Cooking Logics:
Cognition and Reflexivity in the Culinary Field

Vanina Leschziner

Abstract

This paper draws on ethnographic research with elite chefs in New York City and San Francisco to present an analysis of the socio-cognitive and organizational foundations of culinary creation. I examine the cognitive schema upon which chefs rely in creating dishes and seeking legitimation, and the organizational factors that constrain them in their choices. Chefs rely on particular ideas about food, their inclinations, and perceptions of customers' expectations, to make choices about the food they will serve in their restaurants. I show that they focus on either of two principles of culinary creation: flavor or market differentiation. Flavor is the principle of excellence in cuisine, and as such is the value to strive for in making food, and thus the means to acquire legitimacy as chefs. But chefs cannot simply make flavorful food, they need to differentiate themselves from others to survive in the competitive market of high cuisine. To make flavorful food that customers will like, and distinguish themselves from others, they must find a balance between conformity to traditional styles and originality. Conformity and originality introduce contradictory pressures, and individuals must make choices out of this contradiction. I suggest that one way whereby they make choices is through their "self-concepts." But self-concepts are not up for grabs, they are constructed throughout individuals' careers, and are therefore associated with individuals' positions in the field. Thus, whether chefs focus on flavor or differentiation in creating food and legitimating themselves is associated with both their self-concepts and field positions.

A few years ago, a certain chef at a renowned Italian restaurant in New York City, whose culinary style was perceived as Italian food with a New York sensibility, included a *panna cotta* (an Italian pudding) topped with whole pink peppercorns on his dessert menu. Unless one knew better, one might have expected the creator of such an original dessert to highlight his creativity when asked about it. During an interview, however, far from this attitude, this top chef instead drew attention to the traditional ingredients he used in the dessert and when asked further about the pink peppercorns (not a traditional ingredient in Italian cuisine, and much

source:i-Stockphoto

less so in any type of dessert), suggested that using them was rather accidental. If he served dishes that departed from the Italian canon, he explained, it was because he had to adapt to the ingredients available in New York, and that adapting to one's surrounding is in itself very Italian.[1]

This story is representative of several central themes that emerge from an examination of the culinary styles and discourses of elite chefs in New York City and San Francisco, the two most prestigious restaurant cities in the United States.[2] The above chef's dishes are, as in most high-end restaurants, a negotiation between culinary tradition on one hand, and a combination of innovation, economic and geographic constraints on the other. His discourse, as is the case with most elite chefs, shows substantially his ability to navigate between these pressures and constraints in representing his food.

Whether in New York, San Francisco or other cities, chefs create dishes within limitations introduced by geographic, economic and socio-cultural conditions. A restaurant's location influences the nature of the food a chef prepares through access to ingredients, local cuisines, and customers' inclinations and expectations.

---

1. These data are from an interview I conducted with the chef.
2. For analytical purposes, I consider culinary styles to be constituted by two central aspects: regional denominations (i.e., French, Italian, New American) and degree of innovativeness (which I categorize as traditional and innovative). To be sure, these are not neatly defined categories in actual practice. The boundaries between categories are fuzzy, and indeed chefs, as well as critics (who have a role in defining categories [see Hsu 2006; Rao, Monin and Durand 2005]), disagree over such boundaries. Some of this disagreement, specifically that among chefs, is analyzed in this paper.

Chefs must also create food within the constraints of the particular conditions of the restaurants where they work, namely the restaurants' culinary styles, budgets and market niches, kitchen staff and equipment. They also design dishes from a particular social position in the culinary field, a position they attain through their culinary styles, skills, status, and social networks.[3]

But constraints are not the whole story. Chefs make choices within constraints, and they make use of different resources to arrive at such choices. It is reasonable to assume that they draw on information that is available to them (see Daft and Weick 1984; Owen-Smith 2001; Rao 1994; Simon 1959; Weick 1995), monitor what their colleagues do, and rely on their experiences to make choices.[4] But culinary fields are complex environments, where too much information is available and too many factors put constraints upon chefs' work, some of which are also contradictory. Hence chefs need to prioritize some of these factors when they conceive dishes for their menus. How they perceive the objects with which they work and reflexively understand their work is likely to determine the kinds of factors they attend and respond to.[5] Generally, chefs approach the ingredients and the creation of dishes through particular cognitive schema, partly constituted by the principles of culinary creation they have learned during their training and careers. Chefs need some kind of compass to navigate through the complexity of their environment and make choices about their food and careers. Their self-concepts, meaningful, strongly held narratives about the self, provide guidance. Self-concepts, thus conceived, are not erratic psychological states but relatively stable conceptions of the self which are the product of the reflexive processes whereby individuals consider themselves consciously, and do so in relation to their social environment. Thus, self-concepts are profoundly shaped by the multiple associations with actors and organizations that

