gone. Ben warmly thanked me for agreeing to help out, I dropped my bag and got right down to pouring out testers for the first wave of regular shoppers. I was also happy to see Andrew and Tomic again – the two Polish workers I had met in the second week. Andrew had been in London for over a year and alternated between stocking up the shop front and staffing the till while Ben ran his errands. Tomic, who spoke little English, worked to keep everything topped up in the shop – filling up the juice fountains, restocking the bottles of juices on the shelves, bringing out more apples and punnets of strawberries. Ben told me that we were now 2 to 3 weeks into the strawberry and blackberry season, and that soon the gooseberries and raspberries would be ready for picking, probably the following week.

Saturday is the busiest day of the week. As I flitted across from serving tasters to packing punnets of strawberries, juggling numbers in my head and selling bottles of apple juice, I hardly had time to look up to observe the people around me. I was no longer there to “help out”. In previous weeks, there had been the luxury of taking a step back and talking to customers if I wanted to. This week, the waves of people

kept coming so fast that I barely had time to greet and explain, when a group of friends including my cousin wandered into the store without knowing I was there, why I was suddenly selling apples in Borough Market. I felt rushed, as people crowded round the tasting booth waiting for me to line up the little cups. As soon as they were filled, arms stretched from all directions and they were gone within seconds.

As I tried to keep up with the demand of curious customers, I felt like a machine lining up the tasters or a robot with a pre-recorded line that repeats itself again and again. I became frustrated at not having time to engage with anyone. What was even more frustrating was that when I stepped away from the booth to help out at the till, people would happily crowd round and help themselves to generous servings of juice, spilling half the bottle in the process of doing so. As soon as I made my way back, they all looked or backed away – as if they were children caught with their hands in the cookie jar.

I was surprised at the way I felt irritated by those people and wondered why that was. What had made the difference between two weeks ago when I was “helping out” and this week? It struck me then that I was so consumed by the idea that I was working there this morning, that I had been driving myself to be efficient and productive – to ensure “fast” production, according to my own definition. I was keen to prove to Ben that I was a worthy employee and so in my haste to refill the tasters, I had forgotten to maintain the qualitative aspects which had made the previous weeks enjoyable. I had not gone beyond the simple mechanical repetition of stating what type of juices they were; for all I knew, I could have been working on an assembly line in a factory.

There were no moments of conversation, exchange, sharing or hospitality. For the customers, there would be little difference between coming here and going to the supermarket – an impersonal form of service disguised in a human shell.

I was horrified. I was in effect doing everything that I was against. I quickly adjusted and changed my attitude and strategy. Rather than filling up fifty tasters at a time, I filled only ten, I would then wait for people to approach and ask them what they thought of it. There was immediate improvement, I regained some of the sense that I was engaging with people rather than mechanically pouring juices. People responded and began asking more questions about the products – whether or not they were organic, were there any additives, do we add water or sugar, etc. I explained (as before) that even if they were not certified organic, no pesticides were used in the process. Ben explained to me that because some of the fruit trees were grown on rented land, they could not obtain organic certification from the soil association even if no pesticides were used.

It had been so busy all morning that when I finally took a break, it was 2:30 in the afternoon. Suddenly I felt extremely hungry, and asked Andrew and Tomic if they wanted something to eat while I stepped out to get a sandwich. They both declined but Andrew excitedly asked me to wait and went into the stock room where we kept our bags and rummaged around till he found an apron. He gave it to me and said “people will give you a discount if you wear an apron”. It suddenly dawned on me why earlier in the morning a woman from the next stand of Monmouth café came round, winked then gave me £2 for a large bottle of juice that costs £3. “We give discounts to people who work here” said Andrew, “of course” he added. It was a

lovely feeling. Suddenly I felt I belonged to the community of people who runs those stalls and that there was a sense of solidarity among us. How terrible it would have been, for workers such as myself to be surrounded with all that great produce but not be able to afford it. I was reminded that my local sandwich-maker George had once told me with disgust that the workers of Starbucks have to pay for their own sandwiches and coffee. At least I had been drinking all variety of apple juice mixes that morning for free. With the magic apron, I returned victorious with a turkey and stuffing sandwich that had cost me £3 instead of the usual £4.

The afternoon wore on and waves of people continued to come to try out the different blends of juices. I found myself at the till while Andrew and Tomic refilled the shop front. Ben had gone to meet his friend earlier and as I ran to fetch another bottle of juice for a customer, I saw that he was back. An older man, who bore the undeniable resemblance of a family member, was standing next to him. I finished up at the till and Andrew stepped in to take over asking if I have met the “big boss”. I replied no and went over to say hello. Ben introduced me to his father David and I immediately recognised the name from the blogs on the Chegworth Valley website. I mentioned the blog and he said he has been so busy on the farm that he had had no time to keep it up. I was relieved, since I had had no reply from them since writing via the website at around the time I first found out about the farm. I had sent an email asking for their permission to use their work as a case study. He now told me that Ben had mentioned my interest and that he had taken the opportunity of being in London today to drop by and see how things were going. He then asked me, without a hint of suspicion in his voice, what kind of work I was doing. I proceeded to explain my PhD research interest in the Slow Food movement, and briefly described

my project.

David was aware of the Slow Food movement but he did not think that his work was along those lines. When I asked him how he sees his farm and his work, he said that they are simply taste-driven, that they want to produce apples that taste good. They are still in the early stages of developing their juices, and the difficulty at the moment is trying to make the business work so that they can try to continue to improve on the quality. They have been expanding in recent years and with the opening of more stalls in weekend markets, they have more outlets from which to sell their produce. Their juices are working well and the berries that come into season in late spring and through the summer help to tide them over during the months when they are low on apples. “For example”, he said as he gestured to the apples in the stall, “at the moment we only have Braeburns left, and we have to fill the boxes with the same variety until we start the apple-picking season, which is around the end of July. Then you will see the varieties we’ll have.” He then asked me how I liked working in the stall. I told him that it had been very enjoyable and gave me a wonderful opportunity to talk to the people. He agreed and said it is also a perfect opportunity to educate people: to tell them that apples that come with bruises and scabs are perfectly natural and normal and that what is important is how apples taste. How is that that different to Slow Food then, I wondered, but before I could ask, David went off to put some strawberries into a paper bag for a customer. I was thinking then how it really does not matter if a product or producer is associated with the label of Slow Food or not; the passion that David and his family have for their apples is already a perfect example of careful (and caring) production and distribution.

It was nearly 4:30pm and the market was closing, Ben told me to keep serving customers at the till while he went to get his van. Andrew and Tomic started packing away the apples and juices and what was left of the strawberries. We had done well that day, the apple and rhubarb juice that I was serving at the tasting booth was sold out. There were only a few punnets of blackberries and strawberries left. The till was heavy. There was a flurry of activity as all the stalls started to put away their stock for the week. I was surprised to see that some shopkeepers came round with cakes and bread and left them with Ben while they helped themselves to the apples. Another man walked away with a bottle of juice and some strawberries; Ben explained that the man had given him a free sandwich for lunch earlier on. It would appear that a form of gift economy was operating between shopkeepers in the late afternoon, just before closing.

It was approaching 5pm and Ben came and thanked me for my help. He asked if I would be interested in helping them regularly. I was excited at the chance of establishing a regular contact but cautiously asked if it would mean firing any of his regular workers. Ben said I would be replacing Russ – the student who lives in Sidcup who has called in sick too many times. I thought Russ could find another job easily enough and did not feel too bad about taking his job (I was right – in a few weeks time Russ found another job in the market, selling mushroom pâté). Ben paid me 40 pounds in cash while Andrew filled up bottles with the remaining juice from the fountains. I left with six bottles of apple juice, two punnets of strawberries and two of blackberries, a bag of apples and 40 pounds in my bag. I was so excited about the day that it was not until I arrived home that I realized I had been paid minimum wage.

2nd June 2007

Keen to make a good impression on my first day as a regular worker, I woke up at 7:00 after a rather late Friday night and prepared for the day ahead. I arrived on time, but not being used to such an early start I was terribly tired. Ben, Andrew and Tomic greeted me with a cheerful “morning” each while they finished setting up the stall. I dropped my bag and quickly noticed that Andrew had his apron on already.

Remembering the value of the apron, I asked where I could perhaps buy one of my own. Andrew and Ben started rummaging round the boxes that were lying around and found another one for me. There was also a spare money belt which Ben took out and dangled hesitantly in front of us. Andrew took it, gave it to me and said, “for the second boss”. I laughed and accepted but wondered why Andrew did it so instinctively, why should he feel I was “above” him? Was it because I spoke better English? Surely he should be my “boss” since he had been working with Ben much longer.

The morning started slowly. Most stalls were being set up. I looked around and for the first time realized what stalls were situated around us. In previous weeks, I had been so absorbed by the tasks in front of me that I did not even notice that directly in front of us was a meat and sausage stall. Further along to the right, Degustibus were laying out their bread. I tried to help Tomic but the work was done. Nevertheless, he explained to me the system he had set up in the stock room. Ben then asked me to pick up the Borough Market Magazine as there was an article on the Chegworth Valley apple and beetroot juice and he wanted me to cut out the article and pin it to

the wooden crates where we display the juices. By then it was starting to get busy and even a simple task such as that took me a relatively long time to accomplish.

It was already getting warm under the plastic corrugated sheets and the weather was promising. Ben thought it was going to be a busy day. He then called Andrew and I over and briefed us on how we should serve today. He wanted us to serve fast when there was a large queue but slow down when only a few people were waiting. The idea is to always have people wandering round the stall. I thought then what a great idea, it is almost as if we were the traffic controllers, controlling the flow of people.

It was already mid-morning and I had been serving non-stop the steady stream of customers. The first raspberries were out today and we set them side by side with the strawberries on the front of the stall. The berries smelled heavenly. They were also very large in size – only about 4 or 5 strawberries could fit into a punnet. For a while I was serving out tasters next to the strawberries and overheard a group of Chinese students, almost certainly from Hong Kong, exclaiming that they have never seen a strawberry that big before. In fact they used the word “terrifying”⁴. To them, these strawberries were misshapen and deformed. These students reminded me of Hong Kong, my home city, where increasingly the traditional markets have been replaced with neon-lit supermarkets playing repetitive lift music, interrupted only by the latest deals delivered by an over-enthusiastic voice in three languages. It was disheartening.

I remembered that while growing up in Hong Kong, I would regularly go after school

⁴ 恐怖

with my mother to the market. It was not an experience I particularly enjoyed. It was always hot and noisy in the summer. Due to the tightening of health and safety regulations, more and more council markets were built and the open-air stalls moved indoors, into what normally would be a two three storey building. Not all of these indoor markets were equipped with air-conditioning then, certainly not the one we went to in Choi Hung. Going to the market after school was at best bearable but at times abhorrent. The fruit and vegetable section was generally manageable except when the Durians were in season. The smell of the “fruit king”, as it is known in Southeast Asia, is heavy and, like the humid air of a tropical summer, clings to your skin and hangs over the stalls. The tiles would be wet from the melting ice that some vendors put underneath the fruit to keep them from wilting in the heat. The cooked meat section was the one that I least minded. Rows of barbecued meat hung in brightly lit shop windows and butchers with big heavy knives chopped away on the high chopping boards. The tiles would be greasy and I would glide up and down the corridor while I waited for mother to finish her shopping. The poultry section was one of the worst. Those were the days before the avian flu – chickens would be clucking in small cages while the vendor periodically reached into the cage to take one out and blow on the rear of the animal to show how meaty their chickens were. Once chosen, a quick slit on the throat and the animal would fall limp. It would always take a while for them to pluck, drain and prepare the chicken so would be given a little tag and told to return later. The fish section was by far the worst. Carp and mullets would writhe in a shallow pool of water with eels fighting for air. Expensive sea fish like garoupa would have the slight luxury of being in a separate tank but the water was murky and stale. Once sold, the fishmonger would whack the fish on its head with the back of his knife and quickly, with rhythmic flicks of his

wrists descale, gut and clean the carcass, put it in a plastic bag and hand it over to us. Normally I would only help carry the vegetables but once I reached out for the bag while mother tried to find the correct change. I stared at the blood-stained bag, dotted with scales and was horrified to notice a tiny lump of flesh stuck to the handle where my fingers were. I gagged and tried hard not to vomit in the market. Mother noticed and quickly took the bag from me while she stuffed the notes back in her wallet, tainted with blood.

But these memories were not “terrifying”; this was the way that food came to the table. If one out of every seven pounds that the British consumer spends goes to Tesco's, it is not difficult to imagine the power supermarkets have in shaping the way we understand our food. If we do not see misshapen strawberries and scabbed apples on the shelves, it is because supermarkets have provided us with a safe and sterilized version of food production. Meat and fish are safely packaged into hermeneutically sealed boxes with pads that absorb excess blood. Even vegetables and fruit, whose skins are already natural seals, are wrapped in layers of plastic set in polystyrene boxes. If romanticizing is the act of making something more beautiful and attractive than it is in reality, then surely the selection methods of supermarkets could be understood as romantic. When I met David at Borough Market he also said that as a point of encounter, weekend markets offer opportunities for educating people. I hoped that these Hong Kong students, having seen and tasted the “terrifying” strawberries would realize that the monstrosity of “normal” strawberries that we see in supermarkets is in their lack of taste as well as the homogeneity of shapes and sizes in those punnets.

As much as I enjoy working in the stall, not all the day's experiences have been good. When Ben went to get his lunch during one of the rare quieter moments, a woman came by and asked about the origins of the strawberries. I managed to answer most of her questions until she asked me which type of strawberries they were. Hard as I tried, I could not remember and neither Andrew nor Tomic knew the type. Luckily Ben came back just in time and as I ran over to find out, I overheard the woman saying to her husband, "really, *these* people should be informed." I felt my face go red and I was angry – both at my inability to answer the question and at the attitude of that woman. How dare she talk about me like that? "These people" as if people working in the markets are below those who go and shop. "These people", "the others" versus "us"; I was furious. Ben came and started explaining that these were the "Elcentres" the same variety of strawberries that we find in the supermarkets. As I listened I realized there was much more to be learnt about these berries. The Elcentre (like the shiraz grape) is an economical variety to grow as it is full of flavour – when grown properly – Ben pointed out. I calmed down but as they left I felt humbled. I had much to learn still. A trip to the farm in Kent needed to be arranged.

It was finally a quarter to five and Ben gave me permission to go. I joined my friends in the Brew Wharf wine bar next to the Borough Market, wincing at the glare of the sun. My throat hurt, my legs were shaking and I was completely exhausted. As I recounted my day to my friends, they laughed and reminded me that I did none of the heavy work. When I arrived – the stall was already set up and I left while they were loading the van up with heavy crates of apples and juices. How could I deny the fact that I was "the other"? My research had led me to the opportunity to sell apples, but

under normal circumstances, I would not have been interested in a job like this. I became aware of the differences of culture and lifestyle that still kept me at a distance from the other market traders, exemplified by the way on leaving the market I immediately immersed myself within my own, external social group, sharing my experiences of the day as a token gesture of hard labour. I had been given the money belt on my first day of work and the money that went through my hands that day easily could have amounted to over £500. Andrew did not have more than 50 pounds in his change box. Tomic did not even have access to the money in the stall. I was the researcher: however hard I tried to fit in, I would still be “the other”.

Chapter 2: Slow Journeys

Introduction

When the new high-speed walkway opened in Montparnasse station in Paris in 2001, its design sparked international interest; professionals from all around the world flew in to witness this magic carpet in action. I was curious to find out what it felt like travelling at 9km/hr, three times the normal speed, through the 185m tunnel in the depths of the underground transportation system. As I approached the travelator, I was slightly anxious to join the crowd of other expectant passengers. Members of staff in high visibility jackets were waving people on while instructing passengers to align their feet onto the rollers in the acceleration area so that they would then be transferred safely onto the moving walkway. The state of anticipation was not unlike that experienced while waiting for a roller-coaster ride where anxiety is mixed with the heightened expectation of an exhilarating but inevitably scary journey. Once on the moving walkway, the only reference I had was the stream of billboards on the side on the tunnel and I was amazed at the speed at which they were moving across my field of vision. By the time I had adjusted to the pace at which we were being transported, the journey was over. As I stepped off the walkway, I was both nervous and relieved that I had not created chaos by falling over, but most of all I was frustrated at the slowness of my own two feet.

My experience of the high-speed walkway in Paris is similar to, if somewhat less noteworthy than, the experience of the first passengers on the steam engine that replaced horse-drawn carriages in the early 19th century. The technology marked the

beginning of a new era for travelling but its significance lay in the way it revolutionized the way we encounter and experience the nature of time and space. Victorian passengers who travelled on trains experienced such exhilaration that they announced it was the “annihilation of space by time” (Thrift 1996). Harvey (1989) uses the term “time-space compression” to signal the “processes that so revolutionize the objective qualities of space and time that we are forced to alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world to ourselves.” (Harvey 1989: 240)

As fast food and fast life characterize living in the 21st century, we are accustomed to an always ready-to-go world – instantaneous information, *prêt-a-porter* fashion, ready-made meals. In fact waiting in a queue is considered such a waste of time that most people will try to occupy the space with other activities – checking phone messages and sending texts for example, to justify and fill that space of idling. Such behaviour indicates an impatient way of living; one where time is always running out⁵. The Parisian travelator is deemed a success in the context of being a great time-saver as it has been calculated that the average passenger will save up to 11.5 hrs over the course of a year.

Harvey argues that time-space compression, as a distinct condition of (post)modernity, gives an “overwhelming sense of *compression* of our spatial and temporal worlds” (Harvey 1989: 240 original emphasis). The technologies that allow us to be in more than one space at any given time – the Internet, mobile phones, just

⁵ The social historian E.P. Thompson notes that during the industrialisation period of the 19th Century, time-discipline was imposed on the workers and propaganda constructed around the notion of “time-thrift” was directed at the working class, stating that “all time must be consumed, marketed, put to *use*; it is offensive for the labour force merely to ‘pass the time’” (1991: 395 emphasis in original). Thompson tries to argue that the time discipline enforced by the rhythm of industrial capitalism has been internalized; this mundane observation of the activities of people queuing perhaps serves as a demonstration of Thompson’s point.

to name two that bridge distance through a virtual world – make everything available at hand immediately. Boulding (1978) uses the term “temporal exhaustion” to express the experience of being mentally out of breath all the time in dealing with the present. The Marxist theorist Fredric Jameson (1984) regards the condition of (post)modernity as a crisis because we fear that we cannot keep pace. It would therefore seem bizarre that instead of inventing even newer and better ways to keep up we should choose to slow down. But with the event of every new technological innovation that increases time-space compression, there has always been a parallel slowing down process that takes place elsewhere. These processes are reflected in various movements, for example, the hugely popular romantic art of the 19th century, when painters such as Constable offered romantic scenes of quiet country landscapes, brought a comforting experience of nostalgia⁶ to the population (Thrift and May 2001). The need to search for comfort in a slower moving past can be understood as a response to a certain anxiety which accompanies periods of acceleration in the pace of living. Just as some of the first 21st century users of the travelator were reported to be elated, others felt relieved to get off. As my slightly shaking legs suggests, the after-effects of the experience are often overwhelming and unsettling. The speeding up of time creates an angst that has to manifest in a space where slower rhythms provide a sense of security. Not only are speeding up and slowing down concepts that acquire meaning through their relations with each other, but their co-dependence is apparent even in tangible movements experienced in art and living, where a manifestation of one is so often found coupled with a parallel manifestation of the other.

⁶ The concept of nostalgia will be discussed in detail in chapter 4 of this thesis (Jamie at Home), in the context of food marketing practices.

It is in this context of the interrelatedness of the experiences of speeding up and slowing down in (post)modernity, that I situate the Slow Food movement. Established in 1986, it came as a timely response to the unease created by the fast-paced way of modern life and aims to protect the pleasures of the table from the homogenization of modern fast food and life (Petrini and Padovani 2006). Ideas of hospitality and sharing are key to members of the Slow Food Movement. Cooking and eating along with other examples of “good” and slow living promote a way of living that emphasizes quality rather than quantity. Slow Food opens up certain questions of time and space. The dining table in this light becomes a physical and mental refuge from a fast-paced life of work characterised by rhythms of efficiency and productivity⁷. In this chapter, I would like to explore the qualities of the Slow Food movement in order to understand what it means, in such a context, to go slow: a form of travelling where destinations are perhaps secondary to *how* we make the journey. How can one imagine occupying a space slowly? What does it mean to do so? What qualities does the “slow” of Slow Food offer that one cannot have in a fast life? I would like to examine the idea of slowness through the notion of pleasure and care. It offers a theoretical model through which to better understand the qualities that are imbued in a slow culture, as a partial basis for developing a practice that is ethical and sustainable and which extends beyond the dinner table. At the same time, in addition to highlighting the positive aspects of the slow approach, as the thesis

⁷ Thompson’s account of the historical development of time disciplines from the 14th to the 19th centuries demonstrates the connection between the development of industrial capitalism and waged labour. Thompson identifies the link between the shift from task-oriented activities to timed labour with the standardization of linear time which organises industrial production and employment. Employees are said to experience a marked distinction between their own time and their employers’ time, contributing to the demarcation between “work” and “life”. The employer “must *use* the time of his labour, and see it is not wasted: not the task but the value of time when reduced to money is dominant. Time is now currency: it is not passed but spent” (1991: 358 emphasis in original). In this sense “fast” is held in this thesis to represent living within the rules and rhythms of capitalism. (The relationship between work and life will be discussed further in chapter 6 (Lifestyle versus Way of Life), also in the context of leisure).

progresses I will develop an account of the potential limitations of the way slowness can be put into ethical, cultural and everyday practice – as evidenced in my case study of the London *convivium* event documented in chapter 5 (Borough Market III, Slow Eating, Ginger Pig and Mute).

In search of Slow

The idea of taking time highlighted in the Slow of Slow Food or Slow Living does not merely refer to speed or duration. To explore the idea of fastness and slowness in linear time is as limiting as it is futile. The essence of the slowness that is examined here does not lie in a Newtonian or chronological understanding of time (*chronos*), where time serves as a unit of measure – as quantity or duration, length of periodicity, age or rate of acceleration (Smith 2002: 47). Rather, my understanding of slow lies in a qualitative character that the concept of *chronos* does not embody. The counterpart of *chronos* is the Greek term *kairos*, which is most commonly defined as the opportunistic or propitious moment (Sipiora and Baumlin 2002). I am therefore arguing that a Slow meal should be one that offers moments of *kairos*: slow is a moment of timelessness, where opportunities to share, reflect and be convivial, give time its quality.

There is, however, a need for a more careful laying out of the understanding of *kairos*⁸. The art historian Erwin Panofsky (1972) recounts that *Kairos* is often represented by a young nude man in fleeting movement, with wings both at the shoulder and at the heels and carrying a pair of scales balanced on the edge of a

⁸ The term *Kairos* first appeared in the *Iliad* and was used to denote a vital/lethal place in the body (thus initially carries a spatial meaning it denoted (Sipiora and Baumlin 2002)

shaving knife. Moreover, his head often showed the proverbial forelock by which bald-headed Opportunity can be seized. After the 11th century, this figure merged with the figure of Fortune (the notion of opportunity began to emerge only later on in the tragedies of Aeschylus), this fusion being favoured by the fact that “the Latin word for *kairos*, viz., *occasio*, is of the same gender as *fortuna*” (Panofsky 1972: 71-72). Fortune carries the meaning of chance, hap, luck or fate but these are qualities that should not be associated with *kairos*, for the opportunistic moment cannot rely on chance. *Opportunus* originates from the denotation of having a favourable wind blowing towards the harbour (from ob- “in the direction of” and *portus* “harbour”) and from this it extends to mean advantageous (OED 11th edition). *Kairos* requires a certain skill and knowledge for one to be able to grasp the right moment to do the right thing. The sailor who has a favourable wind that blows towards the harbour still has to use his skill and knowledge in manoeuvring the sails in order to sail back to port. Perhaps the Chinese word for opportunity offers a better interpretation of the idea, for it includes two characters, the first of which is time (時 *shí*) and the second is opportunity or opening of a possibility (機 *gāi*); the word for fortune or luck (運 *wùn*) is not normally used interchangeably. The fact that two characters are needed to express opportunity also suggests that knowledge or skill understood through *timeliness* is as important as the opening or possibility.

The 90-second burger of McDonald’s offers not only value for money but also value for time: the standardized design of menus and outlets ensures that the customer does not have to think too much about the food or the environment in which they are eating. In fact, their thoughts might very well be on what they could do in the time “saved” by having a quick bite. The focus of their thoughts is not on the moment of

eating but on the moments to come. If we were to understand the experience of fast and slow food in terms of qualitative rather than quantitative time, then the consumption of fast food can be seen as a missed opportunity to reflect and repose. By the same token, a meal that is slow is a meal that grasps the opportunity to reflect. To take time, is to take time out of a regular routine dominated by work and characterized by productivity. One reflects on how to spend that moment so that the table becomes a focal point for affiliation and association and ultimately becomes an experience that enhances the social well-being of the group.

Moreover, to read fast and slow in linear terms is to equate fast with bad and slow with good. Fast food is bad not because it is fast but because it is *careless* – or as Parkins (2004) puts it, “mindless”. In the case of the fast food industries, McDonald’s for example is careless with regard to the effects of homogenization which privilege profit over the environment, animals, consumers and its employees. Fast food companies are only concerned about the merits of fastness, high turnovers and their own gross profit. However in the wider social context, the lack of sustainability in the way food is produced results in an irretrievable destruction of the agricultural, social, cultural and economic landscapes. By the same principle, Slow Food is good not because it is slow but because it is a careful way of living. As a movement it aims to protect, sustain and repair the damage done to the environment, animals, culture and people.

Slow Food's philosophy gave rise to the new concept of eco-gastronomy, which is based on the belief that every person has a fundamental right to pleasure and that the plate and the planet are inter-connected. This idea of connection forms a bridge

between the individual and the cosmos and this belief brings an ethical dimension to food through temporality. Slow is a particular way of viewing the world: by paying attention to how and what we eat, we are reflectively positioning ourselves in a world which we are part of, adopting a worldview which a capitalist perspective eschews. “Care” in this context, associated with a notion of being care-ful, starts with oneself but then extends to a wider community. This care is a Foucauldian care of the self. It is interesting to note that Foucault's third volume of the *History of Sexuality* is originally published under the title of “Le Souci de Soi”, *souci* in contemporary French is used to convey the idea of “concern” or “worry”; but rather than simply the idea of being upset or concerned *because of* something, *souci* is more an idea of worrying about, or being concerned *for* someone or something. The self is therefore understood in the identification with the other, or in the recognition of the other as present in each of us. This is the reason I believe that the English translation uses “care” for *souci* rather than “concern”. It is also the reason I chose to explain Slow Food through a *careful* way of living, as opposed to Parkin's “mindful” (Parkins and Craig 2006). Montanari (1996) also identifies in an editorial for the journal *Slow* that care lies at the core of a slow culture, that care gives us a capacity to understand and assess our experiences. It is a mode of attention directed towards everyday practices.

It would appear that at the core of Slow lie two conflicting qualities, those of pleasure and care – pleasure being a selfish concern for oneself, and care, a concern for another. I would argue that this is not the case. Foucault in *Care of the Self* characterizes the “cultivation of the self” as an “art of existence” which requires the principle that “one must take care of oneself” to preside over the development and organization of the practice (Foucault 1990: 44). This idea is derived from an ancient

Greek notion (*heautou epimeleisthai*), a drive to care for the soul. Foucault quotes from Plato's *Apology of Socrates* to make the point that one cannot hope to govern a city or manage its affairs without first attending to oneself – to the cultivation of the self. What lies behind such a claim is not a mere selfish internalization of attention that privileges the self over another, rather, it is being aware of oneself as part of a whole. As a practice, it requires one to start with oneself, but always with an eye for the other, and this is where a development of a form of praxis should be based. Slow Food, or the cultivation of a slow culture, therefore transcends the private domain of the kitchen and extends to a wider form of politics, a self-generated, perhaps more organic and sustainable way of development that rests upon care. Slow Food therefore does not merely call for us to change what we eat or the way we eat. It seeks to situate the individual within a network of local relationships, family ties, economic dependences and relations of patronage and friendship. For example, rather than understanding the consumers as separate from the producers, Slow Food offers the possibility of reading consumers as co-producers. I would like to believe that this is more than just a mere choice of words, for identifying us as co-producers places us in a position where we are responsible for the other. The choice of what to buy and where to buy our food from is directly linked to the livelihoods of farmers. It is a philosophy that reconnects the alienated individual to a wider community. Hadot rightly points out that Foucault's *Care of the Self* is based on a mode of being in the world which stems from a feeling of belonging, belonging to the whole constituted by the human community, and that constituted by the cosmic whole.

Slow Food define their food as good, clean and fair, meaning that the food we eat should taste good; that it should be produced in a clean way that does not harm the

environment, animal welfare or our health; and that food producers should receive fair compensation for their work. For example, their project, the Ark of Taste, aims to preserve biodiversity, by identifying species of animal breeds, fruit and vegetable varieties and local recipes that have been marginalized or sometimes driven to extinction because of mass production. They aid the producers in cultivating and promoting these lesser known varieties and reintroduce them to our plates. The Filder Pointed Cabbage of Germany for example, or the Poire Sartheau of France or the artisanal Somerset Cheddar of the UK are only a few of the 5000 varieties that Slow Food have helped to preserve (Petrini 2006).

This, in my understanding, is what differentiates Slow Food from fast food. Where fast food is read as an embodiment of negative traits of alienation, homogenization and globalization, slow food returns our attention to integration, diversification and localization. If Slow Food were only to do with a nostalgic desire for a lifestyle of luxury and leisure then it could be criticized for trying to bring back a form of bourgeois living that Veblen(1994), Bourdieu (1984) and many others have criticized. But it goes beyond that: the value of slow food lies in a reflective way of positioning the self. The practice of slow living is an exercise, a model of life, a way of being in the world. This mode of praxis brings an ethical dimension to pleasure. Through a practice of self-examination, reflection and monitoring, one seeks to form a subjectivity that is thought through ethics and which can apply to everyone regardless of their social status. It also highlights the interconnectedness of the community in which a society is formed of connected rather than alienated individuals. By recognizing the other in us, one starts caring for the community by being aware that the effects of one's actions have bearings on the lives of others. The

process of cultivating oneself would therefore result in ‘an intensification of social relations’ (Foucault 1990).

The metaphor used in the cultivation of the self obviously lends itself to the idea of the cultivation of the land. But more importantly, cultivation implies work, the care of the self cannot be a rest cure, but it should be a constant practice. The philosophy as such should not rest in a rhetorical discourse and the reason I believe Foucault's work is applicable to understanding something as everyday as eating is because it returns philosophy to antiquity. Hadot (1995) makes an interesting point about how modern philosophy has become almost entirely a theoretical discourse and has forgotten the tradition of ancient philosophy – that philosophy is also an art, a style and most importantly a way of life.

Critics of Slow Food have challenged on various levels and to different extents, the movement's ability to change the food system at a local as well as national or global level. As Donati (2005) observes, the position of these critics ranges from cautious optimism to deep scepticism when it comes to the question of how committed Slow Food is to bringing about change and if indeed these changes can be sustained. On a local level, Gaytan (2004) draws on her own experience of attending a Slow Food *convivium* and criticizes the lack of political agenda of the meeting. Chrzan (2004) recounts her encounter with Slow Food as she tried to launch her project to develop and create a food education curriculum for middle and high school students on a national scale. Chrzan states that she received minimal aid from the movement and associates the failures of Slow Food in general with its self-positioning as a movement – an organisational form which she regards as too abstract to induce any

real changes in society.

While I do share the frustration of these writers and understand their criticisms, I would hesitate to declassify Slow Food as a movement. I would argue that the level of abstraction a “movement” embodies is precisely what is positive about it. Slow Food is not a programme, therefore there is not a prescriptive way of doing. That is not to say that a local *convivium* should be reduced to a recipe-sharing quail-egg-nibbling middle class dinner party – but nor should we understand Slow Food as attempting to offer recipes for social transformation. Rather by treating consumers as co-producers, it renders responsibility back to the individual. If the members are complacent and stop caring, it is not because Slow Food is a “movement” but because members themselves have forgotten to politicize the everyday. Such examples only go to show that a difference has to be made between lifestyle changes and a way of life.

On the other hand, Chrzan's article did mention that although Slow Food showed a complete lack of commitment to her project, it did finally take off with the help of the University of Pennsylvania's Urban Nutrition Initiative (UNI) (Chrzan 2004). Examples such as this are encouraging: Chrzan's project achieved positive and potentially sustainable changes through working with schools and local communities. Despite not being related to Slow Food, this project can be understood as being in the spirit of the movement, and indeed Slow Food can learn from the success of such projects.

Conclusion

Through this exploration of slowness drawing on Foucault's discussion of *Care of the Self*, I hope to have illustrated that slow is an attitude that stems from a way of caring for the other and that it can be translated into practice or a mode of living. The aim of this chapter has not been to hail the Slow Food Movement as the ultimate answer to the problems of fast-paced (post)modernity. Rather by reflecting on the movement, I have drawn out some of the resources it could offer for the development of a wider praxis of "slow" or slow living in general. This praxis should not be confined to the Slow Food movement, its practice could extend to beyond food culture and be applied to every aspect in our mode of living. However, it is important to be aware that the ideal of slowness, and associated principles of care, fairness and quality as found in the Slow Food movement and elsewhere, are not in themselves enough to ensure the development of an ethical praxis that would adequately challenge the negative effects of capitalism's time-space compression on everyday life. Indeed, in some of the examples considered in the following chapters, we will see that such ideals can be used directly within capitalist modes of production and marketing to achieve exactly the kinds of effects that, in principle, they are set against. Such problematics must necessarily be addressed if there is to be any hope of developing an everyday ethical praxis that would be genuinely based on the care-ful way of living suggested by the ideal of "good, clean and fair" – a task to which this thesis ultimately aims to contribute.

Chapter 3: Borough Market II

16th June 2007

As the summer approaches weekends in the market become increasingly less busy. On this particular Saturday, morning sales were much slower as many regular customers had gone away on holiday; afternoon shoppers (known to traders as “tourists”) also seemed preoccupied with other things: as we moved into the summer months, concerts, festivals, holiday plans dot the social calendar of the many denizens of London. Perhaps like these summer events, Borough Market represented for most people a leisure activity, something like a spectacle, or an event to be seen and visited as an “exception” to the daily routines of work. As their attention was directed towards these social events, Borough Market felt as if it had been slightly left aside. From this point of view, Borough Market could not be really seen as the last line of defence standing between supermarkets and food carers. Borough Market's success reflected partly the current climate in food culture: food and the talk of food by heavily mediatised celebrity chefs on television shows remained a mere trend in the many twists and turns of lifestyle marketing – so that the politics of production, distribution and care for the situation of workers had not penetrated more than the façade of our interest in food. Taking a stroll in Borough Market on a Saturday afternoon remained quite a trendy thing to do. As I stood mulling over these events with the extra time I had on my hands, I also considered the possibility that some regular shoppers may have decided to come to the market on weekdays instead of at the weekends to avoid the summer tourist crowd.

Shoppers came and went, but the ebb and flow of customers was nothing compared to previous weeks. The morning dragged on and I realized with disappointment that part of what constituted the excitement and enjoyment of working in the stall came from the steady flow of customers – it was the calculations, the packing, the talking that made the time fly by. I now realized that along with the fear or exhaustion that set in with the acceleration of time (Harvey's time-space compression), came experiences of anticipation and exhilaration. Paradoxically though, it was the “slow” mode of (carefully) serving customers that provided the intensity of the experience – that was what made the time fly. I was absorbed in my tasks. The times when I had fallen into a mindless repetition of movement and dialogue, made the tasks mundane and boring.

Since the flow of people had become slower, I had more time to observe not just the customers who frequented our stall, but those who wandered around us. A group of three girls, possibly in their twenties, laughed as they walked past my counter, observing the large “Chegworth Valley Farm” sign. I overheard one say “...any mention of a farm would be enough to make Claire buy ...” and – perceiving that they thought the reference to the farm was a mere marketing ploy – uncontrollably I exclaimed “we have a farm in Kent!” The girls stopped, there was a split second of silence, more of surprise than anger and I was relieved to see that they were not annoyed that I had eavesdropped. Claire looked sheepish as her friend explained how easily taken in she was with whatever produce that was remotely sourced from a farm. Her two other friends were obviously more sceptical and wary of this labelling and I explained that I agreed that photos of weather-beaten men on packages did not make the meat traceable to farmer Ted or whichever name was printed on the box.

We continued to talk a bit more and they wandered off, still giggling at Claire. My urge to correct them when I overheard their comments stemmed from a feeling of injustice – I felt misunderstood and wanted to justify and defend the farm and the work of David's family. How easy it would be for people to wander through stalls in the market and carry with them the scepticism they had developed from wandering down the aisles of supermarkets. How unfair that would be for those who truly worked to grow their own produce. It was precisely for this reason that I objected to the association of ready-made meals with notions or images of rural living. Slow fast food⁹ remained a fast product but its false associations fuelled a misguided concept of all that was associated with Slow. However, their observations might not have been entirely wrong. Ben told me later that Borough Market, allowed people to sell what they did not grow; unlike genuine farmers' markets which had strict restrictions and only allowed stalls to sell their own produce. The farms must also be within a certain distance from the market to safeguard these outlets for local farmers as well as to prevent excessive transportation that would generate more harm than good. Borough Market thus benefits from the popular perception of the farmers' market as organic, ethical, fair trade, local, etc., yet without having to apply the restrictions that try to guarantee such qualities in the produce of a genuine farmers' market. In other words, Borough Market employs marketing strategies like any other produce outlet in a capitalist system – even if not to the same extent or with the same level of unethical practice as a supermarket.

Joanna Blythman, in a recent article in *The Independent*, wrote “like two out of every three British consumers, I buy organic” (2007). People who bought organic had

⁹ “Slow fast food” is a term which I use to describe food whose modes of production, distribution and consumption are closer to those of fast food chains, but which uses a variety of methods to disguise these modes in order to associate themselves with the qualities represented by Slow Food.

various well-rehearsed arguments as to why they did so, such as: to reduce the risk of eating pesticides (for obvious health reasons); to improve the working environment of the workers by encouraging them not to spray their crops; in the interests of animal welfare; and for the betterment of the environment. However she rightly pointed out that an organic box of Chilean blackberries or Zambian sugar snap peas or an Argentinian side of beef flown in by air freight would leave an unmistakable carbon footprint. To talk of organic but not fair trade, or to talk of fair trade and neglect the impact of the environment in transportation would be what the Chinese called chopping off our toes to avoid the sand worms i.e. a very short-sighted and short-term solution¹⁰ – if one could call it a solution at all. The partial coverage of interests by brands such as organic or fairtrade¹¹ will not bring about the changes that are needed in food production. In fact, like the peas flown in from Zambia, they will probably do more harm than good. The organic trend that had become so popular so quickly in the UK had put pressure on the farmers, with demand beginning to outstrip supply, to the extent that supermarkets, as major distributors of organic food are pressuring the Soil Association (the certifying body of organic food) to lower their standards. Outsourcing the supply of organic produce is destructive in so many ways. Transportation is one of these ways, yet as Blythman pointed out in the article, agrarian countries tend to be precisely those places where water is scarce and soil is prone to erosion and desertification. Hence they require first and foremost an infrastructure that will allow them to grow their own food for themselves. However, the question of the real cost of even local produce opens up one of the most disconcerting questions I had been led to consider since I started working for

¹⁰ This phrase thus carries a sense somewhat similar to the common British phrase “cut off one's nose to spite one's face”.

¹¹ Fairtrade is a registered certification label for products sourced from producers in developing countries (as opposed to fair trade)

Chegworth Valley. Even here, in the case of a relatively local, family-run fruit farm, employing organic growing techniques, which had stopped supplying supermarkets out of concern for the quality of their produce, were there not effects that, from an ethical point of view, must be regarded negatively? Was this really the model of ethical food production that I was looking for?

