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RECIPES FOR SUCCESS  
CULINARY STYLES, PROFESSIONAL CAREERS,  
AND INSTITUTIONAL PATTERNS IN THE FIELD OF HIGH CUISINE

By

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John Levi Martin

and approved by

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# ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Recipes for Success

Culinary Styles, Professional Careers,  
and Institutional Patterns in the Field of High Cuisine

by VANINA LESCHZINER

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This study uses the case of high cuisine in the settings of New York City and San Francisco to investigate the social logic of creation. Drawing on data from ethnographic research with forty-five elite chefs --from in-depth interviews and observation in restaurants kitchens--, I explore how individuals respond to social context in their endeavors to create cultural products. I examine chefs' culinary styles, status, professional trajectories, creational processes, and relations with others in their field to explain (one) their conscious choices about their dishes and their careers, (two) their relations with peers, and (three) their reflexive understandings of their work and social relations.

I analyze the particular characteristics of cuisine as an area of activity (the *mode of cultural production*) to explain the patterning of culinary creation, and demonstrate that such patterning is associated to status. Categorizing elite chefs in middle, upper-middle and high levels of status, I show that those with upper-middle status are more

likely to innovate than others. But chefs reflexively understand their styles, and thereby legitimate themselves, in ways which may be dissociated from external perceptions. There are various risks and rewards both for creating in a particular style and for making particular legitimacy claims, and such risks and rewards are differentially distributed in the field. With constraints of an opposite nature, middle and high-status actors are more likely to represent their styles in ways that may be dissociated from external perceptions.

Chefs focus on one of the two salient principles of creation in their representations of their styles: the principle of excellence in culinary creation, or market constraints. Actors prioritize a particular principle and make claims that are consistent with their self-concepts. Through their theories of themselves, they develop their practical theories of action, and thereby reduce organizational complexity, navigate the field, and make conscious decisions for their restaurants and careers. I show that chefs' culinary styles, relations with peers, and reflexive understandings are all aspects of a creational enterprise that are intrinsically connected in an organizational field, and they must therefore all be analyzed to explain the social logic of creation.

## Acknowledgments

Acknowledging the help, advice, and support that contributed to the completion of a dissertation is always an awkward endeavor. For one, many names must be left out if the acknowledgments section is to remain finite, and this is unfortunate. Further, due to the requirements of research in the social sciences, I am sadly not able to give due credit to the most fundamental source that made this dissertation possible as their names must be kept anonymous and confidential: all the chefs who participated in the project. Though this is somewhat of a cliché in ethnographic research, it is nonetheless true that this dissertation would have never existed without the willing participation of all the chefs I have interviewed. Despite their extremely busy schedules, they all generously gave of their time to let me ask (sometimes annoying) questions, and observe their work. I wish I could in particular acknowledge those chefs who went beyond my request for an interview and observation in their kitchens, and offered greater access to their work, and those who helped me obtain interviews with chefs to whom I would have otherwise never had access.

The other source that made this dissertation possible was my committee. Karen Cerulo, Paul McLean and Ann Mische were always available to offer much needed advice and support, not only in what concerned my dissertation but also in other areas of my academic career. I am grateful for their guidance in making my work more solid, and for their respect for my own ideas or preferences. Above all, I want to thank my advisor, John Levi Martin, who has been an unfailing mentor, critic, and supporter for many years. These words can only hint at the gratitude I owe him. His wisdom, dedication, and tolerance of my idiosyncrasies are unsurpassed. His unflinching encouragement helped

me carry on with my project even (or especially) when I thought this was a pointless endeavor --I remember his encouragement in the early phases of my fieldwork, when I worried about not finding any social pattern worth writing about, to which he characteristically responded “You WILL find something, and even if you don’t, that’s a finding too!” I fear he might regret such mental openness in retrospective.

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## Chapter 1: Culinary Creation

“The intuition of a wall, of something “inside” man  
separated from the “outside” world,  
however genuine it may be as an intuition,  
corresponds to nothing in man  
having the character of a real wall.”  
Elias  
*The Civilizing Process*

In dreaming about our careers, many of us fantasize about having a job that is stimulating and varied in its responsibilities. We generally do not like to see ourselves doing the same little repetitive task over and over again for the rest of our lives. Rather, we value the idea of doing multiple tasks, using a range of skills, dealing with a variety of human beings. We generally dream about a job in which we can be, in one way or another, “creative.” We also happen to live in a society that values “creativity” and generally rewards it quite concretely through ratings, prizes, awards, fellowships.

As much as we may all value creativity, we happen to value a slippery idea. What is creativity? What makes us think that one person is more creative than another? We similarly lack clarity when we think about creative jobs. What comprises a creative job? Can we be creative all the time? Painters, for instance, create objects, and they come up with ideas to do so. But they think of an idea, and then they probably go through a set of repetitive steps, applying technical skills, to bring their idea to material form. Their idea for a painting might be inventive, but it may also be completely unoriginal. A copy of the “Mona Lisa” is not an original object, nor is it necessarily inventive (though it might be claimed to be conceptually inventive). The painting may be well conceived, have good technique, and we may appreciate it. But we are less likely to perceive it to be creative or innovative than we are to perceive an avant-garde piece. Yet, both objects are made by

creators. Thus, I propose to use the word *creators* to refer to individuals who create cultural objects, and the term *cultural creation* to refer to their work as a regularized activity.<sup>1</sup>

How do actors perceive their own creations? How do they deal with their audience's perceptions of their creations? How do they manage the creational and routine aspects of their job? Here, I explore these questions in the occupation of chefs at top restaurants in the United States. We must distinguish chefs from cooks because they have the biggest job in creating dishes; cooks mainly follow chefs' orders to prepare the food. I propose to investigate chefs at *top* restaurants because they are at the core of "cuisine," understood as a social enterprise, so they provide a paradigmatic case. And I *only* include chefs at top restaurants because actors orient their actions to those of others who are in the same area of activity --i.e. actors in the field of high cuisine.

In exploring how individuals create objects, we will examine chefs' conscious choices about the dishes they create, whether their dishes are radically innovative, completely traditional, or in between. But individuals are not insulated from the social environment in their creational enterprises. Rather, they look at what others are doing to make decisions about their own creations. Sometimes they adopt ideas from others, and other times they try to create something that differs from these others. Thus, we must situate creation in a social context. We must also situate creation in a temporal dimension, as actors may transform their creational enterprises throughout their professional trajectories.

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<sup>1</sup> Conceiving of actors who create objects as *creators* forces us to use terms (such as *creational* work, processes or inclinations) that may initially sound odd, or unattractive. But we might do better to sacrifice aesthetics than conceptual clarity.

Indeed, the question that guides this project is: How do individuals respond to social context in their creational endeavors? Actors make choices about their creations and their careers. And they have subjective conceptions of the products they create and of others working in the same area of activity. The choices they make, and their subjective understandings of their work, limit their autonomy because they constrain future choices about the products they create and about their careers.

Chefs at top restaurants make all sorts of conscious decisions that are critical for their careers.<sup>2</sup> Top restaurants have very high costs and much competition in big cities where such restaurants abound. Competition is particularly stiff in those cities widely believed to possess the best restaurants in the country, and among the best in the world. In the United States, these cities are New York and San Francisco, and they are the places we will examine.