---

3. The field is here conceptualized as an area of activity in which individuals orient their actions to those of others. Therefore, I take the field of cuisine to be comprised of non-ethnic elite restaurants, and New York City and San Francisco to be two different culinary fields (for extant conceptualizations of a "gastronomic field," see Ferguson (1998) and also Rao, Monin and Durand (2003, 2005). The category "ethnic" is understood from the perspective of chefs in elite restaurants in these two cities, and thus refers to foods from countries outside of Central Europe, the United States, and Canada. Insofar as chefs orient their actions to one-another, chefs of "ethnic" food (i.e., chefs who work in "ethnic" restaurants and not those who may draw on elements or ideas from foreign cuisines) are not members of the fields examined here. Elite chefs do not need to have information about the "ethnic" restaurants that open or close in their cities, nor do they need to know about the food that these restaurants serve; moreover they do not seek jobs in these places. But they do need to know what chefs at non-ethnic restaurants do, given that they orient their actions to these. For these same reasons, I only include chefs at top restaurants.

4. For an analysis of the practices and management of knowledge-exchange among chefs, see Leschziner (2007a, 2007b).

5. This framework is along the lines of Archer's theorization of reflexivity and social action (2003, 2007). It is also consistent with the perspectives in organizational analysis that have been calling for attention to individual action and cognition, especially the sense-making approach (see Daft and Weick 1984; Weick 1995) and the inhabited institutions approach (Hallett and Ventresca 2006).

an individual has had throughout her career, as well as by the individual's current position in the culinary field.[6]

This paper analyzes how chefs at high-end restaurants in New York and San Francisco navigate the pressures and constraints they face in making decisions about their work with a particular focus on how chefs cognize their work and conceive their selves in order to explain how they arrive at the choices they make. This paper describes only general patterns observed among chefs to explain some of the forces that constitute the social logic of culinary creation in these cities. There are, to be sure, variations in the way chefs cognize their work and conceive themselves (associated, as well, with a chef's position in the culinary field), but such variations are beyond the purview of this paper (Leschziner 2007b).

This paper draws on ethnographic research I conducted with elite chefs in New York City and San Francisco, consisting of 45 interviews with chefs and observation in their restaurant kitchens, as well as several other formal and informal interviews with restaurant cooks and staff. Included also are interviews with individuals in other occupations associated with restaurants (architects, lawyers, food writers).[7] Ethnographic data were complemented with analyses of menus and reviews from newspapers and magazines of all the restaurants concerned, as well as articles on food and chefs in New York and San Francisco published during the period the fieldwork was conducted.

Some of the cognitive schema and self-understandings of chefs in New York and San Francisco examined in this paper are likely to have a higher degree of regional specificity than others. Undoubtedly, a number of principles of culinary creation are specific to cuisines. Insofar as "Western"[8] cuisines are built upon the foundations of French cuisine,[9] some of the socio-cognitive schema described in this paper will apply to "Western" cuisines in general. These cuisines share cooking techniques as well as a conceptual understanding of food.[10] We might question whether some of the cognitive and affective aspects of individuals' understandings as well as the organizational dynamics of a culinary field have less cultural specificity. This is an

---

6. For a related understanding of self-concepts and their role in making choices in cultural creation, see Gross (2002, 2008).

7. The chefs in the sample work at restaurants which have all been awarded stars from the most highly respected publications in each city, *New York Times* and *San Francisco Chronicle* and *San Francisco* magazine. I used ratings from these publications (stars and pricing scales) to classify elite restaurants in three categories: middle status, upper-middle status, and high status.

8. The notion of "Western" cuisines refers (largely) to those that are not "ethnic" (Central Europe, the United States, and Canada), as understood in the population under study.