23rd June 2007

I arrived bright and early again but was surprised to see Yasic, Tomic and a new worker called Grees. Andrew was not there. I asked Yasic where Andrew was, and Yasic said that Andrew had gone back home for a month to see his family and would then return to the farm with his son. Andrew and Yasic, the only two Polish workers with whom I could communicate, are both married. Andrew has a son of 15 years old and Yasic, a boy of 5. Tomic, I found out later with the help of Yasic, has 2 children, a girl of 7 and a boy of 13. These workers left their homes and their families for the unfamiliar soil of England, to work on a farm 10 to 11 hours a day, most of them unable to speak English. Chegworth Valley employed 12 to 14 full-time staff from Poland and I could only assume that they constituted not only one another's work associates but also their social sphere. Outsourcing, normally associated with big businesses using overseas call centres, was also happening here in a supposedly local family farm. It was a delicate issue that I have yet to raise with Ben. But I made use of the few minutes I had for lunch and sat by Yasic in order to ask him what the working conditions were like. I had always wondered why they preferred working at the farm to working in the market.

Yasic explained that at the farm, they woke up early and started work probably at around 6 in the morning, but at least they finished at 4 in the afternoon. On a market day like Saturday they had to wake up at 5am in order to drive for 45min on the motorway then for another hour or so across London. I of course had no idea what the traffic was like at that hour in the morning but I could easily imagine the return journey to be far worse. In the end, they would be working 13 hours on a market day. Then I asked about how (and how much) they were paid, which was still not very clear to me but Yasic as well as Tomic with gesture of rubbing his fingers together agreed that the pay was good. They were on an hourly rate of £6.40/hr (like me) and a fair amount of paid leave. Andrew for example had gone to Poland for a month and would still get another 2 weeks off at Christmas and 2 weeks at Easter. Compared to a friend of Yasic who was working in a factory in Glasgow and who only had 21 days of annual paid holiday, Chegworth Valley seemed to offer a much better deal. Although £6.40 an hour was the minimum wage in the UK, this rate was certainly attractive enough for Andrew to bring his 15-year old son back to work on the farm during the summer holidays. The issue of employing foreign labour is complicated and I reserved judgement until I could find out more about it, but certainly the possibility of growing and eating locally depends heavily on this group of Polish men.

17th May 2008

Sometimes when customers come to the Chegworth Valley stall, they ask whether or not the apples are English. "They are all grown in Kent," I would say when such a question was posed to me, but at the same time I wondered what defined an English

apple. I had many customers telling me that “there's nothing like a good English apple” as they enthusiastically chomped through the tasters. I asked Ben which varieties were English, and he hesitated before saying, “maybe the Cox's, Bramley's and Russet's”. The question of what made an English apple eerily reminded me of what it meant to be British. Was it a question of where your family was from? Or where you were born? Or where you grew up? In the case of the apples grown at Chegworth Valley, the seedlings were all bought from two nurseries, one in Holland and the other in France; Ben said that there was perhaps only one British nursery that produced good seedlings. A well-bred plant as it were, would provide healthy trees that would bear good quality crops that were also strong and resilient to the weather. How did this affect the apples' Britishness I wonder? Would customers be put off if they knew that these were foreign-bred apples?

While writing chapter 4 of this thesis (Jamie at Home) on food and nostalgia, I found myself increasingly wondering about food, identity and the nation-state. I realized then how blind I had been to an event that had happened months before, whose significance had only now become apparent to me through the process of writing¹². Many times my friends had asked me why I still continued working at the market: shouldn't I have learnt everything by now? I realized that even if at times I thought there was no more new material to be found, it was not because it was not there in the field, rather it was because I had not (or not yet) been able to critically analyse it. The field was, as it were, alive and always changing, there was always something new to be learnt.

¹² See footnote 1

When I wrote about the Polish workers in my fieldnotes, I only referred to the Polish farmhands in the stall – Andrew, Tomic, Derek, Yasic... but there were many workers from Poland who worked elsewhere in the market. Tatayana from Degustibus, Gary from Sillfield farm, Tomic from Ginger Pig, Nemo from Furness Fish etc. – these were either regular workers or part-time workers taking on an extra job for cash. Today T from Topolski came round to our stall in the morning and held a red and white flag in support of the Polish football team who had just made it to the Euro 2008 finals, which she wanted to show Derek from my stall. She excitedly waved it around and decided that she was going to put it up in her stall. T, unlike the rest of the traders, was a stallholder. A few months ago, the *Herald Tribune* came to Borough Market and took photos of the market, but they chose the one of Topolski as their main image to accompany an article titled *Poles start moving up the economic ladder in Britain* (Werdigier 2007). T was both amused and annoyed when she came to our stall with the framed article. “Look at what they wrote” she cried, Ben was impressed that the *Herald Tribune* had written a lengthy article on their stall while I was more sympathetic to them being labelled and singled out as Poles. It turned out that we were both right. T was both flattered that her image was chosen for the article but her finger brought our attention to the label “Poles”.

As the title indicates, the article was about Polish immigrants moving up the social ladder, yet interestingly, the text had nothing to do with food. It would appear that the presence of a Polish stand selling Polish produce in Borough market was the mark by which one recognised immigrant culture which had made it into the mainstream. Their presence represented the general upward moving trend of Polish immigrants – who had established themselves not as labourers but as entrepreneurs; not on the

periphery, but in the mainstream. The Topoloski stall was both the marker and the marked. English banks eagerly catered for the new wave of potential customers. I remembered while taking a flight from Stansted airport, how I had been struck by the aggressive targeting of Polish customers in the marketing of English banks such as Natwest and Lloyds, who had translated their billboards into Polish. Mainstream supermarkets also dedicated special aisles to their extended range of Polish foods.

31st May 2008

This Saturday it was business as usual, except for one mid-morning incident, when unusual loud cries were heard coming from the other end of the market. I was surprised, since it was too early for the fishmongers to start shouting “half-price fish” which usually signalled the end of the day, the time when traders started packing up and selling off what stock they had left. The noise caused quite a commotion, both visitors and traders stopped and craned their necks to try and see what the fuss was all about. A party of four men dressed in red-and-white striped shirts and shorts were pulling a cart of the same colour and handing out little tubes of red-and-white packages. They were promoting Nigel Slater’s book called *Eating for England*. What a coincidence, I thought: I had just finished writing my chapter on nostalgia and, as if by magic, nostalgia materialized in front of me. I quickly went over and picked up one of the packages and opened the wrapper. Inside was a voucher for the book and a tube of rock candy. I asked Ben what it was and he explained that these were traditional boiled sweets. For the next hour or so, everyone was biting into these sweets while wandering around the market, no doubt nostalgic for their holidays with their families in Blackpool or other seaside towns in Britain.

It was an interesting experience. Having grown up in Hong Kong, seaside holidays meant something distinctly different to me. Looking around at these men dressed in presumably traditional costumes, I felt I was watching a cabaret, a show that razzles and dazzles. I could not find a level on which to identify – the sweets were too hard and too sugary. I was completely alienated from the collective nostalgia that was taking place. If nostalgia is a longing to return home, then it is truly a paradoxical term, for how can we all be nostalgic for the same thing? Longing could be universal, but home is certainly what divides.

When I returned home, I decided to go online and see what reviews the book had received. In addition to the usual comments readers had made about the book, I was surprised to find how many people had left comments about their own childhood memories, most of them involving biscuits and tea. Somehow the publication invited almost a collective nostalgia for the past. Expatriates in particular were mourning the disappearance of triangular sandwiches, Marmite, digestives and tea. While comments on other issues such as immigration were distinctly divided, biscuits and tea seemed to provide a script for individual longing. While these foods were not regarded as *haute cuisine*, they nonetheless invoked the Britishness of the British. Like steak and chips for the French, these foods are nationalised more than socialised (Barthes 2000).

In an interview I found on youtube (fifthstateuk 2007), Nigel Slater described himself “as a bit of a slut” when it comes to food, saying that he will eat anything, be it English, Chinese, French, Italian etc. “The danger” said Nigel Slater, was that the

British cuisine might be forgotten. In his rather hesitant manner, he indicated that culinary Britain was rather like a magpie, stealing little bits of everything from neighbouring countries. He said so apologetically, seeming almost ashamed, and raised the importance of returning to the traditional British way of cooking. In his interview he was very hesitant, very wary of what he said about British cuisine, as if he was scared of offending nationalists, but equally he addressed those who felt that the British had no cuisine, and so he trod a fine line throughout his discourse.

Nevertheless, he described the enthusiasm for foreign cuisine exhibited especially by his fellow celebrity chefs in the media (such as Jamie Oliver's frequent praise for Italian food, and Gordon Ramsay's passion for French cuisine), and the celebration of cuisines from other countries as a “danger”, implying that there was a risk of forgetting the British national identity.

Chapter 4: Jamie at Home

Introduction

In recent years, cookery programmes – which may in the past have been considered primarily informative shows – have moved from day-time to prime-time television slots, due to their increased entertainment value, which has earned them popularity with a wider audience. This chapter takes Jamie Oliver, a celebrity chef and a prominent media figure in this genre of television show, and examines in particular his show on home-cooking *Jamie at Home* to offer a reading of the way that the “home” of “home-cooking” is exploited – especially through the production of effects associated with the experience of nostalgia – the longing to return home.

After watching four episodes of *Jamie at Home* back to back, I am left salivating in front of my computer yearning for hot summer days, barbecues and tomato salads. As much as I hate to admit it, food on TV does look good, in fact most of the time it looks much better than real food. As I watch the final image of steaming hot sausages crackling in the spicy tomato sauce coming out of the brick oven, I swear I can almost taste the smoky spicy flavour of the dish. Suddenly the episode ends and the jingle of the song comes on ... Tim Kay, it says on the end credits, singing to a feel-good melody of guitar strumming ... “Take time and make yourself feel good ... and you do whatever you want, coz you can now ... in my world.”

Humming to the tune, I adjusted my computer and proceeded to write. The blank white page in front of me contrasted starkly with the vibrant colours that had filled

my screen a few moments earlier – which now seemed almost a mockery of the blandness of my immediate environment. *Jamie at Home* is ultimately a feel-good programme, one that takes you away from a dreary, wet and cold winter's day to a place far away where the sun shines and the food is good. Yet it is also a programme that leaves you longing. As the images of food lingered on in my head, I longed for the taste of sausages, for the smell of rosemary and thyme, for the beauty of the garden and the heat of the summer sun, for a kitchen that makes me want to cook and a way of life that is simpler and slower.

Jamie at Home triggers a nostalgia for a past where food comes from the garden, is cooked in the kitchen, eaten with the family and shared with friends. Anything that serves as a reminder of our processed, artificial lives is kept to a minimum. There are no cans, no plastic, no vegetables wrapped in cling film. We follow Jamie through the back door into his garden and watch him choose his tomatoes and vegetables; they are picked by hand, placed in a wicker basket and brought back to the kitchen where he starts to cook. His kitchen is beautiful – light, bright and airy. It is a small kitchen, unlike those of professional restaurants, which are often large, cold, encased in stainless steel, more reminiscent of a surgical theatre than a place to cook. As Jamie starts chopping onions on his wooden chopping board, I look round the kitchen and admire the old-fashioned tins where he keeps his dried herbs and spices, his pots and pans which hang from shelves looking used and old, and listen to him chop up the “fantastic tomatoes” that he picked from his garden just moments ago. The style of the kitchen complements the way this series has been filmed and aims to evoke early memories of being in our mother’s or grandmother’s kitchen: the low camera angle seems to place the viewer in the position of a child, as though we had

suddenly become little once again, and were perched on a stool watching dinner being cooked.

This can be anybody's nostalgic trip back in time, it can be any grandmother's kitchen – until I stop to realize that the “memories” evoked cannot have any basis in my own, and perhaps most viewers', actual past experiences. My grandmother never farmed or grew her own vegetables. Since escaping from China to Hong Kong, she lived on the 5th floor of a block of old-fashioned flats in Aberdeen and had a kitchen that faced directly on to another kitchen, with windows covered in cling-film, in the tower block opposite. The floors were not tiled and the sink ran into an open gutter, woks hung from the walls and she would cook on two small gas stoves attached to two bottles of LPG gas; at times, the gas would run out and she would have to change it halfway through cooking.

I realized then how appropriate the song was for the programme, not because of its catchy tune or its happy lyrics but because of the final words “... in my world”. So we are told that we can do whatever we want, because we can, but only in *his* world. So I can dream of hot summer days as much as I want, but to have a house in Essex with a garden full of vegetables and a beautiful kitchen equipped to cook in is not my world. It is Jamie at *his* home, in *his* garden and *his* kitchen, and not mine.

Home and Away

Jamie grows his own vegetables and cooks in his own kitchen; the emphasis on growing your own or buying local is strongly articulated. In the UK, he is well-

known for his endeavours to change the way we eat – from fighting for better school dinners to promoting free-range chickens. In short, Jamie positions himself in the public eye as a chef with an ethical mission. As a celebrity chef, Jamie Oliver stands apart from the rest as a young and friendly: unlike Gordon Ramsay, whose TV persona is angry and unforgiving, or Heston Blumenthal, who cooks with scientific precision, Jamie is messy when he cooks and likes to “get his hands in”. In the *Jamie at Home* programme, this is brought to the fore: he wears his chequered shirts and Bermuda shorts, squats in his garden over his barbecues and cooks with a lot of onomatopoeia – “bish bash bosh” and informal language – “get a load of this”. He is easy-going and friendly, and viewers feel “at home” with him.

During different episodes, he makes explicit distinctions between home-cooking and the food we get in restaurants. Home-cooking, discussed almost as a different genre of cuisine, is like Jamie – simple and straightforward, stripped of pretentious garnishes and tongue-twisting names. In the first episode of Series One (Channel 4 2007), Jamie makes a tomato *consommé* with the tomatoes grown in his garden. As the word *consommé* leaves his mouth, he brings his hands to his head and winced, “I hate saying the word *consommé*”, he said “because it reminds me of when I was trained and god knows how many times I have to do this dish... and *consommé* is such a pretty ... posh ... restaurant affair, but,” he confides in his viewers, “I'm not really into that, I'm more into home-cooking”. In episode 3 of the same series, Jamie shows us how to do a “proper” barbecue. He shows us tricks of the trade for making a dish more “exciting” or in his own words, ways to “make a 3 pound dessert look like a 10 pound dessert”. On his wooden board, he lays out his cooked piece of salmon and returns the skin to the barbecue to make it more crispy. He then gently

cuts the fish to expose the “hum of pink” in the perfectly cooked salmon, tosses the now crispy char-grilled crackling on top and challenges anyone not to like his food. “This is not Michelin Star food, this is proper food, this is dinner.”

Jamie is keen to make clear the distinction between home-cooking and restaurant food. Somehow, home-cooking is accorded a magical quality; it seems to be more “authentic”, more real, as opposed to what is found in Michelin star restaurants (including both the food and the atmosphere), which are unreal or inauthentic. Yet home, or more specifically the nostalgic home, is neither a real place nor existing in real time. Home, or the notion of home, is a home that never existed, just as Jamie's home had nothing to do with my grandmother's kitchen. The home evoked in such shows is an imaginary place created by television producers, fuelled by modern media yet viewed and longed for collectively by the public. Nostalgia, originally a medical diagnosis, has two Greek roots: *algia* – longing – and *nostos* – the return home. The term was coined by a Swiss doctor in the 17th century to define the sad mood originating from the desire to return to one's native land – a common sickness found in Swiss soldiers fighting away from home (Boym 2001). Although the longing can be universal, home is what divides: for how can we all long for the same home? A notion of a common home could therefore only be illusory. We dream to return to a home that is not ours. The homecoming embodied in the word nostalgia is thus no more authentic than the exoticism of eating out. Home-cooking and restaurant food in this case are as inauthentic and unreal as each other.

Home-cooking in *Jamie at Home* celebrates a traditional way of life; it asks us to return to our roots and forget about the convenience of ready-made meals, and “get

our hands in". It asks us to long for the comfort and joy of home-cooking. Mesmerized by the promise of good food and the good life, viewers collectively mourn the loss of a more traditional way of life. Yet traditions are often as illusory and inauthentic as the notion of the nostalgic home. As Hobsbawm writes, "traditions which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented. Invented traditions establish themselves by connecting with a suitable historic past to establish almost automatically continuity." (Hobsbawm 1983)¹³ Hence it is not a particular tradition or historical past that is at stake in these evocations of nostalgia, but the sense of comfort or security that is produced by an engagement with a general idea of "tradition". As Boym has argued, invented tradition (Hobsbawm distinguishes between customs and traditions, see Hobsbawm 1983: 2) builds on the sense of loss of community and cohesion and offers a comforting collective script for individual longing (Boym 2001: 42).

Nostalgia can also be concerned with a different time (as opposed to place) in terms of the individual's life-time – for instance in calling to mind the time of our childhood, perhaps, or merely the slower rhythm of our dreams (Boym 2001). What we long for then, is not really home, but a feeling of "*being* at home" – a feeling of security, familiarity and comfort as opposed to "being away", which implies effort and sometimes hardship in dealing with the foreign and strange. To feel at home is a universal sensation, a common denominator that bridges all differences. Boym suggests that it is a state of mind that doesn't depend on an actual location but an imaginary moment where we share an intimacy with the world (2001: 251). Jamie's

¹³ This is not to suggest that there cannot be something like "real" or "lived" traditions – Hobsbawm makes the differentiation between customs and traditions and suggest that customs are more accommodating towards change whereas traditions, including those that are invented, rely on quasi-obligatory repetition to establish continuity with the past (1983: 2-5)

kitchen or his cooking might not be my grandmother's kitchen or my mother's dishes, but their deployment is sufficient to evoke a sense of security and familiarity associated with the feeling of "being at home." Hobsbawm points out that tradition, constituted through formalized practices through repetition, offers a sense of safety and security (Hobsbawm 1983).

Food programmes such *Jamie at Home* conjure up a fantasy world that allows us to experience "home-cooking" vicariously – yet it is home-cooking as we never knew it. Watching these programmes, we bemoan the loss of better, simpler days which Jamie, through the way he constructs and presents home-cooking, invites us to imagine. Such a form of nostalgia is neatly captured in Appadurai's *The Social Life of Things* where he writes,

in thus creating experiences of losses that never took place, these advertisements create what might be called 'imagined nostalgia', nostalgia for things that never were ... this form of nostalgia rewrite(s) the lived histories of individuals, familial, ethnic groups and classes (1993: 24)

In this sense, we are dealing with what Jameson refers to as a nostalgia for the present. He points out that

historicity is neither a representation of the past nor a representation of the future (although its various forms *use* such representations): it can first and foremost be defined as a

perception of the present as history: that is, as a relationship to the present which somehow defamiliarizes it and allows us that distance from immediacy which *we* call historical (Jameson 1989: 523)

Nostalgia therefore is an amalgamation of the past, the present and the future. The consumption of such modern merchandising, in this case televised home-cooking, mobilizes a new allegorical way of visualizing the past to create something new for the present – and for future consumption. Nostalgic merchandise is not recovered from or referring back to an actual past, but is always a construction for the present and the future. Appadurai extends Jameson's argument to point out that we have come to bemoan a loss of a stylized present “as if it has already slipped away” (Appadurai 1993).

Jamie grew up in Essex where his family runs a pub, and the fact that neither he nor I had grandmothers who cooked with vegetables from their own garden does not affect the way the programme is consumed. We need not have shared Jamie's past – it is sufficient for these programmes to present us with a sense of familiarity (whether or not that sense of familiarity comes from the media or our own experience becomes unimportant) in order to mobilize a common longing for a more peaceful and comforting lifestyle. In the case discussed in the present chapter, the past does not point to a specific era: perhaps it is more fitting to think of it as a generational past, that of our grandmother's era or the time when we ourselves were young. Programmes that induce nostalgia need only to present a space that allows for the processing of an imaginary past: as long as we are willing to engage with this

imaginary, such programmes retain our attention. Appadurai also uses the term “armchair nostalgia” to indicate the consumption of such nostalgic merchandise:

Rather than expecting the consumer to supply memories while the merchandiser supplies the lubricant of nostalgia, now the viewer need only bring the faculty of nostalgia to an image that will supply the memory of a loss he or she has never suffered ...this relationship might be called armchair nostalgia, nostalgia without lived experience or collective historical memory (Appadurai 1993: 25).

If *Jamie at Home* triggers a sense of nostalgia, or a longing to return home, the programme also conveniently provides us with a ready-made, one-size-fits-all home available at the flick of a remote control. Nostalgia as used by the entertainment industry makes everything time-sensitive and exploits the temporal deficit by offering a cure that is also a poison (Boym 2001: 38), in the manner of Plato's *pharmakon* as discussed by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1981)¹⁴. *Jamie at Home* both induces and appeases a sense of longing by allowing us, for a short period of time to share the illusion of being at home. In place of the cures that were once prescribed for nostalgia, such as a trip to the Alps, opium or leeches (Boym 2001), watching television is today given the task of curing us and making us feel good.

¹⁴ In drawing a comparison between the *pharmakon* and nostalgia I am invoking not only the paradoxical nature of the *pharmakon*, which acts both as remedy and poison, but also the magical qualities that are attributed to it as a result. The *pharmakon* is described by Derrida as “this charm, this spellbinding virtue, this power of fascination, [which] can be – alternately or simultaneously – beneficent or maleficent” (1981: 70).

In Episode 5 of series 1, Jamie introduces us to a potato and onion *al forno* recipe. In his garden, in front of the brick oven that he has constructed, he chops up the ingredients and throws them in a tray. “This is the bit where no English person would have the balls to do ... but that's because they don't know better. I want you to go and get a bottle of cheap balsamic vinegar” he says, “I want you to use half a bottle of it, I want you to go for it. I want you to trust me and get it on there, come on, let's go for it.” And as he smothers his potatoes in balsamic vinegar and puts it in the oven, he murmurs, “brave.”

In this particular episode, Jamie changes his register; instead of narrating what he is doing, he invites us, commands us almost, to join him on his culinary journey: “I want you to be brave, let's go” he says. Why does he feel the need to encourage us to make this particular dish and not others? When he exhorts us to “Come on”, could he mean something more than drowning potatoes in balsamic vinegar? Could he be pushing us to get off the couch and grow and cook our own food?

Jamie Oliver does not only teach us how to cook, but he opens his doors to us, invites us into his home; he cooks for us, shows us how to bring mundane ingredients to life; he shares, he entertains and he gives pleasure to the audience. He is hospitable and *pukka*-friendly. Yet, as with nostalgia, a paradox is already built into the notion of hospitality; for to be hospitable means to welcome someone into your home and in doing so to make them equal. The host and guest – two different words in English are both translated into *hôte* in French, indicating that the guest and the host are the same. But as Derrida points out, to equalise means that an unequal relationship is

presupposed¹⁵. In a similar manner to Foucault, who traces his ideas back to the Greeks, Derrida, in his book *Of Hospitality*, takes the example of Socrates, who announces in the courts of Athens that he is foreign to the judges, foreign to the language of the courts, to the legal rhetoric of accusation, defence and pleading; therefore he is *like* a foreigner (Derrida 2000: 15). He has to ask for hospitality in a language which by definition is not his own – one that is imposed on him by the master of the house, the host. Derrida points out that this is the entry point of hospitality:

must we ask the foreigner to understand us, to speak our language, in all the senses of this term, in all its possible extensions, before being able and so as to be able to welcome him into our own country? (2000: 16-17)

Could Jamie's friendly and hospitable image be understood as a gesture of equalising? His “bish, bash, bosh”, easy-to-understand language not only puts viewers at ease, but also reduces the gap that stands between the foreign amateurs and the professionals. He brings cooking home, strips his cooking of fancy names and garnishes and calls it the “real stuff”. He invites viewers – foreigners to his world of cookery – to join in, to get off our couches and cook. Yet despite his apparent hospitable friendliness, we are still outside the door waiting; television does

¹⁵ The scope of this thesis does not allow for a deep engagement with Derrida's work, but on several occasions I have invoked his discussion of certain terms (in this chapter, for example, *pharmakon* and hospitality). As his careful analyses make clear, the relationship between a term and its meaning is often ambiguous and cannot be reduced to a two-sense divide. Spivak, writing on the “elusiveness” of Derrida's method of deconstruction, notes that the relationships between the senses of words are never “clear-cut, one bleeds into the other at all times” (1993: 28). On a much simpler level, I am also working on the space between work and leisure, slow and fast, theory and practice in this thesis in order to better understand the ambiguous relationships between these opposites.

not allow us to cross that threshold, the camera seems to take us into the kitchen, and yet we remain outside, unable to gain access beyond further than the screen of our sets.

Friend or Foe?

Jamie is very much a household name. His young, down-to-earth style brought a breath of fresh air to the world of cookery shows. He was only 22 when he was first discovered by the BBC and it has been said that Jamie Oliver and the media clicked like “fish and chips” (Sawyer 2002). As a celebrity chef, he is dynamic and friendly; his life story is inspiring; and his then girlfriend, now wife, is beautiful; in other words, he was a perfect package for the media. I remember cooking one of my first meals with my younger cousin using one of Jamie Oliver's recipes. We brought his book along to the supermarket and dutifully placed the ingredients in our basket according to the list. I remember also that an elderly couple (someone else's grandparents) looked at us as we struggled to find the right cured ham and said “that's a very good idea!” I am not sure whether they meant bringing the cookbook along to the supermarket, using Jamie's recipes, or simply cooking a meal together.

That was more than 7 years ago, at the early beginning of Jamie's career. His recipes appealed to many young people, many of whom barely know how to make *spaghetti bolognese* if it does not come in a can. In his first series – *The Naked Chef*, he showed us how cooking and eating with friends can be easy and fun. 7 years later, many of those who were university students at the time have become young professionals, have maybe developed a more sophisticated palette, perhaps while still

cooking to his recipes. Jamie Oliver has also grown up; he is now married, and has two daughters. Like Delia Smith for many of a slightly older generation, Jamie Oliver is our *confidant* – the one we turn to in times of culinary need. His unpretentious image and fast tongue mean that he gives the impression of sometimes saying things that should not be said on television, but the public likes him precisely for these supposed *faux pas*. His unpolished scripts and slips-of-the-tongue earn him the trust of the audience, because they make him appear more human, more real, as if he could be just one of us. Since his rise to fame Jamie has continued to evolve in television; he started a restaurant called Fifteen, where he trains wayward teenagers to cook, made a programme to show the appalling state of school dinners and was involved in fighting for better-sourced free-range chickens.

Hence the public's feelings of betrayal when he signed the deal with Sainsbury's – a UK supermarket chain – to become their public spokesperson. “The Sainsbury's campaign has deliberately mimicked elements of *The Naked Chef* show – the friends, the flat, 'pukka' and 'nice one' and 'sorted' – which were supposedly based around Jamie's real way of living. The viewer is left with the unmistakable impression that Jamie has sold his lifestyle – his life – to a supermarket” (Sawyer 2002). Despite my reluctant enjoyment of his programmes, I was never under the illusion that the on-screen construction of “Jamie Oliver” was anything more than a media image presenting a lifestyle package.

What is perhaps ironic is that two personas – *Jamie at Home* and Jamie for Sainsbury's – together represent the clash between the two opposing paradigms of food production and consumption. *Jamie at Home* supports seasonal produce, local

and independent production: he only cooks with what is available and therefore seasonal in his garden and shops for all other ingredients he does not have with independent local producers. Jamie for Sainsbury's, on the other hand, represents mass, homogeneous production and distribution. In the discourse surrounding the media's promotion of sourcing quality ingredients, supermarkets in particular have been given a wide berth as they represent (in food at least) the problems of global capitalism. Supermarket chains, motivated by profit, cheap prices and the values of mass production, have been criticized for driving their agricultural providers to cultivate or rear their crops and breeds intensively using certain health-endangering methods or chemicals, inevitably compromising on quality. Indeed, the ideal of home-cooking which these programmes produce is in direct opposition to the supermarket and what it is widely taken to stand for.

The Jamie Oliver paradox perfectly illustrates the form of imperial nostalgia which the anthropologist Renato Rosaldo (1993) explores in *Culture and Truth*. Imperial nostalgia is a sentiment experienced by colonial settlers – in particular agents of colonialism e.g. missionaries, officials etc. – when they “display nostalgia for the colonized culture as it was 'traditionally' (that is, when they first encountered it).” (Rosaldo 1993: 69) The irony is of course the fact that the loss of traditions and culture is the direct result of their destruction by colonialism. Imperial nostalgia, therefore is a nostalgia where

people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed ... (it) uses a pose of 'innocent yearning' both to capture people's imaginations and to conceal its complicity

with often brutal domination. (Rosaldo 1993: 69-70)

It could be said that what imperialism represents to local culture is what supermarkets are to independent producers. The muscle power supermarkets have over the face of retail in a town is vast. It has been reported that, as the number of supermarkets increases, local specialist shops decrease. In the UK roughly two out of three butchers have gone out of business in the last twenty-five years. Fishmongers, green grocers, bakers all face the same threat of closing down. The Manchester School of Management have predicted that if current trends continue, “there might not be a single independent food store left in the whole of the UK by 2050” (Blythman 2005).

Sainsbury's, like any other supermarket, is keen to extend its suffocating tentacles to areas where independent shops might still have a chance to breathe. Pimlico in South London was still boasting 165 small independent shops in 1995 when Sainsbury's decided to move in. Local residents lobbied the Westminster Council and organised community opposition to the opening of a supermarket in the area. It was described by Blythman (2005) as a David and Goliath struggle, except that David did not win the fight, rather it was Goliath who emerged triumphant, as Sainsbury's finally opened their “passion for food” stall in Pimlico. Three months after the opening, local shopkeepers were already feeling the pressure as sales had dropped by 18% in this short period of time (Blythman 2005).

The “passion for food” format is one of Sainbury's “concept stores” where a counter-style delicatessen partially replaces the mind-numbing rows of aisles found in the

more typical supermarket. “Specialist counters” include a master butcher, fishmonger, charcuterie and a carvery that provide hot hand made sandwiches, giving the stall an overall “continental food hall” feel. This particular supermarket format mimics the life of independent shops and can only be seen as part of a larger scheme to dominate the high streets and food markets. Tim Lang, professor of food policy at City University, has urged consumers to look beyond the façade and realize that “there is no real craft on the site. This is just a supermarket with a different fascia.” (Poulter 2003) This is an important undifferentiation, for supermarkets have adapted to the consumer climate and created new niche markets for themselves, as illustrated by the “passion for food” model. They have learnt from social critics, created new lines of “quality” and “seasonal products” that appeal to consumers who want to have food that is more “natural” while longing to return to a period when food was not “contaminated” – the the “good-old-days” as it were. While this refocusing on quality is hard to criticize as a completely negative change, the main problem of the way we consume remains unaddressed. How does the domination of supermarkets affect local shops? How do they source? Under what conditions do they collaborate with producers?

Jamie, despite being the face of Sainsbury's, has always sourced his ingredients from local and independent sources; the programme Jamie at Home in particular teaches viewers about the importance of seasonality and having diverse varieties of each kind of produce. At the beginning of each episode, Jamie will be standing in his garden picking whatever variety of vegetables he plans to cook that day. In Episode 6 of series 1, he roasts carrots and beets. As he pulls the carrots out of the soil, he explains to his viewers that carrots were not traditionally orange – that there were many more

varieties and that it was exciting to have black, white and purple carrots. As he finished roasting the vegetables, he pulled the tray out of the oven and said, “if you have gone to the trouble of growing your own beets, carrots and veggies, this is a lovely way to send them off, in a good way you know; bit of respect. Look at that, full of life, and that's what cooking should be about innit, being full of life.”

Vegetables that are “full of life”, as opposed to limp and “shrink-wrapped”, are qualitatively different, and the distinction perhaps compares to the great difference between the “lively” scenario of high street dotted with independent producers and a “lifeless” street littered with homogeneous chains of stores. The gesture of the supermarket which creates a store reminiscent of the traditional marketplace is a rather cynical one but illustrates perfectly the paradox of imperial nostalgia. Rosaldo writes, it is just as if

a person killed someone and mourns for the victim. In more attenuated form, someone deliberately alters a form of life, and then regrets that things have not remained as they were prior to the intervention. (Rosaldo 1993: 69-70)

By moving into Pimlico, Sainsbury's slowly kills off the businesses of local shops. Here, like in many parts of London today, butchers, grocers, fishmongers and bakers are rarely to be seen. Having suffocated the lives out of these shops, Sainsbury's and other supermarkets mourn the loss of the variety of produce these independent shops offer and re-introduce them in the form of upmarket goods. Sainsbury's is certainly in a win-win situation.

The “innocent yearning” as Rosaldo writes serves both to capture people's imaginations and to conceal its complicity with often brutal domination.” (Rosaldo 1993: 69-70) Sainsbury's domination of the high streets drastically reduces the choices consumers have by closing down competition. In their desperate attempt to distance the company image from the brutal domination that is taking place, Sainsbury's cleverly hijacked the media-friendly image of Jamie Oliver and made use of it to appease whatever dissatisfactions people might harbour. On the other hand, Jamie Oliver, by continuing to feature in household-friendly programmes, is also cashing in on the lack that is caused supermarket chains. Through his programme he reintroduces a way of life which does not rely on mass production or distribution. Both Sainsbury's and Jamie Oliver become the *pharmakon*: the poison and cure of the current food market. They are both the aggressor and the saviour. The Jamie Oliver paradox therefore is the paradox of imperial nostalgia.

Jamie's carrots are “exciting” and “full of life”; supermarkets are completely the opposite, they are sterile and boring. There are many aspects to this comment. The excitement of Jamie's garden comes from the different varieties of fruits and vegetables. For example, in episode 6 the novelty of seeing carrots in colours other than orange can send the viewer into a state of wonder. One of the problems associated with mass production is that the variety of produce is vastly reduced. Certain varieties are economically better investments, they grow better, are more able to withstand unpredictable weather, and look pretty. Taste is of limited, secondary importance (despite what the marketing surrounding the products might declare). From my own personal experience of working for a family-run business that

specializes in growing apples and pears, I have learnt about many of the varieties that would never be made available in a supermarket. Where supermarkets source by the shape and size of fruit, fruit farmers who have managed to escape or hold off the claws of supermarkets are able to grow for taste and variety. Fruits that are misshapen or bruised are not rejected, but instead made useful in juices or compotes. Taste and diversity become the primary concerns for a farmer rather than aesthetics.

Another trend that supermarkets encourage is the consumption of ready-made or processed products. Since the profit margin is much higher here than with fresh produce, supermarkets pay particular attention to making such produce 'exciting' – not necessarily through its taste, but by their irresistible “buy one get one free offers” (and equivalents). Jamie Oliver again presents us with a paradox. While he is known for his cooking skills, becoming the face of Sainsbury's means that he simultaneously represents convenience, and for a lot of people, that means “ready-made”. But since it was Jamie Oliver himself who created awareness of the low nutritional value and high salt content of ready-made meals, Sainsbury's had to find another way to attract customers into their stores. So while Jamie Oliver busied himself with teaching the public how to cook in his own programmes, Sainsbury's hijacked the idea and created short snippets of advertisements featuring Jamie Oliver offering recipes in 20-second commercials. In one of these, Jamie advertises British asparagus, and instead of boiling it or steaming it, he introduces grilled asparagus to his audience, served with olive oil and parmesan cheese. The 20-second commercial led to a 290% increase in the sales of asparagus (Brook 2005); so great was the effect that British farmers were unable to meet the demand and Sainsbury's had to source asparagus from Peru.

I attended a debate at the Real Food Festival held at Earl's Court in 2008, where one of the questions raised was whether or not we want celebrity chefs dictating what we eat. The response from the crowd was mixed. While some shook their heads and booed, others waved their hands in the air and shouted yes. While some might say that Jamie Oliver has a positive effect on making people return to their kitchens and cook, others criticize the way celebrity chefs dictate what we eat. While my feelings on the subject are mixed, what is clear is that the media has a strong influencing power over the public despite their contradictory messages.

Jamie, Britain and British Food

In March 2008, news of Prince Harry fighting in Afghanistan broke out; footage of the prince eating army rations pulled at the heart-strings of the British public. The prince reported that the Mo-D issue ration packs were miserable and appealed to Jamie Oliver to help revamp army food. “Bangers and mash with gravy, in a bag, would be brilliant, awesome. Please, Jamie” the Prince pleaded. (Ungoed and Bingham 2008)

When Swiss soldiers fighting away from home in the 17th century were medically diagnosed with nostalgia, a trip back to the Alps was one of the recommended remedies to cure the disease. Today, for many displaced people – soldiers, refugees, immigrants – food is home away from home. Like Proust's *madeleine* that transports him back to his childhood, taste is a vehicle that bridges time and space. Often settlers in a foreign country will establish ways of importing food products from their

homeland and create communities within a foreign city – Chinatown in Leicester Square, Japanese town in North London, Brick Lane, New Malden, Edgware Road are merely a few examples in London. Although curry has been rumoured to be the British national dish, or the most popular, the dishes that represent Britain are still undoubtedly fish and chips and bangers and mash. Prince Harry pining for bangers and mash in Afghanistan is longing for the taste that reminds him of home.

Bangers and mash to the British is perhaps what steak and chips is to the French, as mentioned at the end of the last chapter. Barthes (2000) in his semiotic analysis of steak and chips, writes, “Like wine, steak is in France a basic element, nationalized even more than socialized ... it is a French possession (circumscribed today, it is true, by the invasion of American steaks)... hardly abroad, he (the Frenchman) feels nostalgic for it” (Barthes 2000: 63). National dishes offer the common script for individual longing; they unite disparate individuals and provide a common ground on which to talk about home. They form part of the discourse of the nation, and “follow the index of patriotic values.” Barthes writes, “it [steak] helps them to rise in wartime, it is the very flesh of the French soldier” (Barthes 2000: 63). If this is the case, one might imagine what a meal of bangers and mash would do for the morale of British soldiers away from home and understand the context in which the Prince made the request to Jamie.

While relatively straightforward connections can be drawn between Prince Harry's request, the experiences of 17th century Swiss soldiers and nostalgia, the case of British food opens up an interesting set of questions about nationalism. The British culture is not known for its gastronomic achievements, but many British subjects

defend themselves by saying that they are open to different cuisines (“unlike the French for example” as many would say), and that this is a reflection of their “openness” towards other cultures. Nevertheless, it is currently possible to observe a resurgence of interest in British cuisine and in traditional dishes within the country (sceptics would ask whether the term “British cuisine” in fact constitutes a contradiction) such as pig's trotters and jellied ham. There is also a more pronounced presence of people defending British dishes and produce. In the media, Rick Stein for example has made a series called *Food Heroes* in which he travelled all around Britain to create awareness of the quality produce this island offers. Even supermarkets celebrate British produce by adorning their packaged goods with the Union Jack. Many customers attracted by the vague reference to local production happily put the carrots and the Union Jack in their trolleys.

While this aspect of the rhetoric of food oscillates between “buy local” and “buy British”, the implications of the two are quite different. The discourse that surrounds “buy local” focuses on sourcing and supporting local production; the concern is (supposedly) about reducing carbon emissions from unnecessary transportation as well as helping independent farmers and growers. “Local” is geographically relative, it indicates the proximity of wherever you are at; the logic is therefore “why buy apples from Chile in September when it is harvest season in the U.K.?” “Buy British” on the other hand, invokes a certain kind of nationalism. While “buy local” is perhaps apolitical, “buy British” could potentially be alluded to as separatism.

Boym distinguishes between two types of nostalgia – reflective and restorative.

While reflective nostalgia emphasizes the *algia* – the longing, restorative nostalgia

thrives on the *nostos* – homecoming. Restorative nostalgia attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home, it thinks of itself as truth and tradition (Boym 2001: xviii). National memory, for example, plays on restorative nostalgia, with the notion of home or homeland creating an imagined community that is based on exclusion rather than inclusion (Anderson 2003). Restorative nostalgia feeds on a discourse of “us against them”, and as Boym points out, revolves around two main narrative plots: the restoration of origins and the conspiracy theory, extreme cases of which can be expressed as forms of contemporary nationalism fed on right-wing popular culture (Boym 2001: 43).

As truth and tradition hold the key to the reconstruction of the imagined home and ritualistic homecoming, they become symbolic and sacred in restorative nostalgia. “Tradition ... is to be restored with a nearly apocalyptic vengeance” (Boym 2001: 41). Like Hobsbawm's invented traditions, truth and tradition in this context are unyielding to change. Ritualistic repetition becomes a process of formalization, it is therefore not accommodating to changes. Traditional dishes for example, are very unforgiving to variations. Claiming to cook traditional dishes therefore always runs the risk of invoking the criticism of not being “proper”. Even Jamie, the home-grown Essex boy, refuses to serve Cornish pasties in the restaurant Fifteen in Cornwall for fear of upsetting people who might think his recipe is not proper (French 2006). In *Jamie at Home* Series 1 Episode 7 Jamie cooks up a “cross between a Spanish omelette and a frittata dish”; of which, when he presents it to the audience, he says, “that's not authentic Spanish, if I went up to a Spaniard, he would give me a little (slap) Olay.” In the following episode, he makes a spicy pork goulash and as he presents the dish, he makes a vague reference to nationality, saying it's “Hungarian-

y” rather than identifying it as a traditional Hungarian goulash.

