

'Meat Smells Like Corpses': Sensory Perceptions in a Sicilian Urban Marketplace

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Based on in-depth ethnographic research, this article analyses how the tendency to sanitising urban spaces has affected the urban marketplace of La Pescheria, Catania, Sicily, and how this is reflected in the sensory experience of the space itself. Local authorities aim to render the market more appealing for a new clientele, mainly tourists and gastronomic experts. The reactions to this urban gentrification attempt are observable through the ethnography of people's sensory experience, which informs what kind of social order is maintained and/or contested within the market. Focusing on what is allowed to be experienced helps to unveil stratification of meanings, which demonstrate that bodily knowledge is deeply connected to space. The market is seen as a space under construction, in which cultural values are intertwined within the economic system. I examine accounts related to smell, touch and hearing as central arenas of contention in the marketplace. The shift in the direction of a more sanitised and secluded urban space encounters resistance and a smelly, noisy market can be understood as a space of disobedience, in which noise and smell become a statement against authority.

Keywords: Senses, Sicily, Food, Market, Cities.

Introduction

Catania is located on the oriental coast of Sicily, on the Mediterranean Sea. It is the second largest city of the region, with over one million inhabitants in the province and with 300,000 citizens residing in the municipality (ISTAT 2011). Like other European cities, Catania experienced great expansion due to increased urbanisation during the 20th century (Pagano 2007). As the urban population increased, the city centre became very congested and overrun with traffic. This was followed by several attempts of decentralisation through the creation of more suburban residential centres. Shopping areas underwent a similar transformation. In the last fifteen years neighbourhood markets, supermarkets and lately hypermarkets have mushroomed in the residential suburbs at the foothills of Mount Etna, where the majority of the province's population now lives.

The city centre kept its centrality for administrative purposes, but lost its importance as far as economic and financial activities were concerned (Comune di Catania 2008). However, the Piazza Duomo (Cathedral Square), built with the unique volcanic stone that is used both for the pavements and the buildings, is still the heart of Catania. The stark contrast of white marble and black volcanic stone characterises eastern Sicily's Baroque style. The Cathedral, designed by Gian Battista Vaccarini (Rio 1987), is Catania's most important church and it is dedicated to Sant'Agata (Saint Agatha),¹ the city's patron saint. *U' liotru*, the fountain of the elephant,² symbol of the city, is also located in Piazza Duomo.

¹ Saint Agatha was one other first Christian female martyrs. Saint Agatha's is the most lively and heartfelt cult in Catania's religious life. Saint Agatha is believed to defend the city from volcanic eruptions. Each February, approximately one million people take part in her celebration: the whole city is transformed into a ceremony. Citizens and tourists crowd the streets and every urban neighbourhood joins the celebrations

² This fountain was also assembled by Gian Battista Vaccarini in 1736. This Italian architect, responsible for much of the town's extensive restorations after the 1693 earthquake, combined the

Piazza Duomo naturally channels the oblivious passer-by in the direction of La Pescheria, one of Catania's historical markets³ (see Map on p. 34). From the square, the marketplace is not yet visible, as it is hidden by the Anemano's fountain.⁴ However, when the wind blows it is difficult to avoid the smell of fish, especially during the warmer seasons. Walking in the direction of the fountain, one can hear the increasing noise of the market, made up mainly of voices, but also of the butcher's cleavers chopping through bones in the meat quarters, or the fishermen's scabbards slicing off the heads of tuna or swordfish. The noise, the smell and the general movement of people combine to indicate the presence of the market. This makes it impossible for a casual visitor to be in Catania without becoming aware of the market.

On approaching the market, one is mesmerized by an array of colours. On both sides, there are stalls with vegetables and fruit and one is immediately struck by the smells of the marketplace. It is easy to recognise the season from the predominant colour across the market stalls: during summer, piles of nectarines, peaches and apricots are displayed; oranges, mandarins and lemons dominate the scene in winter. If tasting is the enjoyment of the gaze (Le Breton 2007: 338), this is the visitor's first bite into a flavoursome market.

The present discussion is informed by ethnographic material collected during an 18-month fieldwork conducted between 2008 and 2009. It is further augmented by many subsequent visits to Catania and its marketplaces. The central purpose is to analyse the shift of Catania's historical market, La Pescheria,⁵ from a place where most daily practices were left to the discretion of the stallholders, to a structure in which vendors deal with bureaucracy, taxes and rules, and which is managed mainly by the council. Like many other city dwellers, my informants describe La Pescheria as a market for the lower classes. During the interviews, many vendors referred to themselves and to the people of the market as *gente bassa* (low

volcanic stone elephant, probably sculptured during the Roman era, with an Egyptian obelisk (Alfieri 2007). There are many legends about the elephant. Some people explained to me that it faces east to scare off the Turks; others that it symbolises protection from the threat of the volcano.