9. France is generally considered to be the birthplace of modern cuisine in the western world (Ferguson 1998, 2004; Ferguson and Zukin 1998; Trubek 2000).

10. For a historical analysis of the socio-cognitive foundations of French cuisine, see Leschziner (2006).

interesting question that requires empirical research to be answered.

In analyzing the cognitive schema and reflexive self-understandings that help explain the social logic of creation in the culinary field, this paper has two (related) goals. First, it shows that cognitive schema and the individual's reflexive processes are inherent elements in the social logic of creation in a field of cultural production, and as such shed light on the dynamics of production in the field in question. In doing so, I expand upon the agenda of those perspectives (e.g., Daft and Weick 1984; Hallett and Ventresca 2006; Weick 1995) that seek to complement the insights of the new institutionalism (see DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 1991; Meyer and Rowan 1977) with attention to individual action, cognition and emotion. Second, by examining a case in which artistic pursuits and market forces meet, this paper contributes to our current knowledge about patterns of cultural production in organizational fields. Such a case introduces more complex dynamics than those we find in fields that are more typically studied (e.g., Bourdieu [1992] 1996; Burt 1992, 2004; Owen-Smith and Powell 2004; Phillips and Zuckerman 2001; Zuckerman 1999), where cultural production either follows artistic pursuits which are not necessarily for profit (such as poetry, or the fine arts) or profit-oriented ends which are not necessarily artistic (such as the biotechnical industry or corporate world).

Principles of Culinary Creation

source:i-Stockphoto

Every area of cultural production, as Bourdieu (1976, 1977, 1993, [1984] 1993, [1992] 1996) has paradigmatically theorized, has its own principles of perception and appreciation, upon which individuals draw in order to both understand their own actions and legitimate themselves. In the culinary fields of New York and San Francisco, elite chefs are likely to draw upon the principles of French cuisine they have learned (regardless of where they have worked), namely techniques, ingredient combinations, composition of dishes, and presentation. These are key principles for assessing the quality of food, judged chiefly by the food's flavor. Insofar as every field has its own principles of perception and appreciation, it also has its own principle of excellence. In culinary fields, this principle is constituted by flavor.

Chefs' claims about what comprises a good dish (an interview question) provide a wealth of evidence that flavor is the principle of excellence. A number of chefs in New York and San Francisco maintain that in conceiving a dish, their main, and in some cases only, concern, is flavor.[11] Without a doubt, just as we would find that the notions concerning the composition or technical mastery of a painting will differ from one pictorial style to another, so will the particulars about what constitutes good flavor differ from one cuisine to another. Yet flavor, as an abstract and elusive quality by which dishes are judged, would arguably constitute the principle of excellence in any culinary field.

Elite chefs must surely concern themselves with flavor and create dishes of exceptional quality, not simply nourishing food. However, because cuisine is an area of activity that stands at the nexus of art and commerce, chefs must also ensure that their restaurants are profitable. This means that even if the dishes they create have symbolic value, chefs are not quite like painters. Painters may be devoted to *art for art's sake* but chefs cannot dedicate themselves to culinary artistry without concern with such issues as customer preferences, cost, and profit.[12]

Chefs have to design dishes that customers will order. This entails, first, using ingredients that customers like. In New York and San Francisco, steak, salmon, tuna, and chicken breast are especially popular among diners (ingredients which chefs find boring, incidentally), whereas organ meats, for instance, are out of favor. In short, chefs must ensure that the dishes they prepare will sell, which in turn means that the ingredient combinations must be familiar to their customers. This results in relatively traditional dishes and restaurant menus which showcase the same ingredient pairings in soups, salads, pastas, entrées, and desserts.

In contrast to pressures to make traditional foods, chefs must differentiate themselves from peers, to stand out in this very competitive high cuisine market in cities such as New York and San Francisco. Inevitably, market competition leads to the need to create original dishes, to which chefs respond by introducing new ingredients, ingredient combinations, culinary techniques or presentation of dishes to their menus.

---

11. There is variation to the extent that chefs claim to be mostly, or only, concerned with flavor. As I have suggested, such variation is associated with chefs' status. This being said, there is evidence from interviews, in the form of behavioral and bodily expressions, that all chefs (regardless of their claims) are aware that flavor is the principle of excellence in their occupation.