While cooking, buying or sourcing British could be seen merely in terms of the changing trends of consumer culture, I would like to suggest hypothetically the possibility of regarding this change from another angle, in which it takes on a slightly more sinister aspect.

While writing the May entries of my field notes, I realized that I had neglected to acknowledge the variety of foods represented in Borough Market. While Spanish hams, Italian olives and French cheeses feature largely in the market, continental produce is seen to be a mark of quality. Other stalls such as Neal's Yard Dairy, which sells only English cheeses, thrives on the community of those looking specifically for British produce. Chegworth Valley, the stall I work for, is also held to be representative of local production. Many British customers who come to the stall are happy to find that the apples that we sell are all locally grown in Kent and that we offer British varieties of apples – Cox's, Bramley's and Egremont Russets, which date back to the Victorian period. Every week I have had satisfied customers telling me that there is nothing better than a “good, old English” pear or apple. In Borough Market, food rarely comes without a flag. (see fieldnotes in Chapter 3 Borough Market II)

As I recounted earlier, the Topolski stall hung up the Polish red-and-white flag to cheer for their country's football team on its successful qualification for the Euro 2008 tournament. Unlike Western Europe or more specifically, continental Western Europe, Poland is not well known for its food. The Topolski stall in Borough Market

attracts tourists and locals alike to their different varieties of sausages. As Polish people migrate to the U.K., they bring along their cuisine and introduce the British public to their country's flavours. The Topolski stall is always packed with people reaching over for tasters, intrigued by the new varieties of sausages that Polish food has to offer. Polish food appears to have become the new exotic. The article published in the *International Herald Tribune* featuring the Topolski girls – three Polish girls selling Polish sausages – created quite a stir in the market. The article is titled “Poles start moving up the economic ladder in Britain” (Werdigier 2007). Although the article does not focus on the stall's food as such, the presence of a Polish stand in Borough Market is nevertheless treated as an indication of the upwardly mobile trend of Polish immigrants. The Topolski food stand represents more than just the arrival of a new variety of quality goods; its significance lies in the fact that an immigrant culture has made it into the mainstream. Like Chinatown in Leicester Square or Korean Town in New Malden, the Topolski stall is a mark of success and is becoming attractive to local tourists.

Prior to Poland joining the European Union in 2004, there had been very little coverage of Polish immigrants in the media, even though the agricultural industry in Britain has relied heavily upon these migrant workers for a long time. During the harvest season in particular, seasonal workers are employed to help deal with the extra workloads of British farmers. Almost all of the full-time workers on the Chegworth Valley farm come from Poland, with the exception of a few Bulgarians and Byelorussians. In September, which is the harvest season, an extra 30 to 40 workers come from Eastern Europe to pick apples. I asked David, the owner of the farm, if he had ever considered hiring British workers; he replied that it is very

difficult to employ locally as manual labour remains a rather undesirable job; and many, even if they do want the work, lack the knowledge, experience and dedication. In contrast, Polish workers are experienced and generally known to have a “good” work ethic; on the whole they remain very desirable employees.

While the Home Office reported that migrant workers account for an additional £6 billion a year for the British Economy (Werdigier 2007) the Immigration Minister Liam Byrne was simultaneously trying to introduce a points system in order to restrict and control large-scale immigration, claiming that it was unsettling the country and increasing poverty by putting strain on the nation’s welfare system (Ford 2007). In Borough Market, as enthusiastic customers celebrate the novelty of Polish sausages, many at the same time make remarks about the “invasion” of Polish immigrants. One Saturday, while I was serving behind the till in the Chegworth Valley stall in the market, I heard a customer complaining loudly, asking if there were any English people at all in the stall. My boss Ben had left to run some errands and only myself (a Chinese immigrant) and two other Polish workers were present in the stall. As he stormed up to the till and pushed away the other customers, he demanded to know if I spoke English.

The incident reminded me of Paul Gilroy’s work on multiculturalism: he asks “what critical perspectives might nurture the abilities and the desire to live with difference on an increasingly divided but also convergent planet?” (Gilroy 2004: 3). Indeed what attitude must we have towards the question of immigration raised and reflected by our food practices? If one celebrates the diversity of different foods one can find in the U.K., one must also recognise that this is partly a result of colonisation and

migration. What does “buy local” or even “buy British” mean if the fact that the agricultural industry relies on foreign labour is neglected? Celebrating the variety of Polish sausages in Borough Market pays lip service to cosmopolitanism, but by categorizing the foreign as exotic one neglects to address the wider implications of immigration and integration. In order to truly celebrate variety, cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism, Gilroy reminds us that

we need to consider whether the scale upon which sameness and difference are calculated might be altered productively so that the strangeness of strangers goes out of focus and other dimensions of a basic sameness can be acknowledged and made significant. (Gilroy 2004: 3)

When the Immigration Minister Liam Byrne proposed to introduce a points system to restrict immigration, the policy sparked debates all over the country. Phone-in lines were set up on various radio and television shows; many who supported the policy left comments that were covertly racist, vaguely disguised within the context of protecting the “local”. The attitude towards the other, within the context of multiculturalism, remains trapped within the discourse of “risk and jeopardy” (Gilroy 2004). In the *Times* article titled “High Immigration is harming Britain’s poor, says Minister” (Ford 2007) the majority of the comments are in favour of introducing a stricter policy towards immigration. One comment in particular sums up many of the concerns voiced; TR from Leicester writes,

the policy of letting anyone into the UK is not only beginning

to change the demography of the UK, but also the delicate balance that only the UK can boast about and multiculturalism that thrives in the UK. It's time we started to say "no". Other European countries do it, why can't we? It's time to start kicking out those who have overstayed their welcome and those who have managed to sneak in under false pretences. The latest influx from Eastern Europe is not helping. Does anyone in government predict what will happen once Bulgaria and Albania join the EU? This has to stop. And giving out handouts to everyone who is not a British National must also stop. Come on UK, wake up...look after your own nationals for a change (Ford 2007)

What is shocking is that TR's comment is not unique; his concerns resound in many of the immigration debates that have been taking place recently. Many engage in a discourse of "us" versus "them", nationals versus immigrants. A battle of contemporary nationalism is taking place, a Manichaeian battle of good versus evil. The "others" are represented as welfare-snatching parasites, they have "sneaked in under false pretences" and the call has gone up to take care of "your own". As with Boym's restorative nostalgia, these cases of contemporary nationalism seek to erase the complexity of history and the specificities of modern circumstances. The drive to eliminate the foreign is undertaken in the name of preserving the British culture – of protecting and restoring home, tradition and values. Nationalists like TR see their imagined homeland as under siege.

Polish immigrants before 2004 did not appear as a threat in the public discourse; after Poland joined the European Union, however, the fear of Polish invasion became more pronounced. The perceived imminent threat appears to have arisen with both increasing numbers of immigrants and the social mobility these immigrants have gained through language. Derrida's example of Socrates asking to be treated like a foreigner in the courts makes the point that having the mark of a "foreigner" allows one to ask for respect in the house of the host. Socrates therefore puts his case forward not as a citizen of Athens but as a foreigner, strange and unfamiliar to the courtroom and the language of the courts. "If I were a foreigner ... you would tolerate not only my accent, my voice, my elocution, but the turns of phrase in my spontaneous, original, idiomatic rhetoric. There is thus a foreigners' right, a right of hospitality for foreigners." (Derrida 2000: 19) The case is exemplified in the example of Polish immigrants: the initial lack of language, i.e. the mark of a foreigner, allowed them entry into and hospitality in Britain. The irony is that as soon as they have acquired the language of the host, in this case, English, rather than being able to cross the remaining threshold and be integrated, equalised as it were in the sense of *hospes*, their foreignness becomes more pronounced and their hospitality is denied, as they are increasingly regarded as a threat. Immigrants, now under the rhetoric of restorative nostalgia, are not regarded as foreigners, for there is a certain level of tolerance for the strangeness of foreigners within the notion and ethos of hospitality; rather they are now treated under the sign of the absolute other, as savages or barbarians.

The angry customer who was in search of "an English person" in the stall was frustrated by the heavily-accented English that the Polish workers had; he did not

tolerate their foreignness nor did he regard them and treat them with the tolerance and politeness of a host. In Derrida's terms he did not treat the Polish workers as foreigners, but as the absolute other, the barbarian. Perhaps for him, as for TR from Leicester, immigrants and multiculturalism are seen to be threats to the British culture. In restorative nostalgia, this could run the risk of being manipulated into extremist nationalism, fed on right-wing popular culture.

As people's interest returns to producing and eating British, the discourse of tradition hovers on the horizon. While not necessarily constituting a threat, Hobsbawm's "invented traditions" and Boym's restorative nostalgia remind us that the undertones of nationalism must be treated with care. The recent debate on immigration sees a new wave of concern in Britain and as more and more Eastern European countries join the European Union, immigrants from these countries are increasingly represented as a threat. While the particular topic of immigration is not the central theme of discussion in this thesis, it is a central aspect of my overall approach that different aspects of the ethical problems posed by contemporary food production and consumption cannot be dealt with in isolation – hence the issues surrounding immigration, brought into focus through the encounters I have had while working in the field, do need to be addressed. The celebration of multi-cultural foods that England offers cannot be detached from the complexity of a country's history. Nor can the dependency on migrant labour be detached from the modern circumstances of food production. Celebrating ethnic foods does not take the strangeness away from strangers nor does it offer a point of integration (although it holds such potential). Gilroy states,

we need to know what sorts of insight and reflection might actually help increasingly differentiated societies and anxious individuals to cope successfully with the challenges involved in dwelling comfortably in proximity to the unfamiliar without becoming fearful and hostile (Gilroy 2004).¹⁶

¹⁶ Gilroy's work is introduced in Angela McRobbie's book *The Uses of Cultural Studies* where she reads his work as a movement towards "the possibility of eventually moving beyond race" (2006: 61) (contrary to Chrisman 2000) and she describes his style as confronting "easy complicities which lead to closure and racial fixity" (2006: 41). While this piece of research might not cover a lot of grounds on the established discussions of race and nationality, the approach of "moving beyond" is certainly a recurrent theme in this thesis, and for the reasons stated by McRobbie, I felt that Gilroy's work is suited to this chapter.

Chapter 5: Borough Market III Slow Eating, Ginger Pig and Mute

13th March 2008

Today I went by Borough Market and met some friends who worked in the bakery. Over the past few months, we had become better acquainted and always socialised after work. When the final customer walked away and the cleaning was done, traders gathered around in the alleyways for drinks and chatted away on makeshift chairs. As we made ourselves comfortable on the wooden crates and sipped our drinks, a man came and joined the group. I did not recognise him and thought he looked too well-dressed to be a fellow trader. At this time of the year, traders who worked in the market wore many layers to ward off the winter chills – this man wore only a shirt and a smart leather jacket. He introduced himself and it turned out that he was the owner of the bakery. After a while he struck up a conversation with me and asked what I did the rest of the week when I was not working in the market. I explained that I was a PhD student, wrote about food in London and expressed my interest in the Slow Food Movement.

He demonstrated little interest in the subject of food, which surprised me since his business seemed to be predicated upon producing quality organic bread which corresponded at least in part to the concerns of the Slow Food Movement. He admitted that he had once been a member of Slow Food but had quickly left the movement. I asked him why and he flared up and said with gusto, “Because it's just

ideas!” He stamped the ground and continued, “People need this, something concrete, ideas don't do anything, they don't pay the bills”. Over the course of the evening, I continued to argue that ideas were important, that ideas brought about change and I challenged his belief that having an organic bakery in Borough Market was the answer to ethical consumption. M. was adamant in his way of thinking, even more so after a few drinks. I could not find coherence in his argument: he kept repeating that he (and not someone with ideas) was the one who created a bakery and that his successful business kept his workers employed and provided “good bread” for the public. I was furious that I could not get him to see that Borough Market was a very exclusive market but at the same time I found it hard to argue against him – I was lost for words.

Before he left that evening, M. left me with his business plan. He said that his next step would be to collaborate with major supermarkets and sell his bread with them. I was in disbelief; surely supermarkets should be avoided at all costs! M. said he was going to change them “from the inside” but I was quite sceptical of one man's ability to change the way multinational corporations operated. In the end a pound was put on his word and retrospectively, I thought I should have put more money on the bet for I was certain the chances of it happening were quite slim.

22 March 2008 Easter weekend

It was a very cold day, a typical day of early Spring perhaps, with a wintry wind blowing through the gates of Borough Market, then came the hail, then sleet, then snow and finally the sun; it would almost seem that Winter was making one final

attempt to remind us of its glory before Spring finally took over, auguring in a wonderful 6 months before we would have to worry about the cold again.

The conversation with M. that evening haunted me; it was in effect a reality check, and it confirmed my suspicion that the people behind the business were focused on going where the money flows. I was almost certain that not all the stalls in Borough Market would go as far as wanting to sell out to supermarkets but ultimately, as Andrew (from my stall) stated in reference to our “big boss” David, it was all about “money, money, money”. At the same time I could not help but wonder what would happen if small producers did exert enough pressure to make supermarkets change: what would our consumptive future look like then?

I was curious about what the people working for M. thought of him. Stefan, who worked at the bakery also ran a community garden in Hainault. He came to our stall every Saturday “until his trees start bearing fruit” he said. Stefan knew a great deal about farming and the Forest Farm Peace Garden project that he worked for used food growing as a tool to help members of marginalised communities such as asylum-seekers, mental health service users and victims of torture reintegrate into society. I had been to his allotment and had been impressed by the nature and scale of his work. I valued his opinion. When I recounted the conversation I had had with M. that evening, Stefan frowned and said that he doubted M.'s business strategy would work. He went on to say that if people could find apricot and walnut bread in supermarkets, why would they come to this market to get their bread? The interest would simply not be there any more. I agreed with Stefan but I realized disappointingly that the existence of supermarkets and farmers' markets were linked.

I reflected on the way I had been doing my own grocery shopping since I began working in the market and I realized that the products I chose to buy from the market were those that I knew I would not be able to find in supermarkets: “fancy” varieties of bread, certain cuts of meat and of course fruit from my own stall; what if supermarkets did stock these products and were selling them for less? Would I still be shopping in the market (especially without the market discount)?

17th May 2008

After 2 weeks of glorious sunshine, the weather finally broke. Clouds gathered threateningly above London and it appeared that many potential customers had decided to sit this Saturday out. On days such as this, fruit sales were usually low. In the afternoon, the rhythm slowly picked up as tourists trailed in. Many were tempted by a glass of juice to accompany their sandwiches. During lunchtime, it became rather busy, queues started to form in different directions and Ben came to give me a hand at the till. I served cup after cup of juice, my motions and speech becoming robotic: repeatedly taking cups, filling them with juice and taking money. After the rush, Ben inspected the crates of apples and realized that not a lot of fruit had been sold. I confirmed his observation and noted that for the past two hours, I had only sold juice. Ben sighed and said “it’s all about the tourists now isn’t it, they come to do their thing, take some photos, have a coffee at Monmouth and they go home”.

Although I had always been sceptical in such a way of Borough Market, it seemed odd that Ben would make such a comment. He had always been a defender of the market, slow to anger, patient with customers and always happy to be getting the business. So it came as a surprise to hear that even he was annoyed with the number

of tourists that the market was receiving. By tourists, I do not only mean travellers. Borough market has established itself as a tourist attraction for travellers and locals alike. "Tourists" is a term used by traders usually to refer to people who come irregularly. Because tourists are passers-by, they are often not interested in buying the produce, rather they are drawn to immediately consumable products. Over the years, Chegworth Valley has learned to cater for the changing clientèle, and brought in warmers and coolers to sell hot and cold juices throughout the year. From my experience, the £1.50 cups appeared to constitute the majority of the Saturday income. The tin box which we used as a till filled up gradually as the day went on: occasionally on a very good day, the tin was filled to its brim.

It was generally considered that shoppers who wished to do part or all of their grocery shopping in Borough Market came in the mornings. Regular shoppers usually arrived before 11am to beat the crowds – sometimes they appeared later during the day, hurriedly going through their shopping to make up for lost time, murmuring as they paid their bills how sorry they were for staying out late the night before. These shoppers avoided Borough Market like the plague on Saturday afternoons; they said the crowd made it terribly difficult to do their shopping and almost impossible to push their prams and trolleys through the throngs of people. Saturday mornings were completely different – then it was a family friendly space: the alleyways were still wide and empty enough for children to run around without the danger of running into people. Shoppers could park their trolleys in the shop while they chose their fruit and chatted to traders. The atmosphere was relaxed and friendly. I also preferred the mornings and looked forward to seeing my regular shoppers; over time I had become better acquainted with them. I listened to their

stories, their holiday experiences, I met their families, I observed families go through their first pregnancy and I shared their joy when they finally brought their child for their first visit to the market. The conversation might not be very lengthy or deep, but market banter made the space personal and familiar. Most importantly, at least from my point of view, it was the element of human interaction that made the experience unique, not objects. I understood why shoppers like Peter, Lindsay and Kevin travel from St. Albans and Cambridge to Borough Market every Saturday, not because they could not find the produce anywhere else, but because they felt that they are part of the neighbourhood.

At the beginning of my fieldwork, I took it for granted that regulars came in the mornings and tourists in the afternoons. But lately I had been wondering if that was not just an indication of how the market had slowly changed over the years. Old-timers who had worked in the market for more than 5 years always told me how different the market was back when they started; for a start, there were less ready-made goods and more regular shoppers. I wonder if, like the grey squirrels in London, the tourists were the ones driving away the regular shoppers, forcing stallholders to cater for more ready-made foods, changing Borough market into a Harrod's variety food hall rather than a traditional market.

8th 9th April 2008 (Spring)

Slow Eating

Catherine, a fellow trader in Borough Market, was a member of the Slow Food Movement. She invited Stefan and I along to the series of talks that the London Colloquium organised. I was intrigued since I had yet to participate in a Slow Food event. From a list of talks on Trappist beers, balsamic vinegar, saffron, etc., we decided to attend a talk that was titled The Art of Slow Eating.

The day came and I went along with eager anticipation. The talk was held in a shop called the Natural Kitchen, which was just off Baker Street. As I got off the public transport and battled my way through the throngs of people in Marylebone, I wondered what kind of meeting it would be and what kind of people would attend. I made the final turn into Marylebone High Street and I knew before I even looked at the street sign that I was in the “right” neighbourhood. A quiet beautiful street away from the screams of sirens, Marylebone High Street was gently humming with activity. The first shop I saw was the Conran shop, with a beautiful dark awning and a display case full of fantastically colourful designer gadgets. Rustic cafés, dainty patisseries and other boutique shops dotted the pavement. Well-dressed pedestrians were idling round coffee shops and pubs, quietly chatting away. As I walked along, what struck me was the quietness of the whole street; it was not a deadly silence as one would find in deserted streets. It was, in fact, quite a busy street, with lots of shops and people strolling along, but the noises were subdued; a gentle and polite hum of activity, quite unlike the main streets of London or the banter in Borough

Market to which I was accustomed.

I finally arrived at the Natural Kitchen and the subdued quietness seemed to continue in the shop. After paying a £5 entry fee for the talk, I was directed up the stairs where the event was to be held. I trod softly, well aware that the rubber soles of my boots were squeaking. It was interesting to note that on the Natural Kitchen homepage, their first questions were “Whatever happened to the thrill and excitement of food shopping? “Where did the animation and bustle of traditional markets disappear to?” and it was according to these laments that the Natural Kitchen was set up. Writing about the experience, I could only say that the shop itself was as sterile an environment as one could possibly imagine. Rows of pretty jars and packages lined the shelves, beautifully packaged and cleanly wrapped. I wondered how the appeal of markets could be recreated in a boutique shop where everything was so hermetically sealed.

The room was quite empty as I arrived early and I saw it was set up for no more than 30 people. It was a good sign I thought, as it means that I would get a chance to meet the people who attended the talk. The first woman I met was someone who was familiar with my work. Dana, was also writing about Slow Food in the department of Sociology in Lancaster. Before our conversation got any further another woman sitting in front of us turned round and introduced herself. Katrina was young and articulate, dressed as colourfully as the jars I saw in the shop. She was a self-declared foodie and said she was keen to find out more about how to eat slowly. Foodie was a word that I have become very familiar with, yet I hesitated to classify myself as one. Most self-declared foodies I have met were only interested in the taste of food; they

could go on for hours talking about a piece of steak, or a recipe they had before but the discussion rarely went beyond their own palette or plate. Maybe I had become too sceptical over the past years working on this project; I reminded myself that I should keep my mind open and try and meet as many people as possible that evening.

The room slowly started to fill up and a bowl of raw carrots was passed round in preparation for the talk. At 6:30 pm the talk began and the speaker introduced himself. Harish Chavda worked in IT prior to establishing himself as a preacher of slow eating. He explained how one day, while chomping on his lunch in front of the computer at work, he came to realize that he was suffering from “hurry sickness”. “Hurry sickness” he said, was a disease of the modern way of life, I nodded to myself as I too believed that Slow Food was a response to the increased speed of life which I equated with Harvey’s “time-space compression”. Unfortunately, that seemed to be the extent of my agreement that evening. The tone of the talk was quickly set as Chavda introduced us to his “friend” Tom – a stuffed toy monkey who Chavda held as our human opposite: unlike us, Tom was in tune with nature, flexible and apparently practiced yoga. Polite laughter followed. The talk lasted an hour and by the end he concluded with a final comment “I am not saying anything new, I am just re-educating you to eat your food slowly. Focus on your food and chew”. As much as I kept an open mind, the “talk” was still hugely disappointing. Slow eating, as it were, was nothing more than taking time to chew your food. There was no evidence of research in his speech, the slightest question would unravel any points he had tried to make. His recommendation was to read Mireille Guiliano’s book about eating slowly. *Why French Women Don’t Get Fat* according to the speaker was the

only book that has been written about the way we eat.

Although the talk was as disappointing as the shop below, what was quite interesting was the experience of it. I had chosen to sit on the side so that I could observe the people who attended the talk. It was a mixture of young and middle-aged couples and friends, predominantly white, well dressed and, presumably, middle class. I came to this conclusion after a certain moment in the evening when Chavda suggested that we should avoid drinking liquids while eating as this would cause our gastric juices to dilute. Immediately, a middle aged grey haired man spoke up indignantly “How could one not have a decent bottle of wine with any decent meal?” Chavda was at a loss and quickly mended his speech. “Slow eating is a recommended practice”, he said, “you can do it when you can.” Another question quickly followed by a middle aged lady, “What would you say to a diet plan that recommends drinking a light soup before the meal,” she asked, “not a heavy chunky soup, but a light clear soup”. As soon as the question left her mouth, a few knowing nods followed in the audience, people helpfully added that this kind of soup was called a “consommé”. My ears perked up as it reminded me of a recent show I have seen on television. Jamie Oliver was demonstrating how to make a tomato consommé and I distinctly remembered that he winced as the word “consommé” left his mouth. “Consommé is such a pretty name,” he said “something you get in fancy restaurants”. Although I was vaguely aware of the name, I had yet to be in a restaurant where they served “consommé” on the menu.

At one point during the talk, Chavda said that we need to break the work rhythm characterized by efficiency and productivity when we returned home so that we did

not carry on that sense of hurriedness when we ate our meal. He suggested praying as a method and said that it could be used as a trigger to turn our minds away from the tempo of our daily lives. Prayer did not have to be religious, he explained, it could be just a little note of gratitude to the people who produced our foods, “Thanks to Tesco” he said, “for the carrots we ate at the beginning of the talk”. I almost choked on my piece of carrot. It was not because of where the carrots came from, but the complete lack of criticality towards food production caught me by surprise. In an event hosted by an organisation that took its stance in opposition to homogenised production, giving thanks to Tesco seemed inappropriate.

We were then given a handout of laminated sheets of instructions on how to eat slowly. A section on mindful eating triggered my interest as it suggested eating food with awareness, but the awareness that Chavda promoted seemed to be restricted to that of our physiological senses, namely of touch, taste, smell, look and sounds. The bowl was passed round again and we ended the talk with an exercise of savouring another piece of carrot with our eyes closed.

My patience was wearing thin and I was hoping for an engaging discussion at the end of the talk, but to my surprise, everyone left hurriedly, with the exception of a few who wanted a few more tips on dieting. Dana, tried to engage Sylvia, the organiser of the event and leader of the London Slow Food *convivium*, with a few questions, but she politely explained that she had a lot of work to do and also made her exit. I have never felt so cheated of £5 before. I realized that the critics of Slow Food had reason to be critical. There was no political engagement, no interest in the paradigms of food consumption, no sense of community and certainly no interest in anyone else

except in the individuals themselves.

After the talk, Catherine, Stefan and I invited Katrina along to a pub. Katrina was fascinated with our work in the market and enthusiastically told us her business plan (inspired by the Slow Food Movement) of opening a community café that served quality fair trade foods where people could meet for a chat. Stefan, Catherine and I listened and invited her to come along to Borough Market whenever she wanted. I noticed how when Stefan and Catherine talked about the market, it was always in a matter of fact way. Katrina reminded me of myself at the beginning of my fieldwork, enthusiastic but misled by many romantic ideas. My fieldwork in the market was a reality check for me and corrected many of those misconceptions; I became more wary and critical although I was still enthusiastic about my work.

Ginger Pig

It had become the norm for Saturdays to end with drinks in the market. As a trader, it signalled the end of the working day, but for a researcher, evening conversations provided a rich source of information, anecdotes and good opportunities to meet people. I became acquainted with some butchers who worked at the Ginger Pig in the market and they invited me to spend a day working with them. I immediately took up their offer and arrived bright and early to start my first day as a trainee. I was not a vegetarian but I was well aware that my experience of handling raw meat was limited to already cleaned and prepared pieces from the shops. Paul, the manager of the stall, welcomed me warmly and gave me my uniform. I quickly finished my espresso and put on the clean white jacket and the apron of the Ginger Pig. I was then introduced to Nathen with whom I was going to train that day. He was very kind and patient and asked if I was comfortable with blood. Try as I might I only managed a weak smile and my arms were shaking; half due to the extra caffeine dose that morning but more so due to nerves. It was one thing selling apples and pears, but another to be handling meat.

Paul busied himself with another trainee but left me with some advice “don't worry about the meat,” he said, “we can fix the meat but we can't fix you, so watch out for your fingers”. I was both relieved and more nervous at the same time: relieved to know that my mistakes would not incur damages to the shop; but nervous as I looked at the wall from which the gleaming blades of the knives and saws hung. Nathen was already bringing full carcasses of lamb and was putting them onto the meat table. I was going to start with learning how to break lambs down. I felt the weight of the

dead animal on my shoulders as I carried the carcass from the cold store and noticed how my clean white gown was already stained with blood. My heart jumped a little but the smell was not overbearing; staring down at the carcass, I reminded myself that I was there to train as a butcher. Nathen was very patient with me and showed me how to break off the first quarter of the animal. Then, it was my turn; I followed his instructions and marked the place where I needed to cut. I familiarized myself with manoeuvring the long blade of the saw while trying to steady the animal with my other hand. Nathen watched as I concentrated and pulled the saw backwards and forwards until the fore-quarter finally came off. I thought everyone else was busying themselves with their own tasks, but as I made my first successful cut, they all turned round, laughed and said they have found themselves a butcher. I realized that despite their invitation and warm welcome, there was certain scepticism of having a young woman in a traditionally male dominated trade.

Butchering was a very physical task, but one that required a lot of precision too.

Nathen was at once a samurai and a surgeon, wielding his knives with strength and accuracy. Needless to say, I was clumsier: my cuts were less clean and I struggled to use the heavy cleaver single-handedly. I noticed how Paul and Nathen's hands were scarred, Paul had in fact cut his fingers earlier on and was bleeding through his bandage into his plastic gloves; but he was still running about, happy to have some new trainees in the shop. Paul was very experienced and started butchery when he was 14 years old; while some shops offer meat carving courses at considerable prices, Paul offered his knowledge freely, and believed that it was more important to educate people about meat than to use it as an opportunity for profit. It was Tuesday, a quiet day in the market as most stalls were not open, but Paul and his team worked

everyday to prepare cuts of meat for the weekend. That morning 13 lambs and pigs had been delivered to the shop for preparation. I had lost count of how many animals I cut; by early afternoon, my concentration was waning and I had forgotten to watch the blade for a split second. I felt the cold tip sink into my fingers and saw blood already coming out from the cut. I put the knife down and quickly moved away from the meat; the professional knives were amazingly sharp, more than any domestic kitchen knives I had used before. It was luckily only a very shallow cut. I excused myself from the table and quickly went to clean my wound. As I ran around the market looking for an open toilet, I passed by my friends at the bakery and showed them my wound, proud that I have made my first cut. I felt like a war veteran and showed off my wounds “from the field” as it were. I returned to the Ginger Pig after cleaning my wound and found some plasters, following Paul's example, put on a rubber glove to avoid contaminating the meat.

I returned to the table and continued with my tasks. Lamb racks, cutlets, bone and shoulder joints, shanks, loin, I slowly learnt how to prepare each of these cuts. The names were familiar but I had been so alienated from the process of meat production that I had no idea which part of the animals they came from. The racks of lamb that I enjoyed from the other side of the counter had to be French trimmed, which meant that the bones had to be stripped clean to make them presentable. Any leftover pieces of meat from the trimmings were kept for mincing and I was impressed at how little we had to throw away. The Ginger Pig had to pay £25 for every bin of bones they threw away so waste was strictly limited to bones that could not be reused or sold.

Nathen comes from Australia and told me that his parents used to be butchers; he

grew up on a farm and learnt how to cut meat from an early age. His mother was retired due to severe tendonitis and his father who was in semi-retirement worked part-time for a supermarket. I was surprised and asked what his father thought of the change. Nathen said his father was initially quite shocked since the meat already came cleaned and cut so the butchering was very different. I wondered what that meant in terms the variety of cuts and resulting waste. Nathen was very professional when he worked, he talked quietly and was patient when he taught, because of that I felt I needed to match his professionalism and held on to the many questions I had for later.

We finally finished with the lamb and moved onto pork; Nathen explained that the anatomy of the animals was very similar, so the preparation was not that different. Instead of preparing racks as we did with the lamb, the ribs of the pigs were used for spare ribs and as I again brought the knife to the meat I struggled to remember all the things I have learnt that day. I was humbled to see the skills, the knowledge, workmanship and strength of these butchers and embarrassed at my own lack of knowledge of meat. I realized once again how alienated we are from the production of food and ignorant of the work that goes into producing a piece of simple pork chop.

It was finally 4:30pm and Paul said that we had done enough for the day. As they busied themselves with clearing up the tables, I was excused and allowed to go and take a rest. I made myself useful by going to fetch drinks from the corner shop and by the time I came back, the worktops and the floor were clean. Paul invited everyone for a drink and inquired if I had had a good time. I was very enthusiastic

and keen to go back for more, if I was wanted of course. Paul and Nathen both agreed that it was a good start and so the deal was sealed. I was amazed at the generosity of these butchers, they did not ask me anything when I started, nor did they make me promise that I would go back continuously, I could have been just a passer-by who wanted to pretend to be a butcher for the day. Paul said that it did not matter, if anyone wanted to learn, he would teach. Paul had an amazing 37 years of experience under his belt and had worked with Alain Ducasse and other top chefs of the 20th Century. His knowledge of meat and teachings of butchery could make any butcher fit to work in the West End but he did not brag, he loved his trade and was happy to share what he knew.

As the market closed, other traders slowly gathered together at the Ginger Pig. It was a normal day with no prior arrangements, but people inadvertently passed by and stopped for a chat. Paul was a story-teller, he did not stop telling stories all evening about people he had worked with or customers he had served. I finally left at 9:30 in the evening with two bandaged fingers as proof of my path of initiation and left Paul and a few others to work through the beers and exchange stories.

When I first started working in the market, I thought the experience would be a good opportunity to learn about the customers, their way of life and their attitude towards food. As time went on, I realized the richest source of information and knowledge did not come from the customers, but from the traders. People who worked in the market, worked and live with food. It was a way of life for them; they did not call themselves foodies, nor were they necessarily members of food clubs, but they knew their produce and were involved in the process of production. Their meticulous

attention to the food they prepared was not limited to their own plates or palettes, but to a wider network of food growers and animal rearers. A batch of veal arrived a few days later and Paul saw that the meat was bruised. He refused to sell them as veal chops which he could sell at a much higher price and said it was only fit for making mince. The bruising did not occur during transportation but from when the animals were alive. He was angry at the way the calves were treated and refused to source any more meat from this provider. Was this not what eco-gastronomy was about? Slow Food stated that the plate and the planet was connected and called their members eco-gastronomes, but the experience of going to the Slow Food event indicated that members seemed to care no further than their own plates, guts and bodies. There was not even the desire to take the time to learn more about each other or foster a community. As I reflected on the two polarized experiences of the past week, I realized that I had made a good decision to search for the ethics of slow food outside of the organisation. As the months went by, friends of mine noticed how I had become more critical of the movement; Slow Food I realized had the potential to become something wonderful but as far as local movements were concerned, my experience had been disappointing.

1st July 2008

Mute Event: Feeding Frenzy? A discussion on Food, Fuel and Finance.

A talk was organised by Mute magazine on the topic of food, fuel and finance. The title of the talk seemed to promise a politically engaged discussion and the panel consisted of an eclectic mix of writers, perma-culture punk and environmental activists. The venue was at a site called the Church House in the East End of London. Everything seemed promising as I headed to the event; I was full of expectation and plenty of enthusiasm.

After I crossed Tower Bridge, I found myself slightly lost on the side of the highway just after St. Catherine's Docks, it was rush hour and the traffic was busy but few pedestrians were in sight. Finally I saw a businessman heading towards me and I stopped him to ask for directions. He had never heard of the Church House or Fletcher Street. As I thanked him for his detailed but not very helpful information (he listed all the names of the streets on one side of the road), I thought to myself how bizarre it would be to work in an area where you never crossed to the other side of the road, as if there were an invisible barrier between the two sides of the highway. The Eastsmithfields Highway ran almost parallel to the Thames. Between the highway and the river there were two main residential and business areas. St. Katherine's Dock sat next to Tower Bridge: it was a quiet area with beautiful houses lining a harbour of luxury yachts. The office of Reuters was also situated there; I had often wandered along the docks and watched business people purposefully striding along, paying little attention to the amazing view of the area. Wapping, to the East of

St. Katherine's Dock was a quiet area full of stylishly refurbished lofts and warehouse conversions, with quaint cobbled stone streets filled with delicatessens. Both were within easy commute to the city and Canary Wharf and with property prices at astronomical figures, it was perhaps of no surprise to see mainly professionals living and working in these places. Funnily enough, after the man left, I looked to my left and saw what seemed like an abandoned church and as I headed further down the road, I realized I was in fact not far at all from my final destination.

I arrived to the venue and found a curious space filled with mismatched chairs and rugs. The building appeared to have been converted to a school and then again (in a very basic sort of way) into what seemed like a very bare living space. There was a bunk bed in the corner of the room and a toilet and kitchen on the other side, but apart from that there was little else. I was not able to find out more about the venue but as we waited for the talk to start, beer was being served in the kitchen and people were chatting away. There were two raised steps that ran along one side of the room, a few rows of stools in front and finally the floor space, almost all of which were already taken up by the attendees. At this point, everything I encountered seemed exactly the opposite to my experience of Slow Food at the Natural Kitchen in Marylebone High Street. The Natural Kitchen was immaculate and pretty, the Church House was old and smelled of moth balls. The attendees at the Slow Food event were well dressed while most at the Mute event were in jeans and t-shirts. No one else seemed to have cycled to the Natural Kitchen while it was almost impossible to find a lock up space along the rails outside the Church House.

Noticing the difference, I hoped that the talk would also follow this pattern. I settled

down as the talk started. Josie Berry from Mute magazine introduced the topic and highlighted several key debates that had been widely covered in the media since the beginning of 2008. Against a background of high oil prices, inflation and the credit crunch, suddenly the basic human need of eating seemed vital. In her brief introduction, Josie also outlined the critical condition of poverty in Africa, bringing our attention to the global consequences of our consumption. The first speaker gave us an introduction to the background of rising oil and cereal prices saying that we need to work out if it was a short term spike or a long term hike. The second speaker James stated that he believed that mass production as well as capitalism fed the world but was clearly critical of people like Al Gore and Zac Goldmann who became massively rich and famous in the process. The third speaker was an activist who talked about the problems of soil depletion in Africa and finally a self declared “perma-cultural punk” who promoted the virtues of growing one’s own food. Before starting his speech, the last speaker passed around a plant and a bag of PG Tips and asked the audience to point out the difference between the two. Some remarked on the packaging, others pointed to the exploitation of workers in the process. While all seemed to agree that the plant version of tea was better, a quick inspection revealed that fewer than 5 people in the room grew anything of their own.

The discussion that followed reflected opinions that were as diverse and varied as the panellists. Most of the questions, or comments seemed to oscillate between problems with growing our own food and feeding the world. While most seemed keen to point out the evils of capitalism, none seemed to be able to point to anything concrete.

Others, or rather one member of the audience in particular (the only one in a business suit), declared that instead of down-sizing, we should up-scale, that more energy

should be used to produce more food. While the tone of the discussion was charged, I did not seem to be able to get a sense of where these accusations were directed.

“Capitalism”, “Africa” and “poverty” seemed to creep up in all comments yet it was difficult to see the coherence between the views expressed.

The discussion turned to the green revolution in Europe in the 80s where nitrogen based herbicides and pesticides were used to increase production. Someone in the audience suggested that such technologies should be brought to Africa. That seemed to anger the activist in the panel who retorted, “Have you spoken to these people in Africa? I have!” While I did not doubt that her work might have brought her to places that most of the people in the room had not been, her comment nonetheless indicated not only her contempt for people who had not worked with African farmers but also that because she had, that alone was enough to credit her point of view. Failing to provide any concrete examples, I felt that I was being swung around in different directions.

Another member of the audience accused people who practised growing their own food as bourgeois and that most “working class people” who lived in inner London did not have access to gardens. While I did not disagree with the comment (the allotment waiting list in Hackney is four years), I felt that his complete refusal to even consider the idea slightly disturbing. However, that seemed to be the tone of the evening, accusations flew back and forth in the room, but none seemed to be able to base their ideas or theory on any concrete events. While Marx was mentioned in a few comments, it was done in such a vague and brief way that I was not sure which idea of Marx they were referring to.

After 2 hours of being perched on the stool and not being quite able to grasp the ideas of the discussion, I finally gave up and left disappointed at the whole experience. As I reflected on the evening's events, I realized that although everything was opposite to the event held in the Natural Kitchen, it remained to be what I would refer to as an aesthetic event. The difference would appear to be between the club of the well-dressed *chi chi* wine-drinking ladies and gentleman versus the hippy type tie-dye beer-drinking idealists. Both clubs had their own dress codes and jargon; neither group seemed to be particularly engage in the *common* issues of food production.

Chapter 6: Lifestyle versus Way of Life

Introduction

The conversation turned to my studies over dinner with some friends one evening. It was at a time when my research was still at its early stages and I had not yet started my fieldwork at Borough Market. I remember talking about the virtues of organic and local food as examples of the “good” Slow Food Movement. Excited by my subject of research, Ludivine, a health-conscious office worker, invited me to spend the following day with her. Against my better judgement, I agreed. Sunday came and as my alarm went off on what was supposedly a day of rest, I struggled out of bed and as I sat mulling over my coffee, I wondered what a healthy Sunday might entail.

I arrived at the meeting point just 5 minutes late and Ludivine was already there, waiting in her sportswear. She took me to her local yoga centre and explained that we were going to start the day with a session of Bikram Yoga. The yoga centre was quiet, a CD was playing softly: the music of Buddhist chants and bells chimed in the background and there was no one in sight except for a lady at reception. After paying, I was instructed to change into my sportswear and to bring along the mat with me to the next room. Incense sticks were burning in the changing room and as I asked my friend (in a whisper so as not to break the calm) what Bikram yoga is, I finally learned that it is a form of yoga practised in a heated room. Equipped with minimal knowledge of the sport, I was completely caught off-guard as I opened the door to the practice room and walked into a wall of oppressive heat.

