Abstracts

Stewart Lockie
'The invisible mouth': mobilizing 'the consumer' in food production-consumption networks

The distanciation of production-consumption relationships in space and time, and the historically productivist bias of social theory, have contributed to the development of sociologies of food production and consumption as largely unrelated academic discourses. Production-based agri-food studies have tended to treat consumption as either a domain of social practice distinct from, but determined by, production, or as a source of 'demands' that producers must compete among themselves to meet. Both perspectives fail to deal either with the complexity of food consumption practices or their relationships with practices of food provision. One solution to this problem—informed by actor-network theory and commodity systems analysis—has been the examination of specific commodity chains, or networks, and the material and symbolic transformations that substances undergo as they move from the point of production to the point of ingestion. However, as a number of studies have found, simply adding the hitherto neglected activity of consumption to the end of the commodity chain has proved difficult; this method ultimately favoring the analysis of relatively small chains for niche and specialty foods for which specific actors may unproblematically be identified. This paper argues that while the conceptualization of production-consumption in terms of actor-networks is itself robust, the methodological injunction to simply follow actors through networks is problematic. Additional conceptual and methodological tools are needed that allow an examination of the ways in which actors seek to render others knowable and governable 'at a distance'; that is, to order diffuse and complex networks. In much the same way, for example, that the point of production has become increasingly invisible to the consumers of industrially produced foods, so too are those ingesting food potentially invisible to its producers. 'The consumer' is, however, made knowable and governable through the application of technologies including market research, survey data and point of sale record keeping. Investigation of the ways in which 'the consumer' is made knowable within rapidly extending organic food networks illustrates the ways in which ensuing discourses of 'consumer demand' are deployed to mobilize actors at multiple points within each network—including the point of ingestion from which this demand is purported to flow.

Julie Guthman
Commodified meanings, meaningful commodities: re-thinking production-consumption links through the organic system of provision

Agro-food researchers have yet to systematically theorize how the social life of food intersects with a political economy of food production. Yet without such understanding, activists are unlikely to affect the politics of production in intended ways. It is crucial to understand how the meanings that animate the politics of consumption are translated and distributed as surplus value and rent, and, for that matter, how surplus value and rent value are translated into meanings. This paper is a preliminary attempt to further that understanding by considering these translations in organic food provision. It begins with some recent interventions in conceptualizing taste and then explores their significance in value creation.
and distribution. It then considers what they offer in understanding the taste for organics specifically. Ultimately, I argue that certain of these tastes present considerable, if different, problems for the commodification of organic food, which are only resolved by a re-making of organic meanings together with unintended distributions of value.

**Mara Miele and Jonathan Murdoch**

**The practical aesthetics of traditional cuisines: slow food in Tuscany**

The paper examines the aestheticisation of food in the context of ‘eating out’ and distinguishes two main aesthetic types: first, an ‘aesthetic of entertainment’ in which food quality is secondary to the restaurant experience; second, a ‘gastronomic aesthetic’ in which the quality of food, notably seasonality and freshness, is seen as primary. Having distinguished the two types, the paper then investigates the second – the gastronomic aesthetic – through the case study of Slow Food in Tuscany. The Slow Food movement seeks to heighten the aesthetic appreciation of typical products and works mainly through local groups and typical restaurants. Through the in-depth analysis of one such restaurant, the paper outlines three main strands in the gastronomic aesthetic: a practical aesthetics of restaurant organisation; an aesthetical-ethic of typical foods; and, an aesthetic of ‘connectedness’ or ‘embeddedness’ in which the food is seen as a reflection of surrounding socio-economic and ecological relationships. The paper concludes by drawing out the implications of the study of aesthetics for rural sociology.

**John Wilkinson**

**The final foods industry and the changing face of the global agro-food system**

This article focusses on the challenges which current processes of global restructuring represent for the leading food industry firms, exploring, in addition, the hypothesis that both the new bio(techno)logy paradigm and novel patterns of food demand (nutriceuticals, organics) accentuate the vulnerability of firms organised around this link in the global agrofood chain. Two dimensions of the new demand oriented food system which assumed dominance as from the mid-70s can be analytically separated out. The leading food industry players can be said have responded well to the first dimension which involved above all the transition to multi-product demand and innovation oriented firm strategies. The second phase is not so much focused on the diversification of demand as on new contents of demand. These either push food further along the substitutionist trajectory up to the frontier with pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, nutriceuticals and functional foods, or radically challenge industrial transformation, harnessing preservation technologies to the reintroduction of the agricultural product as final food. In this second phase the final food sector would appear to be in danger of being squeezed between the extremes of demand and supply. On the one hand, it is largely passive in relation to the drama of the new biotechnology paradigm, and on the other it lacks the nuanced knowledge of global demand made possible by information technology which provides a decisive advantage to retail. This second dimension of the new agro-food system places the future of the traditional giants of the food industry in considerable doubt.