12. That painters *may* be devoted to *art for art's sake* is not to be taken to mean that painters are, by definition, uninterested in market success, but that they have the option to be single-mindedly devoted to art, whereas chefs do not.

The contrasting pressures towards tradition and innovation introduce constraints into the dishes chefs create. Chefs are keenly aware of these as well as all other factors that limit their creational potential. This is not only due to the knowledge that they work in a profit-motivated area of cultural production. Chefs are responsible for restaurant management as well as the food they serve. As a consequence, their tendency to claim devotion to flavor raises questions about why they ignore, and in some cases deny, other factors when representing their respective approaches to culinary creation.

source:i-Stockphoto

The significance of chefs' tendencies to focus on flavor at the expense of other factors that limit them in their work becomes clear if we examine how chefs talk about what they seek to achieve when they create dishes. This excerpt from a high-status chef in New York, who discusses the elements required for a good dish, illustrates the single-minded dedication to flavor many chefs claim.[13]

> [For a dish to be good] It's got to have a good sauce. It's gotta be very well cooked; that's technique. It's gotta be appealing. It's gotta be very fresh. The ingredient has to speak by themselves. That's it. [Q: What do you mean by appealing?] The taste. The taste, the taste of everything. It's essential. It's gotta be cooked well, not overcooked, not undercooked. It's gotta go all together. It's…and…the taste is, it's gotta be honest, it's gotta be clean. (High-status Chef in New York City, fieldnotes)

---

13. All the names of chefs and restaurants have been kept anonymous and confidential.

We note here the extent to which the chef emphasizes the primacy of taste, a taste that is pure, honest, and clean.[14] By maintaining the position that ingredients have to speak for themselves, he alludes to the understanding, widespread among chefs, that a dish should have as few ingredients as possible, and that these ought not to be tampered with.[15] This results in dishes that are simple. We should note that this chef has worked at some of the most refined and exclusive restaurants in New York, those that command the highest prices in the country. In such restaurants, he not only used the most exquisite and costliest ingredients, but also served them in what critics and customers identify to be elaborate compositions. That even chefs cooking at the most high-end restaurants highlight the primacy of simplicity—an honest and clean flavor—sheds light on the symbolic meaning of the notions of flavor and simplicity in the culinary field.

The elements this chef singles out as being the most important—flavor and its two associated values of simplicity and the quality of ingredients—commonly arise in discourses of chefs in New York and San Francisco. If chefs maintain that flavor is the essential value guiding them in their creational pursuits, and that the conduits for achieving flavor are good ingredients and simple preparations, it is because these claims signify a devotion to the principle of excellence in their occupation. These claims are thus the means by which chefs legitimate themselves. Dedication to flavor, simplicity and nature of ingredients denotes indifference to economic success or prestige; in other words, it signals the chef's purity (Bourdieu 1993).[16]

Some chefs do not profess such devotion to flavor, instead acknowledging the importance of the other, much less noble principle of culinary creation: market differentiation. The chefs who sustain that differentiating from others is a goal that guides their culinary creations tend to highlight a number of elements as important for making a good dish, and they may or may not include flavor among these elements. They generally highlight the importance of originality, contrast of textures or colors, and presentation. Instead of conveying a pursuit of culinary excellence, these other qualities are based more on impure motivations, namely a desire to increase market success or prestige.

---

14. It should be pointed out that the remarks quoted here are representative of the whole interview, i.e., the chef emphasized the primacy of taste in his approach to culinary creation throughout the conversation.

15. He indeed goes on to elaborate upon this understanding.

16. Here, I follow field theory (see Bourdieu 1993) with the premise that every field of cultural production is structured around a pole of purity and another of impurity. Creators in the former are guided by a devotion to art for art's sake, and so are indifferent to market dynamics or attaining success, while creators in the latter are motivated to increase their reputation or economic capital.

The contrast between the position of chefs who claim devotion to flavor and those who invoke other qualities as critical in culinary creation becomes apparent in the following excerpt from the chef of an upper-middle status restaurant in New York. Through his comments about the qualities that make a good dish, the chef illustrates the position of those who focus on market differentiation.