An hour and a half later, with a drenched towel in hand, I came out of the session feeling energized and famished. The next stop was Ludivine's local organic vegetarian café where the menu consisted of wheat, grain and soy in all shapes and forms. The restaurant was again strangely quiet: only the occasional dropping of a fork punctured the subdued murmurs of customers. As the morning came to an end, I felt good, virtuous almost, after exercising and eating organic vegetarian food. Ludivine explained that this was her weekly routine; a time given over to relaxation and repose in order to rid her body of the fatigue and toxins built up during the week. Unaccustomed to such routines and environments, I felt as though I had spent my morning in a bubble, where everything was quiet, calm and clean. As I left the restaurant to set foot once again on the busy streets, the bubble burst and I was back in the bustle of the real world.

A few months later, I started my fieldwork in Borough Market and the early morning alarm clock became routine. As I observed the people coming and going, I wonder if this is also their weekly routine of virtue – shopping local, eating organic. I wonder if they, like Ludivine, would designate a day for detoxing with fruit smoothies and organic vegetables. The virtues of eating organic for most people would appear to be first and foremost health-related. When selling fruit juices in the market, I was constantly bombarded with questions such as “is there any sugar added?” “Is this natural?” or “Is this organic?” Today organic farming is almost symbolic of what is natural and pure; chemicals, pesticides or additives like sugar are viewed as contaminants that threaten the “naturalness” of the produce. Like Ludivine, many health-conscious people nowadays view ordinary day-to-day foods as impure and regard regular detoxification as necessary to rid the body of these contaminants.

To have a day of relaxation, a day of repose or a day of detox gains meaning when mapped against the rest of the week. For the majority of the working population, work stands between us and the precious time for leisure. Activities of leisure must therefore represent a rupture or a break from work, a time to do something radically different to the rest of the week: a de-toxification from the contamination of daily toil. The emphasis on leisure as a rupture or a break for distraction indicates a compartmentalization of different aspects of life, namely, work and leisure.

Differentiation of the elements of the everyday, as argued in what follows, responds to a sense of alienation. Beginning with an analysis of the tension between work and leisure, this section develops an understanding of the way in which these two spheres interact, and their relation to what one often thinks about under the larger category of one's "life" in general.

Work and Leisure: Work

According to popular perception, leisure is the time "left-over" from work; it is the residue of the working week. It is the time "to be recognised, logically, as the reward for production time well used" (Appadurai 1993). Leisure as a form of reward therefore has to be consumed in a way that does not bring about more anxiety, worries or stress (the modern epidemic) – in other words it has to be relaxing. Yet this form of leisure has to be, on the one hand, outside of the everyday, without reference to ordinary life, being situated precariously in an artificial realm that borders on the ideal; and at the same time, not leaving the real world (Lefebvre 1991: 34). In other words, leisure allows us something of the experience of briefly stepping

outside of the everyday without actually leaving or transforming it. Does the market not provide such forms of leisure I wonder? Does it not momentarily offer a space where people can vicariously participate in the “good food movement”, to enthuse about and enjoy it without having to get their hands dirty?

Like certain forms of art that aim to embellish the everyday, activities of leisure transpose life into something more palatable, “presenting it in a flattering light” as Lefebvre points out (1991: 34). This embellishment of everyday life, more than the surface aestheticizations discussed in chapter 8 (Inextricable Aesthetics), takes on another angle in Lefebvre when he speaks of images which

so skilfully and so persuasively exploit the demands and dissatisfactions which every ‘modern’ man carries within himself that it is indeed very difficult to resist being seduced and fascinated by them, except by becoming rigidly puritanical, and, in rejecting ‘sensationalism’, rejecting ‘the present’ and life itself. (Lefebvre 1991: 34)

Entertainment often employs techniques of seduction and fascination by the transposition of objects of reality into the realms of fantasy. One is at once spellbound by these images’ eerie resemblance to reality and enticed by the lack of complexity represented in that particular form of “reality”. It is through this process that these activities achieve the break that is imperative to the idea of leisure. One could find countless examples in Hollywood films where life is represented in a beautified yet hollowed out way (much like the summer strawberries on offer in

supermarkets, all rosy and plump on the surface, but hollow and tasteless to the bite). These activities have become so intrinsic to our everyday experiences that it is impossible to extricate them from life because to do so would be to “reject life itself” (Lefebvre 1991: 34). It would therefore be unproductive in the analysis to immediately condemn the idea of leisure and dismiss the importance of the market as a site that offers such pleasures. Instead I propose to focus on the role these activities play in our everyday lives and to extract meaning from an examination of their interrelations.

Lefebvre points out that the relationship between everyday work, life and leisure is intrinsically a dialectical one, they are on the one hand separate but paradoxically united. He argues that one cannot make the simple separation between an individual working on weekdays and the individual at leisure on weekends, “for a man [sic] is still the same man” (Lefebvre 1991: 30). Lefebvre, following Marx, points out that under capitalism, time off work is in fact inextricable from time at work: “every week Saturdays and Sundays are *given over* to leisure as regularly as day-to-day work” (Lefebvre 1991: 30 my emphasis). In *Capital*, Marx points out that leisure time, like food, clothing, fuel and housing, appears as a means of subsistence to maintain the worker in an operational state. The conditions of these “benefits” are deemed necessary depending “on the conditions in which, and consequently on the habits and expectation with which, the class of free workers has been formed” (Marx 1990: 275). Leisure time therefore cannot be understood as separate or a means of parting from work, there must also be consumption. To extend this line of thought, one could make the point that there is in fact no time “off” work; weekends are merely a necessity for making possible weekdays, and “time off” becomes an

extension of the working day. If one were then to ask when there was a genuine time for leisure, the obvious response would be to hark back to a pre-capitalist agrarian society in comparison to the capitalist present. In such former societies, as Thompson emphasises, there was “no great sense of conflict between labour and ‘passing the time of day’” (1989: 60). Productive labour is understood to have been integrally bound up with life or living in general, such that with such forms of social existence there is no clear demarcation between work, life and leisure. Hence, rather than representing a time when the worker possessed more leisure or free time, past agrarian societies really only represent a time in which the distinction between work and free time was virtually meaningless.

Thus if work and leisure are – and historically have been – so deeply interrelated, how is it that we experience them as quite divergent aspects of a fragmented everyday existence in modernity? The paradox is perhaps best understood in terms of Marx’s alienation and commodity fetishism.

In the general form of capitalist society, the relationship between work and life is further complicated. Labour, in particular waged-labour, under capitalism becomes a commodity – an entity that can be bought and sold. Such is the first form of alienation in Marx’s writings: the alienation of productive activity where the work becomes external to the worker. Marx’s theory of fetishism allows the further understanding of the shift from human activities to economic things: commodities, in the form of embodied human labour power then become our objective being – “the existence of man for other men, his human relation to other men, the social behaviour of men” (Marx 1975: 43). For Marx the commodity embodies the human

expenditure necessary for its production, therefore it “reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things” (Marx 1990: 164-5). Commodity exchange for Marx is nothing but the “fantastic form of a relation between things” (Marx 1990: 165). It is in terms of this disembodied relationship that Marx critiques social reality, whereby individual life, alienated from itself becomes abstracted from other lives as well as from the community.

Under capitalism, the individual, alienated from their own labour power and objectified in commodities, becomes further fragmented by the drive to accumulate more possessions. For Marx, private property is the “material and sensuous expression of *alienated human life*” (1975: 156). The drive towards individual wealth, as Lefebvre points out, is merely “an individual appropriation (of capitalist private property)” (Lefebvre 1991: 154). Under such circumstances, the individual becomes more isolated and inward-looking and his individuality becomes more alienated and fragmented. Lefebvre writes that the “individual consciousness [was] split into two [into the private consciousness and the social or public consciousness]; it also became atomized [individualism, specialization, separation between differing spheres of activities, etc.]” (Lefebvre 1991: 31). It is within the framework of alienation and self-estrangement that it becomes possible for an individual to exist in a fragmented way where work, life and leisure become separate entities rather than exist as a unified whole, even as they are underpinned by a more unified set of economic and social relations.

Work and Leisure: Leisure

While Marx focuses his critique primarily on economic alienation (the transformation of man's activities and relations into things by the action of economic fetishes such as money, commodities and capital), Lefebvre extends his analysis of alienation to more mundane yet complex features of everyday life. In the second volume of *Critique of Everyday Life*, Lefebvre points out that the worst form of alienation is when the alienation itself is not recognised by the individual, for "awareness of alienation is already disalienation" (Lefebvre 2002a: 208) (even though failure to reconcile the situation will bring about even deeper alienation). It is with this understanding of alienation in mind that I wish to further analyse the nature of leisure activities.

Each year I return to Hong Kong to teach summer courses at the British Council and the first sessions inevitably involve getting to know the students. I have often been amazed at the answers students – teenagers and adults alike – give when asked to introduce themselves. Most say that shopping is their favourite way of spending a weekend; interestingly, they classify shopping as a *hobby*, equivalent to that of playing a sport or a musical instrument. Certainly such "hobbies" provide the necessary distraction from the daily boredom of studying or working. Shopping, as with the majority of leisure activities, involves consumption. Appadurai writes, "when leisure is reliably available and socially acceptable what is required is not only 'free' time, but disposable income" (1993). Cities in particular offer a vast array of choices for how to spend this time and income – cinemas, restaurants, shops; even yoga centres are today forms of consumption.

Leisure involves passive attitudes (Lefebvre 1991: 32). In many ways activities such as going to the cinema, dining out or strolling in the market are similar in that they require little or no engagement. What differs between work and leisure is the mode of participation: active versus passive; concentrated versus distracted. Benjamin gives the example of a man being absorbed by the work of art in front of him as an illustration of what it means to be concentrated. By contrast, one who does not engage absorbs the work of art (Benjamin 1999: 232). In other words to engage is to completely immerse oneself in the subject of focus (art absorbs the beholder); on the other hand, to be distracted is to notice the subject only in an incidental way (the beholder absorbs art). Certainly, concentration and distraction represent the two extreme modes of participation. However, real life rarely allows for two simple binaries: Benjamin furthers his argument by drawing upon the experience of watching a film whereby the audience is placed in the position of the critic but at the same time watches passively. “The public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one.” (Benjamin 1999: 234)

This idea of the role of an absent-minded examiner could perhaps give us a better understanding of the complex results of alienation in the contexts I have been discussing. One could argue that adopting such an attitude mid-way between distraction and concentration is the only way we are able to make sense of living our lives in separate bubbles: for how can life, work and leisure, which together constitute the individual's everyday experience, not consist in a continuous unity? It is through this state of absent-minded examination, itself the product of modern alienation, that I want to understand how “lifestyle” becomes parted from a “way of

life”.

Lifestyle shares the same parameters as leisure activities in that it is situated precariously on the brink between fantasy and reality; it is an adaptation of certain aspects of everyday life into an artificial form that avoids reference to the less appealing complexities or hardships of real life. As with leisure, lifestyle allows us the Hollywood experience of stepping outside of the “real world” without actually leaving it: lifestyle is an embellishment of everyday life that makes the latter more palatable. It is an activity, a weekend entertainment, a game or time for role-play, the chance to step inside someone else’s shoes and live their lives for a day. Similar to the “healthy Sunday experience” with Ludivine, we move from each one of these bubbles to the next, allowing each to remain somehow detached and separate.

It is perhaps also the adoption of this mode of the absent-minded examiner of the everyday that allows certain absurdities or incongruities in life to escape our critical attention. What does it mean, for example, when one buys organic but not fair trade? How can “buying local” at a supermarket not constitute a contradiction? More than just a result of branding or merchandising, this indicates an alienation, or a separation of form, function and content. As Lefebvre notes, “style has degenerated into culture”: there is a decay of style, whereby style, which has become the core of everyday life, “ceases to influence objects, actions and gestures and is replaced by culture, art and aestheticism or ‘art for art’s sake’”(Lefebvre 2002b: 36, 39).

Lefebvre puts culture in the same category as aestheticism and criticizes both for their lack of unity and fragmentary character but most of all for merely being “an ornament adorning the everyday life but failing to transform it” (Lefebvre 2002b:

36). This results in what he terms the “artlessness” of our everyday lives (Lefebvre 2002b: 37), where philosophy, art and religion have become estranged from the quotidian.

Art for art’s sake, organic for organic’s sake or fair trade for fair trade’s sake: each becomes a means to an end, existing in its own bubble, for its own sake, neither drawing from nor giving meaning to the wider context. It becomes a cult, a self-referential unit that allows for, encourages even; a fragmentation or a disunity within a unified whole or totality. This disjointed or alienated relationship lies at the heart of my critique of lifestyle and leisure activities. By existing independently and in separation from one another, everything can be turned into a commodity, a bite-size entertainment (even life); the illogical is allowed to become logical; the irrational to seem rational. For example, does buying organic (but not fair trade) mean that one is concerned for the welfare of the land (if at all) but not the welfare of the workers? Does driving to the large-format supermarkets (hypermarkets) to buy locally produced food sold in large distribution outlets wrapped in recycled packaging not constitute a contradiction in itself? What about using bio-degradable materials when no facilities exist in England to process the waste? What allows for such contradictory actions to appear side by side is their being conducted without reference to one another – their evasion of the kind of comparative or collective consideration that would reveal the disjointedness or the lack of unity that they together comprise. What is called for then, is a reintegration of doing, making, thinking and being – what Lefebvre terms “the art of living” (Lefebvre 1991: 199). This is elaborated in the next section.

Lifestyle as opposed to way of life might be considered more of an entertainment that provides distraction rather than demanding attention or concentration from the participants. The experience is summed up neatly in Benjamin's critique of cinema, where he quotes Duhamel: cinema is

a spectacle which requires no concentration and presupposes
no intelligence ..., it kindles no light in the heart and
awakens no hope other than the ridiculous one of someday
becoming a 'star' in Los Angeles" (Benjamin 1999: 232).

Ultimately lifestyle practices that remain in the realm of leisure propel the individual into a vicious circle of alienation, for even when the idea of leisure is to counteract (or "disalienate") the effects of fragmented labour, activities of entertainment or distraction contain their own alienation (Lefebvre 2002: 208). The relationship between alienation/disalienation is one in dialectical movement, therefore Lefebvre reminds us that the focus should be on a precise analysis in order to distinguish between the aspects of the movement rather than muddling them up together.

On the other hand, leisure itself also embodies different possibilities that extend to varying degrees beyond the level of distraction. While mindless shopping might involve passive attitudes and be considered impoverishing, other activities might prove to be more enriching. Certain forms of cultivated or cultural leisure (Lefebvre 1991: 32) produce active attitudes, for example in sports; others involve learning a new skill, such as cookery or photography; some even provide knowledge, e.g. visiting art galleries or reading (although many of these activities are also co-opted

into lifestyle packages). Therefore one could not dismiss all leisure activities as the same; different forms of leisure embody different orientations and possibilities. What is common to forms of cultivated or cultural leisure (as opposed to mindless entertainment) is that they lead the individual back towards the feeling of presence, towards nature and the life of the senses (Lefebvre 1991: 41-2).

Art of life

It is therefore not leisure as a category that should bear the brunt of critique: what is impoverishing in leisure as it is in work or any part of life is alienation. As Trebitsch writes in the preface to *The Critique of Everyday Life Volume 1*, “Alienation thus leads to the impoverishment, to the ‘despoliation’ of everyday life” (Lefebvre 1991: xxiii). Therefore alienation should be at the heart of critical inspection but it should also be approached as the site that holds the potential for transformation. While most would consider alienation to be part of a critique that pertains to the economic sphere in Marx, Lefebvre has argued that analysis of alienation of the everyday is also already present in Marx: “Marxism describes and analyses *the everyday life of society* and indicates the means by which it can be transformed” (Lefebvre 1991:148). Such is the value of Marxist thought to Lefebvre where historical materialism brings ideology and practice together in critical analysis. Marx’s theory of economic fetishism for example not only makes clear the shift of human relations to relations between objects, but more importantly it brings ideas to practical life. Without material input, theories of alienation or ideologies remain abstract and idealist for Lefebvre. So within this framework of understanding the work of Marx in relation to Lefebvre, I have chosen to use the latter’s work as the basis of my

analysis, favouring his approach of incorporating Marxist thoughts, that works from within but also directs focus beyond the traditional economic spheres dominant in Marx.

For Lefebvre, the bringing together of practice and theory – praxis, is key to the process of disalienation. It is useful to understand in the context of this chapter that praxis is also key to unifying the different aspects of life, namely work, life and leisure, all fragmented and alienated from the individual as well as each other in capitalism. Rather than approaching these elements separately, which in itself constitutes an alienation or fragmentation, the focus is on the dialectical relation between them. So instead of abandoning the idea of leisure, or work, I will draw on the notion of praxis (as a mode combining thought and practice) as a starting-point for their reintegration. Another important advantage of praxis is the combination of the macro (philosophy, theory, ideology) and micro-structure (social practice), rendering this method both scientific and philosophical. In this sense, everyday life is not a synonym for praxis although praxis should operate on the level of everyday life. Thoughts, ideas or philosophy should demonstrate themselves in the everyday as it is this realm where feelings and pleasures serve to authenticate these “higher realms” of practice: “praxis is the equivalent of totality in action; it encompasses the base and the superstructures, as well as the interactions between them.” (Lefebvre 2002a: 45)

Writing about praxis, my thoughts went back to the conversation I had with M, the owner of a chain of organic bakeries, one evening in Borough Market. During the discussion of food movements, M brushed off my comments as merely “ideas”. He

argued as he stamped on the ground “people need this, something concrete, ideas don’t do anything, they don’t pay the bills”. I remember being haunted by his comments and how frustrated I was at my inability to argue against them. Thinking back to the encounter now, I wish I had said, (also stamping on the ground) “without ideas, this is just concrete!” Ideas without action, or action without ideas, is merely fragments of a totality. Without a superstructure or philosophy behind action, action cannot exceed or go beyond itself. Similarly ideas without action will remain idealistic and estranged. Both belong to part of a whole, action is an expression of ideas, it authenticates abstract thoughts; thoughts or ideas give meaning to action.

The idea of an art of living proposes a totality or unified structure with which to begin an examination of what has been extracted in alienation. “The art of living presupposes that life as a whole – everyday life – should become a work of art” (Lefebvre 1991: 199). A “work of art” or “genuine art” (as opposed to art for art’s sake or artistic simulacra) as Lefebvre terms it, involves going beyond its own conditions in an attempt to see itself not just as a means but as an end. Similarly, Rancière in his work *Aesthetics and Politics*, also makes the point that “true arts” are “forms of knowledge based on the imitation of a model *with precise ends*” (Rancière 2004: 21 my emphasis). On the other hand, art which uses itself as a means to an end would lead to an alienation of the act, an individualization, resulting in forms of artistic simulacra – art that imitates simple appearances (Rancière 2004: 21) or art for art’s sake, which Rancière identifies as an “aesthetic cult” (Rancière 2004: 45). Benjamin similarly criticized art for art’s sake as a negative theology, meaning that art has come to be denied any social function and that its reception is based on the cult value of the individual piece (Benjamin 1999: 218).

For Lefebvre, “the genuine art of living implies a human reality, both individual and social”. (Lefebvre 1991: 199) Such an approach incorporates a wider community;¹⁷ living therefore has a bearing upon the individual as well as the social. In *Aesthetics and Politics*, Rancière repeatedly states that there is no such thing as art but only arts, ways of doing and making (Rancière 2004: 21) and that aesthetics is a mode of articulation between these two (Rancière 2004: 10). Rancière’s work is suggestive of the idea of praxis (although he does not use the term explicitly) because for him artistic practices should make and do things “from the standpoint of what is common to the community” (Rancière 2004: 13). From this point of view then, praxis, by opening up a site of integration, also suggests an end to alienating self-referential units, or an end to cults – be it the aesthetic cult, or the organic food cult.

What Rancière terms “making”, Lefebvre calls “producing”. “Making” for Lefebvre reduces social practice to individual operations of the artisan kind, for example, bakers, potters and weavers (Lefebvre 2002a: 232). But even with this type of making, the artisan is seen to be also making themselves through their work, for Lefebvre this can be seen as part but not the whole of what constitutes praxis. In Lefebvre’s “production”, he states that it is “not only products which are produced and reproduced, but also social groups and their relations and elements” (Lefebvre 2002a: 238). It is from this viewpoint that I bring together Rancière’s “making” and Lefebvre’s “producing”. For Rancière, this idea of making and doing involves the community and situates the individual in a network of relationship within the social, therefore his acts are never purely individual. “*Production* (is) the identification of a

¹⁷ For the moment I use the term “community” in a general, everyday sense. In the following chapter, focusing on the “community garden”, I develop a more specific understanding of the term.

process of material execution with a community's self-presentation of its meaning" (Rancière 2004: 44). This understanding of "production" is also distinct from Marx's "production" which refers to labour for sustenance (which Rancière terms "manufacturing" in order to distinguish it from his own use of the term "production"). Thus praxis, in the sense I am using it, may be understood as a bringing together of manufacturing and production in which the act of manufacturing also draws meaning from and produces meaning for the community. It brings together thinking, making, doing, seeing and being – putting "art" back into life, returning individual acts to a unified totality.

Clearing the ground

Praxis produces everyday life, but everyday life does not produce praxis; everyday life is merely a platform in which the world of objects and thoughts come together. So within everyday practice, a more detailed examination is required to extricate the extraordinary from the ordinary. Critique plays an important role in such a process, for one must first and foremost be aware of the lack (alienation, artlessness) in life before praxis can be put into practice. The attitudes of students in Hong Kong who classify shopping as a hobby indicate their complete acceptance of their (alienated) reality. One cannot begin the process of reconciliation if there is no distancing from such reality. Critical distancing therefore is key to understanding the wider social framework in order to be able to sift knowledge from ideology.

From another point of view, once critical distance is achieved, critique cannot be made in isolation: like the act of making for Lefebvre, it can only be considered in

relation to a wider perspective. To take critique in isolation would take theories of alienation into the realm of pure speculation. This would run the risk of coming back to reality armed with only pseudo-concepts that can do little more than substitute one ideology for another (Lefebvre 1991: 77). This analysis seems to sum up my experience as a researcher in the past 4 years. In the search for food movements that would bring about real sustainable changes, I have observed, participated and attended numerous events, programmes and activities – all of which addressed or even provided answers to parts of the problems we face today but none of them in an entirely satisfactory manner.

To the health-related problems that fast food raises, the slow food movement replies by asking us to slow down and eat healthily. To the problems of soil depletion and related environmental issues caused by the excessive use of pesticides; the organic movement answers by reducing the use of artificial chemicals. To the problem of global conglomerates taking over food production, local farmers' markets respond by allowing farmers to sell their produce independently and locally. To the problem of exploited third world producers, fair trade helps to ensure that a minimum wage is paid to the workers and a fair price paid for the produce. The list of examples could be extended: my point is that each of these movements address a problem only partially, or in isolation from other problems from which they are not in reality distinct; they do so by exploiting certain publicly expressed dissatisfactions, instigating their own ideologies around these dissatisfactions, and recruiting their own members. In short, they end up taking on more the form of cults than ethical projects.

Followers of these different cults then produce their own rhetoric and critique. As Lefebvre notes, “the concept of alienation is open to strictly individual manipulation” (Lefebvre 1991: 77). In some ways this is the problem with the Slow Food Movement mentioned at the beginning of this thesis. Slow Food, classified as a movement, like Lefebvre’s use of a notion of everyday life, possesses the capacity for social transformation, while itself having the ability to adapt to different environments: its capacity to transform is bound up with its own potential for self-transformation and for being interpreted differently by different individuals. The movement’s general popularity has been declining in recent years. This may partly be an indication that the initial interest in the movement belonged to a passing fad – though the declining enthusiasm has also been attributed to the ways in which local meetings are held. In terms of the latter, the movement has been criticised for reducing itself to a sort of exotic travel agency which organises trips for “dilettantes who travelled the countryside ‘discovering’ Berkshire pigs and heirloom tomatoes and old apple orchards” (Severson 2008). As a friend of mine poignantly said, Slow Food is like “a cheese and wine party with ingredients difficult to source to which we are never invited”. From my own personal experience of attending events organised by the London *convivium*, it is certainly difficult to argue against these criticisms.

Steven Shaw, a food writer and a founder of the food Web site *eGullet* says that the early success of the Slow Food Movement was due to the combination of pleasure or “hedonism” as he puts it “with a leftist political agenda” (Severson 2008). The rise and fall of the Slow Food movement offers a microcosm of the manifold processes or levels upon which alienation operates. Key features of Slow Food are its strong anti-technology and anti-globalization views. One could argue that such attitudes arise

from a (falsely) “Marxist” point of view within which technology is regarded as an important factor in objectifying human labour and therefore an anti-technological stance represents a movement towards disalienation. If this is indeed the case then the movement itself can be said to have been born out of a critique of alienation. Yet this conscious awareness of alienation has ended up producing a movement that is equally alienating but in different ways. Such is the complexity of bringing theory and practice together in everyday life: even the theory of alienation, critique and practice can produce forms which are themselves speculative and arbitrary.

In other cases, such as the Mute event I attended, the circumstances are slightly different and pose a different set of problems. Unlike Slow Food, the discussion of Food, Oil and Global prices was an individual event and because it was hosted by Mute Magazine, it attracted a different demographic. Mute Magazine positions itself as an alternative magazine that engages popular culture with politics. Similar to Slow Food, Mute is generally seen to be a magazine informed by left-wing politics. The discussion of food prices set against an economic background of rising fuel prices provoked a heated debate. One of the first questions, or rather accusations, that came from the audience was directed against the notion of growing one’s own food. “Who can afford to grow their own foods? Only land-owners and capitalists!” Although food cultivation in inner cities might present certain difficulties, there are also ways in which it could be done. While most of the audience seemed to believe or think that growing one’s own food presents a partial solution to tackling the dependency on global production (at least from an individual’s point of view) and the problem of increasing food prices, less than a handful of people in the room that evening actually attempted to grow food themselves. The subsequent discussion was difficult to

follow; most comments or questions lacked focus or direction; phrases adorned with Marxist vocabulary flew across the room but none seemed to have any genuine engagement with his theories. The overall effect was the production of a general hypercriticism instead of what could have been a positive critique. The lack of engagement, making and doing, produces a critique of everyday life that does not translate into action but will only lead to what Lefebvre calls a “philosophy of idleness” (Lefebvre 1991: 78).

On the subject of idleness, I am reminded of another event I attended at the “Secret Garden Party” festival. The talk was hosted by Tom Hodgkinson, editor and founder of *The Idler* magazine. The intention of the magazine is “to return dignity to the art of loafing, to make idling into something to aspire towards rather than reject” (idler.co.uk accessed 8/8/08). The idler movement was inspired by the writings of Dr. Johnson who published in a gentlemen’s magazine in the 18th century and presents itself as a movement campaigning against the work ethic. The current edition of *The Idler* is titled “How To Save The World Without Really Trying”, in which it is argued that idleness is eco-friendly and that in order to save the planet we need to do less. The editorial states that it is man’s interference that has caused the problems; therefore we need to leave nature alone. (idler.co.uk accessed 8/8/08). The talk was held in a marquee, with damp cushions and rugs making up for the lack of seats; the atmosphere was relatively serious (when compared to the mad ravings taking place in other tents at the festival) but relaxed. Hodgkinson started the talk by declaring himself an anarchist and went on to promote the art of idling by making vague references to pieces written on festivals, saying that festivals (as the polar opposite of work) are to be upheld as a model for living in order to find happiness.

Hodgkinson is another example of how the theory of alienation is taken in isolation or non-dialectically. The idler movement rejects work on the grounds that productive work constitutes alienation. Although there might be an element of truth in such a declaration, the theory of alienation is nevertheless taken up only partially.

References to Marxist terms are used in an arbitrary and fragmented manner to lend an air of authority to the movement's political ideology. A similar rhetoric is found in Lefebvre's example (1991: 78) of a schoolboy who refuses to do his homework because he considers it alienating. Lefebvre illustrates how this constitutes an interpretation stemming from "a false point of view" with the theory of alienation being manipulated for individual purposes. For both *The Idler* and the schoolboy, it is not a particular aspect of work which is alienating, nor social labour which is alienated; work, taken in a conflated general sense is condemned for being alienating and rejected on this basis. In both cases, what is interesting is that it is no longer consciousness that is alienated (in fragmented labour), but the consciousness which does the alienating.

Art of Living

The art of living is therefore not an embellished way of stylized living (in the sense that Rancière understands style); it is, rather, an approach that regards living or life in its entirety. Lefebvre sees philosophy – a unified approach – as an answer to alienation (in contrast to the scientific approach which in his view addresses problems individually and in isolation). However, Lefebvre's philosophising of the everyday has been criticised for pushing everyday life further into abstraction or

alienation. In response Lefebvre has pointed out that the failure of philosophy often lies in philosophers' inability to fulfil "the aims and aspirations (of philosophy)... by superseding abstract philosophical thought" resulting in "a seesawing between system and experiment, between state ideology and anarchizing critique." (2002a: 23) In other words, philosophy is regarded as abstract thought only because of the way it is conventionally presented and conceived as a *discourse* – and such a conception is by no means necessary. On the contrary, Lefebvre wants us to understand philosophy as an attempt to bring the greatest quantity of present-day experiences into a reflective and conceptual mode with the aim of bringing about transformation of the human world. To replace philosophical discourse with philosophical praxis is "[t]o change the process of the philosophical becoming of the world into the process of the world-becoming of philosophy" (Lefebvre 2002a: 23). Therefore the radical critique of everyday life for Lefebvre, aims to attain the radical metamorphosis of everyday living – as a way of both superseding and fulfilling philosophy. Philosophy, more than a discourse, is understood as a "mode of the 'lived'" for Lefebvre (2002a: 23). This understanding of philosophy is similar to that approached in antiquity, discussed by writers such as Pierre Hadot and Michel Foucault in Chapter 2 (Slow Journeys).

For Foucault, philosophy lies at the heart of the "art of existence": in a manner similar to Lefebvre's "art of living", its concern extends beyond the individual and lies within the social. Practising philosophy for Foucault has a double obligation: "in relation to oneself, it is the duty of giving one's existence a universally valuable form, and in relation to others, it is the necessity of offering them a model of living." (Foucault 1990: 157) Similarly, in the Hellenistic and Epicurean periods, philosophy

was regarded as a “mode of existing-in-the-world” (Hadot 1995: 265): it was a way of life; thought in practice. Conceiving of philosophy as a way of life means, in contrast to a view that sees it as a diverse collection of theoretical approaches to different aspects of the world, understanding it as “a unitary act, which consists in *living* in logic, physics, and ethics” (Hadot 1995: 267). Such a perspective makes it possible (and valuable) to distinguish between philosophy and a/the discourse of philosophy. In contrast to the more abstract or academic *discourse* of philosophy, philosophy itself is then understood as a “concrete attitude and determinate lifestyle, which engages in the whole of existence” (Hadot 1995: 83). Foucault, similarly drawing from the Stoics, sees philosophy as an “attitude” or a “mode of behaviour” which, through its practise, instils itself in the ways of living, evolving into practices that individuals reflect upon and develop.

It thus came to constitute a social practice, giving rise to relationships between individuals, to exchanges and communications ... and it gave rise, finally, to a certain mode of knowledge and to the elaboration of a science (Foucault 1990: 45).

For the Stoics, studying philosophy meant practising how to live – in Hadot’s terms, how to live “consciously” and “freely”: here to live consciously means to pass beyond the limits of individuality; and to live freely means to give up desiring that which is not in accordance with reason (Hadot 1995: 86). Consciousness for the Stoics extends beyond the thought and experience of any individual; living consciously in their sense thus entails living in awareness of this wider framework,

and of the individual's place within it. Hadot writes, it is "to recognise ourselves as a part of the reason-animated *cosmos*" (1995: 86). What he refers to as "cosmic consciousness" (as opposed to Lefebvre's private or individual consciousness) therefore turns our attention outwards in order to search for the connection with others. Stoic philosophers could be understood as cosmopolitans – citizens of the cosmos – in the sense that their allegiance, their responsibility lay beyond themselves, extending not only to the political state of which they are citizens, but to a wider community that is not based upon geographical boundaries. To live freely could be understood as freeing oneself from the desires that are not based on real needs. Lefebvre makes the point that in a consumerist society, a consumer "submits" to the orders created by advertising, sales and social prestige. In the desire to accumulate more and more commodities based on artificial needs, the relationship or circuit between need and desire is interrupted or distorted. (Lefebvre 2002a: 11) and the individual further alienated.

One means by which the Stoics approached this task was through formulating particular exercises to help achieve the goal of living "consciously" and "freely". Foucault also makes reference to these exercises in his discussion of care of the self and regards these forms of practice as ways of cultivating the art of existence (1990: 44). The "art of" implies a technique and the aim of these exercises is to convert an individual's way of being so completely that it "turns our entire life upside down" in order to achieve what Hadot calls an "authentic condition of life": a state in which a complete self-consciousness is attained. This would entail the individual possessing an exact vision of the world (and their place within it) (Hadot 1995: 83). Reflecting on Foucault's *The Care of the Self*, Hadot states that these exercises collectively

constitute an effort to become aware of our situation as a part of the universe and an attempt to render oneself open to the universal (1995: 212).

At the heart of these spiritual exercises, as they were known, is the fundamental attitude of *prosoche* – attention: a will to learn how to concentrate on the present moment. The aim then, is to facilitate a reorientation of attention towards such concentration. Such is the fundamental Stoic spiritual attitude: a continuous vigilance and presence of mind, the cultivation of a self-consciousness which is always at hand and the maintenance of a constant tension of the spirit. For Hadot, the ideal Stoic philosopher is then fully aware of what he does at each instant and he wills his actions fully, always maintaining the “concentration of the present moment” (1995: 84). The concentrated state of mind of a Stoic philosopher makes for an interesting comparison with Benjamin’s “absent minded examiner” – which as we saw above represents an attitude of critical awareness that may be the key to the process of disalienation. The practise of philosophy brings *prosoche* into practice. Returning to this older conception of philosophy as a way of life – as opposed to the discourse of philosophy (in Hadot’s sense) – with its incorporation of spiritual exercises, constitutes a shift from the cognitive level of knowing to the care or practice of the self: that of being. The aim of the Stoic exercises therefore is not merely to increase knowledge but learning with the aim of transforming one’s personality. Lefebvre writes, “knowledge encompasses an agenda for transformation. To know the everyday is to want to transform it” (2002a: 98). So in a sense if the discourse of philosophy (in Hadot’s sense) is to gain knowledge, then according to Lefebvre it can only be realized in the consequent search for ways of metamorphosing thoughts and action. These spiritual philosophical exercises of antiquity can in a sense be

understood as pre-figuring the critical approaches discussed in this chapter – Lefebvre’s praxis (inseparable from knowledge), Rancière’s true or genuine arts (that transforms the individual as well as the community), as well as Benjamin’s state of distracted attention (as opposed to *prosoche* – vigilant attention that is always ready at hand).

It is an attempt to recover philosophy as the search for wisdom, returning it to what for some is the originary meaning of the word: *Philo-sophia* – love of wisdom.

Chapter 7: Borough Market IV

8th March 2008

My fellow PhD student at Goldsmiths who worked in the neighbouring stall asked me one day: “Do you feel that you are still doing fieldwork? Or is it just work now?” I thought about how I stopped writing my field notes and how, even if I tried, I did not have a lot of new things to add to what I had already written. Had I indeed stopped being the researcher? When one had completely immersed oneself into the field, where did one draw the line between work and fieldwork?

Ben took two weeks off for his ski trip in Canada, so his sister Charlotte, instead of working at Notting Hill with David, came to oversee the stall in Borough. Charlotte had a very different way of running things – a different way of setting up and a different way of managing the stall. The first thing that she said was that she did not know much about the Borough Stall, and she asked me if everything was done the way her brother usually did things. She also told me that her father David had left her with the advice “to be the boss” that morning. I assured her that everything was all right and proceeded to carry out my tasks. As the day went on, Charlotte showed more and more frustration as Andrew and Tomic – the two usual Polish workers from the farm – continued to operate the way they did when Ben was here. Charlotte complained that the fruit cut for tasters was not done in the right way and that the apples and pears on display were not placed so that the red side faced out.

Although these might seem like minor details, it was true that the display looked

much better when done according to Charlotte's recommendations. The attention that she paid to the aesthetics of the stall nevertheless reminded me of how Borough Market inevitably operated on the aesthetics of food. Like supermarkets that only bought apples that were two thirds red and one third green, it was the appearance of the fruit that made the stall attractive. As it came to my turn to serve different fruits for tasters, I noticed people would take pains to pick the slices that were perfect: ones that were not already rusted, bruised or did not have imperfections on the skin.

When Charlotte again came and said that Tomic did not understand what she wanted, I offered to help. I went over to Andrew who spoke more English and explained what Charlotte wanted. To my surprise, Andrew knew exactly how Charlotte wanted the fruit cut and displayed and apparently so did Tomic. Andrew said “Yes I know, she's crazy” and laughed. It was then when I realized that sometimes the apparent lack of communication was in fact strategic and that within unusual circumstances (in this case, the fact that Ben, the usual boss, wasn't here) the hierarchy becomes slightly altered. Tomic and Andrew, with their experience of having worked in the Borough stall longer than Charlotte, made a decision regarding what it was necessary to do and in that act of pretending not to understand, reversed the power relation. I laughed with them and returned to my post. In return Andrew and Tomic made superficial gestures in line with Charlotte's demands, probably because they knew that Charlotte had asked me to convey her instructions.

Over the months I worked in Borough Market, I learnt more and more about Andrew and Tomic, their families in Poland, their work on the farm, their decisions about the future. I established a good and trusting relationship with them and even though time

for relaxed chats was limited, I showed that I was willing to learn about their home and their culture. Recently I started learning Polish and during the quieter moments of the market day, Tomic would take a rare break and teach me words in Polish that I could use in the market. I also noticed that Tomic, usually quiet and industrious in the stall, would ask his fellow Polish men certain words so that he could communicate with me. One Saturday morning, he came and said “Daisy is a flower” I was pleasantly surprised – not because he knew what my name meant, but because it showed that the desire to communicate was reciprocated.

Over the two weeks that Charlotte worked in the stall, I noticed how other traders came to talk to her, not just the usual traders like myself who worked as employees, but owners of other stalls: Richard, who owned the opposite stall, had never spoken to me. This particular Saturday morning, he came straight to the till where Charlotte and I were standing, looked straight past me, and proceeded to speak to Charlotte at length. As the afternoon went by, Maria from Magoo's muesli, another Maria from Maria's café and many others stopped by for a chat with Charlotte. I noticed how familiar these faces were and how I knew most of their names but none of them ever stopped to say hello. The hierarchy in the market was distinct, after almost a year of working in Borough, I knew most traders in the Jubilee market (where my stall was located), but not the owners. Owners talked with other stall owners, they compared notes and businesses, sometimes exchanged addresses or solutions to similar problems, they traded their own goods and had their own circle of friends, but they never mixed. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I had invited Ben a few times for a drink but he never accepted; over the months, we talked about things other than the farm or apples, usually about parties and drinking, but the line was never crossed.

15th March 2008

Ben was back from his ski trip in Whistler, Canada, and I was surprised to see only Andrew, Tomic and Derek – another Polish worker from the farm – setting up the stall. When I arrived, Andrew told me that Ben was sleepy and that he was in the van having a nap. I understood that Ben was extremely jet-lagged because of the 8 hour time difference between Canada and London. Andrew immediately said “Daisy, you are the boss today.” The almost automatic assumption that I was somehow higher than them was back again. I made a lame joke about closing the shop and going off to party and went about setting up the counter.

It was pleasant working without a “boss” – not that Ben was ever strict with us, but the sensation that we could wander off and chat to people without the fear of disapproval from an overseeing boss was liberating. Ultimately we operated as we normally did when Ben was here, but there was more chatting and joking around. Andrew wanted me to get him a rice cooker and I promised I would buy it for him and bring it the following week. Derek was going to Poland soon to see his family for Easter. Tomic taught me more words in Polish and it was on the whole a nice and fun morning.