To survive in these markets, chefs must conceive of ideas for original and inventive food so that they can get attention and consequently customers. But few chefs create new dishes everyday. They tend to serve the same dishes for a few weeks, or most likely a few months. They may have “daily specials,” but few chefs change specials everyday, and fewer make new specials everyday. In making changes to their menus, most chefs change a few items at a time. And most leave some, their “signature dishes,” on the menu forever. These are the products customers like, expect, and demand.

While chefs may like their occupation because they see it as an outlet for their creativity, they must cater to their paying audiences if they want to keep their jobs.

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<sup>2</sup> That chefs make conscious choices about their products and careers should not be interpreted as an assumption that all action is rational and driven by an instrumental pursuit of a given goal (such as the individual increase of prestige). Yet, we should understand that chefs must make judicious decisions to successfully run their restaurants, and they have to analyze the conditions in which they work to make such decisions.

Unlike painters, poets, or musicians, chefs require an affiliation with an organization (a restaurant, in their case) to do their work. In principle, painters, poets, or musicians can create their paintings, poems, and music anywhere, and they can present them to audiences anywhere. Furthermore, they can see themselves as painters, poets, and musicians whether they make a living off of their art or not. But chefs cannot possibly do their work and see themselves as chefs without a job at a restaurant. Consequently, they cannot ignore their audiences. This means that they cannot give free rein to their ideas, because they must serve dishes that customers will like, and these are dishes that are somewhat familiar to their customers (as I will explain). Whether familiar or not, they must make the same food countless times everyday, for weeks and months.

Some chefs make traditional fare such as grilled chicken breasts and Caesar salads, and others make innovative preparations with buffalo and tobacco, or potatoes with the texture of shaving foam. Though the degree of innovativeness in their food may vary, it becomes secondary when we think of their job as one of *cultural creation*. Thus, we can examine characteristics of their occupation that are common to those who cook with new ingredients, new ingredient pairings, or avant-garde techniques, and those who make completely traditional dishes. Furthermore, we will come to see that distinguishing chefs who create inventive dishes from those who make traditional food is a thornier task than one might think. It is not always easy to distinguish an original dish from a traditional one. If we have heard of caprese salad before, we know that the combination of mozzarella, tomatoes and basil (its very classic components) is not innovative. But whether replacing mozzarella with ricotta would make it innovative or not is more arguable. And indeed, we will see that chefs argue about it, too.

Chefs may create inventive food or follow decade-old recipes, but much less of their time is spent designing dishes to put on their menus than it is taking care of routine tasks. They spend a good part of their day on administrative duties, managing their staff and restaurant operations. And they generally spend every evening ensuring that their dishes always taste and look the same --expediting. They check dishes after they have been cooked and plated, perhaps add some decorative garnishes such as herbs or sauces, and send them off to the dining room.

Elite chefs work at different types of restaurants and have different work conditions. Some work at small and informal places. They may serve traditional, rustic Italian dishes. They likely have a small kitchen with only three employees, and no managers. They may spend their days going to farmers' markets, doing administrative work, and cooking. They may also cook during dinner service. Other chefs work at larger restaurants, and may make more elaborate food. They probably have a manager and about ten cooks in the kitchen. These chefs generally spend their days doing most of what those at smaller places do, but they probably do not cook during dinner service. Indeed, with the exception of those with a very small kitchen staff, chefs rarely cook during dinner service, but expedite. Finally, others work at the most prestigious restaurants in the country. They have managers, assistants, and very large kitchens, with twenty or thirty cooks. These chefs generally own their restaurants (with business partners), and they probably own other, more downscale restaurants as well. They spend much more time doing administrative work, visiting their multiple businesses, and much less time in the kitchen.

Any particular chef may or may not own his restaurant, and he may or may not do much administrative work or purchasing of foodstuffs. But the likelihood that he does these things varies with the type of restaurant. The higher the restaurant status, the more likely are chefs to spend a lot of their time on management, and less on cooking, and the more likely they are to expedite in the kitchen, if they are there at all. And chefs at high-end places are more likely to own their restaurants and other businesses well.

We can classify the field of high cuisine as follows. The first type of restaurant I described above is what I categorize as a mid-status restaurant. This is a place that has been awarded one or two stars (out of four) by the most influential publication --the *New York Times* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*-- in each city respectively. It might have a celebrity chef. A meal for one person (including drink) may cost between \$60 and \$80. The second case is what I categorize as an upper-middle status restaurant. This type of place has been awarded two stars, has a famous chef, and the price for a meal (with drink) for one person is between \$80 and \$120. The last example is a high-status restaurant. This is a place that has been awarded three or four stars, and has the most famous chefs in the country and the world. A meal costs between \$150 and \$400, and reservations for a table must be made long in advance. In these restaurants, the pressure for demonstrating excellence is very high.

Note that here I am not using chefs but restaurants to classify the culinary field. First, just as many other systems of classification, culinary reviews do not rate individuals but organizations --i.e. restaurants, in our case. To be sure, it is generally easier to observe organizations than actions of individuals. Therefore, evaluation of

organizations is more reliably standardized (than that of individuals).<sup>3</sup> But if we are able to use restaurants in lieu of chefs to classify the culinary field, it is because we cannot think of one without the other. Of course, chefs can only do their work if they have a job at a restaurant, and restaurants require chefs to run them. But more importantly, elite chefs are perceived to have given levels of status and culinary styles, and they influence the perception of their restaurants with their status and styles. By the same token, the restaurants where they work (and further, where they have worked in the past) have their own externally ascribed status and styles and they influence how chefs are perceived. We must conceive of chefs and restaurants as having their own trajectories and their own status in the field, but such trajectories and status are interdependent. This interdependence is particularly tight given that there is only one chef per restaurant. Academic departments, for instance, have multiple faculty, and therefore the trajectories and status of departments and any particular faculty are more loosely interdependent.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, I take chefs and restaurants as a couple because their trajectories and their status are co-constitutive.<sup>5</sup>

We understand that elite chefs work in different types of restaurants with varying conditions and job responsibilities. Further, some are young and relatively unknown, while others are renowned and prominent celebrities who have received numerous awards and appear in the media regularly. But so long as these chefs are in the same city, they compete with one another, and thus they compare themselves, their styles, and their

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<sup>3</sup> Having reliable categories is particularly important when the evaluation of products is a somewhat ambiguous task, as is the case of dishes (for an analysis of the role of categories in markets, see Zuckerman (1999)).

<sup>4</sup> Certainly, departments are less dependent on any particular faculty for their attainment of status than the other way around.