> [For a dish to be good] I mean, the visual appeal has to be perfect because when the dish comes to the table, that's the first thing. You have to look at it and say, "Wow, this is…." [Q: What would be a perfect visual appeal?] Something, I mean, without affecting the flavors of it, it needs to be colorful…. and I think always the plate, too makes, it can make or break a dish too. So I'm always trying to find unique plates that nobody else has, or different styles. (Upper-middle status chef in New York City, fieldnotes)

When asked about what constitutes a good dish, this chef does not make reference to flavor or the associated qualities of ingredients or simplicity. Rather, he points to visual appeal, and what is more, to the appeal of tableware. And he highlights the value of tableware, not food, for differentiating himself from other chefs. This contrasts quite sharply with the way in which the previous chef represented his approach to the creation of dishes. The above discourses are good illustrations of the two typical positions I have found in interviews with chefs in New York and San Francisco, i.e., individuals who claim that the principle that guides them in creating dishes is flavor or market differentiation. To be sure, there are nuances to these positions. Some chefs maintain they pursue flavor while also being mindful of the imperative to differentiate among one's peers. Others state that while seeking to distinguish themselves, they also recognize that ingredients are important, or that making flavorful food is essential.[17]

source:i-Stockphoto

The contrast between these two characteristic positions is not limited to chefs' discourses. Insofar as there is some form of relationship, however complex and

---

17. In the data analysis, I coded chefs' representations of the principles that guide them in creating dishes on the basis of the number and order of their claims (i.e. whether they only mentioned flavor or they first mentioned flavor and then originality was coded differently).

multi-faced, between individuals' discursive representations and their practices (see DiMaggio 2002; Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003), we should find a patterning between discourses and culinary styles. Thus, we may surmise that individuals who claim devotion to flavor might be likely to create food in traditional styles, while those who focus on the pressures of market differentiation, and therefore invoke originality as a guiding principle, are more likely to create original or innovative food.

Insofar as there is an assumption that old recipes have stood the test of time because their flavors have reached perfection, chefs who claim to pursue flavor (or simplicity, or the quality of ingredients) as their guiding principle of creation are inclined to rely on traditional dishes. These chefs would see tampering with traditional recipes as an attempt to be original for the sake of originality, or as they call it, for the "wow factor." Tampering with traditional recipes may take the form of substituting classic ingredients with others that are new or faddish, or using fashionable cooking techniques (especially those associated with "molecular gastronomy") to change the textures of ingredients. Thus, the chefs who belong to this group generally represent their culinary styles as traditional, whether they make French, Italian, or New American food. Chefs who underscore differentiation as a guiding principle tend to add novel touches to their food, focusing on those elements that are original (in contrast to chefs who follow strict tradition). They are consequently likely to view their styles as innovative.

So long as individuals focus on different principles guiding culinary creation, we can see that the same dish may be represented as either traditional or innovative. To illustrate this, let us imagine a recipe that takes the traditional Caprese salad—a classic Italian combination of mozzarella, tomato, and basil—turned into a tomato broth with mozzarella foam and basil gelée.[18] Chefs who focus on flavor would frame this dish as traditional because it adheres to the traditional ingredients and balance of flavors of the Caprese salad. These individuals would say that the dish changes only in terms of the textures of the ingredients, and that the purpose of such change is to make the food lighter. Making food lighter allows for flavors to be more focused. Because they transform the classic salad for the sake of flavor, these individuals represent themselves as faithful to tradition. In contrast, chefs who invoke market differentiation as a principle of creation and focus on food *originality* would point to the transformation of textures, and possibly to the presentation of the dish, noting that these transformations change the experience of partaking in the combination of

---

18. This is an imaginary dish because the confidentiality and anonymity of interviews prevents me from using real dishes. However, the imaginary innovation on a traditional dish is analogous to the work of some chefs in New York City and San Francisco (or, for that matter, numerous other cities). Thus, the imaginary arguments that chefs would invoke to explain why they represent the dish in one way or another are based on arguments I have heard chefs use.

flavors. These individuals thus turn the traditional salad into a new dish for the sake of innovation. Acknowledging their mindfulness of market pressures, they represent themselves as innovative.