³ Upon entering the city, signposts indicate the location of the two historical markets: '*mercati storici*' (historical markets) the sign reads, clearly visible on the way to town from the airport. It is not difficult to grasp the symbolic importance of these markets. La Pescheria and the *Fera du' Luni* are located in the city centre, about 500 meters from each other. In spite of their similarities, they encountered very different destinies. Whilst *La Pescheria* remained a 'traditional' market run by Sicilians and connected to what is regarded as 'traditional' food, the *Fera du' Luni* has incorporated new social actors such as immigrants from different countries, who have brought new elements also from a gastronomic point of view. *Fera du' Luni* is somehow more similar to other Italian urban markets, such as Piazza Vittorio in Rome or Porta Palazzo in Turin.

⁴ This fountain was sculptured by Tito Angelini in 1867. Its name, *Funtana dill'acqua a linzolu* (the fountain of the sheet water), derives from an optical illusion whereby the water seems to flow onto the marble like a soft white sheet (Alfieri 2007). The official name of the fountain is Fontana dell'Amenano, Amenano being the name of an underground river flowing underneath the city centre. The river becomes visible under the fountain and draws the eye to the bowels of the city.

⁵ 'Pescheria' generally means fish shop, but in Catania La Pescheria (*Piscaria* in the local dialect) identifies the fish market. In spite of its name, the market does not sell fish only, but all sorts of food.

people) or *popolino*,⁶ a derogative way of designating the proletariat. Thus they refer to the mass of poor people who used to live in this rundown central city area and have now mostly relocated in the suburbs.

I argue that the local authority, specifically the municipality, is currently aiming to clean this urban space and make it more presentable for tourists and city dwellers; the aim is to render the market a safer, more appealing and entertaining destination. This transformation has been characterised by the standardisation of services and practices according to criteria set out by organizations such as the European Union, when they provided guidelines not based on local concepts such as tradition or proximity but on extra-territorial authority (Seremetakis 1994).⁷

The ‘clean-up’ operation (*ripulitura*, in the words of people in the market) is a clear attempt at urban gentrification. This process is apparent observing how the sensory experience of the market has been affected. According to Degen (2008), bodily knowledge reflects social changes and its analysis can shed light into the socio-cultural contexts of cities, contributing to a deeper understanding of order, power, and control. The marketplace experience is both synaesthetic and kinaesthetic, bringing senses and movement together. The moving subjects engage with a totality of smells, sounds, consistencies, textures and tastes that follows customers to their homes, into their kitchens and finally into their mouths. Le Breton (2007) argues that it would make little sense to isolate one of the senses, because the phenomenology of perception can only be holistic. He emphasises that it is not the senses that decipher the world, but each individual embedded in a specific history and culture. It is in this sensory *Weltanschauung* that I place the marketplace and its overwhelming combination of perceptions.

In the specificity of La Pescheria, the transition of the marketplace translates into a shift in what is considered a culturally appropriate bodily knowledge. Distance, standardisation and new hygienic standards convey a more private, secluded and ‘safer’ approach to food, which affects what is allowed to be perceived in an urban space. I will proceed firstly by briefly describing the methodology of this research, then I will examine why food marketplaces are still relevant in the discussion around urban contexts, highlighting their cultural and economic significance and their contribution in addressing issues related to public space. I also take into account approaches which argue that sensory experience is fundamental to an understanding of our relationship to places. I will then describe the market from the perspective of the sensory experience, drawing mainly on the reported experience of smells, touch, and hearing. These three senses have been chosen, because they were the most

⁶ Pardo (1996) reviews the literature on the definition of *popolino* in his book about morality in Naples, where the connotation was not as negative as in my fieldsite. See also Pardo (2012: 53n).

⁷ A consistent body of anthropological and sociological literature focuses on the role of European Union regulations, perceived in juxtaposition to local traditions (Leitch 2003). The European Union has introduced a body of regulations concerning food labelling, food production and fisheries. Italy, as a European Member State is obliged to follow EU policies about food labelling and sustainable fishing. Catania’s local municipality has been unable to impose these rules at La Pescheria, despite recurrent attempts. The reasons of this failure will not be discussed here.

contested during my ethnographic work at the market. The relationship between place and smell and the disgust for strong smells are investigated in the light of the contemporary tendency to sanitising public spaces and to removing death and decomposition from our daily urban life. As far as touch is concerned, the introduction of packaging, perceived as a barrier between buyers and food, speaks for the desire to move towards a more upmarket clientele, bringing in the concepts of privacy, seclusion and democratisation into the relationship to food. Noise is also addressed within this analysis. Practically and symbolically, it signifies disobedience and resistance toward authority and toward an imposed new order.