Mid-morning Ben arrived looking exhausted and said that he had only managed 2 hours sleep last night and informed us that he would leave round 2:30pm. Notting Hill market closes at 1pm and David and Charlotte would drive round to pick him up. I asked him what I should do when we closed and he told me “just the usual”. I

was to hand over the money at the end to Andrew “but not before”. It was the first time I had seen Ben leave the stall early; even when he was here, he would wander off for extended periods of time, coming back just to see if everything was running smoothly. His absences indicated a certain level of trust and approval of the way we ran the stall. Ben never really gave compliments, unlike his father, who visited the stall once and said to me “you are doing well”, but the effect of this relative autonomy almost surpassed that of verbal compliments. During the quieter moments in the market Andrew and Tomic would sometimes stand round the till and chat to me, talking about the things happening on the farm and how David pushed them to work harder – for the Polish workers, David was all about “money, money, money”.

June 2009

A few months later, the credit bubble burst: talk of credit crunch dominated the newspapers, everywhere I turned, the fear of the upcoming economic crisis and recession loomed on the horizon. During the first few months of the crisis, business seemed to carry on as usual in Borough Market, but gradually the business slowed down – regular customers and tourists alike bought fewer items, people seemed to be more careful with their money.

I arrived one Saturday morning to find Derek talking worriedly with Lucas – another Polish worker who works for Degustibus. Ben was working at another event so I was “the boss” that day. Over the past year, Ben had taken breaks from Borough Market more frequently, leaving the running of Saturday business to us. When Derek returned I asked him what the problem was. He told me that David had asked the

regular workers on the farm to take some time off, instead of working 7 days a week, they could only work 5 or the equivalent in hours. Derek said that a day in the market already constituted 13 hours, which meant that he would not be able to work much more during the week. I remembered how, at the beginning of my fieldwork, I had been worried that these workers were exploited by the long working hours and the lack of days off. I realized now that long working hours meant higher wages and were therefore welcomed by workers like Derek and Tomic. The lack of work meant less income, and more time on their hands.

The call to limit the time workers could work meant that the business of Chegworth Valley was also feeling the pressure of the credit crunch. But over the period of two and half years that I have worked for them, I have also observed their gradual expansion. They have opened a farm shop in Notting Hill which sells their own produce as well as meat and flowers from other producers. They have built more polytunnels to grow more varieties of fruit, they have started growing organic vegetables and selling the produce in the farm stalls and shop. They have constructed huge cold stores that regulate not only the temperature but the level of oxygen in the atmosphere in which the apples are kept. It would appear that their talk of financial difficulty was a result of the combination of the economic climate with their plans for rapid expansion.

I sympathized with Derek and felt the injustice of the situation. When business was good for Chegworth Valley, the workers were not paid more; but when the business suffered, the workers were asked to carry the responsibility of reducing the cost of the farm. Derek and Tomic were right, it was all about “money, money, money”.

Chapter 8: Inextricable Aesthetics: A Chameleon's View of Farmers' Markets and Supermarkets

Introduction

Leisure activities, seen to be distinct from work routines, encourage passive attitudes and contribute to an embellished way of living (lifestyle) and an “artlessness” of everyday life. Lefebvre pointed out that praxis as the key to disalienation is a method by which these problems can be addressed. However, not all forms of entertainment, nor all leisure activities, are the same, and they cannot all be condemned with a single reading or critique. Leisure, even when seen simply as entertainment, holds multiple meanings and potentials for individuals. For Lefebvre, the importance is that the study of everyday life should be approached dialectically: moments of the everyday, whether in work or in leisure, provide their own critique; for example a weekend binge might already incorporate a criticism of the alienating aspects of weekday work. The nature of leisure can at times be enriching or impoverishing, often conflicting and contradictory. However leisure activities that show an awareness or a critique of their own alienation do not automatically lend themselves to an “art of living”: in some cases, such as the ones discussed below, they can also contribute to further alienation.

In this chapter, I will start by looking at the importance placed upon the aesthetic quality of the products found in supermarkets and major distribution outlets, using observations of the strategies and media representations employed by Marks and Spencer and of the hypermarkets such as Carrefour. I point out that the marketing of

food has become highly aestheticised; this is most apparent in the presentation of products, but I contend that the aestheticization process also extends to the shopping environment and the experience thereof. In the recent upsurge of ethical concern that surrounds food consumption, especially in the areas of “good”, “clean” and “fair”, various responses have appeared in the public domain. Supermarkets and other major distribution outlets brought out new lines and strategies to demonstrate that they are not only committed to aestheticizing the appearance of commodities, but also to improving the quality of the food, the environment and the welfare of the people who work within it. Such responses reflect the complex nature of the everyday: on the one hand, this could be seen as an acknowledgement and self critique by these institutions of the ways in which food has been produced, distributed and consumed (associated with a globally rampant capitalist mode of production); on the other hand, these apparent ethical concerns have opened up profitable niches in that market. Ethical concerns, which helped changed consumer behaviour have been quickly subsumed into a set of superficial aesthetics that are perhaps no different to the premium lines offered by supermarkets: both contribute to generating profit and the expansion of capitalism. This chapter offers a critique in view of the above.

Carrefour

Several summers ago, I was invited to spend a week’s holiday with a family in the South of France. It was a particularly hot day and the heat made everyone lethargic. As we dozed in the shade and waited for the relentless afternoon sun to ease, my host announced that she was short of a few ingredients for dinner. Anticipating her request, we groaned in unison at the thought of having to leave the cool confines of

home to head to the shops. To my surprise, the daughter-in-law, Sandrine, who had been dozing on the couch, perked up and enthusiastically volunteered to go. A few minutes later, with a shopping list in hand, I found myself in the car listening to her eager babble as we whizzed through the small roads and headed towards the hypermarket. “I love going to Carrefour!” she said. In a quiet country village where social activities are few and far between, going to the supermarket provides a welcome distraction and perhaps becomes a source of animation and entertainment. Sandrine comes from Paris where shops and supermarkets are all too ready-at-hand and it seems that her interest in going to supermarkets is not a newly acquired taste.

Arriving at Carrefour, Sandrine immediately proceeded to take a massive trolley and without wasting any time went around the aisles with a certain familiarity picking up ingredients on the shopping list. As we finished with the groceries, she headed further into the shop (or rather the complex), and worked her way through the different sections of children’s clothing, cosmetics, clothes, home-ware etc.

Wandering through the aisles of the hypermarkets – I could not help but feel that I was in a theme park in which each section featured its own characters and attractions (one could easily substitute Carrefour with Disneyland and imagine a child enthusiastically saying “I love going to Disneyland!”). Lulled by the jingle of background music and neon lighting, I was unaware of the time passing. When we finally pushed the trolley, full to the brim, to the cashier, I realized we were already late for dinner.

Hypermarkets, or large format supermarkets, often provide more than just day-to-day groceries. From the usual fruit, vegetables, meat and dairy, to clothing, accessories,

home-ware, sports as well as audio-visual equipment, they cater for all that anyone could ever need, from birth to death. Roaming through the aisles of the supermarket, one could not help but be drawn into the dazzling promotions and offers. Part of the attraction perhaps comes from the possibilities of what these goods provide, whether it be a new sport with the trainers on special offer, or a new recipe with the casserole dish. Entering a supermarket is often like entering into a space where possibilities are endless. Neon lighting provides an illusion of timelessness while subtle variations set the mood for different sections. For example, the fresh fruit and vegetable counters are brightly lit to emphasize the natural colours of the products. Because of the promising and pleasant nature of the display, they are often situated close to the entrance of the supermarket in order to make the space more inviting. The clothing section, on the other hand, is dimmer by comparison and encourages more lingering along the aisles. The in-house bakery often features freshly baked bread, reheating half-cooked loaves to trigger memories of warm crusty bread. As the smells waft through the aisles, we salivate like Pavlovian dogs. It is no secret that supermarkets are very persuasive (some might call it manipulative) in their marketing strategies: the attention given to the lighting, music and smell excites, soothes, appeals to our every sense; everything is executed to near perfection.

The care that supermarkets invest in their presentation of products highlights the important role that aesthetics play in merchandising. Aesthetics is after all an appreciation of beauty through the senses – a way of perception and sensation.

Welsch uses the term aestheticization to denote the furnishing of reality with aesthetic elements, “a sugar-coating that corresponds to our senses and feeling of form” (Welsch 1996: 2). Packaging in particular features largely in the

aestheticization process. While care is invested in the layout of the supermarket, equal attention is imbued upon each commodity on the shelves. From logo design, through packaging to display, the appearance of every product has been deliberated upon in a manner that is far from haphazard.

Gastro-porn

Today food itself, before any of its packaging comes into being, is already heavily aestheticized, and this is nowhere more apparent than in the advertisements of Marks and Spencer's Simply Food campaign. Take the advertisement for Christmas Lunch for example: Marks and Spencer's in 50 seconds presented viewers with a four-course meal, starting with smoked salmon and ending with Christmas pudding.

Backed by the slow seductive guitar music of Santana, a spoonful of mustard sauce drops invitingly among the pieces of smoked salmon. Simultaneously, an invisible hand brings into view a forkful of fish and sweeps it into the creamy sauce. The shot fades out to bring on the next course of turkey and stuffing. As the invisible hand once again serves to carve the meat, the viewer is treated to a full glimpse of the apple and sage stuffing inside. Just when one starts to think that the dish lacks lustre and moisture, the "Lincolnshire red cabbage with apple and cranberry braised in red wine and tawny port sauce" follows swiftly in order to ease the dryness in our mouths. And in case that is not enough to satisfy the traditional dream of Christmas, a tray of parsnips quickly follows, spitting and bubbling in the oven tray sticky with honey and mustard sauce. No British Christmas can end without the traditional Christmas pudding, so for the grand finale of the show, the familiar sphere of the

dark pudding adorned with a single sprig of mistletoe on top is set aflame as the sultanas roll and bounce onto the plate. The entry of each dish is narrated by a velvety woman's voice; like the Sirens calling out to sailors at sea, the voice lures us into the scrumptious and exciting world of Marks and Spencer food.

Every visual representation in the advertisement is an exaggeration, each motion, each cadence, each shot is overly vivid, dense and slow. This style of filming can be equated to that of pornography, where subjects dress up and are explicitly presented to provoke and incite desire. The French Structuralist Roland Barthes makes the distinction between pornography and eroticism: pornography leaves nothing to the imagination, it "presents the sexual organs, making them into a motionless object (a fetish), flattered like an idol that does not leave its niche" (2000: 59). Eroticism, on the other hand, does not make the sexual organs into a central object, it relies on the *punctum* – the blind spot, that which we cannot see: it "is a kind of subtle *beyond* – as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see ..." (2000: 59 emphasis in original). Gastro-porn (Smart 1994: 158-180) refers to food that has been aestheticized to the extent where it becomes pornographic. These exhibitiv images of food tempt and excite, they tease and lure, but like pornography the object of desire remains just beyond our reach. As the 50 second advert ends, we are left pining in the darkness of our own homes as we rummage uneventfully through the empty larder to satisfy the abyss left by the images. Food on television or visual cookery is a good example of aestheticization. Consuming such objects of ornamentalization, as Barthes pointedly observes, "can perfectly well be accomplished simply by looking" (Barthes 2000: 79). The satisfaction that comes from consuming such food pornography does not derive from the palate – rather,

“eating” in such cases begins and ends with the eyes. Gastro-porn heightens expectation, it tempts and excites, but like pornography, it promises far more than is ever delivered: although one’s appetite and desire may be satisfied in a basic, immediate sense, true gratification is rarely met. The promise of such scrumptious meals is never quite realized.

Environment and experience

Another distinctive feature of Marks and Spencer's style of advertisement is the narration that accompanies the visual presentation. A typical advertisement offers a sequence of images of the product, linked together as if they were scenes in an unfolding dramatic narrative. An accompanying voice-over describes every detail and ties one scene to the next, almost as though the producers were afraid the viewer might miss some crucial element; some essential component of the dish, just as the makers of modern television dramas frequently begin and end each episode with a (re-)statement of its key themes and essential plot developments.

Consider for example, the advertisement for beef burgers. Against the familiar jingle of Marks and Spencer, the narrator introduces viewers to the “herb-cruste British beef, melt-in-the-middle burgers, filled with creamy Italian Gorgonzola cheese.” Suddenly an ordinary cheeseburger has been transformed in front of our very eyes, an “aura” is bestowed upon this boring piece of patty. “This is not just a burger,” she continues, “this is an M&S burger.” The images and the narrative have created a value that exceeds that of the product itself. By value, I do not only point to the economic value of the product. Rather, I follow Simmel in referring to value as the

judgements made by subjects (Simmel 2003). The “aura” created through fancy packaging and enticing advertisements is therefore what creates the value of the object.

This is further enhanced in an aestheticized environment where design extends from the individual styling of a commodity to the environment in which it is presented. Shop floors of Marks and Spencer and other large format supermarkets are no longer merely utilitarian. Rather, they have been refashioned; aestheticized in order to make them vibrant and lively spaces. In the UK, large-format superstores have adopted various approaches in order to achieve different moods. For example, the “passion for food” format of Sainsbury’s boasts a traditional counter style delicatessen which gives the shop a “continental food hall feel” (Sainsburys 2009). Others offer cafés within the shopping space that recall Parisian terraces. Dark wood panelled-walls in Marks and Spencer draw the attention away from the aisles of industrial refrigerators and offer the illusion of a classy and chic environment.

Fancy packaging, enticing advertisements together with beautified interiors can be likened to displays in a chic boutique. These superficial images feed a current need in the social life of commodities, as Appadurai (1993) points out. They evoke the imagination of a lifestyle that boasts of affluence, luxury and leisure. One could argue that “the aesthetic aura is then the consumer’s primary acquisition, with the article merely coming alongside” (Welsch 1996: 3). The aesthetics of the product come to determine the value of the purchase. Consuming Marks and Spencer’s food becomes more than just reheating a ready-made meal. Instead, it signifies a certain bourgeois lifestyle. Aesthetics is no longer just the vehicle that sells the product, but

rather transforms itself into the essence of the purchase.

Marks and Spencer's Simply Food is considered by the business world to be one of the most successful rebranding projects in the UK. Stuart Rose, the chief executive charged with overseeing the project has given its shops and products a good face-lift, they have turned what used to be a shop exclusive to the elderly into a new, sexy and classy environment that attracts chic, young professionals. When one goes into Marks and Spencer one brings along the lingering desire provoked by the images presented in these advertisements. When we pick up the packet that contains the turkey – we are clouded by the images of the completed version of the dish – of the turkey being carved while another invisible waiter stands ready with the sauce and accompaniment for the next scene. It is apparent that these techniques serve an economic strategy: as Welsch pertinently puts it, “the bond with aesthetics renders even the un-saleable saleable, and improves the already saleable two or three times over” (Welsch 1996: 3).

In order to consume aestheticized products one has to experience them – they require an active engagement, whether in reality or in our imagination. When wandering through the aisles of the shopping space, we wander also through the corners of our imagination: from one moment to the next, we flit from imagining ourselves preparing for a picnic on the lawn to orchestrating a bourgeois banquet for friends. The “aura” of the product and the “feel” of the environment create a whole new dimension to add to grocery shopping. Welsch terms it experience-shopping, by which he means that experience is as much a part of the aestheticization process as is the superficial embellishment of products. The process is seen to the extent that

“reality as a whole is coming to count increasingly as an aesthetic construction to us”
(Welsch 1996: 1).

The combination of gastro-porn and experience-shopping can be summed up neatly in a recent observation. Lured by the image of a burger steak frying on the barbecue grid and the promise of a Gorgonzola filling, I walked into Marks and Spencer one evening to find not only aisles of visually promising ready-made meals but also a variety of dishes that suit different moods – snug curry evenings, healthy salads, romantic tête-a tête dinners – but one that caught my attention was the range of ready meals called “gastro-pub” dishes. These were contained in rather large boxes, containing sesame seed buns, beef patties or pies and mash. True to the slogan “this is not just food, this is M&S food” of Marks and Spencer, the gastro-pub range offers more than just a few beef patties in a bun. It promises a good evening in the pub – now available in the comforting confines of home. By offering the replicas of hearty pub dishes in attractive packaging, Marks and Spencer seem to have successfully combined products, mood and experience in an amalgamation of ready-made gastro-porn-experience. Like some futuristic device that has come out of a Philip K. Dick novel, our moods can be set with a dial on the mood organ console (*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Dick 2004). Perhaps in a further analogy with pornography, the marketing team of Marks and Spencer have neglected to address certain crucial aspects of the kind of experience being marketed: a good evening in the pub also involves convivial meetings with friends, colleagues and partners; the essence of the experience cannot be wrapped in foil.¹⁸

¹⁸ Ready-made meals such as the ones offered in Marks and Spencer classify as “slow fast food” – see footnote 9. Images evoking a sense of affluence such as in the example discussed above, or a sense of healthy goodness using images of rural farmers, form marketing strategies for glamorising what are quintessentially microwave dinners.

Packaging Ethics

The influencing power of packaging, advertising and shopping environments has been discussed by many and has acquired a raised awareness in the public domain. Contemporary writers such as Naomi Klein (*No Logo* 2001), Eric Schlosser (*Fast Food Nation* 2002), Joanna Blythman (*Shopped* 2005) and directors such as Morgan Spurlock (*Super Size Me* 2004) to name just a few, have popularized these concerns and put many fast food chains and supermarkets under public scrutiny. In response to these criticisms, we see corporations increasingly trying to highlight the changes they have made to show that they are in fact committed to being responsible for the quality of their produce (and not just the packaging), the sustainability of the environment (e.g. through the use of more recycled materials) and the welfare of the workers (e.g. fair trade). Consumers of today are also responding to these concerns: products that claim to be produced ethically are seen in a more favourable light – it is no longer sufficient for aestheticized products simply to appeal to taste, a sense of beauty and immediate, sensual desire (hedonism), but an appeal to the ethical sense is also now required. Welsch points out that aesthetics are becoming increasingly important in defining human interaction. “*Homo aestheticus* is becoming the new role model ... he is sensitive, hedonistic, refined and, above all of discerning taste” (Welsch 1996: 6). Aesthetic competence is no longer restricted to simply the possession of taste, manners and etiquette, such as the petite bourgeoisie of Bourdieuan times; today, aspects of all areas of life including value-judgements, self-orientation and ethical norms are part of the necessary requirements to achieve an aesthetic quality in the modern consciousness (Welsch 1996: 6).

Marks and Spencer launched their 200 million pound “Plan A” eco-business plan in February 2008 and announced that from May onwards they would stop providing free plastic bags to customers as part of their plan to become a cleaner and greener company. Like many retailers nowadays, Marks and Spencer are eager to show that they are willing to take steps to address ethical issues raised against major corporations. Although this is not an unwelcome step towards sustainable or at least greener consumption, Marks and Spencer nevertheless continue to give out disposable cutlery, sell fruit in polystyrene trays and laminate their vegetables in plastic. As a company, Marks and Spencer use more non-recyclable materials in their packaging than any of their rivals (Benjamin 2007).

Many food retailers are keen to participate in what is nowadays regarded as a necessary form of marketing, known as “green marketing”. This is a branding exercise that forms associations between businesses and environmental issues so as to put forward a positive, caring and friendly public image. In other words, it encourages an illusion of care - that companies do in fact care for the environment, and that they would also put care into sourcing from those who also grow, produce, transport and package with care. Sourcing, together with so-called “green” practices, have become the buzzwords in the food industry and companies have scrambled to put together more and more images of rugged farmers to adorn the faces of what are still mass-produced and heavily packaged readymade foods.

Green marketing takes the examples of surface aestheticization described by Welsch to another level, insofar as it is quintessentially a packaging of ethics. Since

greenhouse gases, carbon footprints and recycling became global concerns, the *homo aestheticus* of today has also had to pay attention to these wider effects of production. Today what constitutes good taste is also the ethical demeanour that indicates an awareness of the concerns that have entered the realm of modern consciousness. Enterprises have been quick to take note and react to these issues, raising and churning out ready-made solutions. Organic, fair-trade, carbon-neutral – whether the concern is the environment or the working conditions of employees, there is now a product that responds to every worry. Food products that have some claim to (a plastic wrapped) ethics are more of a norm than an exception nowadays.

Chameleon

While the apparent concern shown by these businesses might appease the guilty consciences of a very few consumers, others have found it insufficient. Many still feel that the mass production that the supermarket instigates constitutes an economic paradigm that is exploitative and wasteful. To this group of people the antidote for the ills that supermarkets pose lies in farmers' markets. Over the past decade or so, numerous small-scale weekend markets have opened up all around the UK – *The Guardian* recently estimated that there are currently about 550 of these farmers' markets operating every week (Morris 2007). The popularity and increasing demand for more is now putting pressure on the markets to expand in size as well as the frequency with which they operate. Farmers are now under pressure to trade on weekdays as well as weekends. As opposed to merely seeing farmers in photos, shopping at markets allows for actual conversation with farmers themselves. Instead of buying meat that is wrapped in layers of unnecessary packaging, the meat that you

get in markets comes in waxed paper and simple brown bags. Instead of having to choose between “organic” and “finest”, one gets to choose what is seasonal.

On the surface, Borough Market is everything that a supermarket is not. There are no designated aisles for categorising products, no “buy one get one free” offers, no perfectly wrapped apples sitting in a polystyrene tray ready to go. Instead directions are passed on by word of mouth, offers depend on individual stallholders and every stall is individually decorated. Chegworth Valley, for example, displays their fruit in old wooden crates, and arranges beige jute and badly handwritten signs across anything that does not look rustic. In doing so, they present people with what they want to see – namely, a true farmer's stall, to which people flock in order to buy apples and pears.

It would appear that the differences between supermarkets and farmers' markets are distinct and clear, but I would like to employ the figure of the chameleon in this section in order to introduce a few important paradoxes. The chameleon's amazing ability to change colours is often exaggerated. Chameleons are adapted to their environments and their colour tones provide a natural camouflage. In other words, a chameleon's ability to conceal themselves within their environment is circumstantial – their protective mechanism only functions in their natural habitat, and they are inextricable from their environment. I would like to borrow this idea of an inextricable relationship and use it to point out that the current popularity of both farmers' markets and supermarkets is much like the chameleon and its environment, in that the existence of the one depends on that of the other.

The differences that stand between supermarkets and farmers' markets become meaningful and attractive when compared to each other. For example, consumers are drawn to the use of paper bags only by virtue of their antipathy towards the excessive packaging used in supermarkets. In the same way, the value of organic produce is predicated upon the use of chemical pesticides elsewhere. Supermarkets need farmers' markets to show consumers that their products are good value for money, and farmers' markets need supermarkets to show that their produce is ostensibly superior. In order to attract customers, both farmers' markets and supermarkets must co-exist. The present success of farmers' markets is merely due to their occupying a niche created by the domination of the food retail industry by the supermarkets, and vice versa. This paradoxical relationship means that the success of farmers' markets is in fact inextricable from the successful existence of supermarkets, and that each depends on the other's lack of ability to create meaning for the customers.

The inextricable relationship between farmers' markets and supermarkets indicates that the changes that we currently see in the food industry are merely catered to meet the different aesthetic considerations that consumers now expect. Miele and Murdoch (2002) point out that aestheticization is a component of a new cultural matrix in which aesthetic values and concerns have become intrinsic to "lifestyle creation" and that everyday practices – eating, dressing, interacting, cooking, designing, entertaining, managing and so forth – are increasingly underpinned by aesthetic considerations. Since food became trendy, going to markets has also become a fashionable thing to do. Borough Market, with its wrought iron and old brick arches, colourful banners, jovial traders and spread of chocolate, olives, bread and cheeses, offers a weekend of entertainment for the senses. Together with panels signalling

locally grown organic produce to appease one's conscience, visiting Borough Market becomes the ultimate gastro-aesthetic experience.

Satisfied by the illusion of change provided by aesthetic variations, consumers no longer feel the need to look further afield for solutions to the problems that surround consumption. Welsch makes the point that desire, amusement and enjoyment without consequence form a new cultural matrix, and that these pleasures increasingly expand and dominate culture as a whole (Welsch 1996: 1, 3). This hedonism, which characterises lifestyle creation, does not bring about sustainable changes. Cosmetic shifts that constitute trends could sometimes even be detrimental to the process of change.

Let me sum up this section by returning to the Marks and Spencer's "Plan A eco business" example. Encouraging the culture of reusing or recycling is undoubtedly a step towards a "greener" way of consumption: instead of giving out free carrier bags, Marks and Spencer now only provide cloth bags as a more sustainable alternative. Encapsulated within this business move is a critique of the prior ways in which we consumed and discarded plastic bags; however the use of the cloth bag brings with it its own problems. The cloth or jute bag is now a tool to demonstrate the ethical awareness of its users as well as a fashionable item. Fashionable designs also contribute to the popularization of these bags: the once humble cloth bags have now acquired the status of a "tote bag" – considered a "must-have" of the moment. Borough Market also launched their own brand of jute bags which quickly sold out. Even as I pointed out to visitors that there are many more places in the market that sell reusable cloth and jute bags, most were adamant in their search for the "Borough

Market” one. From Marks and Spencer, through Borough Market to high-end fashion designers such as Marc Jacobs, companies have embraced this new wave of ethical consciousness with vigour. Recyclable and reusable bags have now become a collectable item, the ethical intention behind which has been buried under yet another avalanche of consumable commodities. Dimitri Siegel in an article published by *Creative Review* points out that the cost (environmental as well as financial) of producing one of these bags is equivalent to producing four hundred plastic bags – which is “fine if you use the tote 400 times, but what if you just end up with forty totes in your closet?” (2009: 54).

Private and Public Consciousness

In the section above, I have briefly discussed the process of aestheticization of the everyday, particularly within the realms of leisure activities and consumption. While I do not wish to diminish the critique of the illusory changes apparent in innovative commercial techniques and promotional skills, equally I do not wish to erase the role of the individual in the practice of consumption. Academic discussions surrounding consumerism, in particular those derived from the work of the Frankfurt school, argue that individuals are submitted to greater opportunities for controlled and manipulated consumption in the face of an ever-expanding range of consumer goods. This approach has been developed most prominently by Adorno and Horkheimer (2008) in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, where they argue that leisure time pursuits, arts and culture in general have been filtered through the culture industry and made into commodities bound by the logic of capitalism. Consumption becomes the lowest common denominator in which a manipulated mass participate in the production of a

commodity culture. Commodities, with the help of advertising, take on diverse forms and cultural meanings, mundane products are accessorized with images of romance, exotica, nostalgia, beauty, fulfilment, communality, good life, ethics – they become part of the “aura” of the objects we consume. Manipulation in this sense is taken as a form of ideological control (control of meaning) that governs the actions of individuals. Consumerism from this point of view is seen as a culprit responsible for the increasing effects of individualisation.

However, the discussion has also taken on another path, one which defends the individual against what has been criticized as an elitist way of approaching the topic of consumption. The production of consumption approach such as the one adopted by the Frankfurt School has been criticized for not being able to account for the multiple and complex ways in which individuals make use of these commodities. The tendency to regard culture industries as producing a homogenous mass culture neglects to address an individual’s ability to exert his or her own individuality and creativity. From this point of view, individuals are not seen to be impassive in the ways they consume. Practices of consumption, as in the uses to which goods and services are put, could be seen as ways of expressing individuals’ identity, marking attachment to social groups, exhibiting social distinction etc. Rob Shields (1992) for example in his book *Lifestyle Shopping* suggests that consumption can be seen as a form of social exchange through which a sense of community is actualized. De Certeau and Lefebvre emphasize the ways in which individuals create meanings for themselves through consumption (these two theorists will be discussed in further detail in the chapter 10 (The Practice of Everyday Life I: Gift, Tactics, Neighbourhood)). From this point of view, the examples employed in this thesis

might not do justice to all the individuals mentioned, as I might not be able to give an all-encompassing reading of what consumption might represent to these individuals. Sandrine, for example, who loves shopping and going to Carrefour, is not an automaton disillusioned by advertising or manipulated by the interior design of the shop. Shopping is a choice for Sandrine, chosen as one of her leisure activities; it represents a time when she can entertain herself and which she associates with time off work. As she wanders up and down the aisles, she chooses and picks items that correspond to her tastes; actively comparing prices and creatively putting pieces together to suit her style, creating her own individual identity.

While I feel that the first section of the current chapter draws heavily from examples of consumption, I do not wish to limit my discussion solely to the debate generated on this topic. Rather I wish to explore the link between consumption and production, not in terms of a certain commodity but in terms of their wider social implications. As Lefebvre has pointed out time and time again, everyday life must be studied in its totality; leisure activities become significant when studied alongside their interrelation with all aspects of life. A leisurely visit to Borough Market or Carrefour might not appear to be significant in that it stands as a minor exception to the usual routines of daily rhythm, however for Lefebvre, even occasional activities should be seen *in relation to* other regular activities such as work and family life: everyday life in its totality is precisely the relationship between all these different spheres. “Everyday life is profoundly related to all activities, and encompasses them with all their differences and their conflicts; it is their meeting place, their bond, their common ground” (1991: 97). If aestheticization and commercialism are bound up with everyday life, they also have the potential for transformation – if the project of

understanding, criticizing is aligned with the goal of changing daily life (Lefebvre's ultimate goal). For Lefebvre, everyday life is a challenge to general social atomization: the separation of society and experience into discrete realms of the political, the social, the aesthetic, the economic etc. From this point of view, aesthetics is part of the political inasmuch as leisure is part of work. "Thus, *the critique of everyday life involves a critique of political life, in that everyday life already contains and constitutes such a critique: in that it is that critique*" (1991: 92) (emphasis in original). In order to be able to better understand everyday life as Lefebvre suggested, we need to study life in all its varied aspects and the conflicts and contradictions within them. In the following section, I will be looking at these layers theoretically with reference to the works of Lefebvre and André Gorz. In particular, I would like to point out that the relationships between consumption, leisure, life and work (discussed in chapter 6 Lifestyle versus Way of Life) cannot be disassociated from each other – one cannot be seen as derived unproblematically from another, these spheres of life are also inextricable from each other.

Contributing to the aforementioned social atomization is the split between private and public consciousness which is demonstrated in the rupture between work, life and leisure. For Lefebvre, individuals are social beings (as opposed to merely biological), in and by the content of their lives (work and leisure) and the form of their consciousness (private and public), which combines to create the foundation of all societies. But paradoxically, it is also that which limits and confines the development of the human social because of the way that society is structured and organised upon the division of labour (Lefebvre 1991: 148). This is in line with Marx's critique whereby he points out that alienated labour creates a negative basis

for the development of a limited self-consciousness that tends towards individualism. Fragmented labour causes individuals to lead inward looking lives, concentrating on their particular skills and specializations. Lefebvre's notion of the private consciousness is therefore discussed in the context of the bourgeois individual whose (private) interests include the pursuit of pleasure, luxury, profit, power and the accumulation of property (1991: 86-7)¹⁹. Individualistic tendencies such as the ones mentioned shape what is known as the "private life": this is a term that designates the everyday life of individuals in this social structure as "a life of 'privation', a life 'deprived': deprived of reality, of links with the world – a life for which everything human is alien." (1991: 149). It is a life where work and leisure, aesthetics and politics, private and public are placed at opposite poles. Private consciousness shrinks in upon itself, believing that it is self-sufficient, it is a consciousness that is "limited, restricted, negative and formal" (Lefebvre 1991: 154)

But how does this reflected in everyday life? Lefebvre states that an individual's consciousness is determined by their social being – their place in society and interactions with other people. Consciousness "reflects" the social. Here, "reflect" is used intentionally to evoke the image of the mirror – in the sense that the image only appears to be a reproduction of whatever is in front of it, it can be "mutilated, inverted, distorted, mystified" (1991: 92). The split produced within the lives of individuals by the structuring of society based upon the division of labour is

¹⁹ In line with the argument offered in this section, Ulrich Beck in his book *What is Globalisation?* points out that the trend of individualization causes society to lose its collective self-consciousness and consequently the capacity for political action (2005: 8). He discusses the problem with reference to the global economic market under neo-liberalism which permits transnational corporations to produce goods and services through a division of labour in different parts of the world; by doing so these businesses can play off countries against one another in order to find the cheapest fiscal conditions and social infrastructure to support their businesses. Beck furthers his analysis by saying that businesses that produce in one country, pay taxes in another and demand state infrastructural spending in yet another place undermine the wellbeing of the public (e.g. by not contributing to the local fiscal structure that supports education, health care etc.) (2005: 2-6).

illustrated in the separated spheres of work and leisure. The norms and values that conduct an individual's private and professional lives are radically different and at times contradictory. For example, in general terms, an individual's professional performance is judged according to the efficiency with which they function within a large corporation, where success demands a spirit of competition and opportunism. A capitalist individual "sees the other members of society – be they bourgeois or not – as outside of himself, and in opposition to himself" (Lefebvre 1991: 93). Such attitudes are not necessarily part of an individual's character – indeed, they might be in opposition to the role the individual plays outside of work, for example, the loving husband or wife, the doting parent, the amiable friend etc. André Gorz, the Austrian-French social philosopher, discussing the social aspects of work and leisure in *Critique of Economic Reason*, also makes the point that the splitting of the social system and the divorce of rationalities produce a split within the individuals themselves. The contradictory demands placed upon the individual are compensated by the promise of financial rewards that could in turn be used to satisfy an individual's private needs and desires such as in the case of Sandrine. In other words, "professional success becomes the *means* of achieving private comfort and pleasures that have no relation with the qualities demanded by professional life" (Gorz 1989: 36). Such forms of consumption are termed "compensatory" by Gorz as they encourage functional workers to accept alienation in their work on the basis of the promise of monetary returns.

Consumption therefore cannot be regarded solely within the realms of leisure, as it is inextricably linked to an individual's work life – both in the way described by Appadurai (1993) (discussed in chapter 6 Lifestyle versus Way of Life) where he

states that leisure requires not only time but disposable income and is a way of rewarding time well-spent in production; and also in dialectical terms, in the ways Lefebvre (1991) and Gorz (1989) have demonstrated. There is however a missing link. It is not enough to simply produce working conditions that create needs for compensatory goods, it is also necessary to “educate” the workers to *choose* to want to consume these compensatory goods over their alienated labour. And here is where advertising becomes a strong force in conditioning individuals: commercial advertising as manifest in the examples discussed in this thesis, offers a certain private satisfaction or pleasure which is individualistic. Gorz states that the message of advertising tends to “establish a sense of complicity between seller and potential buyer, by suggesting that both are exclusively pursuing their own private advantage ...” (1989: 45). Advertising serves to persuade individuals that the goods and services offered are adequate in recompensing the sacrifices individuals make in order to obtain them, it helps construct “*a haven of individual happiness which sets them apart from the crowd...*” (1989: 45 emphasis in original). Advertising constructs objects of desire by placing them in the realms of “fantasies, whims, the bizarre (as in the decadent aesthetic!)” (Lefebvre 1991: 162). The advertising of Marks and Spencer is a good example of that. The bourgeois political economy instigates the need for money to acquire these goods. Lefebvre states that, in the hands of the individual, money “is the only power which gives him contact with the alien, hostile world of objects” (1991: 161). Money, as man’s alienated essence becomes the standard against which everything is measured: “as a set of desires, the human being is not developed and cultivated for himself, but so that the demands of this theological monster may be satisfied.” (Lefebvre 1991: 161).

Herein lies another important point: commercial advertising does not *produce* consumption (although it does play a part); rather, consumption *is already produced* by the alienation of labour and the subsequent experience of employment within the organisation of society. Gorz says that “the passive and ‘massified’ consumer ... is not created by capitalism by means of advertising, fashion, and ‘human relations’, ... on the contrary, capitalism *already* creates him within the relationships of production and the work situation by cutting off the producer from his product...” (1989: 71 emphasis in original). Following this line of thought, Conrad Lodziak in *The Myth of Consumerism* goes on to say that we are in fact *compelled* to consume. For him consumption is less of an “ideological manipulation” than a “material manipulation” which acknowledges the material power of the capitalist system to “organise effectively the means through which we are to satisfy our basic needs, however these might be interpreted. Under the alienation of labour this translates into our *dependency* on employment, which alone ... exerts its own material manipulations on needs and consumption.” (Lodziak 2002: 93 emphasis in original). In other words, the drive to acquire in private consciousness within the bourgeois individual, as Marx poetically puts it, locks two souls – characterised by the need to enjoy and the need to accumulate – in “a Faustian combat” (Lefebvre 1991: 93). For an individual’s desire to satisfy his private needs is dependent upon his financial capital and therefore employment which puts him in competition with other individuals; however the private man is also perhaps a father, a colleague, a friend, and his private consciousness is also tied to the needs of other people which are determined by the economic, social and political conditions the individual is in.

The battling of private desires with public consciousness in an individual is

illustrated by Gorz with a game-theory scenario by Garret Hardin titled *The Tragedy of the Commons* (1998: 47). In this scenario, a piece of land²⁰ is given to a group of farmers who are free to pursue their personal interest and graze their animals on the common land. However, increasing the size of the herds will inevitably cause overgrazing on the land, resulting in a diminishing yield of milk per cow. The scenario was set up so that the interests of individual farmers are linked to the wider common: each additional cow grazing will be at the expense of all. However contrary to the common belief that farmers will keep their herds to an optimum minimum, it is in fact in the farmer's personal interest to enlarge his herd as fast as possible and faster than everyone else's. The inevitable problem of overgrazing had to be then resolved by imposing an obligatory limit on the total number of animals and the number of farmers allowed. The scenario demonstrates that the use of incentives that appeal to *individual interests* (private consciousness) does not in fact lead to a functional integration – even when the collective's interest is at stake. Moreover, a separate authority will have to be appointed to regulate personal interest. This has been discussed by Gorz in relation to the role of the state. He writes, “the use of incentive regulators to achieve functional integration by appealing to individual interest, will require responsibility for the collective interest to be assumed by a separate authority – the state – whose powers will be widened and whose legitimacy will be based on the mandate received – and solicited – from its citizens to take charge of public affairs on their behalf.” (1989: 48). The political power (defined by Gorz as the power to administer the apparatuses of the state) will become increasingly separated from social and cultural life as public interests are taken on by managers of a separated authority, which consequently leads to an “aggravated

²⁰ The term “the commons” refers to what is held in common by human – land, water, air etc. are regarded as the natural endowment in the context of human life (de Angelis 2007: 241)

division” between society and state. The loss of the individual’s autonomy in the political sphere is compensated by the promise of a protective welfare state (in the form of social benefits and social services) in the same way as consumerism compensates for the “withering away of self-regulated social relations and family ties implied in this process of socialization” (1989: 49). This illustrates the widening gulf between public life and social life (or in Lefebvre’s terms private and public consciousness) and the general and individual’s interest.

The public consciousness for Lefebvre is the consciousness of “belonging to a society and a nation the consciousness of class. It enters into permanent contact with the state and the state apparatus ...” (1991: 92). Yet the role of the State and its relationship with the individual is again a complex one. Similar to the way in which Gorz outlined the role of the state in the scenario – a separate authority designated to care for our welfare – the individual enters into permanent contact with the state by way of administration and bureaucracy. Individuals rely on the state to care for the simplest matters – transport, playgrounds, education etc and in terms of professional performance, the state is judged on the basis of its ability to grade these elements into a certain hierarchy. But the state, which is where political life operates, is by definition lived out in the stratosphere of society (Lefebvre 1991: 89), it detaches itself from everyday life except in certain privileged moments (such as in elections, where politicians appeal to voters’ individual interests rather than the social, in a way that is similar to commercial advertising – discussed in Gorz 1989: 48). The problems therefore which are concrete to everyday living are managed in the abstract stratum of the political. The citizen in a bourgeois society realizes himself as being part of the social, he plays a part in a political community in which he sees himself as

social, but “within every class-based society the constraints that one class imposes upon another are always part of the inhuman power which reigns over everything” (Lefebvre 1991: 90). It is in this sense that a bourgeois society “perfects the opposition between the public and the private, between community and slavery” (Lefebvre 1991: 91). On the one hand, society sanctions the private man through employment and creates needs that are both real and fictitious – the individual therefore becomes alienated and isolated. On the other hand, it gives individuals a sense of public consciousness by placing them in a political fictitious community through bureaucracy and administration as well as giving them a part to play during privileged moments such as elections. Individuals become fragmented by these contradictory roles, they are disillusioned, and at this point the only link between all these “social atoms and fragmented activities” seems to be the state. From this point of view (like the one suggested in the game scenario) the state plays the role of cementing civil society together, but as Lefebvre points out, this is not the case. For Lefebvre, the activities and needs (fictitious or real) of individuals are what bring individuals into contact with each other, no matter how alienated need, necessity and properties may be, they still form a link between members of the society. “Thus these needs in everyday life are a cohesive force for social life even in bourgeois society, and they, *not political life*, are the real bond” (1991: 91 emphasis in original). This point will be discussed in more detail in chapter 10 (The Practice of Everyday Life I: Gift, Tactics, Neighbourhood).