That chefs represent their food variously depending on their cognitive focus suggests that a chef's self-representation is not necessarily in line with the perceptions that others have of his or her style. As with the high-status chef (mentioned above) who characterizes his food as simple, individuals who maintain that flavor is their guiding principle and therefore represent their culinary styles to be traditional may be cooking food that is perceived by others to be original.[19] Such dissociation between a chef's self-representations and external appraisals, however, arises only among chefs who characterize themselves as traditional.[20] That the dissociation is found in the above case, but not among chefs who represent their styles to be innovative, is a significant aspect of the social logic of culinary creation, as I shall explain.

If we consider the means through which chefs legitimate themselves, it is reasonable that the lack of association between self-representations and external appraisals does not exist among New York and San Francisco chefs who characterize their styles as innovative. First, individuals attain legitimacy by claiming devotion to the principle of excellence in cuisine. Therefore we are more likely to find chefs who express devotion to flavor and represent their styles as traditional (relatively independently of how others see them) than to find chefs who maintain that they work in the service of the market if their culinary creations also seem (at least to them) to be driven by a pursuit of excellence.[21] Individuals might more or less admit, with some embarrassment, to responding to market pressures, but they would be unlikely to maintain they simply pursue originality if there is some evidence to the contrary.

The Social Logic of Culinary Creation

The relationship between chefs' discourses and the external assessment of their culinary styles does not simply show processes of legitimation in cuisine. For one thing, chefs legitimate themselves more through the food they create than through

---

19. Evidence of this perception comes from articles about chefs and restaurants from several media, as well as opinions of other chefs.

20. The dissociation between chefs' self-representations and external appraisals of their styles is not randomly distributed. There is a mapping of chefs' discourses and culinary styles (in their associations and dissociations) that is related to status. For data on the status distribution of chefs' discourses and culinary styles, see (Leschziner 2007b).

21. This ought not be taken to mean that chefs are necessarily calculating and misleading in their representations of their styles.

personal claims. And if a chef were to make claims that are inconsistent with her culinary style, such claims would not be credible, or worse, would appear insincere. Therefore, we can reasonably expect discourses to be intrinsically associated with culinary styles. Further, it was noted earlier that while chefs face contradictory pressures on their culinary styles, they also face pressures in representing themselves. Just as they must respond to pressures to conform to tradition, yet be innovative in the foods they create, they must also respond to these contradictory pressures in terms of legitimating themselves.

Stock photo: Microsoft

We know that chefs must innovate in order to differentiate themselves from others, but they cannot make dishes so original that customers cannot fit them into a familiar repertoire of food (see DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Glynn and Abzug 2002; Lampel, Lant and Shamsie 2000; Phillips and Zuckerman 2001; Zuckerman 1999). At the same time, too much innovation would make chefs appear inauthentic.[22] Yet, making traditional food without adding a novel element to it would look as though the chef had no idea of his or her own. Thus, in seeking legitimation, just as in creating food, individuals must find some form of balance between the two pressures.

Without a doubt, individuals cannot respond in a totally satisfactory way to contradictory pressures, so they have to prioritize one of them in creating food and making legitimacy claims. How they make such choices leads to the central question of the social logic of culinary creation. Because high cuisine is an area of production of goods with symbolic value that is invariably profit-motivated, we should find that individuals must demonstrate creativity as well as succeed in the market to remain in business and legitimate themselves.[23] It follows that flavor and market differentiation will be the two most important principles of creation.

It seems reasonable to assume that these two principles of culinary creation may be the most important factors in other major cities besides New York and San Francisco, and to posit that the concept of flavor may be associated with the values of simplicity and ingredients, while market differentiation may be associated with originality, regardless of the regional specificities and culinary traditions of the field in question.[24] Similarly, it seems reasonable that, in any culinary field, responses to

22. I follow Peterson (1997; see also Rao, Monin and Durand 2005) in maintaining that individuals must find a balance between conformity to a traditional style and originality to appear authentic.

23. In this regard, as I suggested above, cuisine is quite different from areas in which the goods produced do not necessarily have symbolic value, such as the biotechnical industry, and those in which the production of goods with symbolic value is not necessarily for-profit, such as painting.

24. Of course, empirical data would be required to substantiate what are merely reasonable expectations. It is worth noting, however, that simplicity and the quality of ingredients have been

the two pressures may take the form of dishes with familiar foodstuffs and traditional ingredient combinations, along with discourses extolling the virtues of simplicity and ingredients on the one hand, and innovation through the introduction of new ingredients, ingredient combinations, technique or presentation, and claims about market pressures on the other.