Ethnography of a Well-ordered Chaos

At first, La Pescheria appeared chaotic and impenetrable, an indistinct knot of colours, voices, smells; an overcrowded assemblage of stalls, foods, and people. Many ethnographers dealing with markets have reported a similar initial sensation. Black (2012: 34) depicts markets as ‘contained chaos’ and De La Pradelle (2006: 17) recounts her first impression of the market as an ‘inextricable chaos: a labyrinth of densely crowded, narrow streets and squares, the pleasant jumble characterizing some stalls, products spread about in apparent disorder [...]’. Similarly Bestor (2004: 52) borrows Geertz’s expression of ‘grooved channels’ to delineate the intricate and complex systems of relationships within the marketplace.

Undoubtedly, such a context poses a methodological challenge to the ethnographer. In order to integrate the theoretical background and my methodology (Krase 2012), I chose to combine traditional ethnography with some more innovative approaches. Following Le Breton’s call (2007) for examining the senses in their totality, I embraced a phenomenological perspective, in which the observation of space, movement and sensory interactions with the surrounding environment became vital.

In tandem with participant observation and in-depth open-ended interviews with buyers and traders, I also availed myself of techniques which could allow to broaden my perspective on the marketplace and its social dynamics. To capture the marketplace’s visual layout, I did not take pictures but asked others to do so. It was useful to see the place with ‘different eyes’, from different perspectives, and this allowed me to check whether I had overlooked some aspects of the market organization.⁸ I collaborated with architect Guido Robazza to create ad-hoc maps that would help to achieve a more detailed geographical representation of the market area. I also personally recorded the sound of the market; I strolled through it with a recording device, seeking to capture the vendors’ hawks and cries and the noises in the different parts of the market. A visual anthropologist and a film-maker worked with me filming the marketplace and my interactions with vendors, buyers and fishermen. We also filmed ten interviews with regular customers in the market and followed them through by filming in their kitchens, whilst they were preparing and cooking the products bought at the

⁸ Three professional photographers agreed to shoot in the market: Athanasios Zacharopolous from Greece, Giuseppe D’Alia and Andrea Nucifora from Catania. Other friends visiting the city were encouraged to photograph La Pescheria while I was showing them around.

market. All this material greatly contributed to my analysis and was integrated into the writing up process.

Bestor (2004) describes the Tsukiji's market while warning the reader that the market is not fixed in time and space but rather changes constantly. He notes that this kind of description may seem to 'freeze the place in time' but, despite this inconvenience, he acknowledges the need to provide a sense of the market's spatial layout, in order to understand how '[t]ime and space [...] significantly construct the social structure of the marketplace' (Bestor 2004: 55). I would like to exposit the market's 'well-ordered chaos' (De La Pradelle 2006: 17) and this can only be achieved through a detailed description of how space is used, occupied and structured.

Urban Markets and the Senses

Recent times have been marked by the increasing urbanisation of the world population and the never-ending industrialisation of food systems (Tscharntke et al. 2012), stimulating a greater interest in urban and food studies. A growing desire for more trustworthy sources of food has emerged in academic and public discourses (Counihan and Siniscalchi eds 2014). Food markets around the globe are undergoing radical changes (Téhoueyres 2007) and this is especially apparent in urban markets (Herzfeld 2006). Here, I address the market as a space under construction: 'a product of relations-between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices' (Massey 2005: 9). Intending place as socially constructed, reproduced, lived and experienced (Lefebvre 1991) implies that 'place' is not just a location where things happen but is recognised in its own complexity. Current debate supports this view (Gupta and Ferguson eds 1997, Harvey 1985, Low and Lawrence-Zuniga eds 2003, Rodman 2003, Zukin 1995 and 2010).

According to Lefebvre (1991: 46), '[i]f space is produced, if there is a productive process, then we are dealing with history'. This history of space recalls a conceptualisation of time and space as formed by cumulative layers, in De Certeau's (1984:200) own wording by 'imbricated strata'. De Certeau (1984: 200) argues that these layers 'are available for analysis; they form a manageable surface'. From this perspective, places comprise stratifications of meanings hidden in spatial practices observable through ethnographic scrutiny. Rodman (2003:208) says that places are 'local and multiple', referring to them as 'polysemic'. These places 'bespeak people's practices, their history, their conflicts, their accomplishments' (Rodman 2003: 214). This connection between practice and place challenges a static and simplistic idea of place in favour of an analysis that takes into account multiple aspects, such as the subjective, yet cultural sensory perception of people.

Assuming that '[e]xchanges involve categories, classifications of intended results, commodities and relationships' (Davis 1992: 63), a continuous re-negotiation of social categories can be observed in the ever-changing urban scenarios. Public spaces change alongside political, economic and cultural transformations, becoming often territories of contestation and social divisions. The ability by social actors in the market to manoeuvre through social constraints is deeply connected to the performance of identity and the sense of place is intertwined with the creation of boundaries (Bestor 2004).