Chapter 9: Borough Market V

10th May 2008

Spring had finally arrived. The days were getting longer and the sun warmer. The market was buzzing with activity, and traders and shoppers alike lingered on long after the market had closed. The crates created a lounging area and street musicians provided entertainment that accompanied the evening. It was the best time to be working in Borough Market.

On Saturdays, around closing time, when the majority of customers start to head towards the pub with their trophies from the market, another small wave of people would appear. They would loiter around the stalls as the traders put away their displays and cleaned and packed away any left over food. These people looked for discounted products, half price bread, half price fish; as Borough Market is closed on Sundays, many stalls are happy to get rid of their perishable goods at discounted prices. Most people were disappointed when they come to the Chegworth Valley stall, since all of the goods could either be returned and kept in cold storage or used for their juices. The only thing our stall threw away at the end of the day, however, was the left over juice from the coolers. Over the months I had developed a habit of staying longer; partly to help clear up the stall, but also to socialise with Andrew and Tomic whom I barely spoke to during the busy hours of trading. Instead of leaving the juice in the coolers, where it would be thrown away, I re-bottled it to take home with me or gave to my friends.

The people who worked in the olive stall next to us were fans of the Chegworth Valley juices, and I always tried to bring them the leftovers. In return they would give me a tub of olives or garlic or whatever they had left. This exchange was quite common among traders, as the majority of people who worked in the market were food lovers. Their involvement with food varied, but ultimately there was always a certain respect for the food they sold. Today, as I finished bottling the remaining juice, Marco from the olive stall came over and looked perplexed. I asked him what was wrong. With a wave of his hands, he told me that his manager, who normally did not work on Saturdays, had thrown away buckets of leftover olives. Marco had only managed to salvage a few small boxes. I looked at him with horror; not because I would not have my weekly olives, but rather because it pained me to see such horrific waste in the market.

One of the key criticisms of supermarkets was the waste that they produced. The amount of food that supermarkets throw away is scandalous: *The Independent* reported that 1.6 million tonnes of food goes to landfill each year (Mesure 2008), whilst the government-funded recycling agency Wrap, estimates a total consumer and industry food waste of 17 million tonnes (4 million tonnes of edible food) (Coughlan 2006). Although I doubted whether Borough Market was contributing much to these figures, it was nevertheless shocking to see bagfuls of bread, olives and even fish going to waste. Marco from the olive stall was angry at his manager for refusing to sell the leftover olives at a cheaper price to customers as well as to traders. The manager said that it was bad practice, and that would affect sales: selling cheap towards closing, she claimed, would encourage people to come later during the day, entailing that less would be sold at the normal price. Giving them away also

encouraged scavengers which would affect the image of the stall. A business woman at heart, the manager decided to throw them all in the bin.

This led me to realize that although Ben did not stop me from giving the bottled juices away, it was certainly not a gesture he would encourage. He said that it puts the image of the company at risk. On a brighter note, as we had a sense of how much we sold during the day, we tried to limit the amount of waste and slowed down the refilling process towards the end of the afternoon. As I watched traders and managers drag out bags and bags of food I was only slightly consoled by the sight of people rummaging through the bins at the end of the day; at least some of the loaves of bread would feed those who needed to be fed.

17th August 2008

“There’s a bad vibe in the market,” Richie from the bakery said after work today. I stared down at my juice-stained shoes and nodded glumly. The crowd that gathered in front of the bakery after work was much smaller than usual. Only a few familiar faces lingered, all looking slightly lost in the empty spaces on the pavement. This is, for Borough Market, a rather unusual scene: normally after the market closed, traders lounged on the large empty wooden crates like swimmers on a sundeck, and even in the winter people would huddle together and talk till the late hours of the evening. To a very large extent this was what kept traders going; there was always something to look forward to at work, as friends and spontaneous encounters made up for the long working hours and minimum wages. Even on days off many would return to the market to meet friends after work. It was more than just the familiarity of the place;

the atmosphere itself was somehow addictive.

I remembered Paul the butcher once told me that there was no animosity towards other competitors in the market. “Everyone,” he told me, “works together for the love of it.” He gave the example of Andrew Sharpe, who ran another butchers just 10m from the Ginger Pig where Paul worked; they would both come together to discuss meat, share recipes and knowledge because of their shared goal of producing good quality food. I was seduced by the open spirit around me and drawn by the closeness of the community.

Consequently, the whole market was in shock the weekend that Paul did not show up for work. Nathen, another butcher who worked in the store, reported blankly that he had been fired. It was only later that I found out from Paul that Tim, the owner of the Ginger Pig, had been tipped off by Paul’s fellow colleagues about his (after-work) drinking habits. Tim had decided that this rendered Paul unsuitable for the job. Over the past few months I had worked as an apprentice butcher at the Ginger Pig, learning about meat, and I found it hard to believe that the people who had so generously given me their time and knowledge – who were all so proud of their skills and trade – could do something like this to Paul.

This event was preceded by another incident a few weeks ago, when undercover police came to the market and caught two men. Both were builders, and used the market regularly for drug dealing. Despite not being numbered amongst the traders they were nevertheless part of the crowd of familiar faces. Although their arrest was half expected, the combination of both events changed the atmosphere in the market. Suddenly people were no longer sure of the company they were with; they no longer

knew who the backstabber was, nor who could be trusted. Conversations were guarded, and restricted to the banalities of market life. It reminded me of the “war on terror” where fear comes from the illusion that the enemy is amongst us.

August had never been a good month for trade, especially for butchers and fish mongers. Many Londoners went on holiday, and the mass of tourists who visited the market were not interested in making purchases. Slowly, week after week, familiar faces became more and more sparse as managers of the stalls had to lay off staff during the quiet season.

All these events constituted what Richie called the “bad vibe” in the market. Yet times of crisis also opened up new chances and opportunities. In the weeks following Paul’s redundancy, I received numerous phone calls from market friends. Gary and John the fish mongers, Chiara from the smoothies bar, Richie, Enzo and all the bakers, Ann the ice cream girl; all were all trying to get in touch with Paul to offer their help. Some helped Paul move his belongings from the market, others took care of his *curriculum vitae* (which he had not updated in 30 years) and searched for jobs on the Internet. Meanwhile, he himself went round all the shops and looked to see if there were any vacancies.

I realized then that what drew me to Borough Market was not only the food, or the endless possibilities of generating material that illuminated my research, or even the market discounts, but the people; it was the people, the crowd of familiar faces who were my informants as well as friends that gave meaning to the space; that made me return week after week and made me feel at home in the streets of London.

Chapter 10: The practice of Everyday I: Gift, Tactics and

Neighbourhood

Introduction

In the previous chapters of this thesis I discussed various phenomena and behaviour relating to nostalgia, aesthetics and individual lifestyles within supermarkets and farmers' markets. Through doing so, I sought to develop a critique that outlined the manner in which certain environments can be detrimental to change. I also contended that capital's subsumption of any alternative space geared towards such change denigrates and arrests its progressive aspects. However, I will argue in what follows that pockets and potentialities of resistance remain within such subsumed environments. The present chapter thus explores the techniques, strategies and tactics that are peculiar to this resistance, and which form part of the practice of the everyday.

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, every Saturday when the market closes huge amounts of perishable leftovers are thrown away. This is due to the fact that Borough Market is not open on Sundays, and that most goods would not last till the next trade day (the following Thursday). People in the know hover around the bins to retrieve perfectly good discarded bread, olives or cakes to take home. The other week, a middle aged man came round and asked if we had any soft fruit that we have not been able to sell. I was apologetic, since all of the left over fruit in our stall is kept for making juice, or for selling in other markets. I did suggest he try the bakeries since they seem to regularly over produce, he might have better luck with them. He smiled and said he already has a lot of bread, nodding over to his bicycle parked in the corner, I looked over and saw that a tower of bread already sitting in the make shift pannier at the back, I

laughed and asked whether he had far to cycle with such a heavy load. He laughed too and said he only lives across the road and proceeded to describe the huge space he has for his workshop. Wondering why someone who lives in a huge flat in London Bridge would need to scrounge for food, I suddenly realized he is describing a place I have visited before. It is under the railway arches, one of the first in the area to be renovated into usable spaces. I was talking to Pierre Garroudi, the fashion designer, and it was his massive workshop/gallery that he was describing. He proceeded to explain that he keeps the food for the artists that work in his gallery, and that he prefers to give it away than see so much food go to waste.

There are others, less glamorous than Garroudi, who also regularly ask or scrounge around for left overs. Kenny, a regular face in the market who sells The Big Issue every Saturday, usually wanders into the stall to ask for a glass of juice which I give for free if my boss Ben is not around. Another lady who comes with a shopping trolley visits the stall occasionally to take a few apples. Since most left overs are able to be reused or resold, most of the time Ben would refuse; but one time he agreed, and the old lady rummaged around the crates until she found the best looking apples to take home. Waiting for her to finish, Ben frowned and said softly “you spend all this time and energy growing apples and in the end these people just come and take the best from you”. My feelings were divided. Initially I could not understand why stalls that do good business could not afford to give away a few bits and pieces to help people in need; the refusal, I felt, was an act of selfishness and stinginess. Yet upon hearing Ben I felt more sympathetic; I could see that from his point of view the apples on sale are really the fruit of his own labour. I also felt guilty, for as common market practice we often give away our goods to friends who also reciprocate with their own left over produce. It is easy to give away goods that are not mine and that I have not put any effort into making.

When the distant shouting of “half price fish!” echoes through the market, it usually signals the time to start packing up. The closing hours of Saturday are often a flurry of mad activity as traders hurry around to pack up displays, while vans slowly move into the market to transport these goods back to storage. Those that cannot be repackaged and resold are products that are considered as waste. Stall-holders or managers are keen to keep this otherwise edible food as waste as the practice of giving them away would diminish the value of the product. For example, the manager of the olive stall not far from where I work refuses to reduce the prices at the end of the day for fear of encouraging customers to frequent the stall only at closing. While that seemed to be the common code of practice, employees of the stall nevertheless pack the olives in containers and secretly give them out to other traders. In return for the olives, I also give Marco the juices I re-bottle from the juicers. Before I started working in the stall, the juices would be emptied into the drain at the back of the stall. Once I asked Andrew and Tomic why they do not re-bottle it and keep it for themselves, to which they laughed and replied, shaking their heads “no more juice please!” Gesturing to say that they drink so much juice on the farm that they have apple juice coming out from their ears. But more than just being sick of drinking apple juice, these Polish workers, despite having worked in Borough Market longer than me, have not had the occasion to develop networks with traders of other stalls. Left over juices do not represent value for them, as their interest lies in closing efficiently so that they can be on the road back to the farm as quickly as possible. For me, on the other hand, these left over juices are of utmost importance; they are my chips which I use to trade for other goods and the currency of a subterranean economy. In fact, favours are most likely returned at the end of the day with these left over goods – favours such as being allowed to jump the queue for lunch, or that of a friend who gives you extra market discount, etc.

Between the regular customers, tourists and scavenger who congregate in Borough market at the end of the day, another strata exists: a sub subterranean economy of trade, usually amongst the traders themselves. It is an unspoken rule that a “market discount” should be given to anyone wearing an apron; depending on the practice of individual stalls, this generally means that anything from 10% to 80% will be taken off the retail price of the product. The amount of discount that traders get depends on their familiarity with other stalls. When I first started working in the market I was given what I call a face value market discount – a minimum reduction given as a gesture of recognition to a fellow worker in the market. But as the months went by these familiar faces became friends, people whom I look forward to having a drink with and sharing stories after work. As social relationships establish over time, subsequent purchases also reflect the strengthening of the social bond. In addition to these purchases of “regular goods”, at closing, leftovers are kept and given to friends. These might be a gesture of good will or used as returning favours claimed during the day or used in exchange for other left over goods (as in my case of juice for olives).

To an extent, this economy resembles the gift economy examined by Mauss. In this work Mauss quickly outlined the fact that gifts are in fact never unrequited; that they might appear voluntary, free and disinterested, but that in reality there is “obligation and economic self-interest” (2006: 4). In other words, gifts are never given freely. In Mauss’ study of the Polynesian tribes he pointed out that the offering of gifts demands an obligation to receive them, and a further demand to return them – either, depending on the tribes, with gifts amounts of equal or excessive value. Tribes and individuals thus enter into a contract, so that “each gift is part of a system of reciprocity” (2006: xi). Such contractual gifts seen in the tribal communities can still be observed in today’s

society. As Mauss points out in the introduction to his book: “we still feel the need to ‘revanchieren’”: to return gifts and favours (Mauss 2006: 8). This can certainly be seen in Borough market.

The obligation to return gifts or favours can be demonstrated by the following example. In the shop opposite to mine, Richard Bramble sells a collection of screen prints, crockery and kitchen ware. While his employees are all considered to be market traders, they often seem apologetic to receive market discounts. I only found out why a few months ago when I went over to buy a set of mugs as a gift for a friend. Keeping an eye out for her boss, Nina lowered her voice; and when I asked for the price, she explained that although the market discount (face-value) that Richard gives out is 10%, she would use her employee privilege to give me a better discount. Pleasantly surprised, I readily agreed as long as it would not be too much trouble for her. She shook her head and insisted, saying that she (and the other employees at that stall) often “feel bad” at not being able to return favours or discounts as often as they receive them.

While the obligation to return favours and the feeling of obligation to do so are similar, the obligation to receive differs slightly in the case of the market. There are cases where unwanted gifts or favours are forced upon certain individuals and evoke rather negative sentiments. Ben, who works for the raclette stall, told me that there is one girl in the market who he will “never give a discount to.” Amused at his policy, I asked why that was. He told me that this girl tried to force him to take some tuna when he did not want any, and asked in return for a market discount for his cheese sandwiches. It turns out that it was Joyelle, a supplier of Ghanaian tuna to the fishmongers at Borough market who Ben considers “not even a real market trader”. On another occasion I overheard Enzo from the bakery animatedly laying down the rules for market discount: “no

discounts for people whose breasts are below here! (drawing a line across his mid ribcage) And no discounts for the girl from Tolpolski even if her breasts are high up!” It was obviously not a real rule, although it is an unspoken but well-known fact in the market that girls often get better discounts than boys. I asked Enzo why he was so agitated, and almost as if in a comedy sketch he illustrated how the girl from the Polish sausage stall imposed her own discount on the bread while batting her eyelashes. In this instance, it is not the gift of a commodity that was offered; it was more a favour, a calculated pleasantry given in order to elicit a certain response. In this case, the premeditated offer was forced upon the recipient in order to contract him into a system of exchange.

It is apparent that the gift economy in the market cannot be explained completely through Mauss's theory of the gift. Firstly the majority of gift giving practices in the tribes that Mauss studied are competitive in nature: the Tlinglit and the Haida tribes in the American Northwest go as far as to fight and kill chiefs in the opposing tribes to establish their status in the social hierarchy (2006: 8). The act of offering gifts in these instances are often charged with hostility and rivalry. Secondly, the need to outdo each other in these competitive circumstances often result in the destruction of gifts. Mauss recorded instances where the chiefs of these tribes break and throw precious copper objects and money into the rivers and seas in order to preserve their higher social status by demonstrating their superiority; for to receive without giving back is to become client and servant (2006: 95). Although the spirit of destruction and rivalry cannot be found in the market, the contractual spirit of exchange can nevertheless be seen in the obligation to return gifts and favours. I shall return to this point later. The commodities used in exchange in the market are not universally seen as precious, unlike the copper jewellery, or the intricately carved spoons of the tribes; in fact, market traders trade

mostly in left overs – in what is to be considered waste, but which in the gift economy of the traders becomes useful and desirable, and certainly suitable for personal consumption.

The total system of giving in Mauss's work not only highlights the fact that gifts are never free. More importantly, the obligation to receive and reciprocate forces the individual to enter into a system of exchange. The point that Mauss makes, and which Mary Douglas highlights in the introduction, is that the practice of potlatch “is a total system in that every item of status or of spiritual or material possession is implicated for everyone in the whole community.” (Mauss 2006: xi) Potlatch is understood as a complete system because the relationship between members of these societies can be mapped by the catalogue of transfers which designate their obligations: “the cycling gift system *is* the society” (2006: xi my emphasis). The importance of this integrated relationship is that gifts are used to implicate another individual, to draw the another into the system of exchange; it is used to strengthen relationships, create bonds and ties between tribes and clans. As Mauss points out, “a gift that does nothing to enhance solidarity is a contradiction.” (2006: x). Similarly de Certeau makes the point that the potlatch, through this obligation to give, relies upon this reciprocal social interplay to organise and articulate a social network (de Certeau 1988: 27).

La Perruque

An exact model of potlatch societies might not be apparent in today's market economy, but nevertheless, variations of its operational mode exists in the sidelines and the margins of contemporary society. The subterranean economy of trade, exchange and gift in the market operates in a similar manner to the potlatch society. Despite being held to

be illegitimate, and whilst consequently occupying a liminal space, the traders' "tricks", "diversions" and "tactics", as de Certeau would call them, survive in the interstices of the mainstream to construe a sub-socio economic sphere. The tactical nature of the gift economy in the market is that traders collect what is designated to be waste and transform them into exchangeable gifts. The repackaging takes place on "company time", since most sellers are paid by the hour, and is done in a fashion that is not necessarily encouraged by the stall owners. De Certeau calls this the *perruque* ("wig"), by which the worker disguises labour conducted for his own ends as that conducted for his employer's. He points out that the *perruque* differs from pilfering in that nothing of material value is stolen, and that it also differs from absenteeism as the worker is officially at work (1988: 28). Since it is not considered theft most managers or stallholders usually turn a blind eye, as in the case of my re-bottling of juices. The *perruque*, unlike theft, is an activity of diversion: it transforms the resources available (not saleable goods since the materials are only scraps or left-overs) from the stalls into something that can benefit the worker (to return favours, trade for other left over goods or for individual consumption); it diverts time from waged labour to something free, creative and not directed toward company profit. De Certeau writes that:

[The worker] cunningly takes pleasure in finding a way to create gratuitous products whose sole purpose is to signify his own capabilities through his *work* and to confirm his solidarity with other workers or his family through *spending* his time in this way. (1988: 25-6 emphasis in original).

De Certeau uses factory workers as an example of waged labour, and argues that the combined "complicity" of other workers serves to undermine the established order of

the factory. The *perruque*, therefore, “reintroduces ‘popular’ techniques of other times and other places into the industrial space”. (1988: 26).

As techniques such as the *perruque* do not change the formal structure of an establishment, such as that of the factory or the market, they are therefore considered to be a “tactic”. According to de Certeau, such a tactic is a “calculus which cannot count on a ‘proper’ [a spatial or institutional localization]” (1988: xix). Unlike “strategy”, which occupy and assume a space that can be “circumscribed as *proper* [*propre*],” (1988: xix) tactic can only occupy the liminal space at the margins, and can thus only be temporal. By a “proper” space de Certeau means a space that can serve as the basis for generating relations; a space that allows for agency, and which can be treated as an individual unit (an institution, an enterprise or a city for example) (1988). Tactic, therefore, is always in their very nature temporary and fragmented. A tactic “insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety” (1988: xix). Tactics succeed when the making of timely decisions create profitable opportunities for the individual. Such a success is a “victory of space over time ... whatever it [the use of tactics] wins, it does not keep” because it does not have a base (a ‘proper’ space) where it can “capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances” (1988: xix)

De Certeau's choice of “the wig” or “la perruque” as a metaphor to describe the tactics used in everyday life is interesting. Why wigs? Wigs are hairpieces used to cover baldness; they are also used in fancy dress parties, and are worn as elements of a costume. In other words, they are disguises used to cover the normality that lies beneath them. Wigs transform, but unlike hair transplants the effects are not permanent. Wigs are therefore only tactical solutions; forms of “making do”. Like “tactics”, their

existence is illegitimate in that “they do not obey the law of the place, for they are not defined or identified by it” (1988: 29). For de Certeau then, *la perruque* is like a trick; it grafts itself upon the “proper place”, but does not agree to abide by its rules and remains as a foreign entity within its margins.

Since *la perruque* depends on the possibilities offered by the circumstances, its nature is often shifty, fragmentary and elusive. Described by de Certeau as “sly as a fox and twice as quick” (1988: 29), *la perruque* is more than just individual initiatives for managing waste. By diverting resources and time away from the employers to individual uses, *la perruque* introduces another operative mode in the workplace; namely, that of leisure. From this point of view, work and leisure are no longer completely separate. Leisure does not begin only when work ends, as these two areas of activity “flow together” to thereby “repeat and reinforce each other” (1988: 29). The differentiation between activities of work and leisure cannot be confined to the space to which these activities are oriented; the work space could now also be seen as a space for leisure when *la perruque* is practised. These “modalities of action” and “the formalities of practice” are now differentiated in the way that “they traverse the frontiers dividing time, place, and type of action into one part assigned for work and another for leisure” (1988: 29). *La perruque* is playful, cunning and resourceful; it slips between the formal structures and rules imposed by work and eludes the governing bodies of employers and managers. It knows what it can get away with, and it teases the boundaries of that which is punishable. It tests the managers, counting on them to turn a blind eye.

Although Foucault also discussed small acts of cunning in *Discipline and Punish*, he did so in very different terms and within an equally different context. Foucault studies the penitential, educational and medical institutions of the 18th and 19th century and points

out that the organisation and procedures with which these institutions (de Certeau would call it “proper spaces”) are established organise a body of power that acts through the individual. The organisational methods of discipline in particular, as described by Foucault, are methods which makes possible “the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility,” (1991: 137). Foucault argues that discipline produces bodies that are useful (in economic terms of production) and obedient (in political terms) so that they operate with speed and efficiency. He highlights the fact that systems of punishment and discipline disassociate power from the individual and create “docile bodies”: passive entities that can be manipulated, shaped and trained to respond and obey, like that of a soldier who marches in uniformity. Discipline is seen by Foucault as in terms of “formulas of domination” (1991: 137), and institutions are held to be productive apparatuses (produces discipline) that serve to diffuse that power. His careful examination of the “minor processes” and “details” of the body illustrates that power or the “mechanics of power” (1991) operate upon the micro-level of human gestures and behaviours to the extent that discipline is claimed to be “a political anatomy of detail.” (1991: 138-139). Mapping the history of disciplinary institutions, Foucault highlights the “micro-physics of power”. These are “small acts of cunning endowed with a great power of diffusion, subtle arrangements, apparently innocent, but profoundly suspicious”. Unlike de Certeau, however, Foucault contends that these cunning acts are suspicious, as they are “mechanisms that obeyed economies too shameful to be acknowledged ... [economies] that brought about the mutation of the punitive system” (1991: 139). For Foucault, it is essential that attention is invested to examine the meticulous detail of everyday life. Through doing so, a political awareness might be developed that would be capable of revealing the mechanisms of power and the dominating forces of a system. These details of life, therefore, should be approached

with “precaution” for they are seen as “acts of cunning, not so much of the greater reason that works even in its sleep and gives meaning to the insignificant, as of the attentive 'malevolence' that turns everything to account.” (1991: 139)

De Certeau's attitude to Foucault (or at least to Foucault's early work) is ambivalent. While he agrees to a certain extent with Foucault's argument that space and the individual's place within society is shaped and organised by institutions of socio-economic production, and indeed with Foucault's further claim that techniques of creating efficiency and organisation reproduce itself throughout the strata of social activities, de Certeau nonetheless criticises Foucault for privileging the development of disciplinary institutions. By doing so, he claims, Foucault overlooks the important role that individuals play in developing alternative meanings. De Certeau argues that Foucault has foregrounded normative institutions such as schools, prison and hospitals, and downplayed innumerable other practices that, despite remaining “minor”, are capable still of organising spaces and creating meaning on different levels. De Certeau also points out that the ensemble of procedures that Foucault has criticised could not possibly exhibit the same coherence, in that the behaviours that institutions instigate in individuals could not all be the same and homogeneous.

The coherence in question is the result of particular, contingent successes, and will not be characteristic of all technological practices. Beneath what one might call the 'monotheistic' privilege that panoptic apparatuses have won for themselves, a '*polytheism*' of scattered practices survives, dominated but not erased by the triumphal success of one of their number. (emphasis in original De Certeau 1988: 48)

In other words, de Certeau does not completely negate Foucault's theory. Rather, he explores other dimensions by introducing ways of looking at the “minor” practices of everyday consumption in a wider sense. His research is based on the belief that the ways in which individuals “make do” in everyday life produce more multi-faceted meanings than Foucault indicated in *Discipline and Punish*. De Certeau acknowledges that technological institutions impose a system of production in which discipline plays a decisive role in diffusing power, and that they organise society and individual behaviour; yet he maintains that the act of consumption nevertheless reveals ways of subverting or altering the dominant socio-economic order. Rather than seeing consumers as passive entities, he sees them as active users capable of spontaneously creating new ways of using the products imposed upon them by a dominant social order. Take for example the mundane, apparently passive act of watching television. De Certeau points out that although the individual does not have control over the production of the broadcasted images, what he *makes* or *does* with the images might be quite different to what the production company intended. Another example can be found in colonialism: although the Spanish colonizers imposed their own culture upon the indigenous Indians, what the Indians made of that law, culture and set of representations was again different to the colonizer’s intention. In both these cases, despite being trapped in a system where individuals have no power to change or to leave, the practice of consumption nevertheless becomes subversive when the users superimpose and create their own meaning with what is at hand.

The ways individuals make use and make sense of their immediate environment are considered by de Certeau as a form of *poiesis* (making or producing). This is similar to the Rancière's “making” and Lefebvre's “producing”, both of which were discussed in

the previous chapter. It differs from Marx's understanding of production in that it is not about the production of commodities with the sole purpose of generating capital; and it also differs from Foucault's understanding of production where institutions produce efficiency and docility through discipline. It is rather a *poiesis* where “not only products which are produced and reproduced, but also social groups and their relations and elements” (Lefebvre 2002a: 238). For de Certeau the multiple ways in which individuals use and produce meaning for themselves are acts of creativity and invention; yet the *poiesis* that occurs in everyday life is more elusive, as it does not necessarily take place in fields already defined and occupied by larger production systems. Rather, these practices are hidden “because [they are] scattered over areas defined and occupied by systems of 'production' (television, urban development, commerce, etc.)” (1988: xii). These varied and diverse practices do not occupy a proper space (*un espace propre*), as in order to exist they have to insinuate themselves into the dominant order, hiding in its nooks and crannies: they have to be devious and cunning; in other words, they can only exist as tactics.

The objectives set out by de Certeau are ruled by paradoxes: he searches for the power of the powerless, the activities of the passive, the productions of non-producers, escaping without leaving. Yet within this paradoxical logic, he opens up the complexities of everyday lives, and brings otherwise “minor” practices to the foreground so that “by means of inquiries and hypothesis...pathways for future [investigations]” might be indicated. In this sense, de Certeau's work should not be considered as a completed project, but should rather be approached as a blueprint; a way in which future projects could be thought and approached differently (all the more since he died before *The Practice of Everyday Life* was completed). Buchanan makes the point that critics who have perceived de Certeau's work as a failure have themselves

failed to understand that *The Practice of Everyday Life* needs to be read as “blueprints for something still to be constructed, not as maps of what already exists” and that it is a “tentative, searching work, not a polished, conclusive one” (2000: 97). Buchanan points out that from this perspective, “we still do not know what his theory is capable of and we will never know unless we approach it from the perspective of his overall project.” (2000: 97)

Let us once again return to the market closing. Now there is no more trade; the only money that changes hands are the wages being paid to the traders; the managers are busy doing the final counting up; workers light up their cigarettes, and take off their aprons and money belts as a final gesture to signal the end of the day. At this time the mood in the market changes and becomes more relaxed. To casual observers, the locked up stalls and the empty alleyways might exude a certain deathly quietness; but slowly, as more and more traders put away their aprons and gather round, another scene appears. Empty crates littered across the pavement make good resting areas, so they are collected and stacked up to provide a much needed break for tired legs and backs. Quite a few traders are also musicians, so they settle themselves on the crates and pull their guitars out. People gather around with drinks in hand, exchanging stories and amiable silences as they tap to the rhythm of the song. The gutters, alleyways and carpark become the after work meeting place: seats and resting areas are constructed with things available at hand, and groups gather and disperse erratically. Passers by now have to pick their way carefully through the jungle of legs and bags lying around, waving their hands to clear the smoke in front of them. Sometimes traders take over the car park; on sunny summer days, a game of football might well be under way when I finish work, and late shoppers are seen hurriedly moving their cars away.

On Wednesday nights another scene appears; on that day, there are much fewer traders since only a few shops are open, but when office workers and traders file down to the two pubs on Stoney Street there is nevertheless a regular crowd on the pavement enjoying the rare warm London summer evenings. Sometimes the crowd can take over the whole street, and drivers have to slow down to a crawl so as not to disturb or run over the drinking crowd. But every Wednesday, just after six, conversations stop as the first loud revving engines announce the bikers' arrival; as the evening progresses, more and more join in, loud, fuming and spectacular, until the area is completely packed with motorbikes and leather clad bikers. It is the weekly London Bikers gathering, and although Borough Market tries to mark out the area which they wanted to keep clear by putting out plastic traffic cones, the crowd can sometimes be so large that the space looks rather ridiculous: a dismal island in the midst of heaving motors and bikers. A few rules were laid down on the London bikers website, encouraging them to avoid parking at the side of the market, to park with their engines facing away from drinkers in the pub, and to try not to make too much noise – as “the longevity of the meet depends on us getting along with the neighbours”. Soho and Chelsea Bridge has apparently been lost as sites for biker meets “due to some careless actions of a minority”. Regularly, albeit temporarily, bikers have appropriated Borough Market and created a space for motorcycle fans amongst an established area for food.

The Borough market that traders or bikers occupy after opening hours is not a proper space (*un espace propre*); in fact a very different picture can be painted if a distinction is to be drawn between Borough market *propre* and Borough Market afterhours. The former is a planned space, a space that has been rationally organised through a classificatory system of functions (storage, stalls, passageways, waste etc.) that has to be strictly adhered to. Just yesterday I received a warning from the regulating body of

the market: some of our empty plastic juice refill bags had been found in the large green bin (next to our stall) which is now reserved only for customers. Trade waste has to be thrown in the yellow bins located in the carpark instead (300m from our stall which will take anything from 5 to 15mins to cross depending on the traffic of the market). The market is a highly regulated functional space; not surprisingly, even waste is separated and administered through colour codes. De Certeau talks about a functional city in similar terms in that it is a proper space that is conceived and constructed on the basis of a “finite number of stable, isolatable, and interconnected properties” (1988: 94). A city (like any other proper space) differentiates and distributes areas to its various functions, and those that cannot be dealt with in such a system are considered as the “waste products” of a functionalist administration (abnormality, deviance etc) – although even waste products can be reintroduced back into administrative circuits (through rehabilitation for example). But between the disciplinary (which the urbanistic system administers) and the non-functional (to be suppressed or recycled back) lies the space for everyday lives and practices. This space is marked by a contradiction between the collective mode of administration and an individual mode of reappropriation, i.e. everyday poaching (1988).

But poaching, as de Certeau suggests, is not only the taking over a space; it is also about ways in which everyday life invents itself by making do with the space or the property of others. It's about making one's own mark; similarly, a child scribbles on a book knowing full well that he will be reprimanded later on, but nevertheless leaves the mark of his activity and signs his authorship (1988: 31). As de Certeau points out, those who rent properties do not have own them, but nevertheless decorate or mark their environment with personal belonging and memories: photographs, trinkets, etc. are used to make the place more “homey”; or, in de Certeau's terminology, 'habitable'.

Reappropriating a space is only one of the many ways by which individuals make do. Reclaiming alleyways in the after hours of the market is the way traders mark their presence on a place, and develop a sort of familiarity, affection even, for the space they were recruited to work or function in. To make a space habitable is not restricted to physical sense of the word; it can be extended to the mental space, such as in the act of reading where the reader is “lost” in the book (*prosoche* – attention discussed in the previous chapter). The process of losing oneself in reading is described by de Certeau as an insinuation of the reader into another person's text. He is transported by another person's pleasure; he “pluralizes himself in it like the internal rumblings of one's body. Ruse, metaphor, arrangement; this production is also an 'invention' of the memory” (1998: xxi). This mutation is what makes the text habitable, and it does so by transforming another person's property into a space borrowed for a moment by a transient reader.

In a way, what is being recovered in the act of reappropriating a space is not the physical space of the pavement or the rented property or the city. To make one's own changes, transforming that which was formerly foreign into something familiar – even just temporarily – is the act of grafting: the private grafts itself onto the public space, blurring the boundaries between them. Private and public in this sense are not marked by the limitations of walls and architecture, but by individuals' use or relationship to the space. As this space is difficult to localize, de Certeau calls it “the *murmuring* of the everyday in which one can multiply the soundings indefinitely without ever locating the structures that organise it” (1998: 7 emphasis in original). What is common to the market, the city and the indigenous Indians that de Certeau talks about, is that individuals are “other within the very colonization that outwardly assimilated them” (1988: 32). Today, with the urban regulatory environment ever expanding, individuals

are left with very little space to claim for themselves: they are categorized as functional units, efficient and productive, and practising *la perruque* or poaching is not sufficient to change the system that they are located within. But as de Certeau points out, the multiple ways in which individuals make use of that system “metaphorize the dominant order” and made it function in another register (1988: xiii, 32). It is through reintroducing a plurality of goals and desires that individuals are capable of deflecting, even only temporarily, the power of the dominant order creating a habitable space to dwell in: “an art of manipulating and enjoying” (1988: xxii).

The Neighbourhood

In response to the problem of localising a space of research, de Certeau suggests examining the physical space only to the point where it becomes the “terrain of choice for a 'setting and staging of everyday life'; to work both setting and staging insofar as they concern the *public* space in which they are deployed” (1998: 7 emphasis in original). By doing so, he escapes the limitations of defining a space physically, which would privilege objective data such as surface area or topography. In other words, the space that has been researched in *The Practice of Everyday Life* project is defined not just by the physical parameters, but is rather the 'area' generated by the ways in which that space is practically used. With this understanding, the space of Borough Market after trading hours that I described earlier can now be drawn with a more dynamic line; one that shrinks and expands depending on individuals and their activities. In fact, there is not just one line, but many criss-crossing each other in a network that gives meaning to the neighbourhood. A neighbourhood can thus be understood as a social field that consists of the relationships among individuals, but more precisely of the “the link that attaches the private to the public space” (de Certeau 1998: 8). As such, a neighbourhood

does not necessarily depend on its proximity to an individual's residence, although that was one of the defining factors in the project of *The Practice of Everyday Life*. While de Certeau was the key figure in this project, he recruited several others who took up areas of the research. Mayol worked on the theme of the practice of the city, developing ideas on the relationship between housing space and neighbourhood in an area called the Croix-Rousse in Lyon, France, and it will be from this part of *The Practice of Everyday Life* that I will draw upon in the following paragraphs.

When discussing the idea of the neighbourhood, Mayol points out that the physical proximity of a space is fundamental because it allows for frequent visits, meetings, and encounters (de Certeau 1998: 47). While that might hold true for the Croix-Rousse region in Lyon, it might not necessarily be the case for London. For example, the occasional visitors that come to Borough Market might not regard the market as part of their neighbourhood (even if they live close by); but for the regulars Borough Market can be considered in these terms: take for example Kevin, who travels from Cambridge, and who has to wake up at 5:30am every Saturday; or Peter and Lindsay, the couple who travel from St. Albans to do their shopping, and who claim that they come to Borough Market not solely because it is part of their routine, but because they feel that they are part of its community. Almost all of the regular customers that I receive every Saturday would tell me when they leave for holidays and when they come back, and if they ever forget some would even apologize for not remembering to notify me in advance. If I was away for any amount of time, regulars would always ask Ben where I was. This small talk, which is a key element of our weekly encounters, could be just a reflection of certain habits; but nevertheless they indicate a certain familiarity with the environment and a feeling of belonging to the social milieu. Belonging to a neighbourhood thus becomes “a marker that reinforces the identification of a specific

group” (de Certeau 1998: 47). It is first of all the *practice* of their weekly shopping that identifies them as a dweller of the neighbourhood; secondly the *relationship* these shoppers have with other people, be it other familiar faces in the market or traders like myself. Concerning themselves with the whereabouts of people reflects the way in which shoppers take possession of the urban public space; and even if it is just to a small extent, they feel that people in the neighbourhood concern them too. It is also an area of social space where not only are the shop keepers familiar faces but shoppers too know that they themselves constitute part of the familiarity or the neighbourliness of the environment. Thus, “what is decisive for the *identity* of a dweller or a group insofar as this identity allows him or her to take up a position in the network of social relations inscribed in the environment” (de Certeau 1998: emphasis in original).

That said, there might be other reasons where shoppers and traders alike engage in these polite exchanges. Mayol identifies this as the propriety which regulates the behaviour of individuals in a neighbourhood. He means that there is a compromise in which each person, “by renouncing the anarchy of individual impulses, makes a down payment to the collectivity with the goal of withdrawing from it symbolic benefits necessarily deferred in time”, comparable to a “communal kitty” (De Certeau 1998: 8) in that there is a “price to pay” in terms of knowing how to behave appropriately. Like the bikers that meet every Wednesday, there is an explicit rule asking the participants to keep the noise down as “the longevity of the meet depends on us getting along with the neighbours”. Not unlike Mauss’s contractual gift discussed earlier in this chapter, this implicit or explicit rule marks out the social contract of everyday life in the neighbourhood in that the positive recognition of a dweller and the amiability of the experience of coming to Borough Market depends heavily on the propriety of the individual behaviour. “The neighbourhood thus appears as the place where one manifests a social ‘commitment’; in

other words, an art of coexisting with the partners (neighbours, shopkeepers)...” (de Certeau 1998: 8). As a result of frequent visits, the neighbourhood can be considered as the progressive privatization of a public space. The regular visits allows for individuals to develop a relationship to the environment (familiarizing themselves with a public space) and the people. The frequent use of this environment allows individuals to leave their own mark (when they themselves constitute a sign of familiarity). Further, the progressive process of familiarizing has the function of extending what is most intimate (the individual’s abode) into the foreign sphere (the outside) thus blurring the boundaries of what constitutes private and public. “The neighbourhood is the middle term in an existential dialectic (on a personal level) and a social one (on the level of a group of users) between inside and outside. And it is in the tension between these two terms, an inside and an outside, which little by little becomes the continuation of an inside, that the appropriation of space takes place.” (De Certeau 1998: 11) It is in this sense that Mayol calls the neighbourhood “an outgrowth of the abode” (de Certeau 1998: 11). The neighbourhood is thus marked by the actions of individuals and their resulting relationship to the environment. There is thus “an entrance and exit between qualified spaces and quantified space”; a definition taken by Mayol from Lefebvre (1998: 10). The act of grafting personal habituations onto an urban space, reconstituting and recreating meaning by undoing the constraints of urban apparatus, can thus be understood as poaching in de Certeau’s terminology. It is ultimately a tactic: what it gains it does not keep; it does not occupy a proper space (*un espace proper*), but what it does is deflect the restrictions of the dominant order – even if it is just temporary.

De Certeau and Lefebvre

De Certeau’s project of everyday life focuses on the minor practices of individuals. It

argues that even small things constitute a certain rebellious act of deflecting power, and therefore allows for a different reading of leisure activities. While this might appear to contradict Lefebvre's critique, according to which leisure is only seen to be an embellishment of everyday life (discussed in the previous chapter), I would hesitate to make that suggestion. Firstly, de Certeau is aware that tactics such as *la perruque* and other forms of poaching are ways of "cheating" the dominant order. Although not discussed in the exact terms, this indicates that he is aware of an alienation of individuals and their environment. Secondly, while the published volumes of *The Practice of Everyday Life* might give the sense that the project is primarily concerned with the ways in which individuals create meaning for themselves, it should be noted that this is merely the blueprint of what should have been a much bigger project. De Certeau has made it clear in the first volume that the subject of his work is how these small acts "compose the network of an antidiscipline which is the subject of this book" (1988: xv). Focusing on individual acts is the means by which an operational logic could be determined and analysed. Contrary to the belief that this move is a return to individuality, de Certeau points out that the individual represents the locus of relationships. Since a relation is always social, it offers a site in which one can begin to understand the multiple, often incoherent and contradictory ways in which social determinations interact. From this point of view, individuals are important insofar as they are "vehicles or authors of the operation or schemata of action" (de Certeau 1988: xi). The emphasis on the "minor acts" of individuals also reflects the belief that consumers are not as docile as Foucault indicated, and that power relations flow in a more multi directional manner.