<sup>5</sup> Similarly, in their analysis of French cuisine, Rao, Monin and Durand (2003) consider chefs and restaurants as a unit because they are co-dependent in the attainment of status. Along the same lines, Giuffre (1999) notes a co-dependence in the careers of artists and galleries.

restaurants to one another to ensure they can maintain an edge on the market. But they do not compete with *any* chef in the same city. They do not compete with corner joints, diners, or down-market restaurants. Therefore, they have no need to be aware of what chefs at these places are doing. But they need to know what those at elite restaurants are doing, as they orient their actions to what these chefs do. Just as they do not compete with chefs at downscale restaurants, they do not compete with those at “ethnic” restaurants.<sup>6</sup> Thus, conceptualizing a *field* as an area of activity in which actors orient their actions to those of others, I take the field of high cuisine to be comprised of non-ethnic elite restaurants. Therefore, I take the cities of New York and San Francisco, where this study is based, to be two culinary fields.<sup>7</sup>

### **Investigating Culinary Creation**

I examined a number of key parts in the process of culinary creation. Some have to do with decision-making, as I sought to explain what drives actors to create their particular products. Others are more processual aspects, namely how individuals go about turning an initial idea into its material form. Still others have to do with the subjective component in creation, exploring how actors think of themselves, their careers, styles, and relations with peers.

If we seek to understand the *social* logic of the creational process, then we cannot examine the work of particular individuals, isolated from their surroundings. Rather, we

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<sup>6</sup> Since this project is an examination of chefs’ views of their world, the category of “ethnic” is defined after chefs’ understandings. In other words, it is defined phenomenologically.

<sup>7</sup> This conceptualization of the field of high cuisine is not consistent with extant definitions, which draw the boundaries more widely, generally extending to the national level (see Ferguson, 1998; 2004; Rao, Monin and Durand, 2003; 2005). However, it should be noted that Ferguson, for instance, writes about a “gastronomic field,” an area in which she includes food writers, producers and consumers.

must investigate the group of individuals who, working in *both* the same area of activity and social context, orient their actions to one another, and thus constrain one another. We must also examine the particular characteristics of their area of activity. Here, we will explore the logic of creation in the culinary fields of New York and San Francisco. These cities offer good sites for the investigation because, as they are believed to have some of the best restaurants in the country, they bring about high levels of competition, and high pressures for demonstrating excellence. Such conditions may introduce incentives (or disincentives) for individuals to create new products, as we will find.

This is not a comparative study of New York and San Francisco. In this project, San Francisco plays a smaller role than New York (and it is a smaller culinary field, too). It operates rather as a control case, to help elucidate the extent to which the patterns we observe in New York may be generalizable to other fields with similar conditions, and the extent to which they may be specific to idiosyncrasies that may exist in the New York culinary field. Certainly, adding only one other city is not sufficient to allow us to confidently generalize our findings. But such a case as San Francisco, having some similarities and some differences with New York, illuminates interesting aspects of each field that otherwise would have been obscured.

There has long been sociological curiosity about how people create new things. In the last few years, such curiosity developed a few different lines of study that deal with cultural creation. It is not my goal to point out their shortcomings, but rather to establish a dialogue with them, resorting to their contributions where they may help understand what I seek to explain, and proposing an alternative perspective where I find that a new approach may shed light on an old question. Of course, a dialogue is especially fruitful

with perspectives that seek to answer similar questions. Thus, throughout the chapters we will mostly visit works on patterns of creation that focus on the constraints introduced by individuals' status and by the actions of others in the same area of activity. These lines of study come from research on other fields of cultural creation (a category in which we can include arts, sciences, design, technology), analyses of how institutional organizations work, and the literature on social networks.<sup>8</sup> We will also visit research on social cognition to understand how chefs think about food, their dishes and menus, and how they go about creating dishes. And I will draw on the sociology of culture to explain chefs' actions, strategies, dispositions, and inclinations.

To understand how chefs create new things, we must first keep in mind that they are responsible for the creation of food but also for the entire restaurant operation --as we explore the logic of creation, the other aspects of their work cannot be ignored. Chefs offer a whole experience for customers, and such experience has to do not only with the food, but also with the ambience, service, music, lighting. The food has to be consistent with the other elements. Chefs cannot serve pasta and pizza in an elegant turn-of-the-century room, or elaborate French dishes in a rustic farmhouse. And they cannot serve pasta and pizza with New Age music, or elaborate French dishes with Hip Hop. These are not abstract issues for chefs, as they spend a good part of their time working on all areas of the restaurant, and the time they spend on them is time that is unavailable for making food. As we will find, chefs experience a tension between, on the one hand, their

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<sup>8</sup> Certainly, there are several other perspectives on the study of the creation of cultural products, and they have all been, in one way or another, influential in this study. Among the most prominent contributions are the notion of "art worlds" developed by Becker (cf. 1982; see also 2006; Becker, Faulkner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2006), and the "production of culture" perspective developed by Peterson (cf. 1997).

administrative duties and the routine of the kitchen, and on the other, their creational aspirations.

The best way to understand the processes involved in chefs' decisions about their dishes and their careers is to learn what is like to be a chef. To this end, I did interviews with forty-five chefs and observed how they work in the kitchens of some of the best restaurants in New York and San Francisco.<sup>9, 10</sup> I wanted to know about their careers, how they got started in cooking and why they chose to become chefs, as well as all the jobs they had along the way. We talked about their food, and they described how they conceive of the initial idea for a dish and turn it into a product that can be added to the menu. I prodded them with questions about the particular decisions that they made about their food. If they decided to pair sea bass with thyme, I wanted to know why they did not use mint or rosemary instead. I asked them about how they get ideas for their dishes and whether they read cookbooks or go out to eat in their search for new ideas. I learned how they decide what dishes to put on the menu and how often they change the menu. I asked about their kitchen staff and the criteria they use for hiring. They told me about the restaurants they visit, the food they like, the chefs they consider interesting, those they admire, and those they wish they had worked for earlier in their careers. And I learned about their future plans.

When we do interviews, we generally try to set up a relaxed and amicable environment that is conducive to the contemplative mood we hope to evoke in our

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<sup>9</sup> I initially selected chefs with a random sample. I sorted restaurants out in the categories of middle, upper-middle, and high-status (using the *New York Times* and *San Francisco Chronicle* for each city), and randomly selected from there. I augmented the stratified sample with purposive sampling once I was already doing fieldwork, using chefs' opinions about others to know who they consider to be influential.

<sup>10</sup> Interviews have been anonymous and confidential for the protection of chefs as research subjects. Therefore, I will not use their names or those of their restaurants.

interviewees, a mood that might allow them to elaborate on the descriptions, explanations and rationalizations of their actions and decisions that we seek. Thus, when I asked chefs about the processes of thinking of dishes, creating menus, or making decisions for their restaurants and careers, I gained insight into their reflective sides. In contrast to the introspective mood of interviews, kitchens run at an intense pace during dinner service. Cooks have to simultaneously prepare many dishes under pressure to produce flawless food in few minutes. Chefs become (in their words) “factory workers” or “robots” during dinner service. So we get to see another side of them in kitchens. I did observation in the forty-five restaurants to understand this other part of their jobs, and also to get a better idea of the food they talked about in interviews.

I went during dinner service because it was the best time to observe the dishes chefs described, and contrast their descriptions with what I saw. I also wanted to get a sense of how the kitchen worked: the layout, the staff, each person’s job, the work pace, and the attention enforced on the cooking and presentation of dishes. I took note of the social dynamics: whether it was a collaborative or friendly environment, relatively relaxed or hectic and tense. I observed chefs in particular, noting what they did in the kitchen, how they did it, and how they related to the staff. If the kitchen was not too busy while I was there, I had another chance to talk to chefs, and ask them more specific questions about the dishes I saw, the ingredients in them, and the presentation. And whenever possible, I also talked to chefs de cuisine, sous-chefs, cooks (the ranks below chefs), and service staff.