As it has been demonstrated by De La Pradelle (2006), markets offer a vantage point for challenging a common understanding of cultural values in an economic system. In the market, social relationships and economic transactions are combined in the daily interactions among people (Black 2005), whereby they exchange goods, ideas and values. The market is, thus, the perfect context in which to observe resistance to more rationalised use of public space. Social scientists who study the urban gentrification of cities often share this viewpoint (Herzfeld 2009, Zukin 2010). The socio-economic significance of markets in urban settings derives also from their ties to food production and food distribution networks. Studying a geographically located place in relation to the local territory and to the global food systems allows us to investigate the interactions between cultural values and material and economic situations (Bestor 2004).

Geertz (1979) showed how the market is structured according to general principles of social organization. Consequently, it is easy to understand his definition of the bazaar as ‘a distinctive system of social relationships centring on the production and consumption of goods and services (that is, a particular kind of economy)’ (Geertz 1979: 124). More recently, De La Pradelle’s (2006) monograph about a Provençal market challenged the radical opposition of modern societies, where the rationality of the market prevails, to ‘traditional societies, where the exchange of goods is always ‘embedded’ in the social relations of persons and groups (kinship, status hierarchy, domination and so on)’ (De La Pradelle 2006: 2). This perspective followed the objection raised by Bird-David (1997: 471), against ‘reproducing the master-division into wholly capitalist or wholly non-capitalist economy kinds’. These themes have recently originated debate in economics, as much as in the social sciences. The global recession which started in 2008 has fuelled a reconsideration of the long-established claim in economics, which reassured that ‘everyone is rational and markets work perfectly’ (Krugman 2009). As Harvey and Wachsmuth have noted ‘[a]t times of crises the irrationality of capitalism becomes plain to see’ (Harvey et al. 2012: 264).

As much as we cannot divorce economy from cultural and social processes, it is not possible to dissociate knowledge from bodily perception (Serres 2008). Herzfeld (2001: 252) argues that ‘the study of sensory symbolism forcefully reveals the hierarchies and stereotypes through which certain social groups are invested with moral and political authority and other groups disempowered and condemned.’ This constitutes a fertile terrain of investigation in the social sciences (Chau 2008, Classen 1997, Geurts 2002). Attaching importance to the senses deprives the intellectual dimension of social life of its supremacy (Brant 2008, Chau 2008). In the case of La Pescheria, competence is acquired through the verbal interactions between seller and buyer, but it is also related to the ‘social sensorium’ (Chau 2008: 489). Stoller (1989) uses the expression ‘tasteful ethnography’ to emphasise that dealing with food means ‘not only [to] investigate kinship, exchange, and symbolism, but also describe with literary vividness the smells, tastes, and textures of the land, the people, and the food.’ (Stoller 1989: 29).

Nonetheless, places need to be investigated taking into account the sensory interaction between people and their environment. Place is indeed deeply interconnected with sensory perception and, in the market, it is essential to learn how to move in a ‘sensorially rich social

space' (Chau 2008: 489). Degen (2004: 1) clearly explains that the ideologies behind urban regeneration 'aim to control disorder, impurity and exposure' by regulating what citizens are allowed to experience in a public space; she adds that 'sensuous geographies are important elements in the construction and maintenance of social order in place' (Degen 2008: 67).

'Meat Smells Like Corpses'

Smell has been often dismissed as an inferior sense (Bauman 1993, Classen et al 1994, Miller 1997), because it threatens 'the abstract and impersonal regime of modernity by virtue of its [...] boundary-transgressing propensities and its emotional potency' (Classen et al. 1994: 5). However, this sense more than others is associated with social order (Degen 2008), and is definitely 'a way of making sense of the world' (Bubandt 1998: 48). In some ethnographies it is the privileged sense, which together with taste, is seen as a marker of belonging and of difference (Walmsley 2005). Herzfeld (2001) provides the example of how exotic cooking smells can provoke strong reactions within neighbourhoods. In a recent article, Śliwa and Riach (2012) analyse smell to understand the political transition in Poland and connect the olfactory everyday experience to social distinction and stratification.

Places and smells are deeply interconnected (Brant 2008). When approaching La Pescheria market from a distance, its smell reaches one's nostrils well before one gets there. It is very common to hear people complaining about La Pescheria: 'The market stinks'; 'The smell of fish stays with you'; 'I cannot go there, the smell is too persistent'. Smell is a constant issue of contention at the market. Visitors often say that they do not like the smell of La Pescheria; it lingers in the area day and night, despite earnest attempts by the municipality to wash it out daily. It is a mix of water, meat and fish, as many trimmings end up on the pavement and during the hot season they start putrefying.

According to Bauman (1993), smells are invasive and they can be unsettling for a society obsessed with order. Urban interventions tend to 'clean' the public space of smells which could be considered unpleasant, such as the stench of fish. The most pertinent questions at this point would be, how does a smell that has been tolerated for centuries become unpleasant? And, what kind of changes does this reflect?