**Mary K. Hendrickson and William D. Heffernan**

**Opening spaces through relocalization: locating potential resistance in the weaknesses of the global food system**

In this paper we explore several themes based on our intertwined research and outreach activities. First, we examine and discuss emerging global food chains that are embedded in strategic alliances, joint ventures and relationships – in short in networks of power. Decisions are being displaced away from multiple actors situated in different localities to globalized decision-making located within a few firms that make up each cluster. While the roots of these phenomena are firmly grounded in long-term historical processes, it is important to document and understand what is emerging at the global level in order to create alternatives. Second, we discuss our outreach work with farmers, consumers and communities in helping
them to frame and understand the changes that are taking place in the food and agriculture system. This is exemplified through a case study of the Kansas City Food Circle and its role in generating alternative visions from the consumption side of the food equation. This work is extremely important for challenging the global food system, and also for helping to empower farmers, eaters and communities to create alternatives. We lay out an analytical understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the global system, and the opportunities found in the social, environmental and economic failures of the global system. In conclusion, the work described above rests on the recognition of different forms of agency that are appearing in the food system, agency that is located within the spaces provided by the unsustainable, unjust nature of the global system. We remain cognizant of the incredible networks of power that shape the production and consumption relationships in the food system. However, we remain hopeful that models of emerging alternatives can help relocalize production/consumption relationships in the food system in equitable ways. In other words, in relationships that are personalized and sustainable, and that are embedded in place and community.

Lourdes Gouveia and Arunas Juska
Taming nature, taming workers: constructing the separation between meat consumption and meat production in the US
In this article we examine corporate and state actions implicated in manufacturing the extension, and precipitating the collapse, of the fictional distance separating production from consumption in contemporary agro-food systems. We investigate this phenomena via the case of the U.S. beef industry. Specifically, we examine regulatory initiatives and corporate responses aimed at addressing the two most important issues confronting the industry today: bacteriological meat contamination and an over-reliance on Latino immigrant labour. We focus most intently on two U.S. government regulatory initiatives and accompanying strategies of resistance. The first of these regulatory initiatives is Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points, or HACCP as it is commonly called. HACCP was designed to enhance meat safety regulations inside packing plants and in the face of a rising number of bacteriological infection outbreaks. The second initiative, ‘Operation Prime Beef’, later re-named ‘Operation Vanguard’, was launched by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) responding to public pressures to eliminate meatpacking as a powerful ‘magnet’ for undocumented workers. State efforts to introduce new regulatory requirements in meatpacking plants, especially in the current neoliberal climate, are met with intense resistance by meat corporations - often successfully. However, these regulatory activities, the public debates that often surround them, and the increasingly dense and politicized networks they engender, also serve to mobilize social actors interested in alternative food provisioning systems. The analysis is informed by an eclectic combination of insights from Political Economy and Post-structural approaches such as Actor Network Theory or ANT.

Michael Redclift
Chewing gum in the United States and Mexico: the everyday and the iconic
Chewing gum is a good example of a commodity whose ‘value’ is not confined to the sphere of economics. Gum became one of the first products to employ mass advertising and marketing expertise, even in the first decades of the twentieth century. Later chewing gum became associated with all things ‘American’, and was used as a way of promoting ‘American values’, in sport, entertainment and even politics. Chewing gum assumed iconic status in the United States at a time when its sourcing and raw material (chicle) was largely unknown (or hidden) in Mexico, the chief supplier. The paper argues that consumption can, and often does, acquire primacy within production/consumption circuits, when its use becomes seen as both necessary and inevitable. Products like chewing gum also point to complex cultural relationships, that can extend beyond national boundaries, and illustrate the way in which political economy is supported by fashion and taste.
Laura T. Raynolds

Consumer/producer links in Fair Trade coffee networks

This article analyzes the multifaceted connections linking consumers and producers in expanding North/South Fair Trade coffee networks. I develop a commodity network framework that builds on the commodity chain tradition, integrating insights from cultural studies, actor-network theory, and conventions approaches. This framework illuminates how material and ideological relations are negotiated across production and consumption arenas. In the case of Fair Trade, progressive ideas and practices related to trust, equality, and global responsibility are intertwined with traditional commercial and industrial conventions. As I demonstrate, the negotiation of these divergent conventions shortens the social distance between Fair Trade coffee consumers and producers. I conclude that by re-linking consumers and producers, commodity network analysis provides a robust entré for academic inquiry and engagement in alternative food politics.