For Lefebvre, a genuine art of living implies a human reality that exists both on an individual and social level (Lefebvre 1991). De Certeau's long-standing concern with

broader political and social issues recalls aspects of this view, in that he states that the further goal of articulating the systems behind the models of action is to develop a “*therapeutics for deteriorating social relations*” (1988: xxiv emphasis in original). The contemporary fragmentation of the social fabric, he claims, lends a political dimension to his studies insofar as it requires that the techniques deployed by individuals should be cultivated into a collective set of politics. In this sense, taking de Certeau’s theory of poaching in isolation is not sufficient for building a collective. Its shortcomings can be demonstrated by the fact that despite the multiple ways in which individuals appropriate space to create new meanings for themselves in Borough Market, an ability to claim a proper space for these alternative uses still remains to be seen.

Using de Certeau’s own terminology, the question could be posed in the following way: how can tactics be turned into strategies? Strategies, as de Certeau points out, become possible only when individuals have the power to manipulate power relations, in that they occupy an environment that is isolatable; an environment that “can be delimited as its own and serve as the base from which relations with an exteriority composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed” (1988: 36). Although a typical attitude of modern science, business, politics and of course the military, strategies are nevertheless a useful in the effort to “delimit one’s own place in a world bewitched by the invisible powers of the Other.” (1988: 36). This proper space (*un espace propre*) or autonomous space indicates an ownership that differs from that of tactics, which merely plays in the space of the other. De Certeau favours tactics over strategies as it is “an art of the weak” (1988: 37). With its guileful ruses and seized opportunities, tactical mobility allows power to be found and contested in surprising places. Tactics operates in isolated actions, “blow by blow” (1988: 37). Nevertheless, strategies offer certain

advantages: by occupying a proper space, it allows “one to capitalize acquired advantages, to prepare future expansions, and thus to give oneself a certain independence with respect to the variability of circumstances.” (1988: 36). It also allows one to see ahead; to predict and anticipate; to have the power of knowledge that is sustained and determined by the power to provide oneself with one’s own place. While this space runs the risk of being manipulated by a panoptic power (Foucault), a careful combination of both strategies and tactics might still prove to be the basis of a collective politics.

Chapter 11: Community Garden – Forest Farm Peace

Garden, Hainault

Near the beginning of my fieldwork in Borough Market, I met Stefan who worked in the bakery. He came to the apple stall and spent time talking with Ben, usually about the farm and asked questions about apple growing. Initially I thought he was one of the many food enthusiasts that worked in the market but as I became better acquainted with him, I realized he had a much bigger project in place.

Stefan worked at the bakery one day a week and this job at the market partially provided him with the means to live. For the past 5 years, he had been working to set up a community garden in Hainault in the northeast of London. I visited him a year earlier and been struck by the scale of the plot of land they had. The opportunity to join an open day on “eating local” arose, so I went along to see what was on offer.

The journey was long to Hainault; no longer accustomed to taking public transport after I bought my first bicycle 4 years ago, I had forgotten the complicated changes and the many “planned” engineering works that took place on a Sunday. As I exited from the station, I realized my fists and jaw were clenched as I walked through the noise of the traffic in the busy high street. I made my final turn into the street and suddenly the only noise I could hear were the birds chirping in the trees. I was surprised, since I was still only 5 minutes away from the station and from the garden, that I could still see the trains passing. As I approached the gates to the garden, two young boys, presumably brothers, were cycling on their bicycles. They probably lived locally, I thought, since I could not see anxious parents hovering around. The older boy passed by but his younger brother stopped, and without prompting, decided to offer me some advice. I had to go

through the gates, he said, turn this way and that (and I am quoting from him) and I would find strawberries and raspberries as well. As I thanked him, he cycled off to catch up with his brother, shouting still as he left, about the food that was on offer in the garden. As I chuckled to myself, I approached the entrance and saw that a marquis was set up to welcome visitors.

I was greeted by a woman with white hair and a gentle smile, she introduced the garden to me and asked whether I would be interested in volunteering to help out. Rather clumsily, I explained that I had made other commitments, but my excuse sounded rather false and alien to my own ears. After I registered, I browsed through the many leaflets that offered information on seed gathering, buying and growing local as well as useful information about recognising edible plants. A talk was about to start so I made my way towards their refurbished portacabin which usually served as an office and storeroom but was transformed into a classroom for the day. On the way, a family walked past me to a table where local produce were on sale; it was a very humble selection, a few punnets of strawberries, some honey from the onsite apiary and some free-range eggs from a local farm. I overheard the mother asking her son whether he knew what free-range means. In a very bored tone of voice, he replied “yes,” and proceeded in a monotone: “free-range means the chickens are not kept in cages”. He replied in such a way that reminded me of children memorising pages from history books: bored and unimpressed. Recently, Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall did a series of programmes on television about intensively reared chicken and suddenly the public turned their eyes to free-range poultry. Like Jamie Oliver and other celebrity chefs, Hugh's celebrity status had the power to almost dictate what the public should be concerned with. While raising awareness should not be undermined, the media had a way of over-writing and over-exposing certain issues that were of the moment until they became banal. Judging from

the tone of voice of the child, his family no doubt had been over feeding him on free-range information.

As I sat down and waited for the talk to start, I noticed that the people seemed to come from more diverse demographic groups; there were individuals from different ethnic backgrounds and religions. There were also whole families that came to the event, which was uncommon in the other events I attended. A Muslim mother sat in a corner while her daughter busied herself with organising seating arrangements. All around me, people clustered together and talked about their own allotments, discussing ways of educating the public about the importance of local food and more sustainable ways of living. Unfortunately before I had time to join into any conversation, the talk started. Paul Mobbs introduced himself as a trained engineer. Clad in hiking gear with a head of curly white hair and dark egg shaped glasses, he struck me as a rather eccentric character. The talk was titled *Energy and Food* and as I sat down, I wondered if it would be about 100 ways we could save energy and if I would be sitting down to hear people talk about changing light bulbs. While the format of the talk was reminiscent of the “Slow Eating” event I attended in Marylebone a while ago, the similarity ended there.

Paul started by asking whether we were familiar with the peak oil theory, which had been referred to in light of recent debates on inflation and rising food costs. Most of the audience nodded their heads, but for the sake of those unfamiliar with the theory, Paul explained in a very straight forward way that it was based upon Hubbert’s theory that the world had reached a peak in the extraction of oil and that from now on supply would never be able to keep up with demand. As Paul clicked through his power point slides, I was truly surprised at his well-researched, academic, yet straight forward and accessible paper. Except for the family with a young boy I encountered by the free-range eggs

stand, everyone else stayed until the end of the talk. The main points that Paul raised were that the world's oil reserve was in decline. His statistics showed that it was not transport nor housing (heating) that consumed the most energy, but the intense production of food. His message was clear: that we needed to change not merely brands, but the very way in which we lived in order to make a difference. I realized that although he came from a very different angle and research, he had shed new light on how I thought about my own work. In a very lucid way, he explained how changing brands did not affect the way things were produced – that mass production and distribution – even when they were organically produced – still consumed vast amounts of energy. From a cultural point of view, I argued for the same changes – that we had to move on from a “lifestyle” to an actual way of living. Changing light bulbs did feature in the talk, but it was contextualized in a way to make the audience feel the urgency for change.

I went into the talk with a certain scepticism, developed perhaps from going to the talks that Slow Food organised. I was humbled at the end of the talk, and even more so when the audience started sharing their own ways of saving energy. Paul urged us to turn our heating from the usual 22C to 16C, and said that perhaps it might initially feel harsh, but our bodies would acclimatise to the change. An elderly couple who sat behind me chuckled and said they had been doing this for years and that they lived in much “harsher” conditions. A younger couple sitting across the room from me raised questions about education, which generated much debate. All in all, these were discussions that were relevant, poignant and implicated a wider community. These were people who were more concerned about the “planet” than their own “palate”, a motto that Slow Food held but failed to live up to, at least the Slow Food London *convivium*.

The Peace Garden consisted of various allotments surrounded by communal gardens – half of which was still wild scrubland at the moment. Stefan, with his colleague Gareth, oversaw the day to day running of the project as well as organised workshops and open days such as the one I attended. Within the communal space people from all walks of life came together to help grow the food that was then shared. There was a well managed apiary, a wind turbine for generating electricity, a compost toilet and a refurbished container which was in the process of being converted into a carpentry workshop. Three days a week, volunteers came to help take care of the communal space as well as cultivate their own individual plots. These included refugees and asylum-seekers, mental health service users and people on community payback orders. The garden offered a point of integration for many of these marginalised and alienated communities. Stefan told me that many people who suffered from depression had benefited from working in the garden and learnt a range of new skills. He thought that it was a much more holistic, viable and humane approach to dealing with mental illness than the continued prescription of pharmaceutical drugs and the results could be much longer lasting. Although not all volunteers volunteered out of their own good will (people on community payback orders had to work a certain amount of hours), the experience of working in the garden fostered a genuine sense of community and the promise of a different way of life and it had been recorded and noted that many of the people on community orders recognised the value and importance of their contribution to the community at large.

Paul in his talk remarked on how few skills we had nowadays; that the promise of a “career” drove people to specialize in areas of work that had no bearing on the way we lived and how, if we were left to fend for ourselves without technology, many would die as a result of ignorance. I noticed while working in the market that I knew so little that

was of use; before I spent time at the Ginger Pig I had barely used a handsaw, and if I were to be given a carcass I would not have known where to start. Sheer physical work leaves me exhausted, even if it was just a day of training at the butchers. In the apple stall much of the furniture we had was built by hand out of pure necessity; the display rack, for example, at the apple stall was built by Ben and a worker on the farm.

As I wandered into the gardens after the talk, I saw two men tending to their vegetable patches. The plants were lush and bees busied themselves on the blooming flowers. Dirk and Ola-Wale said hello and started to show me around their piece of land with certain pride. Artichokes, grape vines, tomatoes, lettuces, chard, curly kale, potatoes, all the vegetables one could imagine were grown next alongside one another. Timed so that they would have enough vegetables to last them the year, they proudly told me that they barely had the need to buy their own vegetables anymore. Neither of them was at Paul's talk, but in a way, they were already living the life that Paul was preaching. Rather than sitting for an hour and a half in a container, they chose to spend their time weeding and tending their patch. Fuel, cereal and food costs affected them they said, but having an allotment helped make them become more self-sufficient. As I left they urged me to get a plot and grow my own vegetables, but I explained that I lived too far away. They feigned disappointment, but said that if I knew of someone who lived in the Redbridge area, they should grab the remaining plots. They feared that if they could not prove to the council that the land was put to good use, the council would sell it to developers. Ola-Wale then told me about this deserted car park near where he lived and said that it used to be a place where gangs used to hang out. Vandalised and deserted, the space was avoided by the public. Then one day a neighbour decided to start growing vegetables in bags of compost, and slowly the car-park transformed itself. Gradually, people started to bring in their tools to clear away the weeds in order to grow more vegetables, until it

became a spontaneous, beautiful garden. I realized how, for this community, growing and planting was not only for their own interest but that it also represented the potential to transform spaces and the community.

I walked down towards another patch and I found a much younger couple tending to their newly acquired allotment. They were tidying up for the day as the sky loomed dark and threatened to rain. We had a brief chat about their way of life and I was surprised to find that Amy used to work in the Borough Market; disappointed in the tourist attraction it had become, she'd chosen to grow her own vegetables instead. To many of my friends who worked in a corporate environment, my job at the market and, to a larger extent, my training at the butchers invited many curious questions. Many could not understand why I would want to do something like that, but to this couple at the Peace Garden it was normal. Amy said that if one loved food one would want to learn more about it in different ways: the market was my learning environment but for them, the allotment provided them with the hands-on experience that they were looking for. It was simply a way of life; no memberships, no labels, no brands.

When I left the garden it was nearly 7pm; I hadn't realized it was so late. I noticed that I seemed to wander a lot in the garden, with no particular destination in mind, but every corner I turned offered new points of encounter, new knowledge, new skills. If there was such a thing as slow space, then the Peace Garden was it. It was an intensively and qualitatively slow experience; that's not to say that it was boring, but rather that the care that was invested in the people, the place and the environment made it a dense and thoroughly enjoyable experience.

27th August 2008

Every time I saw Stefan on Saturdays in Borough Market, I found myself explaining why I had not been able to help out in the community garden during the week. Although the reasons I gave were valid, they were nevertheless excuses. Disgusted with myself, I decided to make amends, so the following Wednesday, I headed towards the tube station early in the morning and braced myself for the unpleasant, hour-long ride ahead. The underground station was hot and the air was stale; fumes and dust particles made the air opaque; it reminded me of the recent Olympic games held in Beijing. There, in the weeks that led up to the opening ceremony, journalists for the 24hr news channel had stood in the smog of Beijing, reporting every hour – with an air of severity – on the terrible conditions in which the athletes were expected to compete. As I held my breath waiting for the train to arrive, I wondered if the Olympics committee would ask London Underground to improve its air quality for the 2012 games too. After my change at Bank station, I sat down on an empty seat and rummaged around in my bag to look for the newspaper that I'd bought on the way to the Underground. Observing my otherwise very normal activity with a certain curiosity, the man who sat opposite me reached over and gave me a leaflet asking me to read it instead. Finding it difficult to refuse, I politely flipped through the pages and realized it was a publication from a religious group. I handed the booklet back to its owner, thanked him and proceeded to unfold my newspaper hoping that he would not strike up a conversation. Unfortunately, my tactic of avoiding eye contact did not work. Leaning forward in his seat, the man shouted across the loud clanging of the train that I could let go of all my worldly worries if I believed in God. I sighed and proceeded to explain curtly but still politely that whilst I respected his beliefs, I personally was not religious. That comment irked him somewhat and he raised his voice above what was necessary to be heard in the train. “You do not

respect my religion, you tolerate it!” Seeing that his approach did not seem to have any effect on me, he tried another way. “If you stepped out of the station today and got stabbed to death, that would be it for you, finished, bye bye, but if you believe then you will have eternal life!” Not wanting to make a scene, I held my temper and waited for him to get off the train, as he finally left with a handshake and a warning “there is only one God and one Truth”. A few stops later it was Hainault and as I walked towards the garden, I muttered angrily under my breath at the nuisance to my journey caused by this Bible basher. His final words chilled me, and as I pondered on his intolerance to other religions I was dismayed as to how, as a society, we were still far from understanding and respecting our differences. As I walked through the gates to the garden, wide open as usual, angry thoughts of insult and revenge left me and I refocused on the tasks ahead.

Unlike the previous visits to the garden, there were no events planned for the day. As I surveyed its vast space from a distance, I saw people milling about, carrying tools around as they planned to begin their tasks. As I walked closer, I passed two girls with a tape measure and slabs of metal standing near a freshly dug hole. Others wandered round the garden, individually, pulling out weeds or carrying cans of water from the trough to water the plants. One man was doing woodwork on a bench. Finally I spotted Stefan in a ditch not far from the communal space and, after a quick greeting, he explained that he was preparing the foundations for a second pond. He invited me to join him and I picked up a fork and started to clear the weeds. While working, Stefan explained that the two girls were volunteers at the garden and that they were building a wind turbine after attending a course in London. Stephen, who I saw working on wood earlier, was a carpenter; he'd also volunteered his time and was building a compost toilet. Emma, the woman I saw clearing the weeds, was preparing a patch for the

volunteers to come later on in the week from a mental rehabilitation centre. I wondered if I would have a chance to speak to these people, but as everyone seemed to be busy with their tasks, and remembering why I was there, I put my head down and concentrated on the weeds.

Two hours later a massive growl came from my stomach. The digging was physical and I guessed I spent most of my energy that morning being angry at the bible basher. Stefan smiled and suggested we break for lunch; I wandered towards the communal space and sat down, tired after the morning's digging and looked forward to the promise of a big salad. Stefan came soon after with a large bowl in hand and Gareth, the other project leader of the garden, wheeled in a barrow of kitchen utensils and condiments. I quickly jumped up, embarrassed at my own ignorance for expecting lunch to be in the barrow and realized that more work has to be done before there was food on the table. The group of volunteers gathered around, and some took the initiative to set the table while others wandered over to the communal patch to start digging for food. Gareth picked leaves for a pot of herbal tea while others pulled up beetroot and carrots. I took the opportunity to join someone who I had not had the opportunity to speak with in the morning and joined him to pick various leaves for the salad. Andy did not seem to be uncomfortable in my presence but neither was he too anxious to strike up a conversation. It was an amiable silence and one that seemed to permeate the garden; most of the time it would appear that it was because people were absorbed in the tasks at hand.

Soon after everyone gathered around the wooden table that Stefan had built and emptied their pickings. Everyone contributed to the effort of making the salad but little was said about it. I noticed that unlike with other “foodies” whom I have encountered, the focus

seemed to be on the sharing rather than on the amazing quality of the food. Nonetheless, all the vegetables grown in the garden were organic and everything was full of flavour and good. Everyone seemed famished and dug into the big bowl of colourful salad while exchanging news on the morning's work. The compost toilet was nearly ready and we were invited to try it out and test it for comfort. The wind turbine needed more work and they were trying to decide how deep the base should go into the ground. The girls explained that the turbine would generate electricity to be stored in a battery which would then be used to power the workshop. The patch I was working on was cleared of all weeds and Stefan said that after lunch we should start harvesting the potatoes. Over lunch I met Sophie, a woman in her late twenties or early thirties, who had just acquired an allotment on the garden and had spent the morning clearing her patch of weeds and turning the soil. She lived in Hackney, but since the waiting list in her Borough was 4 years long she had decided to come to Redbridge, where she used to volunteer when younger. She admitted that she was overwhelmed with the vast task at hand but Stefan, Gareth and other regulars of the community garden quickly jumped in to say that people were ready to help, and that if she wanted they could help her plan the winter crops. Later on I asked Sophie what she did for a living and she explained that until recently she had been a primary school teacher; unable to cope with the feeling that her job was taking over her life she decided to quit, and admitted that she did not know what she would do in the future. But she seemed certain that it was the right choice and said that work should not jeopardize her health.

After lunch, we packed the dirty dishes into the barrow, picked up our gardening forks and gloves, and headed towards the potato patch. A group of 5 or 6 followed Stefan and watched as he showed us how to push our forks in so that it would not damage the crop. As we started working on our respective nests, as the clusters of potatoes are called,

conversation started slowly; first about the crops, and then a broader discussion about the whole well-being of the project. Stefan helped start the garden five years ago and, in that relatively short period of time, he had turned a wasteland into a thriving community garden that offered individual allotment patches. It also featured a communal garden in which, thanks to the help of volunteers, vegetables grew all year round; there was an abundance of wildlife living alongside the crops, hundred of thousands of honey bees occupied the apiary and the project was planning ahead for ever greater self-sufficiency. More than just a garden for vegetables and wildlife, the space also seemed to have given some, like Sophie, a space to regain control of their lives. For others, it represented a break from the hustle and bustle of their everyday lives; as Andy told me that day, "I don't know why, but I always feel good when I come here." Or it could be simply for health reasons, like Stephen the carpenter, who told me over lunch that he was trying to lose weight. More than just physical, gardening also seemed to be beneficial to people's mental health; many volunteers who came on Wednesday as Stefan told me afterwards were suffering from depression and other mental illnesses. It was only then that I realized that when the people I met that day spoke of their own health, they also pointed to their mental health. For keen gardeners like Dirk who I saw again on Wednesday, the patch allowed him to continue his passion and in times of rising food prices, as he reminded me, it provided cheap yet superior quality food. Later on in the afternoon, I saw a family coming to harvest their crops for the evening's dinner; the children ran around the garden as the parents chatted away to the neighbours at a distance. Andy also told me that, like Sophie, he had recently taken a patch with his sister since her children were getting older and they thought that it would be a good weekend activity for the family. Although excited about the prospects of having an allotment, both Andy and Sophie did admit that it was a big responsibility and that a patch to themselves at this early stage seemed slightly daunting.

As we filled one bucket after another full of potatoes, I was amazed at how much the little plot of land yielded; there were more than enough potatoes for all the volunteers working that day as well as plenty to store away for later. Stefan, who was working beside me, suddenly stopped and observed the harvest with a certain satisfaction; for it wasn't only potatoes, but runner beans, broad beans, chard, beetroot, carrots, blackberries, strawberries, tomatoes, rocket etc were all growing with vigour. As we dug up the little gems from the soil, Stefan reminded us to turn the soil so that the plot would be ready for the next crop. Then he came up with an idea for an event for harvest; he said "why don't we do a slow food event in a few weeks time so that we can celebrate the harvest." All the volunteers thought it was a good idea. It was no coincidence that Stefan called it a "slow food event", for a few months ago, we had attended the "Slow Eating" talk organised by Slow Food and were both disappointed at the hype built up around the event. It could also be a time to discuss the future of the garden, he said, for up till now the Forest Farm Peace Garden had been the brain child of Stefan and Gareth – from the design of the use of space, the choice of crops, to the digging, planting and growing. Stefan thought it was about time to "let go" and allow others to come in and transform the space. The way he talked about the garden reminded me of a parent talking about their children growing into adulthood. "To let go" for Stefan seemed to be an important step, presumably for himself, but more importantly for the space of the garden, for ultimately his work was meant for the community. He admitted it was a difficult process but that it was necessary for his own well being as well as that of the project. Although made as a side comment, I respected his reflection on his work and his attention to the space; an attention that was meant to allow for the transformation of the individual, but also for that of the community. Stefan always said that community gardens or gardening were not the ultimate answer, but

rather only a stepping stone in the right direction for change. I realized how true that was; my own research project began with a dissatisfaction with supermarkets, which led me to Borough Market and, after a certain time, and via a developing and emerging critique, to the community garden. Reflecting on how my own project had transformed I realized that the importance lies with the process of change.

Chapter 12: The Practice of Everyday Life II: The

Community Garden

The Community Garden

This thesis moves, at the end, from and beyond supermarkets, the Slow Food Movement and farmers' market. I would now like to look at the paradigm of the community garden. I first came to know of Forest Farm Peace Garden through Stefan, a fellow worker in the market, who introduced me to the project in Hainault which is situated in the borough of Redbridge in North East London. The project was started in late 2003 by a woman named Joanna Burch Brown who received a fellowship from the Compton Foundation in order to create a community project. Through a serendipitous series of events she was offered a piece of land on a 10 acre site owned by the local council which was part of the Food Futures project, an inter-borough initiative, which developed out of Agenda 21. The council's Agenda 21 is the result of the Earth Summit held in Rio in 1992 as an initiative for local councils to develop their own strategies for the sustainable development of their respective areas. The Forest Farm Community Garden site near Hainault tube station was an allotment space that had been largely abandoned due to excessive vandalism, and was no longer in use. The decision to turn it into a community garden was made collaboratively with local environmental activists and the council around the turn of the millennium. Burch Brown's initial idea was to use an area of land on the site to partly replicate work done by the Natural Growth Project, which was run in

conjunction with the Medical Foundation for the care of victims of torture and was a combination of horticulture and psychotherapy. Because of that, the initial work of Forest Farm Peace Garden had a strong emphasis on creating a garden that served solely as a therapeutic space for refugees and asylum-seekers. These parameters however were soon redefined and extended when Stefan joined the project as a volunteer and worked closely with Burch Brown designing a more holistic and integrative community space which could cater for people suffering with and recovering from mental health problems as well as other special needs groups and the wider community.

The Forest Farm Peace Garden might not appear to directly address problems surrounding food production but their work nevertheless echoes the “good, clean and fair” concerns that have been discussed in the thesis. The project is founded upon three core ethics: earth care, people care and fair share, and while this might seem like yet another repackaging or rebranding exercise no different to Tesco's “finest”, “organic” and “fair trade”, the important distinction is the way in which these issues are approached. Stefan has emphasized time and again that these three guiding principles are interrelated, like three interlocking circles: the environment, the people who inhabit it and their sharing of resources are all part of a whole system which cannot be treated separately. Food growing therefore is situated within the context of creating an environment that not only nourishes the individual's mind and body but also the general well-being of the community and the social body. In the following paragraphs, I will be revisiting some of the themes raised in this thesis via the work

of the community garden, using this final paradigm to shed some light on the problems. It is important to note that I am not putting forward community gardening as the ultimate goal or solution to ethical food practices. In fact, Stefan has been wary enough to caution me not to read it as the “answer to everything”. It would perhaps be more productive to think of it as part of the process, or in Lefebvre's terminology the “creative struggle” that is crucial to the dialectic approach to everyday life.

The Missing Link

One of the key points that run through the critique of recent developments in ethical food practices discussed in this thesis, is that having categorically identified the problematic areas of mass food production, the solutions offered to “good”, “clean” and “fair” food are often made independently of each other and isolated from the context in which these problems arose. Supermarkets and Farmers' markets commitment to ethical changes are limited by having to respond to shifting public concerns. While their strategies might differ in degrees and extent, they are nonetheless operating as a business within the mechanisms of capitalism. The Slow Food movement, having identified and articulated the need for a more connected approach, tried to raise awareness by organising events; yet these were disappointingly superficial. Celebrity chefs like Jamie Oliver tried to promote a “better” way of living through his television programmes but all of these responses, despite their initial impact on the public, are quickly subsumed into the mechanisms

of capitalism. This allows its practice to be reduced to a lifestyle (a stylised way of living) that could be fitted on any page of a glossy magazine. The commercialization of ethical consumption has rendered ethics a commodity, and has opened up niche markets for profit rather than an opportunity to better our way of living through more ethical practices. What seems to be missing is the “care” that lies behind the drive towards a more ethical way of living; it is the concern and care for the well being of others that connect together food practices, individuals and the environment, without which any other new “solutions” would sooner or later become yet another form of careless, passive entertainment encouraging a drop in drop out attitude that does not require commitment or effort.

Care

The Forest Farm Peace Garden addresses the notion of care which they highlighted in their motto in several ways.

Earth Care

The community garden's ethos of “Earth Care, People Care and Fair Share” is borrowed directly from the design system known as Permaculture, which aims to promote sustainable environments through the use of a design system rooted in the observation of natural systems and patterns, “that inspires and empowers us to create our own solutions to local and global problems (and) provides ways to design and

create healthy productive places to work, rest and play...” (permaculture 2006).

Sustainability, understood as a way of development that is not restricted to the parameters of the model discussed (as opposed to sustainable development which is concerned only with the development within the model) is key to the design of the garden, as well as the activities that are hosted throughout the year.

This can be seen not only through their practice of organic farming (which can also be found promoted at supermarkets and farmers' markets) but in their day to day organisational work and educational activities. For example, the technologies used in the garden are chosen so that they are appropriate to their surroundings and needs: the wind turbine, for instance (constructed by volunteers during a series of skill-sharing workshops) is designed to make use of the wide open spaces of the site to generate electricity. This is then used to power the new workshop, charge batteries and screen community films. Rainwater collection and compost toilet systems are built to cultivate and collect useful materials that are then available to water and fertilize the garden. An apiary adds to the biodiversity of the site as well as ensuring good pollination of the Food Forests and also addresses the crisis of declining bees (possibly caused by colony collapse syndrome). Wildlife ponds have been constructed to support the growth of local eco-systems and reduce the impact of pests and diseases. These examples illustrate the ways in which the garden addresses the issues of energy preservation, waste, pollution and offers local solutions that contribute to the wellbeing of the environment.

The garden also organises workshops regularly which proves to be very popular among the regular volunteers as well as members of the public: handicrafts, woodwork, beekeeping, elderflower cordial making, music and foraging are but a few of the activities held throughout the year. All these activities are designed to raise awareness of the small ways in which we could change our ways of living. Stefan has always emphasized the importance of “one small change at a time”. His point of view, along with that of the project, appear to illustrate Lefebvre's theory of the everyday (discussed in Chapter 6 Lifestyle versus Way of Life): that the ordinary often holds extra-ordinary powers and knowledge within it and that the global is made up of the local.

People Care

For many of the volunteers who are either victims of torture, or mental service users, the garden offers a supportive and relaxing space for them to begin their individual process of healing. Unlike the Natural Growth project which was the model on which Forest Farm Peace Garden was based, the garden does not offer one to one psychotherapy sessions; the support given to people who have suffered traumatic experiences are provided through the opportunity to work, learn and be with other people. The idea is that physical work undertaken in the garden allows participants to focus on the tasks at hand and by doing so leave their traumas momentarily behind; growing food, provides the opportunity to learn new skills and contribute to the building of confidence and gradual recovery; working with other people allows them

to develop their social skills and ensures that individuals are not isolated or marginalised.

What was being grown or what features the garden could boast of have always been secondary to what the work represented for the people themselves. Although food growing was the chosen method, it was chosen as a means by which to facilitate not only the growing of vegetables but also the well being of individuals. In this sense, gardening plays the role of cultivating the self as discussed in Foucault (1990). In fact, the cultivation of the self through tending to the land was apparent in the times of the ancient Greeks; Foucault, quoting a Lacedaemonian aphorism, states that the reason for which the helots of Sparta were given land was because they “wanted to take care of themselves” (1990: 44). This theme, as Foucault traced in the consecutive paragraphs, was extended from the Spartan's physical and military training to a wider sense of the cultivation of the individual and the soul that lies at the heart of an “art of existence” (1990: 44). In ancient Greece, tending to the land through which the body and soul is cared for is the path to achieving pleasure and happiness. What lies at the heart of the cultivation of the self is the idea that the body and the soul are connected and that we could not hope to achieve happiness only through bodily pleasures. To discuss this in more contemporary terms, we could substitute the understanding of the soul and spirit with mental well-being, in fact as one of his examples Foucault quoted the case of Pliny who attends to himself by “reading and writing and finding time to take the exercise which *keeps my mind fit*” (1990: 48 my emphasis). In this sense, the importance placed upon gardening as a

therapeutic space for the mind and the body offers up similar points of comparison to the ancient Greeks.

In essence, care of the self does not imply an encouragement of individualism, even though the part of the objective of cultivating the self is to learn about and better understand ourselves, where “the relations of oneself to oneself were intensified and valorized”(Foucault 1990: 43). The reason is because the *practice* of cultivating the self, which in antiquity, takes the form of various exercises (details of which I will not go into here) are done with tutors, mentors, or even within institutions so that people could learn from each other; the activities devoted to the self are not practised in solitude, but “a true social practice” (Foucault 1990: 51). “The care of the self – or the attention one devotes to the care that others should take of themselves – appears then as an intensification of social relationships” (Foucault 1990: 53). This is because the practice is done vis-à-vis an individual role that is based firmly within a system of local relationships, family ties and relations of patronage and friendship. In short, the exercises, whether done through tending to the land or under the tutelage of mentors in ancient Greece, is a platform upon which we learn about ourselves with and through others, with a view towards creating a stronger social bond. In other words, it is an opportunity to be *with* and work *with* others.

The community garden, by offering up a space to work communally, facilitates learning through communication and integration between members of the garden, volunteers and the local community. On a very basic level, it facilitated language

exchange and learning: I have overheard on more than one occasion exchanges of recipes or gardening tips in which individuals relied on their mother tongue to communicate the ingredients, methods or concepts. Indeed examples surrounding food exchanges seen in this thesis illustrate that food is a shared language and invokes a sense of community. Food was the first topic of conversation between me and the Polish workers (conversation about Chinatown noted in Chapter 1 Borough Market I p25). The exchange of ideas and recipes often provide opportunities to learn about not only other people's cultures but also through articulating and explaining themselves, a better understanding of their own knowledge and experiences. The importance placed upon gardening as a platform of facilitation is a key distinction between the community garden and other spaces that have been discussed previously in this thesis.

Fair Share

On every occasion that I have been to the garden, I have been offered the opportunity to pick from whatever is available for my own consumption: the produce from the garden is shared among volunteers who have given their time and effort to the growing of vegetables. This idea of a profit share differs from economic incentives offered by businesses in that the garden does not offer bonuses depending on a company's profitability. In fact, none of the fruit and vegetables grown in the garden are sold and the garden does not aim to produce anything for profit; the idea is merely to offer a fair amount to those who have put in the effort of caring for the

garden. From this perspective, the garden stands apart from supermarkets and farmers' market in that it does not operate according to the accumulation of capital and the general logic of capitalism. Obviously this is not a model that can be considered "outside" of the system as the garden is dependent upon funding from local authorities, businesses and other charities. It could be considered as existing in the fringes or the margins, but it certainly still stands within the capitalist system. Yet this marginal status in itself allows for interesting strategies and practices for countering or dealing with alienation.

Apart from the members of staff (which comprise a part-time project manager, a part-time head gardener and a one day a week support worker) who organise and supervise the day to day running of the project, work in the garden is not paid. This lends itself to illuminating Marx's critique of alienated labour: when labour power is not sold, it does not become external to individuals and their activities and relations with others do not therefore take an abstract form of "the fantastic form of a relation between things" (Marx 1990: 165). The fundamental difference between workers producing for themselves and working as productive labourers in a capitalist system is that in the latter case workers produce for and contribute towards the accumulation of capital. In this case, it is not sufficient simply to produce a commodity with a certain use-value deemed fit only for exchange in the market, but the *productive* workers have to produce an addition of surplus value for the capitalist. As Marx clearly states: "capitalist production is not merely the production of commodities, it is, by its very essence, the production of surplus-value" (Marx 1990: 644). This is not

to say that the workers in the community garden are not productive (understood in the everyday sense) but that by working towards providing for (at least part of) the individuals' own sustenance, the labour given over in the garden are less abstracted and alienated. This is important within Marx's critique of capital because abstracted labour (when work becomes a commodity which is external to the worker) is precisely the first form of alienation which provides the basis for the development of a capitalist mode of production. Moreover, as the goal is not to produce for surplus value, work is no longer divided into necessary and surplus labour; the amount of work that is required is determined by the individual with reference to the effect and the product of their work to their needs. (Nevertheless, this "alternative" remains minuscule and insignificant in the present system).

When labour is abstracted from individual workers it is subsumed into a system within which they form a collective body of production under capital. In this system the labour process is no longer purely individual as the workers do not control or supervise their own work: the worker becomes an organ of the collective labourer, supervised by others, occupying only a branch that performs its subordinate function. Marx compares it to a body where the head and the limbs are separated as opposed to a body where all parts are united. He writes, "just as head and hand belong together in the system of nature, so in the labour process mental and physical labour are united" (1990: 643). By contrast, if we understand the parts as separated, for example, in conventional accounts of the capitalist mode of production, these separated parts develop a "hostile antagonism" towards each other (1990: 643). To be

a productive worker, each individual stands at a different distance from the actual manipulation of the object of labour; the end product is the result of a combination of efforts, it is therefore no longer a direct product of an individual producer, but a social product of the collective (Marx 1990:644). Labour in the collective body becomes a means of production owned not by workers themselves, but by capitalists whose goal is then to take the commodities (the final product, which is the result of combined commodified labour) to the market to be sold, which then allows the surplus value in the commodity to be valorized in the form of capital as profit.

The need for a capitalist system of production to continually expand means that to maintain their rate of profit capitalists require ways of extracting more and more surplus value from the worker operating in the system of production. This can be achieved either by increasing productivity in the work force or by the prolongation of the working day.²¹ This is described by Marx as the extraction of relative and absolute surplus-value. According to Marx, the prolongation of the working day is seen to be a “very characteristic product of large scale industry” (Marx 1990: 646), in fact, the observations I made in my fieldwork revealed that not only large scale industry, but small scale industry too are fond of employing these methods in order to create surplus value. It would appear that the logic lies not in size but in the mode of production: the goal of extracting surplus value will always dominate when it is

²¹ E.P Thompson in the chapter “Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism” in *Customs in Common* notes that owners of textile mills and engineering workshops in the 19th century exploit the workers by expropriating them of the knowledge of time. A witness in Dundee has reported, “The clocks at the factories were often put forward in the morning and back at night, and instead of being instruments for the measurement of time, they were used as cloaks for cheaters and oppression...” (1991: 389)

within a capitalist mode of production. Christmas in Borough Market would offer a good example with which to illustrate this point.

For stall-holders as well as the traders who work in the market, Christmas is seen to be a money making period, however the principle in which this is achieved differs largely between the two groups. Take for example, the Ginger Pig butcher in Borough Market, which exceeds its normal popularity by almost eight-fold during the festive season with meat orders piling high weeks before Christmas.

For stall-holders, Christmas orders mean more business and therefore more profit and capital. In order to meet these festive demands however, the butchers who work in the Ginger Pig have to put in extra hours: in addition to the usual trading hours of the market, they have to prepare the cuts of meat for the next day. It is not unusual at this time of the year to see them still carving and breaking down carcasses after midnight everyday in the week leading up to Christmas. In fact almost all traders who work in Borough Market in this period would be working a minimum of 13 hours a day, some even more depending on the stalls. For most traders who are paid hourly wages, the increase in their income is directly in proportion to the amount of hours spent labouring in the market. Since the absolute cost of production (stall rent, machinery, tools) remains the same for stall owners, the increase in the business takings over Christmas and the profit that week yields is at a scale much higher than that of a waged labourer²².

²² Marx (1990) refers to factories as a site of production in his analysis in *Capital Vol. 1*, however as many stall-holders of Borough Market are also the owners of the businesses, the logic of the extraction of absolute and relative surplus value still holds.

The prolongation of the working day is an example of what Marx calls the extraction of absolute surplus value. This turns exclusively on the length of the working day. Relative surplus value, on the other hand, increases the rate of production so that more surplus value can be produced within the same amount of time. This presupposes (in the calculus of labour time/ value) that the working day is already divided into two parts: necessary labour and surplus labour. Necessary labour is the worker producing an equivalent (averaged over all workers in a particular branch of industry) for the value of labour-power and the surplus is whatever the worker produces in addition for their employers (Marx 1990). But as Marx notes, the distinction between the two is illusory, as

relative surplus value is absolute, because it requires the absolute prolongation of the working day beyond the labour-time necessary to the existence of the worker himself.

Absolute surplus value is relative, because it requires a development of the productivity of labour which will allow the necessary labour-time to be restricted to a portion of the working day (1990: 646).

Regardless of these differences, surplus value would make itself felt whenever there is a question of raising the rate of extraction, such as in the case of the Ginger Pig butchers during the Christmas period. In any case – and regardless of whether the labour concerned is employed within supermarkets, farmers' markets, financial

institutions etc. – waged employment is an example of how labour is alienated from the individual and socialised to the extent that one person's production of surplus value becomes a condition of existence for another; hence Marx regards waged labour as the basis of all alienation (1990). Thus the community garden addresses this problem by not entering into the capitalist system of the production of value, whereby capital constitutes value that has the capacity to generate more value (1990:709). For Marx, living labour is the only source of value because it has the ability to generate surplus value (1990:672): the surplus value gained from this production has to re-enter the production process in order for it to be valorized as capital (a process known as self-valorization) (1990: 724, 932-33). Since the community garden does not operate on the basis of waged labour, the necessary condition for the circulation of value as capital is not in place.

P-leisure and Ethics

The notion of alienation taken on by Lefebvre is premised upon Marxist thought. However, Lefebvre points out that alienation is not absolute, and that Marx too often treats the alienation of man as that of a single unit. He argues that “there are many alienations, and they take many forms.” (2002a: 207). While Marx within his lifetime might not have extended his critique to the mundane features of everyday life (although many of his examples do come from the everyday), it is nevertheless important to regard his work not as a blueprint but as a process in which to develop a set of tools in order to better understand the workings of society. In this sense,

Lefebvre's comment is not in opposition to Marx but rather it is an indication of the continuation of the analysis.

For Lefebvre, alienation cannot be conceived outside of a social frame of reference, which makes possible his discussion of alienation between work, life and leisure in *The Critique of Everyday Life*. In the process of what he calls relativizing (situating his understanding of alienation in social contexts), alienation becomes dialectical; a perpetual movement between “alienation-disalienation-new alienation” (2002a: 207) (such as in the case for Marx). For example, in the context of work and leisure, an individual recognising that his work is alienating will seek to compensate his weekdays through entertainment during weekends (or days off work), yet within entertainment, there are also new forms of alienation which form part of the dialectic of the everyday.

The search for “good”, “clean” and “fair” food points to an ethics of consumption; the philosophy of Slow Food has been key in identifying the relationship between pleasure and ethics by highlighting that the plate and the planet are connected. Foucault also talks about an ethics of pleasure in the cultivation of the self. Pleasure, he writes, “arises out of ourselves and within ourselves”, by which he means a pleasure that is not based in objects

whose presence we cannot be sure of: a pleasure, therefore,
which is precarious in itself, undermined by fear of loss, and

to which we are drawn by the force of a desire that may or may not find satisfaction” (1990: 66).