The following extract from my field-notes illustrates remarkably well how people's attitude towards smells has changed, especially among the younger generations.

'One day while I was chatting at Gaetano's vegetables stall, a woman, holding her little son's hand, approached him and asked "Gaeta could you keep an eye on him? He doesn't want to see the meat stalls going down via Pardo. He doesn't like the view. It is disgusting to him". The kid looked at me and explained "It is the smell of meat. It smells of corpses". I asked the 10-year old if he felt the same way every time he sees meat. "No", he replied, "in the supermarket it is different. It is different also at the butchery in via Umberto, where we live. It is cleaner. You don't see blood or big chunks of meat and there is no smell. That is disgusting. Have you seen the stalls here? With all the animals hanging"'.⁴

The little boy referred to the whole chickens, the big beef quarters and the lamb legs hanging from the counters of the stalls in the via Gisira. While the sight of fish was never reported to me as repelling, things are different for meat; many people find the sight of blood and animals disgusting. The urban daily experience of meat happens in contexts, such as supermarkets, where customers are not exposed to sights, such as that of blood and offal, that are very often considered disgusting. People do not see the animal's shape and they do not see the animal alive.

According to my informants, attitudes toward the smell of meat changed in the 1990s, when supermarkets and hypermarkets became popular.⁹ The market's butchers consider themselves as artisans of the art of butchery and they think that supermarket packaging prevents people from having the 'real' experience of meat. Antonio, one of the market's butchers, pointed out to me that the contemporary concept of butchery keeps the slaughtering process separated from the sale. It was, in fact, at the end of the 19th century that across Europe the slaughterhouses were moved outside city centres (Fitzgerald 2010). This move was justified by reasons of hygiene. The legislation about animal slaughtering constitutes an interesting example of how our ideas around these issues have been changing; as Herzfeld (2006: 131) points out, 'the progressive removal of "polluting" abattoirs to marginal spaces' belongs to a progressive rationalisation of public spaces.

Death is removed from sight through the de-localisation of the slaughterhouse but also through the display of meat that is already sliced, losing the resemblance of the animal shape. Vialles (1994) highlights that meat raises questions of taboos, especially concerning blood. She reminds us that '[t]he urban consumer is never, in terms of his daily alimentary experience, brought face to face with the animal. His steps take him no farther than the butcher's shop where he buys his meat.' (Vialles 1994: 28).

It seems that the exposure to death speaks against an idea of modernity, whereby, as Bauman (1993: 39) writes, '[o]ur world hides the secret of decomposition beneath its glittering surface, and decomposition is there because the inner energy of the emancipation drive, needed to keep the bubble inflated and impregnable, is all gone'.

The Urban Touch

A digression similar to Bauman's given above can be applied to touch. An ever-increasing distance between food and people has been introduced due to notions of hygiene. In Italian supermarkets, for instance, the customer is required to wear a plastic glove to handle produce even if vegetables and fruit are displayed in a market-like array. At La Pescheria, people are in the habit of touching produce in order to choose what they want. While the vendor is busy helping a customer, ladies approach the stall and start inspecting the wares on sale. Many of the buyers with whom I talked clearly explained that it is possible to assess the quality and the ripeness of the produce by touching it. For example Mrs La Rosa, one of the regular buyers, used both words and her hands to explain, 'It depends on what you want to eat and cook.

⁹ Catania is the European city with the second highest concentration of hypermarkets after Norway, including 650,000 sq. metres of shopping malls (Camarda 2008).

Let's take tomatoes. If you want to make tomato sauce, you need pulpy, soft, ripe tomatoes, but if you want to make a tomato salad you need greenish, harder ones. How can I know if I don't touch them? Oranges and lemons are the same. If you buy a soft lemon, the next day you throw it in the bin'.

At the market, a direct sensory relation with food is sought and more and more customers worry that they will no longer be able to touch their food before buying it if market vendors are forced to adopt and follow the new hygiene procedures introduced by the municipality. Vendors, on the other hand, are ambivalent towards hygiene regulations, especially when customers handle produce that are easy to perish. I quote again from my field-notes:

'A man, having approached Enrico's stall, started fingering kaki fruits (persimmons) to see whether they were ripe enough. "I would bite one if I were in your shoes. You squeeze them so much that if you do not buy them, I'm going to throw them away!" argued Enrico. The man answered in a very resolute tone saying, "This is a market, right? Am I in the wrong place by any chance?" Enrico, red in the face from anger, replies, "Yes, but this is not a self-service. You wait for me to finish, then you will be served". "I am not here to waste my money!", the man says, and adds, "Why should I come to the market if I cannot even touch the produce?'. The exchange ends with the customer walking away.'