When we do ethnographic work, we hold long, in-depth interviews, but we also spend time around actors, observing what they do and talking with them. So we get to

discuss many topics that go beyond those included in an interview questionnaire. Thus, I learned about chefs' opinions of their peers, restaurants in the city, publishing cookbooks, the role of media ratings and reviews, website and web logs, life as a chef. I sometimes revisited chefs in their restaurants, after the interview and observation, and had further conversations about their work and the culinary field. Some chefs invited me to spend time in the kitchen during the day, while they created specials, to observe the process of creation in action. Other chefs invited me to go to farmers' markets with them, because it is upon seeing produce that they develop ideas for dishes. Others let me participate in meetings with all the kitchen staff, where they explained the dishes for the day and organized the work each cook would do, or where they discussed problems that needed to be solved. Still others informally talked with me after the interview, kitchen observation, or revisits, teaching me more about their world.

Doing ethnographic work involves developing relationships with those we are studying. When we report how we obtained information for our systematic analyses, we tend to disregard all the activities that are not formalized as "research methods" but that provide information that is just as necessary to construct a complete picture of the social world we seek to investigate. Just as I had conversations with chefs beyond interviews, I also had a chance to meet other chefs, whom I did not formally interview, as well as chefs de cuisine, and sous-chefs who, in telling me about their jobs and careers, and the restaurant world, taught me more about the field.

I have also talked to actors who are associated with the world of high cuisine in ways other than cooking. I did formal interviews with restaurant managers, and also informally talked to other restaurant managers, restaurateurs, food writers, service staff,

and professionals (such as lawyers, architects, food purveyors) connected to the restaurant industry in New York.

Additionally, I did formal interviews with chefs, cooks, managers and service staff in a small city close to New York City, perceived to have a high concentration of good restaurants.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, several chefs working there had previously worked in New York, and trained at the best culinary schools and restaurants. Conversations with all these actors provided a complementary perspective of the field.

Beyond the ethnographic work, I collected menus from all the restaurants where I interviewed chefs, to analyze their content and form. I also collected reviews from printed media of all the restaurants whose chefs I interviewed, as well as numerous articles on food and chefs in New York and San Francisco published during the time of my research.

### **The Mode of Cultural Production**

Throughout the ethnographic research, I came to learn about the particular characteristics of culinary creation that inform actors' work. Learning about the nature of the activity was important to understand (one) chefs' decisions about their dishes, (two) their relations with other chefs, and (three) their subjective representations of their work and relations with others.

To learn about the particular characteristics of an area of activity, we must examine *what* individuals produce and *how* they do it. This is what Marx ([1845] 1965; [1859] 1970) called the mode of production. Because I take cuisine to be an area of

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<sup>11</sup> The name of this small city is kept confidential for the protection of the individuals I interviewed there.

cultural production, I call the attributes of cuisine the *mode of cultural production*. I suggest there are five attributes that inform the logic of creation we find in cuisine.

1-culinary creation is individualized

2-chefs are responsible for the creation and execution of dishes

3-chefs are responsible both for the dishes and management of the restaurant

4-chefs' culinary creation is invariably for-profit, thus it is geared toward non-experts (customers and the media)

5-the exchange of ideas is not legally regulated

We will come to see that these attributes are intrinsically connected to one another. But we should first examine each of them to understand how they all affect the dynamics of culinary creation.

If we spend time in restaurant kitchens, we are not likely to come away with the impression that culinary creation is individualized (the first attribute). The execution of dishes is a collective enterprise. Dozens of cooks may be involved in the preparation of one dish. Further, some of them (those in the higher ranks in the kitchen) may even contribute ideas for the creation of dishes. But customers who go to elite restaurants associate the dishes they eat with the name of the chef, or that of the restaurant. This *individualizes* culinary creation, and consequently turns chefs' names into valuable capital, making status particularly significant in cuisine.<sup>12</sup> Because chefs are associated with the dishes they create, the decisions they make about their dishes are consequential for their standing. We will see that in creating dishes, actors shape their culinary styles and their authorship, both of which are critical for their status.

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<sup>12</sup> To be sure, the individualization of creation (and consequent significance of status) is common to many areas of cultural creation --for instance, the fine arts, music, film, academic research.

In other areas of cultural production, the creation and execution of products are separated in two roles. In contemporary academic music, for instance, composers generally do not perform their pieces for audiences. This means that they can get recognition for pieces that may be interesting, complex and intricate but nearly impossible to be performed. But chefs are not only responsible for the creation of dishes, they are also responsible for their execution (the second attribute). That they are responsible for the two roles does not necessarily mean they actually do most (or any) of the tasks involved in the creation and execution of food. It means that diners tend to collapse the creation and execution of food (it is, to be sure, not always easy to distinguish whether a dish is bad because of the conception or the execution), and associate both with chefs. In effect, chefs tend to have the biggest role in the creation of dishes, but if they have the biggest role in the execution, it is only in overseeing it, as most of them do not cook but expedite to ensure consistency in the food.

We understand that chefs are responsible for their dishes, from the conception to the execution. They are also responsible for the administration of the restaurant (the third attribute). This impinges on their creational work in two ways. First, the amount of time they spend on administrative tasks is time that is unavailable for making food. Second, because they are personally in charge of management, they are all the more mindful of economic issues when they design dishes and menus. Elite restaurants, and particularly in cities such as New York and San Francisco, have very high operating costs, and are part of very competitive markets. Surviving in such markets is not easy, so chefs are limited in the dishes they create by the pressure to keep the costs in check and ensure that the

restaurant is busy --a pressure that their role in management makes them all the more attuned to.

Of course, chefs must bear economic issues in mind because they work in an area of for-profit cultural production (the fourth attribute). They may have ideas for dishes that they cannot bring to fruition because they would not be profitable. They are constrained in the ingredients they can use (as some foodstuffs are too costly), and also in the labor required to make a dish. If the execution of a dish requires too many cooks, then it is not economically viable. Labor is one of the highest costs of elite restaurants, and so it particularly limits the complexity of dishes chefs could possibly conceive.

Working in an area of for-profit cultural production constrains chefs' creation work in another major way. In such an area, the audience is composed of non-experts, and therefore dishes have to be familiar so that they are accessible to customers. Fellow chefs may appreciate uncommon ingredients such as organ meats, unusual ingredient pairings such as foie gras with anchovies, and avant-garde techniques that turn eggs and bacon into ice-cream, but lay customers (and critics) may not be so eager to savor these products. Naturally, chefs must design menus that consist of dishes that customers will order. They must offer food with ingredients that are not only familiar to diners, but also popular, and they must create ingredient pairings that are familiar, too.

But chefs must keep a balance between conformity to traditional styles and originality to distinguish themselves from others and have a competitive edge on the market, and also to demonstrate authorship. If they serve purely traditional dishes, it appears as if they have no idea of their own. But continuously renewing their styles also

harms their authorship because it makes them appear inauthentic.<sup>13</sup> We will explore the relationship between the balance of conformity and originality and culinary creation.