Insofar as we assume that individuals have a reflexive understanding of their work, and have come to create food and represent it through the perspective of their understandings, we can expect that their culinary styles would be associated with their reflexive self-understandings.[25] Multiple factors go into the choices chefs make to create a particular dish, but self-concepts and the desire (or hesitancy) to innovate are key elements in the choices individuals make. Like creators in any field, some chefs may be eager to make frequent changes to the foods they prepare, learn new techniques, use new ingredients, and conceive fresh ideas, and others may never seek to change the type of dishes they create nor vary their work routines. Certainly, chefs tend to have a whole set of routinized skills and work processes—the mastery of which is essential to ensure consistent excellence in their dishes during the rush of dinner service.[26] Yet, they may also act more imaginatively and forward-looking,[27] even if their own habits or pressures to achieve excellence do not always enable them to actualize their desires to create something new.

Chefs make choices out of all the forces that shape their work based on their self-concepts. Through these, they develop a compass that helps them navigate the field and focus on one of the two principles of culinary creation: flavor or the principle of excellence in cuisine, and the imperative of differentiation. In focusing on one of these principles, they make choices about their dishes and self-representations, either leaning towards tradition or innovation. As they prioritize one principle or another, they shape their culinary styles as well as their self-concepts thus locating themselves in the field through both their culinary styles and self-concepts. By the same token, chefs create their culinary styles and reflexively understand themselves from their particular positions in the field, given the constraints introduced by their restaurants, status, and social networks. That they make sense of the field and

---

traditionally associated with Japanese cuisine in particular, whereas Chinese cuisine, for instance, has been generally likened to French cuisine for a higher reliance on technique than on ingredients, and a conceptual complexity in the creation of dishes (see Clark 1975).

25. For a conception of reflexivity along these lines, see Archer (2007).

26. Chefs may be able to conceive of new ideas, but the likelihood that they can turn them into a dish good enough to be served in an elite restaurant and that they can execute the dish under the heightened pressure that rules in restaurant kitchens during service is higher if the actions required to make the dish are relatively automatic. Indeed, chefs remark that they turn into robots in the kitchen, as there is no time to think during service.

27. For an exemplary work on individuals' imaginative and forward-looking action, see Emirbayer and Mische (1998), and Mische (2008); see also Lahire (2003).

shape their self-concepts from their particular positions means, in effect, that they develop their practical theories of action from such positions.

Through the analysis of individual cognition and reflexivity, this paper has sought to further our understanding of the social logic of creation in the culinary field. More generally, by attending to the ways in which individuals perceive what they do and reflexively understand themselves and their work in a field with multiple and contradictory pressures arising from the field's position at the nexus of art and commerce, I seek to contribute to the growing debate about the forces behind organizational fields.

References

Archer, Margaret. 2003. *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

———. 2007. *Making our Way Through the World.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1976. "Le Champ Scientifique." *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* 2:88-104.

———. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 1993. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press.

———. [1984] 1993. *Sociology in Question*. London; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

———. [1992] 1996. *The Rules of Art. Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Burt, Ronald. 1992. *Structural Holes: The Social Structure of Competition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

———. 2004. "Structural Holes and Good Ideas." *American Journal of Sociology* 110:349-399.

Clark, Priscilla P. 1975. "Thoughts for Food, I: French Cuisine and French Culture." *The French Review* 49:32-41.

Daft, Richard L., and Karl E. Weick. 1984. "Toward a Model of Organizations as Interpretation Systems." *Academy of Management Review* 9:284-295.

DiMaggio, Paul. 2002. "Why Cognitive (and Cultural) Sociology Needs Cognitive Psychology." In *Culture in Mind. Toward a Sociology of Culture and Cognition*, ed. Karen Cerulo, 274-281. New York; London: Routledge.

DiMaggio, Paul, and Walter Powell. 1983. "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields." *American Sociological Review* 48:147-160.

———. 1991. "Introduction." In *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, edited by Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell. Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press.

Eliasoph, Nina, and Paul Lichterman. 2003. "Culture in Interaction." *American Journal of Sociology* 108:735-794.