According to the vendors, the challenge is to be able to provide a 'modern' service without losing the directness of the market and without interfering too much with the experiential relationship to food. Enrico is alert to this situation and worries about this conflict. 'This', he says, 'is one of the reasons why this market is so different from a supermarket. You don't need to wear a plastic glove to touch a peach. I know it is not very hygienic, because your hands can be dirty and I don't want to buy the fruit you have touched . . .' According to La Pescheria's customers, a plastic wrap imposes a barrier between the senses and food. If supermarket-like packaging were to be introduced at the market, it would hinder this experience. Pre-wrapping is in fact almost totally absent from the market. As Mrs La Rosa states clearly, 'I like to come to the market because I can be close to what I buy. I can touch and smell before buying. I can feel what is good, what is ripe enough. I prefer this direct relationship with the produce. Much better than everything being wrapped in plastic.' Pre-wrapping would also impose a distance between the consumer and the products. As De Certeau (1984: 75) highlights, 'standardization, pre-wrapping, all the modern procedures in food preparation worry people', who doubt the quality of the products. There are constant suspicions that by imposing cleanliness and banishing dirt modern procedures introduce a new order. The order that is imposed on the market practice is indeed a new one, driven by different ideas of safety, control and purity. New regulations about hygiene introduce a dissonance in the pre-existent ordered system, which explains why any change in this matter was a major concern among vendors and buyers at La Pescheria.

Dirt avoidance is a process of tidying up by ensuring that the order in external physical events conforms to the structure of ideas. Rules on pollution impose order on

experience. They support the clarification of forms, and thus reduce dissonance (Douglas 1999: 111). Furthermore, a looser relationship to food and its de-materialization makes food identification more problematic in industrialised societies (Fischler 1988). This tendency is strongly opposed in the market and both buyers and vendors reject what they describe as ‘fake food’ (*cibo finto*) wrapped in plastic, preferring the ‘real food’ (*cibo vero*) on offer in the market. This resonates with Serres, when he writes that ‘[o]dourless frozen food for the spongy and obese, hidden under the cellophane so that no-one can touch or taste it - watch out the germs! [...]’ (2008: 186).

Voices Occupy Space

Orality is the aspect that most closely reflects the changes occurring in urban markets, and more in general in food commodification contexts. Recently, anthropologists have invited ethnographers not to be deaf to the sound of reality and to engage with it (Samuels et al 2010). At La Pescheria, vendors’ voices occupy and dominate space, while buyers are allowed to answer back in a counterpoint of voices, noises and cries. As they step in the market, visitors can hear the vendors’ voices shouting, ‘One Euro, only one Euro’. Once they have, thus, drawn the attention of their potential customers’, the sellers might add something more, to entice them to stop and engage in social interaction.

The synaesthetic experience of market has been the focus of Bonanzinga’s work on the ‘soundscapes’¹⁰ of markets in Sicilian towns (2007). This way of celebrating the quality of the wares is called ‘*abbanniata, bbanniata, vanniata*’ (Bonanzinga 2007: 92). *Abbanniare* (or *vanniare*) means ‘to shout the wares’, ‘to announce what the vendor sells to the public’, or simply ‘to shout’. The *vanniata* indicates the vendor’s cry to publicise his goods. According to Bonanzinga (2007:89), *imbonimento* means, literally, to make something good, to extol or glorify its qualities. The *imbonimento* could be translated as the ‘sales pitch’, which identifies who is selling what and is also used to catch people’s attention. Sound is information (Serres 2008) and at La Pescheria shouting covers multiple functions: it can signal the presence of certain types of goods at the beginning of a new season, such as artichokes, figs and melons; it can praise the provenance of the produce and provide details about its production; and it can point out the quality of the wares. ‘*Troppu beddi sti caccocciuli*’ (These artichokes are too beautiful), cries the young boy at the corner of the via Gisira; ‘*Boni, boni*’ (Good, good!) shouts Enrico Caruso as he shows his fragrant Pachino melons;¹¹ ‘*Beddi, beddissimi*’ (Beautiful, very beautiful!), screams Antonio Consoli pointing to his crates of perfectly ripe tomatoes.¹² The sales pitch involves visual and gustatory description of the products, for example ‘*Rosse, rosse queste fragole*’ (Red, red these strawberries) or the mentioned *boni*,

¹⁰ The word ‘soundscape’ derives from Schafer (1994), indicating the totality of the acoustic environment.

¹¹ Pachino, a town in South-east Sicily in the Province of Syracuse, is renowned for its melon and tomato production.

¹² Sicily is one of the largest producers of tomatoes in Italy and indeed in Europe, and is famed for the high quality and variety of its tomatoes. According to the national statistics, 15,636 hectares of land is designated for tomato crops (ISTAT 2010).

beddi, and so on. One sensory code calls on others; the vendors' voices stimulate the eyes of the passers-by to notice the colours and the beauty of the produce, to pay attention to the smell or even to prefigure the taste of the red strawberries. The vendors themselves allude to the synaesthetic experience of their products.