Let us apply this ancient Greek thought to consumerism of the 21st century. If ethical consumption means buying Tesco's “organic” or “fair-trade” instead of Tesco value, then this pleasure from consuming ethically is in Foucault's words “precarious in itself”. For Foucault an ethics of pleasure derives from the manner in which an individual forms his own “ethical subjectivity”, which requires “a shift, a change of orientation, a difference in emphasis” (1990: 67). In other words, a pleasure that does not come from material goods, but rather from a shift of attention that originates from the self.

Let me put this in more concrete terms. Supermarkets, Farmers' markets, Slow Food, television, provide a form of ethical consumption that falls into the realm of entertainment and leisure activities. The casual attitude of customers illustrates the limited effort and engagement that buying ethical goods commit consumers. Ethics, placed as a form of aesthetic aura rather than a conduct of practice seems to have become an immediately consumable product that provides instant gratification. On a certain level, such a form of ethics is situated within the realm of leisure. As Lefebvre pointed out, this “encourages passive attitudes” and it is “particularly easy to exploit these attitudes commercially” (1990: 32).

The community garden is not immune to such attitudes: Stefan has told me that many

of the volunteers who arrive at the garden think that gardening is easy and fun and bring with them a casual and care-free attitude. Those who expect to be able to sit back and be entertained were disappointed that the majority of tasks available are back-breaking, unexciting, mundane, and involved no more than shovelling dirt. In this sense, gardening by its nature addresses the passive ways in which we are used to consuming commodities: the pleasure derived from the garden is quite unlike buying and eating a piece of fair trade chocolate cake in the market; it is gained through physical labour and working with other people; the benefits of the garden can only be reaped through work and participation. Work is central to Foucault's discussion of the care of the self. He writes "it is not just a general attitude, "unfocused attention" or a "rest cure"; rather it requires constant (as opposed to once in a while) work, time and effort (1990: 50-51).

The bringing together of work and leisure in the same activity addresses the work and leisure dichotomy discussed in chapter 6 (Lifestyle versus Way of Life). Leisure in the community garden differs substantially to how normal leisure activities are perceived; it does not provide easy and relaxing methods that helps the individual forget his fatigue from everyday work; it does not present an image that embellishes the mundane: it does not make "the ugly beautiful, the empty full, the sordid elevated – and the hideous 'fascinating'" (Lefebvre 1990: 34). In other words, it is not situated completely within leisure. Food growing does not in its nature serve the purpose of entertainment. If anything it is toil; in fact the satisfaction that comes from the garden is based within work, blurring the clear demarcation between work and leisure.

Moreover, unlike most entertainment that provides instant gratification through passive consumption, the nature of gardening is much slower: most crops take months to grow. But more than just finding satisfaction in seeing vegetables grow, for most volunteers the benefits are seen in the improvement of their own and the collective general well-being through the cultivation and development of social relationships (or the intensification of relationships as Foucault would say). From this point of view, leisure no longer plays the compensatory role to work and is not situated outside of the everyday. This shift represents the move from lifestyle (found in mindless entertainment and leisure activities) into a way of life (situated *within* the everyday).

Individual and Social

As mentioned above, care of the self places the individual within the social; its practice enhances the knowledge and the relationship of self and others. The community garden is useful in that it offers a site to think about various ways in which the link between the individual and the social are more pronounced.

Firstly, the overall structure of the garden and its successful operation impinge heavily upon each individual's contribution: without the time and effort given over by volunteers and project leaders, the garden would not exist. Secondly, the growth of the garden depends upon and reflects the changing needs of the participants: the garden today maintains its focus of providing a therapeutic space for individuals to

improve their mental and physical well-being. However, its benefits are not exclusive, as the garden offers many local families (in addition to the above benefits) the opportunity to use food growing as an educational tool. It also offers a means to provide quality and affordable food for themselves which might otherwise be impossible for many flat-trapped urbanites. Thirdly, the work that goes into the maintenance of the garden is carefully designed so that they remain relevant to the people, the garden and the Borough. For example, the garden is designed so that the individual plots for refugees and asylum-seekers are surrounded by common space where food for volunteers to share is grown. This does not mean that plot holders are isolated, categorized or labelled, but rather is done so that there is a natural opportunity for genuine interaction and integration with other members of the community. The garden holds regular open days and events to promote awareness of its work and engage the local community in current issues that relate directly to everyday living: on a basic level, it shows how food growing is achievable, and that access to quality food need not depend on an individual's position in the social and financial hierarchy. Being partially self-sufficient also reduces dependency on distributors such as supermarkets and their sourcing policies, over which we have no control or insight. Other workshops, such as beekeeping, address pressing issues of the environment: colony collapse syndrome which leads to the dramatic reduction of worker bees has a direct, negative impact on the pollination of fruit bearing plants. The apiary in the garden is constructed so that colonies of bees will have a healthy environment in which to thrive, and also helps pollinate the plants in the garden and neighbouring environments. In essence, the community garden is constantly trying to

situate their work within a wider context, and to live up to their claim of not isolating food by treating it as a singular and independent issue. The garden's work illustrates how an individual or a group of individuals could tackle global issues such as climate change by small and seemingly insignificant steps.

On an individual level, the garden provides the means for people to help them help themselves: participants creatively construct new meanings through gardening and use the space as a bridge or a platform for marginalised individuals to integrate with the community. On the level of the garden, the combined efforts of participants contribute directly to its maintenance and continual growth, allowing the garden and the project to become more self-sufficient. The wider environment also benefits from having a space that actively nurtures wildlife and increases biodiversity, so that the community garden sets up an infinite set of ripple effects which extend out into the wider society. The different elements of the community garden – its individuals and families, the food growing and arts and crafts – are all situated within the context of bigger and wider networks, such as the theme of care of the self. For as Foucault writes, “it is the development of an art of existence that revolves around the care of the self, of its dependence and independence, of its universal form and of the connection it can and should establish with others” (1990: 238).

Strategic partnership

The idea of community gardening might sound utopian, yet the operation and the

strategies that lie behind the garden are realistic and pragmatic, as the project leaders are constantly negotiating the ideology of the garden within the parameters imposed by funding bodies and the local council, as well as dealing with daily operational matters. I will be exploring in this section how these different elements come together.

Although the project was born partly out of government initiative, as the plot of land was sanctioned for community use, the result today is nevertheless realised by the combined efforts of the community. As such, the Forest Farm Peace Garden might not necessarily be a “tactic” in de Certeau's terminology, but it could present an interesting case where the dichotomy is not as clear cut as “us” versus “them”, “weak” against “the strong”, “local community” versus “government”, “tactic” versus “strategy”. However, these elements come together in a way that generates other relations that are beneficial to the environment and a wider social body. In fact Stefan told me that right from the beginning their intention was clear, and that their goal was to form a “strategic partnership” with the authorities (in this case the council) rather than taking an oppositional stance against them.

In terms of de Certeau's discussion of “tactics” and “strategies” discussed previously in Chapter 10 (The Practice of Everyday Life I: Gift, Tactics, Neighbourhood), the advantage of having the council's support is that it has allowed the project to occupy a proper space (*un espace propre*) that can serve as a basis from which “relations with an exteriority ...can be managed” (de Certeau 1988: 36). Although de Certeau

points to a proper space as a space that runs the danger of giving over to a panoptic practice: the visibility which a proper space precludes can transform foreign (to the system) forces into objects that can be observed and measured (management), “and thus control and 'include' them within its scope of vision” (1988: 36). A proper space can also be read as a base in which tactically gained advantages can be capitalised (as opposed to individual tactics which cannot keep what it has won). In fact “proper” as de Certeau points out, “is a victory of space over time”; while tactics have to depend upon the circumstances (seizing opportunities on the wing), a proper space allows for the “preparation for further expansions” and “secure independence with respect to circumstances” (1988: xix). Moreover, individuals have agency (de Certeau calls it a subject with “will and power” 1988: 36) over this space, allowing for a more than just temporary change to take place. It could also be a space for collective action, without which only isolated individual tactics could take place. It is in this sense that the success of the community garden gives project leaders a strong voice in the council, allowing them to represent themselves as a unit in negotiations and meetings.

When I first visited the garden 2 years ago the project was already well under way. Vegetables of all sorts were growing with vigour here and there, and additional land was being tilled and prepared for more planting in spring; there was already a productive apiary and in the following year more colonies were introduced as well as the construction of a new workshop and polytunnel. My most recent visit saw a wind turbine, several new ponds and a compost toilet system nearing completion. The

work that has been accomplished in the communal garden relied almost exclusively on the effort given over by volunteers: mental health service users, refugees, asylum-seekers, people on community pay back orders and the wider community, all of whom are equally represented to make up the main staple of the regular volunteer base. There are also other occasional “one-offs” where corporations organise events or programmes, usually under the name of charity to encourage the participation of volunteering. For example, Orange RockCorps recently launched an initiative open to 16-26 year-olds where participants, by giving up 4 hours of their time to community service, would receive tickets to attend a pop concert in the Royal Albert Hall. No tickets were allowed to be sold for this event and the idea was to encourage and expose young people to simple ways of contributing to their immediate environment through “the power of music, community and volunteerism” (Davis 2008). Other examples include corporate financial institutions such as KPMG volunteering their accountants to the garden as part of their company's “corporate social responsibility” programmes etc.

Examples of volunteering, such as the one mentioned above might invoke certain criticism of corrupting the spirit of contribution; the Guardian, for example, reporting on the Orange RockCorps project quoted Dr. Justin Davis Smith, chief executive of Volunteering England, saying that “the concept of volunteering *embraces the act of giving time without expecting a reward in return.*” His critique of such new schemes is that they “could create a hierarchy of altruism, where certain volunteering is better recognised or financially rewarded more than others. There is also potential for

others who volunteer elsewhere to feel that their contribution is undervalued." (Davis 2008 my emphasis) While Dr. Smith's concern is certainly not unfounded, the act of giving, as Mauss's theory of the gift (discussed in Chapter 10 The Practice of Everyday Life I: Gift, Tactics, Neighbourhood) made clear, has never been given freely because it is always contractual. In this case, it differs from the example of the market in that reciprocity does not come in the form of tangible commodities such as bread, olives or traders' discount; but volunteering certainly does not mean giving selflessly without reaping the benefits of the experience. In fact most volunteers have their own individual motives for working in the garden: for the Orange RockCorps participants, it might be the incentive of getting "free" tickets to a rock concert; but even without the promise of such financial rewards, working in the garden for regular volunteers represent a form of "free" therapy, perhaps offering them peace of mind or a step in helping individuals work toward their own well-being. Well aware of these limitations, Stefan nevertheless thinks that "one-off" volunteers sponsored by commercial companies are not entirely bad: from the point of view of the project, the extra labour helps with the maintenance and growth of the garden; it also exposes large numbers of people to alternative paradigms and ways of working and living which helps promote the work of the garden. As for the volunteers, as Stefan said, "if just one person decides to come back and volunteer regularly with us (which is what happened with RockCorps) then it has created a positive ripple effect, and who know where that might end. It might be small, but this is genuine success, genuine change".

The community garden can be interpreted as a model that combines micro-practices with macro-politics; in de Certeau's terminology, it could represent a model in which tactics and strategies converge. Firstly, on a micro level, the interests and needs of individual participants have a direct impact on the overall structure of the garden. On a more macro level, the community project has an effect on the local council's operations. Secondly, Burch Brown's "strategic partnership" with the authorities (first the funding body in San Francisco, then Redbridge Council and the Home Office) is an example of how tactics and strategies converge. It has allowed her to develop her individual project (micro) into a social strategy (macro). From the garden's point of view, the partnership with corporations such as Orange RockCorps and KPMG has allowed two strategies to come together to generate mutually beneficial results. (I am not suggesting that Corporate Social Responsibility projects are unproblematic – the idea of complicity is inherent in the relationship between government, corporations, capital and volunteering.²³ However, this is beyond the scope of this thesis.)

Strategic aesthetics

The aesthetics of the garden provide another example with which to illustrate the success of a strategic partnership.

The majority of food growing in London happens in allotments. These are small pieces of land, rented out to the public for fruit and vegetable growing for private

²³ A critique of volunteering can be found in John Hutnyk (1996) *The Rumour of Calcutta*

consumption. Since it does not operate in a commercial environment, allotments are usually practical in their set up and aesthetic appeal does not appear to be a major concern. In the course of my research I conducted an experiment by digging up a small corner of the university's premises to create a vegetable patch; the idea arose out of student-led discussions concerning strategies for encouraging students to be more active, participatory and practical, with regard to wider issues within local and global contexts. The vegetable patch was based on a small part of the Forest Farm Peace garden, and was designed to encourage an ethic of group participation and teamwork on the cusp of the college's status as a site of pure academic study, and as a site for more general processes of cultivation of community. While the project might have met those claims to a small extent, the aesthetic quality of the experimental garden was admittedly rather poor. Many students and staff, though supportive of the project, mentioned how the beginning stages of the patches resembled graveyards and gave the garden a rather morbid look.

While the aesthetic quality of my experimental garden in college is disappointingly poor, the Forest Farm Peace Garden differs notably from my humble endeavour in that the space is surprisingly beautiful. Stefan who has designed, planned and done much of the gardening of the space told me that this has been the intention from the start. Similar to the “strategic partnership” with the authorities, the community garden has always adopted an approach that finds ways in which to tap into rather than reject the mainstream. Aesthetics in this case is another example of how the project skilfully adopts popular elements from fashionable commercial gardening

and incorporates them for their own purposes. In many ways this is not unlike de Certeau's discussion of ways of making do which are often sly, guileful ruses that traverse, infiltrate and create heterogeneous meanings and desires from an established order. "They circulate, come and go, overflow and drift over an imposed terrain, like the snowy waves of the sea slipping in among the rocks and defiles of an established order ... indeed, it is less a matter of a liquid circulating in the interstices of a solid than of different *movements* making use of the elements of the terrain" (emphasis in original, de Certeau 1998: 34). By doing so, the Forest Farm Peace Garden has skilfully created a space that is not only constructive and productive but also attractive.

Aesthetics in the case of the community garden differs from the discussion mentioned previously in chapter 8 (Inextricable Aesthetics) in that aesthetics is not employed as a strategy to encourage sales. The aesthetic standard was achieved in the process of working towards a bigger goal, to inspire people to grow food at home or in public places; in other words, aesthetics is not put out of context or approached in an isolated way; it is not aesthetics for aesthetics' sake, existing in a self-referential bubble. In recent years, gardening has become a very popular pastime, filling newspaper columns and media programmes, and its popularity drove so many flat-bound Londoners to allotments that they have since become quite hard to come by: many allotments in inner London have a waiting list of many years. Many have criticised gardening as the return of a middle-class pastime, claiming it as merely a bourgeois hobby, fit for property owners with gardens and time on their hands. Such

remarks are not surprising, considering many of the media programmes that popularize the activity situate gardening in the context of home improvement and many of the “how to” manuals seem only seem to be concerned with the aesthetic appearance of the garden. In other words, such forms of gardening serve the purpose of creating an aesthetic environment that is no different to giving shopping centres “face lifts” or creating attractive and pleasing packaging: the purpose is to distract and encourage passive attitudes which help contribute to the successful development of economic strategies that encourage consumption. Garden centres appear to be the equivalent of what Borough Market is to food, and contribute to a stylised way of living.

Conclusion

The examination of “good” food movements and ethical consumption with which this research began, opened up a wider set of questions that prompted further investigation; the materials generated from my fieldwork and media analysis drove the theoretical discussion to the cultural analysis of everyday living. Hence, although I began this thesis by looking at the responses offered to the problem of producing food that is “good”, “clean” and “fair” by supermarkets, farmers’ markets and the Slow Food movement, it soon became apparent that the solutions these institutions created appear to have done little more than open up more niche markets, new opportunities for profit, effectively constituting pseudo-changes that still operate within the rules of the market and capitalism. While ethics appear to play an important role in the discourse of “good” food movements, the recipients of these benefits seem largely to be the institutions themselves. These issues that emerged from my fieldwork and analysis painted a problematic picture of the relation of production and consumption to the ethical and social commitment (and related discourses) of the food industry. Attempting to resolve this problematic, I brought the theoretical discussions of Lefebvre, de Certeau, Gorz, de Angelis (and others) to bear on the fieldwork findings; these theorists share a common ground in that they all in some way adopt a critical approach to capitalist culture and examine the problematics of the experiences of living within it. The research continued to investigate the weakened link between the individual and the social as a way of understanding the conditions which give rise to this problematic situation. The

widening gap between the individual and the social creates a situation where individual choices do not appear to have a direct positive effect on society: the wider common good therefore only appears as an abstract thought, seen or heard in political discourse or in the popular media.

Community gardening seen through the work of the Forest Farm Peace Garden discussed in this final chapter has offered a (by no means perfect) model with which to think about these problems, by approaching the question of food consumption and production in a holistic manner centred on care. Care places the individual within a network of social relationships and links private interests with the betterment of society. Contrary to the methods employed by supermarkets, farmers' markets and the Slow Food movement, the work of the Forest Farm Peace garden aims at (and to a large extent succeeds in) generating awareness of the individual's role in the communal and creating a positive effect on the surrounding community. This represents a better approach to the question of "good" "clean" and "fair" because implicit in the idea of ethical consumption is the idea that individuals constitute the social and therefore each person's actions have an effect on others. The ways in which the garden addresses the three critical issues of "good" "clean" and "fair" in food practices have been useful in suggesting small ways in which larger, more global concerns can be dealt with in the everyday and could perhaps be understood as a way to begin thinking through a basis for a different set of politics, one that is realized and regulated not *for* the community, but *by* the individuals and the community.

The *Tragedy of the Commons* which provides the pretext for thinking through social organization sheds light on a series of problems that go to the heart of the relationship between capitalist individualism and ethical communitarianism that has emerged as central to this thesis. I hope that this piece of research can be read as contributing to the discussion of the process of social re-composition. The first point that I would like to make in conclusion regards one of the recurrent themes that ran through the critique of supermarkets, farmers' markets and the Slow Food movement. This is that their goal of producing food that can be *marketed* as "good" "clean" and "fair" employed the *discourse* of ethics as a tool with which to achieve this goal. However the essence of putting ethics into practice, referred to as "way of life" in this thesis, requires also the facilitation of the production of a functionally integrated community: the commons. Community-building within these institutions has been largely restricted to membership of clubs (which have the ulterior motives of collecting consumer data in order to plan for the next business strategy). In a way that is similar to the scenario in the *Tragedy of the Commons*, communities are produced artificially *by* the rules that govern the environment; in other words, they are defined by the external conditions and not by the nature of the practice of individuals. While Borough Market offers certain pockets of resistance in this regard (seen in the discussion of the neighbourhood in Chapter 10), the spirit of sharing within the community is constrained to the limitations of gift exchange and restricted to the categories of traders, scavengers and regular shoppers. It is clear that the *Tragedy of the Commons* is set up in such a way that the individual interest is linked

to the interest of the communal. However, the “tragedy” still occurred because the incentives only appealed to the individuals’ *private* interests, which resulted in farmers competing to acquire the biggest herd of cows to reap the largest amount of profit before the piece of common land became overgrazed. The principles of *competition* and *private accumulation* still reside in this scenario and thereby apply to the practices of food production discussed in this thesis. If I were to extend this game theory to include collaboration between certain farmers, the success of their partnership would still only be at the expense of others: any gain for one party must be matched by an equivalent loss elsewhere. Paralleling the inextricable relationship between farmers’ markets and supermarkets as argued in Chapter 8 (Inextricable Aesthetics), the incentives offered for collaboration among farmers appeal to the individuals’ immediate material interests, therefore the practices of these farmers/businesses only serve to reproduce the value system within capitalism. These two related considerations of *how* the community is produced (by the force of external rules and predicated upon competition appealing to individual private interests) therefore correspond to the problematic of community-building in the capitalist system.

The second recurrent problem is the attitude towards consumption. Since individual choices do not seem to have an immediate effect on the wider community, most customers I have encountered (though there have been some exceptions) have a casual attitude towards ethical food choices: they will buy it when it suits their moods, needs and desires. Coupled with the media hype and elevated prices of

“organic”, “fair-trade” and “good quality”, most people have either a romanticized or a rather cynical or blasé view of these products. As a result, ethical consumption falls into the category of entertainment and lifestyle practices: fashionable trends that are no different to any other weekend leisure activity. The problematic of leisure activities has been discussed in Chapters 2 (Slow Journeys), 6 (Lifestyle versus Way of Life) and 8 (Inextricable Aesthetics) where I argued that the problem of the careless way we consume cannot be resolved without addressing the larger context of the way we exist. The nonchalance displayed by consumers illustrates that the individualism is driven by their private consciousness (discussed in Chapter 8 Inextricable Aesthetics), which directs the individuals' attention inwards, towards themselves, to their individual pleasures and desires. Overcoming these lifestyle tendencies, consumer behaviours and attitudes represents overcoming the split between private and public consciousness – a division which is key to the successful production of the commons.

Thirdly, the split between the individual and the social indicated by the separation of private and public consciousness is only indicative of yet a wider problem, one that Marx addresses in the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, where he writes:

The bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production – antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism but of an antagonism that

emanates from the individuals' social conditions of existence

(1987: 263-4)

What Marx points to is that the antagonism (reflected in binaries such as employers versus employees, bourgeoisie versus proletariat, capitalist versus working class etc., whose reciprocal hostility was discussed in Chapter 12 Practice of Everyday Life II: The Community Garden) is rooted in the conditions of our social existence. To look at the way we live, work and entertain ourselves separately without addressing the root of the problem serves only to reproduce these conditions within the system. The solutions that supermarkets and farmers' markets offer addressed to a certain extent the need to produce in ways that are more ethical, but "good" "clean" and "fair" are treated by these solutions as isolated rather than related problems symptomatic of the wider system of production. The solutions offered therefore failed to change the overall conditions in which we produce (in the manufacturing sense): the question of *how* individuals relate to each other and to the social are still premised on competition and private accumulation (therefore hostility). In other words, the ways that supermarkets and farmers' markets have approached ethical consumption has neglected to address the system in which they operate and are part of. Capitalism (and the consequent experiences of living within it) is the source of the split between private and public consciousness, which contributes to the individualistic way of "unethical" consumption. The ways in which these institutions have half-heartedly expressed their commitment to changing the way we consume have not even come close to addressing the divorce that manifests itself in the ways we approach

consumption – but, rather, only reflect the social conditions in which we exist. While the Slow Food manifesto identifies food production as part of the problem of global capitalism and articulates the need to place consumers as “partners” in the production process, their London *convivium* events fall short of their noble claims. The problem therefore lies in how to overcome these barriers and allow true social *co*-production, to take place. The antagonistic social conditions mentioned by Marx in the above quotation relate to the way in which society is organised and structured, predicated upon the division of labour (discussed with reference to Marx and Lefebvre in Chapter 6 Lifestyle versus Way of Life, 8 Inextricable Aesthetics and 12 Practice of Everyday Life II: The Community Garden). Alienated labour power puts the individual in an “abstract” relationship with others through commodity exchange in the market. Massimo de Angelis in *The Beginning of History* follows this argument derived from Marx and writes,

Capitalist markets ... are a system of social relations that take away from singularities with needs and desires the need to *articulate* things among themselves, since it is the market that does the *articulation* for them, that puts them into relation with each other in given forms ... (2007: 240 emphasis in original)

The fourth dimension of this conclusion involves the ways that the desire to change the social condition of individual existence is further complicated by the innovative

and guileful changes within the market, whose productive forces create its own “material conditions for a solution of this antagonism” (Marx 1987: 263-264). This can be seen in the examples taken from supermarkets, farmers' market and the Slow Food movement; to a large extent, these institutions all produced an auto-critique of the system of which they are part, and re-introduce new formulas that play straight back into it. Admittedly, Slow Food has identified these specific problems and tried to introduce changes with their strategy of eco-gastronomy, by which they hoped to change the relationship consumers have with the producers, community and the environment; but even so, their efforts are largely subsumed into the mechanisms of capitalist production. Overall, the responsibility for ethical consumption has been placed in the hands of the market; the market produces the problems and offers its own solutions, it is the poison and the cure (the *pharmakon* Derrida 1981²⁴). The problematic of finding a solution allowing individuals to relate to each other on a different plane is the question of how to overcome these divisions in a new form of political restructuring. De Angelis writes,

We break a deal with our opponents on the terrain of the value practices reproduced by capitalist markets, we realise that “the antagonism that emanates from the individuals’ social conditions of existence” is not overcome, only reconfigured. (2007: 9)

To take the question of ethical living outside of the capitalist context could open up

²⁴ As discussed with reference to Jamie Oliver in Chapter 4

new horizons, the choices would no longer be between “organic” or “fair-trade” or any other pseudo-choices provided by the market mechanism, but rather a set of alternatives would emerge out of the common struggle which is the articulation (using de Angelis’s terminology) of the active engagement of the collective. The question of reconfiguration recalls Paul Gilroy’s question quoted at the end of Chapter 4 *Jamie at Home*, whereby he urges us to consider “whether the scale upon which sameness and difference are calculated might be altered productively so that the strangeness of strangers goes out of focus and other dimensions of a basic sameness can be acknowledged and made significant” (Gilroy 2004: 3). To a large extent Gilroy is also calling for a reconfiguration of the current value system, in order to transform it into one in which the interests are not calculated based on private and material interests, but one that goes beyond the antagonism of the individual and the social or the national and the global.

By political restructuring, I do not mean to say that it should be the government or the state who should carry the responsibility for reorganising society, because as Lefebvre has argued, the cohesive force of social life is not in the abstract and high realms of the government, but in the extraordinary powers of everyday life (1991: 91). De Angelis makes a similar point by saying the struggle to produce the commons

must be lived, because only living subjects can participate in the constitution of the mode of their interrelation, and the

mode of relation between individual singularities/fragments and the whole is the central kernel of the problematic of the beginning of history (2007: 240 emphasis in original).

The “*mode* of relation” that de Angelis points to corresponds to the key overall argument regarding a “way of life” in this thesis. The “mode” refers to a living practice, because only living subjects can find their own way of going outside the value practices of capital and create new meanings for themselves. In this new configuration, communities no longer refer to groups of people enclosed by certain environmental or other conditions (similar to the idea of neighbourhood discussed in Chapter 10 The Practice of Everyday Life I: Gifts, Tactics, Neighbourhood), but are defined by their articulation, by which de Angelis means production of meanings – actions that bear meanings which are socially produced.

How do we begin addressing these obstacles to political re-structuring? During his opening speech at the Law of the Commons Conference in Seattle (March 2009), Louis Wolcher called for an engagement with the ideas of a shared community as a force of social ordering; without such engagement, he suggests, the tragedy of the commons will become the “tragedy of the *unimagined* commons” (Bauwens 2009 my emphasis). The failure of the imagination highlighted here is one way of understanding what constitutes the apparent gap between the appearance of ethical consumption and a genuine social and ethical commitment. The calls for change seen in the arenas of media, politics and industry demonstrate a certain awareness which

fuelled the consumption and popularity of goods that are claimed to be ethically produced; however, within these spheres the problematic of ethical consumption remained at a relatively superficial level, manifest in the development of labels of “good” “clean” and “fair”. Although the commons is implicit in these discourses, the question of ethical food production has not been aligned with the wider question of social re-ordering to which Wolcher refers. Despite the heavily mediatised hype around ethical consumption, our participation seems to be restricted to watching Jamie Oliver from the couch; our unchanging attitude towards consumption is perhaps no different to the ways supermarkets pay lip service to ethics, resulting in superficial gestures such as green marketing (using jute bags instead of plastic bags – and making us pay for them) that leave the system of production unchallenged. This is precisely Wolcher’s “tragedy of the unimagined commons”, the product of our willingness to allow the market to determine the conditions in which problems are perceived and addressed, such that we are complicit in the overall failure to imagine another possible way of life.

The commons as discussed in this section is not, however, something belonging to the order of the imaginary, but rather is seen as a state that *emerges* out of a struggle: “commons are often produced by struggles, whether the author calls for it or not” (de Angelis 2007: 238). A reason for the absence of the question of the commons from the way industries approach food production may thus be the lack of any kind of struggle beyond that of the institutional negotiation of shifting market forces from the areas of production and consumption with which they are concerned. De Angelis

posits the emergence of the commons at “a point/moment of *division* of a struggling body” (2007: 238 emphasis in original), a point where the struggles open up possible means of problematising the social conditions in which we live. This process cannot be a prescriptive one, because only the subjects of this struggle have the power to create common meanings which will in turn move the struggles onto new terrain. In other words, such struggles can be generated only by subjects possessing awareness, derived from lived experience of the negative conditions which call for it. This awareness involves a sense of continuous critical attention that calls for action (as discussed with reference to *prosoche* in Chapter 6 Lifestyle versus Way of Life). For Lefebvre, critique indicates awareness, which is the reason he considers awareness of alienation already to constitute a form of disalienation (in the context of his discussion); and the worst form of alienation occurs when the problem itself is non-conscious or unrecognized (2002a: 208). In this regard, the critique of the failures of the models discussed in this work has served to push forward the research and the development of the thesis.

De Angelis points out that the problematic of the commons cannot be overcome by the “abstract and ideological calls for unity” (de Angelis 2007: 238). In other words, the call for the commons cannot be dependent upon the initiative of a third (metaphysical) party, be it religion, government (the State), Slow Food or Jamie Oliver. During the earlier stages of my research, I was seduced by the calls for change made by Slow Food and to an even larger extent farmers’ markets – until the incongruence between their (near-perfect) ideologies and (somewhat flawed)

practices became apparent during my fieldwork. The commons is not a singular unit; there are many commons which emerge out of different struggles. A call for unity risks annihilating the multiple and dialectic nature of these struggles and runs the danger of being co-opted into a nationalist (or other single issue) discourse such as that expressed by TR from Leicester, quoted in Chapter 4 Jamie at Home, who called for the British to unite and protect their collective identity: “come on U.K.... it’s time to look after your own...” (Ford 2007).

De Angelis also makes the point that the commons cannot be realized if the theoretical framework dismisses “the ongoing reproduction (of social divisions) through the application of capital’s measure and value practices” (2007: 238).

Certain calls for changes as seen in Jamie Oliver as well as other examples taken from supermarkets, farmers’ markets and the Slow Food movement illustrate that approaching problems in partial and isolated ways does not contribute towards the reconfiguration of the social system; the ongoing reproduction of capital and its values which is the root, the source and the context in which these problems arise has not been challenged. From this point of view, the process of the production of the commons refers back to Lefebvre’s project in the *Critique of Everyday Life*, where he develops the idea of “totality”: Lefebvre refers to the constant struggle where each activity strives towards totality – the desire to become whole. But striving for totality is a dialectic process, it seeks to understand the development of social categories and their relationship to each other; dialectic reason as Lefebvre puts it “is defined by the *critical movement* of these categories”; therefore the concept of totality is not a drive

towards unity, because “dialectic reason knows that *its* work can never be completed” (1991: 76 emphasis in original).

Only when we take on this dialectic approach towards totality can we begin to think adequately about community, which de Angelis defines as “the domain of relational modes, the problematic of how *free individuals* who are self-aware as being part of a social body in which they are related to each other, articulate their co-production” (2007: 242). This is not unlike the discussion of Rancière’s “making” and Lefebvre’s “producing” in Chapter 6 (Lifestyle versus Way of Life) where the process of production for Lefebvre produces “not only products ... but also social groups and their relations and elements” (Lefebvre 2002a: 238). The reconfiguration of the values of society is therefore the result of the collective articulation of these new *meaningful* actions. This links back to Foucault’s genealogical examination of the “care of the self” (Chapter 2 Slow Journeys) and the work of the community garden discussed earlier on in this chapter. Taking care, in the sense of the analysis undertaken in this thesis, transcends the private domain because individuals (*a priori* social according to Lefebvre), are aware that they are part of their social by their creation of networks of relationships which combine to form the community. This mode of living, this way of life, overcomes the barriers and limitations of a split private and public consciousness as through it, the two share a symbiotic relationship. This could also be related back to the earlier discussion of de Certeau’s neighbourhood and tactics, where individual *practices* give meaning to their environment.

On the basis of this form of community building – the production of the commons, we could finally embark on what Lefebvre calls “the world becoming of philosophy”: a philosophy that as de Angelis states is necessarily “born in struggle” (2007: 239) and one that takes these struggles to the level of dialectic reason and directs them back towards everyday life. Only then, can everyday living be seen as a generative force of change because it is grounded in practices but aspires towards higher and wider realms, and generates a material force that has the potential to grip the masses – which de Angelis defines as the “whole of relating subjects” – because the masses *are* “the producers and the product of this philosophy” (2007: 239).

What I have illustrated in this thesis, is that the question of producing food that is “good” “clean” and “fair” can be and has been approached according to two different rationales. The one taken by supermarkets, farmers’ markets and the Slow Food movement places the problem – and seeks for its solution – within capitalism – hence reducing it to a question of adapting to changing consumer lifestyle demands; a problem that can therefore be resolved by market forces. The second takes “good” “clean” and “fair” as problems *indicative* of the way the market operates within capitalism. This line of inquiry takes the discussion to another plane where they are approached as ethical and political issues and not merely business strategies. Thus the changes that are called for need to implicate individuals on a micro-level as well as generate forces that will change society on a structural level: it is therefore a call to change our “way of life”.

Community gardening seen through the work of the Forest Farm Peace Garden is presented as a model that is closer to the second line of inquiry and can be read as part of the struggle to produce the commons; but it is by no means *the* solution to all the problems raised in this thesis. To conclude, I would like to reflect further on a few aspects of the community garden in order to consider the difficulties of applying their values to the context of a global capitalist system. This reflection constitutes what may be considered the beginning of the practice of *imagining* the commons: a process that is flawed, but nonetheless necessary if we are to avoid the real tragedy – that of the *unimagined* commons, in other words the tragedy of inaction.

The mode of living driven by the motto of “Earth Care, People Care and Fair Share” gives the garden a feel that it is directly opposed to the way we live “normally”. The space of the garden represents for many participants a sanctuary from their troubled lives, but even for me, an occasional visitor, going to the garden was like taking in a breath of fresh air that was untroubled and refreshing. When the light fell and it was time to go home, I always experienced the unhappy feeling of having to return to reality. The way I felt when leaving made it clear to me that the garden is not part of my normal life, nor of the normal lives of many other participants; we had to return to our routines of *everyday* living, to the plentiful worries – paying the rent, the bills, finishing our studies, finding a job, taking care of our ageing parents etc. Therefore it could be argued that Forest Farm Peace Garden offers only a temporary time-space in which a commons emerges, and that the temporal nature of the experience does

not change the reality of the way we survive in society – the need to find a job to pay the bills and shop for food.

A question that remains to be answered is therefore: how do we begin to imagine a world where the values upheld in the community garden can be extended to other spheres of life so that they become our normality rather than the exception? How do we change work from an alienating process to a process necessary for co-production? If the commons is a necessary by-product of our struggles, as de Angelis states, then the search for this alternative value system based on common meanings is the question of “how diverse and interconnected struggles can be articulated together” (de Angelis 2007: 239). The problematic of the circulation of struggles is a crucial element of the discussion of the commons, because it calls forward the idea of moving social struggles to a larger scale, maybe even the beginnings of a revolution. The new value system based on socially produced meanings needs to challenge the effectiveness and the organisational reach of these struggles so that the new changes reach a “deeper” level and tackle the roots of the problems.²⁵

As my discussion in Chapter 12 illustrates, the Forest Farm Peace Garden’s “strategic partnership” with the local council gives them a voice in the Redbridge Borough, but their organisational reach is limited by the space they occupy, both on a

²⁵ Hardt and Negri (2001) in the discussion of the commons in *Empire* states that capitalism drives the appropriation of public property by private hands for profit. Therefore they argue that the struggle to produce the commons need to be situated on the terrain where juridical and political regimes are challenged so that the cycle of private reappropriation of what is naturally common property e.g. land, water, energy etc. may be disrupted. Similarly Deleuze and Guattari (1994) in *What is Philosophy* point out that the construction of concepts (in this case the commons) is an epistemological as well as an ontological project where “constructing concepts means making exist in reality a project that is a community”.

governmental level as well as on a social level. Social actions such as community gardening occupy a liminal space in mainstream political discourse, often relegated to the category of “charity”. The work of the Forest Farm Peace Garden is seen by governmental bodies as valuable only in the sphere of non-profitable activities. On the social level, the organisation is in close communication with other projects, but again this is limited by the nature of their work. For individual participants, the common appeal is based on the liminal space that as social individuals they already occupy – victims of torture, asylum-seekers, users of mental rehabilitation facilities etc.; while the focus on helping them should not be undervalued, there is also a possible risk of further alienation.

The limited reach of the organisation also leaves the system of food production (which to a large extent may be understood as representative of commodity production in general) in the global market relatively untouched. One of the problems raised in my fieldwork was the heavy dependence on foreign labour. While it is easy to criticize larger corporations such as supermarkets for enlarging their profit margins by outsourcing their production lines to poorer countries and therefore benefiting from cheaper human and natural resources; reducing the scale of production does not appear to address this problem: smaller local production also depends on and gains from the cheap labour of, for example, Eastern European countries. Local organic production such as the form Chegworth Valley upholds is seen to be more ethical and gains popularity by helping establishing them as an opponent to supermarkets. However, there seems to be more common ground

between these apparently opposed kinds of institution than might at first be expected: both adopt a business approach when tackling the question of food production.

Chegworth Valley's workforce on the farm consists entirely of workers from Poland and Bulgaria: the conditions of (abstracted) waged production that support these businesses are no different from the conditions in the market and in supermarkets.

This difference is illustrative of de Angelis's point about the reconfiguration of social conditions: that the changes generated by market forces only serve to disguise the unchanging conditions of our social interaction; the antagonism (first world/third world, local/foreign) that is rooted in our social existence has not been overcome.

Changing the scales of businesses, rates of exploitation and degrees of alienation are merely different disguises that serve the same purpose.

The temporary experience of the commons in the community garden thus ultimately appears as an ineffective (if inspiring) force against capitalism. Indeed the commons seem to be able only to operate in a sheltered space, or on the fringes of the capitalist system. The garden for example cannot be considered as independent of capital because it relies heavily on funding provided by the government and industries. Yet de Angelis argues that the temporary experience of the commons is sufficient to arm individuals with new insights upon their return to "normality". He compares it to contemplating the scenery on a hill where

from the vantage point of this panoramic position, we can see more clearly how things are related, so that on our return into

the midst of the scenery, we can measure ourselves and others, our relations of co-production, and the values that give meaning to our actions more thoughtfully (2007: 23)

He states that the temporary commons allows us to be in a time-space where we may say we are outside of capital, and dismisses critics who would suggest that this is naïve and ineffective (2007: 22-23). But this rather optimistic view runs the risk of encouraging us to settle for temporary spaces or experiences of the commons. If this becomes the case, then the struggle for the commons will be reduced to an event, an experience, a “special time” *given over* by capital, much like leisure and summer festivals. It will become no different to Jamie Oliver’s shows on television, Slow Food membership events, shopping local or organic, where we can tune in and drop out again whenever we want. If we settled for just having a view from the top of a hill, then the goal of the commons would be lost.

In other words, these new insights gleaned from the commons need to be re-inserted into the everyday. For example what the community garden *has* illustrated in this research is that there are alternative ways of considering the problem of “good” “clean” and “fair”. In the small ways in which the garden takes up these questions *beside* (not outside) capitalism, it reveals fissures in the social fabric and makes the value practices of capital visible; these cracks allow us to see how our way of life could potentially change. Within the parameters of the garden, the participants are not placed in an antagonistic relation with each other, they are not competing to

acquire more than the others; in other words they are not reproducing the value system that capital instigates. My choice to use the Forest Farm Peace Garden to illustrate a “way of life” is not an example of how life *should be* outside the capital system, but how life *can still be* within (though also to some extent alongside) the system. “Way of life” discussed in this thesis is a *mode* of being, a *way* that aims to overcome the antagonism that capitalism endorses, by choosing to *articulate* human relations otherwise. The quest for change is a constitutive process where individuals find insights and meanings through their own struggles, the responsibility of which cannot be relegated to a third party; the struggle to link up what we eat and how we produce is the basis of a new way of living, a struggle based on and constituted in the everyday.

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