We will come to understand that this balance is particularly critical in cuisine because the exchange of ideas is not legally regulated (the last attribute of culinary creation). Conforming to familiar styles means, of course, that many dishes will resemble others. Certainly, as in most areas of cultural production, chefs derive their ideas from those of others. They obtain inspiration from their contemporary colleagues as well as from chefs who worked in the past. But unlike many other areas, the exchange of ideas is not legally regulated. There are no references or footnotes on menus that make the connection between two recipes explicit. Recipes cannot be copyrighted (cookbooks are copyrighted, but the law protects books as objects, not recipes). Chefs could seek patents or trademarks for recipes that require very elaborate technique, but they almost never do. They could similarly seek trade secrets (another form of intellectual property legally protected in the U.S.), and do not do it either.<sup>14</sup> We will see that not being able to give credit for their borrowed ideas affects how actors subjectively manage their authorship and their relations with other chefs.

### **The Duality of Fields and Self-Concepts**

The five attributes of the mode of cultural production we have just seen introduce constraints to what actors can do in their work, and thus inform the logic of creation in cuisine. But this is not to be understood as a static and deterministic template. Chefs have

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<sup>13</sup> Along these lines, Peterson (1997) suggests that, in any field of cultural production, maintaining authenticity requires two qualities: conformity to a style and originality.

<sup>14</sup> As one of the forms of intellectual property, trade secrets protect any kind of information used in an organization that may afford a potential economic advantage.

given culinary styles and externally ascribed degrees of status that limit their actions, but they constantly adjust their styles, and they may thereby modify their status. We will come to learn that we cannot understand chefs' culinary styles without examining their self-concepts.

### *Self-Concepts*

Crucial to self-concepts are dispositions and appetencies. Dispositions are, as we normally understand them, a relatively non-reflexive form of behavior.<sup>15</sup> They are actors' tendencies to act in a certain way in particular circumstances. We will examine chefs' dispositions to create and produce dishes with particular cognitive and pragmatic processes. In contrast to dispositions, appetencies pertain to desires of actors.<sup>16</sup> Of course, appetencies are more ephemeral than dispositions. Not only do desires vary through time, but also the actualization of desires into behavior varies through time. Several conditions provide (or preclude) opportunities for actors to actualize their appetencies, as we will see.

We understand that an appetency must be accompanied by a given disposition to actualize an inclination to make dishes in a given way. To be sure, if actors have the will to create something, but lack the skill (technical, managerial, behavioral) to do it, they would not be able to materialize their ideas into dishes. But dispositions do not cause appetencies, nor do appetencies lead to dispositions. Rather, the two constantly develop

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<sup>15</sup> For cogent analyses of dispositions along these lines, see Bourdieu (1998), and Bourdieu (1977; see also Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> Understandings of appetencies ought to be traced to phenomenology and hermeneutics. For exemplar literature in these areas, see Husserl ([1901-1901] 1970), Heidegger ([1927] 1962), Schutz ([1932] 1997), Merleau-Ponty ([1958] 2002), and Ricoeur ([1990] 1992). For contemporary sociological literature that elaborates on appetencies of actors, see Lahire (2003), Emirbayer and Mische (1998), and Mische (Forthcoming).

in coalescence. On the one hand, particular dispositions facilitate or hinder the actualization of appetencies. On the other, actors may actualize particular appetencies with such frequency that these turn into habitual behavior. Whether such behavior may, under certain circumstances, become more automatic than intentional, is undoubtedly difficult to distinguish analytically.<sup>17</sup> However, we should not concern ourselves so much with whether we *can* make this analytical distinction, but rather with a conception of action that understands that actors have desires, just as they have mechanical forms of behavior. Not only can we not understand one without the other, but we also cannot understand actors' practical theories of action without both (as I will explain). Our analytical task here would be best aimed at *describing* habitual practices and examining the social context in which such practices developed to explain the conditions that allow for the actualization of particular appetencies and incorporation of particular dispositions.<sup>18</sup>

Chefs' self-concepts are also associated with their work conditions, which vary through time as actors change jobs, cook with different styles, and increase or decrease their status. Actors are unlikely to accept a job that requires cooking with a style that does not resonate with their self-image as chefs. By the same token, if they have changed their styles, they are unlikely to maintain an image of themselves that may now be inconsistent with their new style. There is a duality between self-concepts and culinary styles, which

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<sup>17</sup> Certainly, distinguishing a habitual appetency from a disposition (if analytically accessible at all) is not a task that should be expected of actors themselves but of the researcher (for a cogent understanding of the relationship between the volitional and the dispositional, see Bourdieu (1998)).

<sup>18</sup> The suggestion that we would do better to describe empirical behavior than to speculate in our explanations is reminiscent of Wittgenstein's (1969; [1953] 2003) proposition to describe the use of language (instead of trying to hypothesize explanations) to achieve an understanding of the rules that govern it. For a critical interpretation of this principle that is closer to the position put forth here, see Bourdieu (1998).

will become clear as I explain how it manifests itself in the different aspects of the logic of culinary creation.

### *Fields*

Certainly, chefs have their self-images and preferred creational processes, but they work in restaurants, and both they and their restaurants are perceived to have a culinary style and some degree of status. Their restaurants, culinary styles, and status (that is, their place in the field) all constrain what dishes chefs can create. In more analytical terms, chefs require all sorts of information about how the logic of culinary creation works in the field in order to make decisions about their culinary styles and careers. But fields are complex social configurations. There is too much information, evaluating all of it is unmanageable, and would lead to uncertainty and confusion.<sup>19</sup> There are also always contradictory pressures, demands, and incentives that are inherent to any complex social configuration. We see this in cuisine in the pressures towards conformity and originality. Actors cannot possibly respond to contradictory pressures. What they can do is reduce the environmental complexity to a few salient attributes of the logic of creation that they can cognize and respond to through their culinary creations.

How do actors select what attributes to attend to through their culinary creations? And how do they prioritize these? Chefs come to understand the logic of creation experientially, in an ongoing process in their work. They get cues from the environment, and they observe and interpret how other chefs respond to such cues. As actors make sense of the logic of creation, they prioritize one of two salient principles of culinary

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<sup>19</sup> For literature on how individuals deal with the complexity of organizational fields, see Fligstein (1996), and Porac et al (1995).

creation: (one) flavor, the principle of excellence in cuisine,<sup>20</sup> or (two) the imperative of differentiation. We will note that chefs focus on one of these principles when they represent their styles. But their representations are not just discourses. Rather, we must understand that these representations reveal chefs' attempts to survive in a very competitive market, trying to make the right decisions for their restaurants and careers and legitimate themselves.<sup>21</sup>

In focusing on one principle as they make sense of the logic of creation, chefs develop their practical theories of action. When they remark they seek to create inventive dishes to "wow" diners, they respond to one of the most salient pressures that constrain their work --the need to differentiate themselves from others to get attention and survive in the market. When they claim they only strive to make dishes that have good flavor, they respond to the need to legitimate themselves by invoking the principle of excellence in culinary creation. Claiming they are devoted to flavor, actors distance themselves from any perception that they may want to innovate for the sake of getting attention (and thus any perception that they may have spurious goals), and instead present themselves to be dedicated to the culinary equivalent of *art for art's sake*.