Inside the market, the cries of the sellers intensify as they hawk their wares loudly. In Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto the fishermen occupy centre stage, orchestrating a dialogue with passers-by, challenging each other, and very often disparaging the competition. Each time a person slows down or his or her eyes pause a little longer on the fish on display, the fisherman extols loudly the characteristic of his wares. These announcements both point to the freshness of the goods on sale and include details that only the fishermen would know. Statements such as 'We fished it two hours ago!', 'We fished it in the Brucoli's area' remind the buyers that they would be buying directly from the source. The competition also revolves around the price and this is particularly true for seasonal fish. Apart from the playful prattle for the benefit of tourists and their cameras, the *vanniate* (cries) are targeted mainly at the local experts, since the fishermen use the Catanese name to refer to fish: '*puppo*, 10€' (squid, 10€), '*masculini*, 3€' (anchovies, 3€), '*saddi*, 4€' (sardines, 4€), and so on.

Recently, in Istanbul, a law forbade vendors from shouting in the street market. Stallholders opposed the ban by arguing that it affected their trade. They insisted that 'shouting is a long-standing market tradition dating back hundreds of years' (Allen 2012). In Weare, a small town in New Hampshire, the regulation for vendors at the farmer's market reads '[h]awking is not permitted (shouting prices or shouting about items for sale)' (Weare Summer Farmers Market 2012).

While in the historical Sicilian market shouting is considered 'normal', vendors in the monthly organic farmers' market in Catania do not promote their goods loudly. This difference can be related to the bourgeois desire for privacy and seclusion (Bailey 1996), which has tried to silence the world (Serres 2008). Noise belongs to the low (Bailey 1996) as much as smell (Miller 1997), and a smelly, noisy market can be understood as a statement against authority. Bailey claims that '[s]ilence [...] is the sound of authority — generational, patriarchal and formidably inscribed in the regimes of church and state' (1996: 54). It could be argued that the market constitutes a space of disobedience against a neoliberal order which sharpens social divisions and underscores the 'fabric of social difference' (Low and Smith 2006).

Conclusions

In this article I have argued in detail that the marketplace can be seen as a space under construction, in which the apparent chaos is organised according to a specific cultural ordering. I have examined the dynamics in a specific local market in connection to daily practices and bodily knowledge. I have argued that, assuming that people's relationship with the urban space is active, complex and multi-sensory, this complexity can be approached through a study of the sensory experience.

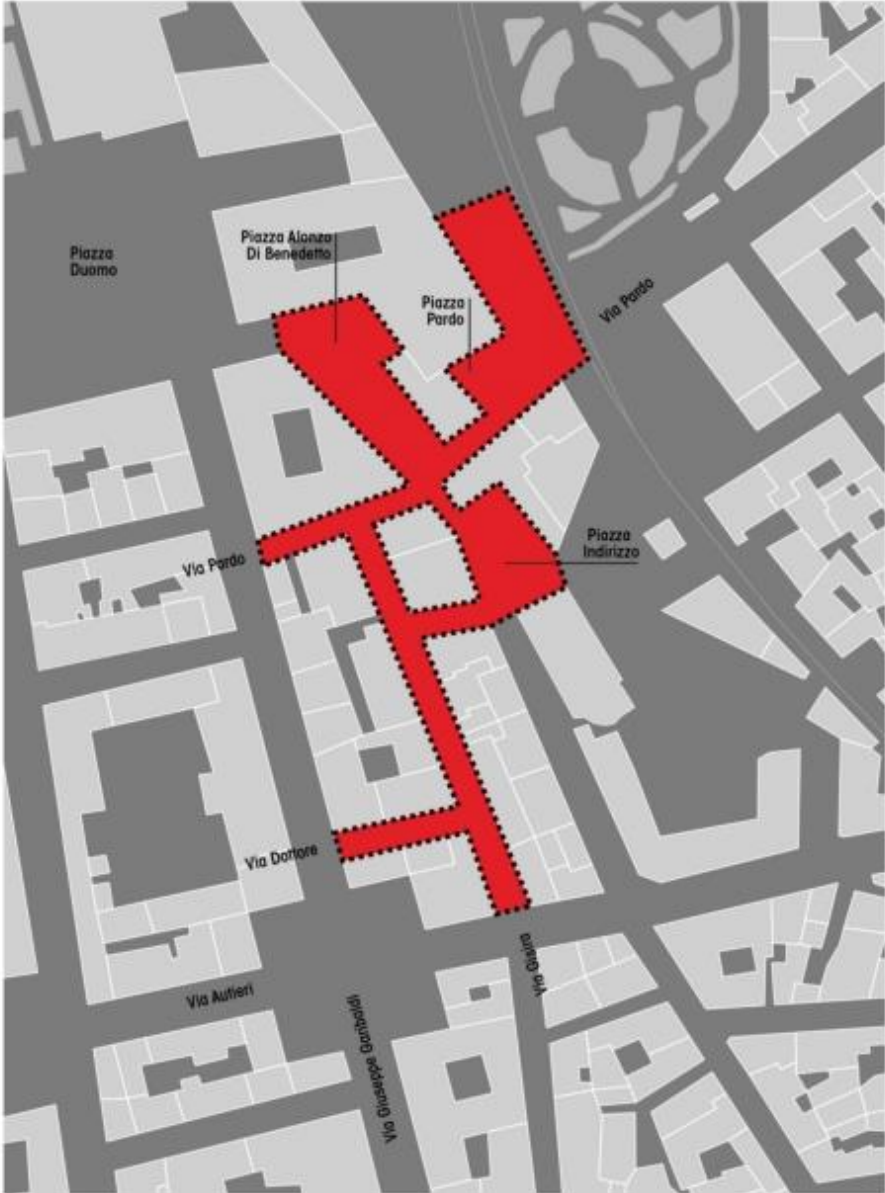
For centuries, markets have been quintessential public spaces (Degen 2008: 21) with their own rules of exclusion and inclusion (Low and Smith 2006). At La Pescheria these rules