Emirbayer, Mustafa, and Ann Mische. 1998. "What is Agency?" *American Journal of Sociology* 103:962-1023.

Ferguson, Priscilla Parkhurst. 1998. "A Cultural Field in the Making: Gastronomy in 19th Century France." *American Journal of Sociology* 104:597-641.

———. 2004. *Accounting for Taste. The Triumph of French Cuisine*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Ferguson, Priscilla Parkhurst, and Sharon Zukin. 1998. "The Careers of Chefs." In *Eating Culture*, eds. Ron Scapp and Brian Seitz, 92-111. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Glynn, Mary Ann, and Rikki Abzug. 2002. "Institutionalizing Identity: Symbolic Isomorphism and Organizational Names." *Academy of Management Journal* 45:267-280.

Gross, Neil. 2002. "Becoming a Pragmatist Philosopher: Status, Self-Concept, and Intellectual Choice." *American Sociological Review* 67:52-76.

———. 2008. *Richard Rorty: The Making of An American Philosopher*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.

Hallett, Tim, and Marc J Ventresca. 2006. "Inhabited Institutions: Social Interactions and Organizational Forms in Gouldner's Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy." *Theory and Society* 35:213-236.

Hsu, Greta. 2006. "Evaluative Schemas and the Attention of Critics in the US Film Industry." *Industrial and Corporate Change* 15:467-496.

Lahire, Bernard. 2003. "From the Habitus to an Individual Heritage of Dispositions. Towards a Sociology at the Level of the Individual." *Poetics* 31:329-355.

Lampel, Joseph, Theresa Lant, and Jamal Shamsie. 2000. "Balancing Act: Learning from Organizing Practices in Cultural Industries." *Organization Science* 11, Special Issue: Cultural Industries: Learning from Evolving Organizational Practices:263-269.

Leschziner, Vanina. 2006. "Epistemic Foundations of Cuisine: a Socio-cognitive Study of the Configuration of Cuisine in Historical Perspective." *Theory and Society* 35:421-443.

———. 2007a. "Kitchen Stories: Patterns of Recognition in Contemporary High Cuisine." *Sociological Forum* 22:77-101.

———. 2007b. "Recipes for Success: Culinary Styles, Professional Careers, and Institutional Patterns in the Field of High Cuisine." Doctoral Dissertation. Sociology Department, Rutgers University.

Meyer, John W., and Brian Rowan. 1977. "Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony." *American Journal of Sociology* 83:340-363.

Mische, Ann. 2008. *Partisan Publics: Communication and Contention Across Brazilian Youth Activist Networks*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Owen-Smith, Jason. 2001. "Managing Laboratory Work through Skepticism: Processes of Evaluation and Control." *American Sociological Review* 66:427-452.

Owen-Smith, Jason, and Walter Powell. 2004. "Knowledge Networks as Channels and Conduits: The Effects of Spillovers in the Boston Biotechnology Community." *Organization Science* 15:5-21.

Peterson, Richard. 1997. *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Phillips, Damon, and Ezra Zuckerman. 2001. "Middle Status Conformity: Theoretical Restatement and Empirical Demonstration in Two Markets." *American Journal of Sociology* 107:379-429.

Rao, Hayagreeva. 1994. "The Social Construction of Reputation: Certification Contests, Legitimation, and the Survival of Organizations in the American Automobile Industry, 1895-1912." *Strategic Management Journal* 15, Special Issue: Competitive Organizational Behavior:29-44

Rao, Hayagreeva, Philippe Monin, and Rodolphe Durand. 2003. "Institutional Change in Toque Ville: Nouvelle Cuisine as an Identity Movement in French Gastronomy." *American Journal of Sociology* 108:795-843.

———. 2005. "Border Crossing: Bricolage and the Erosion of Categorical Boundaries in French Gastronomy." *American Sociological Review* 70:968-991.

Simon, Herbert A. 1959. *Administrative Behavior: A Study of Decision Making in Administrative Organization*. New York: Free Press.

Trubek, Amy. 2000. *Haute cuisine. How the French invented the culinary profession*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Weick, Karl. 1995. *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Zuckerman, Ezra. 1999. "The Categorical Imperative: Securities Analysis and the Illegitimacy Discount." *American Journal of Sociology* 104:1398-1438.