Chefs control their images through both their rhetorical representations and their culinary styles. They must respond to the contradictory pressures in the field in managing their work and relations with peers, and they need some kind of compass to be able to do

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<sup>20</sup> Whether a dish has good flavor or not is understood to ultimately determine the quality of a dish. This notion is consistent with the idea, paradigmatically formulated by Bourdieu (1976; 1977; [1984] 1993; [1992] 1996), that every field has its own principles of perception and appreciation, and that actors resort to such principles to both understand their own actions and legitimate themselves.

<sup>21</sup> Undoubtedly, individuals may pursue professional success, but they also seek to legitimate what they do, and they resort to criteria that are central to their occupation to do so. Abbott (1991) notes that in establishing their legitimacy with their claims, individuals strengthen the legitimacy of their occupation through their shared claims.

so. Throughout the chapters, we will explore how they come to develop a compass, and how such compass guides them in their creational enterprises.

### **Overview of the Chapters**

We will begin by gaining an understanding of what chefs do in their jobs, and what paths they took arrive to their current positions. In chapter 2, we will explore how actors turn to this occupation, and the professional trajectories that they take to become chefs at elite restaurants. We will learn about the specific mechanisms through which individuals obtain jobs in restaurants and move up in the field. As we examine the typical professional trajectories in the two cities, we will come to understand how these trajectories inform actors' construction of their professional self-concepts.

Chefs understand their professional selves in light of their careers, but of course also in view of their culinary creations. In chapter 3, we examine how they subjectively manage their authorship as they respond to the contradictory pressures towards conformity and originality. We will learn about the cognitive mechanisms whereby they represent their practices of information-exchange and cope with the difficulty of demonstrating authorship in culinary production. We will see how, in subjectively managing their culinary production, actors develop their self-concepts.

In chapter 4, we turn to the processes whereby chefs create their dishes and self-concepts. We will look at how they think about the food they create, and how they go about turning an idea into a finished dish. We will also examine chefs' subjective representations of their dishes and creational styles. As we explore these processes, we will not only gain an understanding of *how* chefs come to create food and design menus,

but also about the relationship between the creation of dishes, culinary styles, and self-concepts. We will discover that particular processes of creation are associated with particular culinary styles. And we will find out that these two are intrinsically associated with particular self-concepts.

Of course, chefs understand their creational endeavors largely from the perspective of their jobs, as these introduce particular pressures and constraints on their work. But restaurants are embedded in larger social contexts, and the particular positions they have in the field determine the pressures, demands and constraints that chefs experience in their work. In chapter 5, we will learn how actors' culinary styles, subjective understandings of their styles, and self-concepts are indexed by actors' positions vis-à-vis their peers, and by their social connections with them. In this context, we will see that culinary styles must be conceived of as mechanisms for actors to locate themselves in relation to others in their field. The organizational dynamics of cuisine that we will explore in this chapter is the last aspect of the culinary enterprise that we need for understanding how, in a given creational activity, patterns of innovation and subjective processes of actors respond to the characteristics of a particular social organization.

## Chapter 2: Culinary Careers

### Career Structures, Mobility Mechanisms, and Professional Self-concepts

“Contrary to popular mythology,  
professional artists are made, not born.”

Kadushin

“The Professional Self-Concept of Music Students”

#### Introduction

Some occupations generally have early beginnings, namely arts such as ballet or music. Other occupations tend to have unintended beginnings, such as college books editors or doormen.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps a unique occupational phenomenon, a professional career in cooking typically has both an early and unintended beginning. Unbeknown to those who will eventually turn a convenient temporary job into a career, the occupational path towards chefdom in the U.S. normally starts in adolescence, with a restaurant job during high school or college. Perceived to be a good way to make money, this kind of job is quite widespread, and a common beginning for elite chefs. It contrasts to culinary careers in Europe, where the path towards chefdom tends to begin with a formal apprenticeship, during adolescence, and so actors already commit to the career then.<sup>23</sup>

Chefs resort to two ideal typical stories to account for their career choice. They may have grown up in a food-loving family and learned to appreciate food at an early age, or they may have “fallen into” cooking after their first jobs in restaurant kitchens. Yet, many of us have either grown up surrounded by good food or worked in a restaurant, or both. How are such common experiences turned into seemingly self-explanatory narratives of career choice? This is one of the questions we will explore in this chapter.

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<sup>22</sup> For the occupation of musicians, see Westby (1960), for that of doormen, see Bearman (2005), and for that of college books editors, see Coser, Kadushin, and Powell (1982).

<sup>23</sup> This model was more widespread in Europe before --when those who are now chefs were in training-- than it is at present.

We will also examine how individuals move from their early stints in restaurants to the positions of elite chefs in New York City and San Francisco. This process is not uniform, as we will see. There are multiple entry portals, and a variety of possible paths for mobility: within a kitchen, across restaurants, and across culinary fields.<sup>24</sup> Though there is a rigid hierarchical occupational structure in kitchens, which is strengthened by a long apprenticeship phase, mobility does not have an established path.<sup>25</sup> Not all kitchens have the same positions, or the same job descriptions for given positions, and stages in the upward path may be skipped. Similarly to fine arts, theater, film, or music, where actors are freelancers, but also employed artists as symphony musicians (see Faulkner, [1983] 1987; Westby, 1960), careers are episodic in cuisine. Often obtained by relatively random events, what we conceptualize as the strength of weak ties (cf. Granovetter, 1974), particular jobs help individuals advance their careers.

Actors' careers in restaurant kitchens typically begin with the lowliest job, and move through the first ranks (if they demonstrate hard-work and skill) as positions become available. The lowliest job is dishwashing, and is followed by the position of prep cook, who does the peeling, chopping and such. The next rank up is garde manger, who prepares cold appetizers and salads. After this rank is the first actual cooking position --the line cook, or cook.

By the time actors have been in the position of line cook for a while, they may begin to commit to this occupation as a career. Some move to other, perhaps better, restaurants. Others may go to culinary school, which most typically involves a two-year

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<sup>24</sup> Recall that a culinary field is here understood as a geographically bounded area of occupational activity where individuals orient their actions to one another.

<sup>25</sup> I refer to apprenticeship here in the wide sense of a mentoring relationship. As a formal system, it exists in Europe, not in the United States. Throughout the chapter I will note when it is formal.

program that requires an externship in a restaurant, where students have a chance to be hired upon completion of their studies.

After the rank of line cook, occupational positions vary partly according to restaurant status and kitchen staff size, and partly by restaurants' idiosyncrasies. Most commonly, there is a chef de partie --or first cook--, who is the person responsible for a cooking line (I will describe cooking lines below). Above this rank is the sous-chef --French for under-chef--, often followed by a chef de cuisine, who is responsible for all kitchen operations. The top position is the executive chef. The larger or more high-end restaurants may also have an executive sous-chef, or chef tournant --French for turning chef--, who is skilled enough to replace anybody in the kitchen.<sup>26</sup>

Kitchens are organized in stations --departments--, with a very hierarchical division of labor, which brings about hierarchical social dynamics (Abbott, 1988: 128). Varying from one restaurant to another, cooking stations are ranked in each kitchen according to the technical difficulty of the cooking and the importance of what is cooked in that station for the particular restaurant. Restaurants that are known for their fish will rank the fish station highly, those that specialize in grilled foodstuffs will give the grill station a high ranking. Some kitchens are organized by cooking method, so the basic stations are grill and sauté, and there may be others such as wood-burning oven. Other kitchens are organized by ingredient, and the stations are fish and meat, and perhaps others such as pasta.