have been renegotiated over the last twenty years. The analysis of how smells are perceived demonstrates an increasing fear and disgust toward meat, death and decomposition. The invasiveness of smells poses a threat to the established order and their removal from the public space implies a desire for odourless places (Howes 1991). Power is imposed on public places in ‘keeping with the modern regime of olfactory silence’ (Classen et al 1994: 161). ‘While groups in the centre — politicians, businessmen — are characterized by a symbolic lack of scent, those on the periphery are classified as odorous’ (Classen et al 1994: 161). Furthermore the tendency to prevent people from touching food on grounds of hygiene speaks the language of an individualistic neoliberal view (Harvey 2008) in which urban strangers are feared and bodies are separated and secluded from one another. In Mary Douglas’s words: ‘[r]eflection on dirt involves reflection [on the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death’ (1966: 5). The local ideas about cleanliness, dirt and distance inform a distinctive social order; and yet recent regulations attempt to transform the market into a ‘safer’ place along the lines of the supermarket model, which embodies an idea of modernity where everything is clean, safe and controlled. Hypermarkets respond perfectly to these ideas of hygiene and health regulation. Together with fast food outlets, they are perceived as the rationalised context *par excellence* for food consumption. The hypermarket, O’Connor remarks, ‘is an artificial, sanitised “public space” by excluding nearly all manifestations of collective life as well as those existential aspects of reality which are sequestered by an abstract systems of modernity’ (2011: 3).

The shift of market organization toward a more formalised structure has provoked a change in what is allowed to be experienced in the urban space. This transformation has made the market a more private and secluded space where an active sensory interaction becomes more individualistic. Local authorities very often interfere with the culturally appropriate way of interacting with the material world as they endeavour to regulate the sensory experience. The rationalisation of the urban space involves an increasing control on how space is experienced. Specifically, the rationalisation of urban spaces and the commercial privatization associated with urban regeneration threaten the complex and multi-modal experiences offered by places like La Pescheria (Degen 2008). In the Italian context, however, there is ‘a robust resistance to forms of political life and to civic values that are seen as intrusive and unmanageable’ (Herzfeld 2009: 311-312). I would suggest that even in its renegotiation of modernity, tradition and nostalgia, the market still offers the potentiality of debate and disobedience. It allows space for irrationality and for active social participation in the public arena. This resistance is traceable through people’s reactions to the new regulations. A direct relationship to food remains vital for people who shop in this market and, despite the contemporary drive towards homogenization of urban soundscapes (Adams et al 2006), La Pescheria’s voices still resonate loud in Catania’s public space and the vendors’ cries are one of the many ways in which this local community strives to keep the boundaries of this place safe. As Bestor remarks, ‘[p]lace creates the perception of spatial (and social) fixity in the midst of processual fluidity’ (2004: 18).

As a final remark, I would like to highlight that observing how urban space is constructed and used show us what kind of society we live in. At the moment we are

apparently extending the myth of our forever-young bodies to our cities and to our food. Death, ageing and decomposition are removed from sight. The aim seems to be to construct a clean, almost clinical and aseptic relationship to place; a relationship in which differences of age, gender and ethnicity struggle to find expression. The sensory geographies of cities can contribute to enrich the debate around these issues. I do not believe that there is a call for an anthropology of the senses, but I do believe that our ethnographies can benefit from a perspective that does not relegate the senses to the subjective but recognises their belonging to the social sphere and to the way we engage with the material world in the everyday practice.



Maps Visualization by Guido Robazza; Source: OpenStreetMap;
Credit: © OpenStreetMap contributors

Map 1. The market area with Piazza Pardo and Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto highlighted.

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