The larger the kitchen, the more specialized the cooking lines. Present in all restaurants, the garde manger --or cold station-- for cold appetizers and salads, is the job

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<sup>26</sup> Not surprisingly, the use of French terms tends to co-vary with restaurant status as well. Higher status restaurants are more likely to have a structure closer to the French model, and to use French terms.

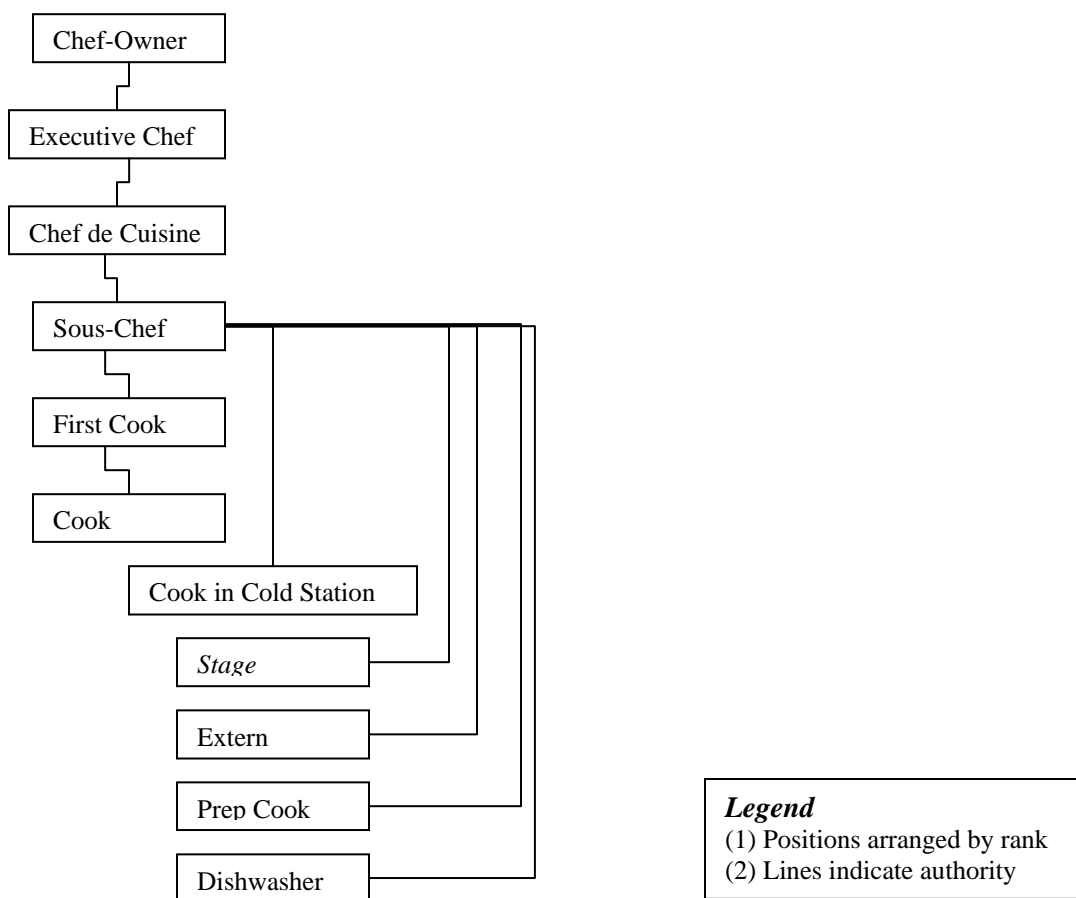
requiring the least skill, and thus the most lowly ranked of all stations. As such, it is likely to be the entryway for new cooks. Counter-intuitively, on the other end of the kitchen hierarchy is the expediting station, where dishes go through before service staff pick them up and take them into the dining room. Here the presentation of dishes is adjusted to insure consistency, and the last few touches (herbs, sauces, seasonings) may be added. Either the executive chef or the chef de cuisine works on this station. These two rarely cook during service, though they may cook in the preparatory phases, during the day. The sous-chef is then usually the highest position on the cooking line.

The division of labor leaves the most routine and menial jobs to the lower status ranks, thus underscoring status in this rigidly hierarchical occupation (see Figure 1 for the basic occupational structure in kitchens). This formal division of labor serves two purposes. First, what is in effect a long apprenticeship trains those in the lower ranks to be competent with the basic cooking skills under conditions of high pressure that only exist in busy restaurants. Second, by having new members do delegated work for a long time, it strips them of power, personal gratifications and affirmations (see Goffman, 1961),<sup>27</sup> and thereby gives them an experiential understanding of the hierarchical structure in the kitchen. By subjecting new members to discrediting and humbling experiences (not only denigrating work, but also pranks and psychological abuse), the formal division of labor and kitchen dynamics serve the function of an initiation process into the occupation (see Abbott, 1988: 126).

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<sup>27</sup> Young cooks go through a process of stripping of any positive feeling about the self that is quite similar to that of mental patients in the initial phases of their careers in total institutions, as described by Goffman in *Asylums* (1961).

Figure 1

*Basic Rank of Occupational Positions in a Restaurant Kitchen*

We see in Figure 1 the basic occupational structure in a restaurant kitchen.<sup>28</sup> In some restaurants, the chef is also an owner, and he or she is at the top. The chef-owner may also be the executive chef, or somebody else may have that position. The executive chef relies on the chef de cuisine (provided there is one), or the sous-chef, for managing kitchen operations, as I have mentioned. The sous-chef's responsibilities vary, in part depending on whether there is a chef de cuisine or not. The sous-chef may lead a section in the kitchen, help in expediting, or work closely with the chef. The first cook controls

<sup>28</sup> Please note that the structure of occupational positions in restaurant kitchens varies dramatically. This "basic" occupational structure would only apply to larger kitchens. A small kitchen in a lower status restaurant may have as little as three positions --executive chef, cook, and dishwasher.

the cooks in a cooking station. We see the lines in the figure (which indicate authority) going from sous-chef to all the ranks below because this position is the highest actual cooking job in the kitchen, so the sous-chef works more closely with the cooks. *Stages* (cooks sent from other restaurants for training) or externs (culinary school students) may do menial tasks, perhaps even work as prep cooks. But they are hierarchically above prep cooks because they are on a professionalizing career path. In contrast, prep cooks are not necessarily on such a path, and are often illegal immigrants.

Kitchens also have a pastry department, and high-end restaurants generally have a baking department as well. The pastry department is a semi-autonomous structure, with a similar, if smaller, internal organization (pastry chef, pastry sous-chef, cook). Indeed, pastry consists of a different career line, and it has its own culinary program (see Ferguson and Zukin, 1998).<sup>29</sup> Arguably, pastry ought to be considered a different field.<sup>30</sup>

Whether as a formal or informal apprenticeship (the first in Europe, the latter in the United States), the early phases in actors' careers are considered training. Some forms of training are structured; they may be on-the-job training, externships required by most culinary schools, or *stages* --French for internship. *Stages* are frequently arranged by renowned chefs for the cooks they have taken to mentoring. *Stages* are most frequently in European top restaurants (though they may also be in top New York kitchens), they are always unpaid, and may range from a week to a couple of months. These internships are fairly common among elite chefs. Whatever professional training cooks may obtain in a

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<sup>29</sup> The expertise required for pastry is completely different than that required for savory cooking. Evidence of this is that career lines rarely cross between savory cooking and pastry. If it happens, it is most commonly from pastry to savory cooking, as technical skills for pastry are considered to be more difficult to acquire than for savory cooking. It is harder to transfer specific capital from savory cooking to pastry.

<sup>30</sup> Pastry chefs orient their actions to what pastry chefs in other restaurants are doing. Their careers and culinary creations are mostly affected by pastry chefs' actions (rather than by savory chefs' actions).

matter of days, there is no doubt they acquire a wealth of symbolic capital in that time. Chefs always reference the restaurants where they did *stages* in their presentation of selves, whether in interpersonal interactions or in their bios (therefore their *stages* appear on the media as well). They do not necessarily specify that their work experience at a given restaurant was a *stage*.<sup>31</sup>

Jobs and externships at good restaurants provide cooks with symbolic capital, and they provide cooks with social ties as well. Both symbolic capital and social ties are essential for having access to high-status restaurants. Moreover, social ties are requisite for enabling further --and constant-- mobility. Never an end in themselves, restaurant jobs are stepping-stones to higher goals. Tenure in a restaurant should be long enough to learn all there is to learn from the kitchen, and not any longer. The intensity of mobility in the culinary field cannot be overstated. Restaurants are among the occupations with the highest staff turnover. It is rare for cooks in any position below executive chef to stay in a restaurant for over two years. In this context, chefs consider one year as a reasonable period of time for cooks to stay with them, and they view a tenure of two years as a sign of loyalty --a quality they value highly. From their viewpoint, mobility is a serious issue because they invest much time and resources in training new personnel.

Insofar as executive chefs are not business partners, they see even this position as transitional, and so are likely to stay for a few years. The position of executive chef serves as a ground for acquiring expertise, visibility, prestige, and some economic capital

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<sup>31</sup> Besides the fact that *stages* are always mentioned to increase chefs' status, the strenuous work and big financial cost involved in working for a restaurant to acquire experience with no economic remuneration (all the more when the job entails going to Europe) gives an idea of the symbolic capital such internships provide. It is only sensible to wonder if a week or two is a long enough period to acquire any training, but there is no question that it is a long enough period for the acquisition of symbolic capital.

to be able to open their own restaurant.<sup>32</sup> The harsh realities of the restaurant business market notwithstanding, all chefs are planning, or at least dreaming about, opening their own restaurants.<sup>33</sup> Restaurant ownership need not be the end either. It opens the door for plans, or dreams, of further ownership (a second, third, fourth restaurant).

It is likely that the inherent contrast in chefs' occupation between its creational side, the intense work pace during service, and the tedious routine of repetitive tasks that stretches for long periods of time deepens the need for mobility. Chefs like their job because it allows them to be creative, and they like the intensity of the kitchen. Yet, their daily work is steeped in routine. They must ensure consistency, for their dishes must taste and look exactly the same every time they are ordered. And the same dishes may be ordered for days, weeks, months or years. Reasonably, after some time they feel a need to change and start anew.

Endemic mobility in a field such as cuisine requires skillful management of professional trajectories for a successful career. Because chefs' trajectories serve as indicators of their stock of status, they have much significance. We should bear in mind that this is a fairly recent phenomenon. Cooking was deemed a blue collar job until the 1970's, when during the *nouvelle cuisine* movement in France, chefs are presumed to have "come out of the kitchen" so that their names and faces were recognized (see Ferguson, 1998; Rao, Monin and Durand, 2003; 2005). This process entailed a transformation of cuisine towards a field organized around chefs and their careers. A change in an area of activity from an organization around single products to one around

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<sup>32</sup> Given the high costs in cuisine, chefs are likely to have financial partners. I do not make a distinction here between business ownership and partnership.

<sup>33</sup> About half of all new restaurants in New York City are said to fail within their first year, and about 65% within the first two years.

actors and their careers brings about a process of further organization (see White and White, 1965). Thus we have seen in cuisine an increasing number of fads and fashions, specialized publications, reviews, ratings and rankings, awards, and culinary schools.

With the transformation of cuisine, professional cooking gained social status, and chefs' names became valuable capital for restaurants. Such conditions encourage actors to seek to accumulate prestige as they begin to develop their careers. Acquiring experience and prestige requires moving fast and early to get the "right" jobs. We observe this in cuisine as well as in other episodic careers such as orchestra musicians (see Westby, 1960). In organizations that are structured around individuals and their careers, prestige has a dynamic quality (see White and White, 1965), because individuals are, to a certain extent, able to control and manipulate their prestige. Therefore, career decisions are of great consequence, for in obtaining jobs actors enact social ties (see Faulkner, [1983] 1987), and through them they enact status, and gradually construct their professional self-concepts.

Chefs' career moves and their actions at a given time are perceived in the context of a diachronic and complex framework of various sorts of possible paths over a long period of time.<sup>34</sup> Insofar as chefs are, to a very large extent, judged by their past accomplishments,<sup>35</sup> this diachronic and complex framework is used by them as well as the media and customers to make sense of the configuration of cuisine.

In this chapter we will come to understand the workings of chefs' careers in high cuisine. I begin by examining the socio-cognitive frameworks whereby actors account for their career choice and the institutional conditions that give the process of becoming a

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<sup>34</sup> White and White (1965: 118) show a similar framework for the case of painting in France.

<sup>35</sup> Podolny (2005) calls the phenomenon of judging actors over their past accomplishments "status signals."

chef its particular qualities. Then I outline the characteristics of mobility in the culinary field, and the mechanisms through which mobility occurs, attending to the attributes of the field which make some mechanisms more effective for mobility than others. I describe career trajectories, focusing on entry portals, and vertical and horizontal mobility. Then I analyze the set of chefs' career trajectories in my sample, closing the chapter with some remarks on career structures and professional self-concepts.

### **Becoming a Chef**

What are the socio-cognitive and institutional conditions which enable the process of becoming a chef? Becoming a chef is unlike becoming a lawyer, physician or businessperson. These are by and large normative occupations, often encouraged -- whether explicitly or implicitly-- by families. Becoming a chef is unlike going into the diamond retail business, or going into politics, fields where the social and symbolic capital required for entry (knowledge of suppliers or brokers, trust from audiences) makes these occupations almost inaccessible to those who do not inherit the requisite capital. Becoming a chef is unlike becoming a jeweler because the traditional, intricate technical skills required in this occupation are often transmitted from one generation to the next. Becoming a chef is also unlike going into farming or mining, because career choices into these occupations are often geographically bound.

There certainly are all sorts of useful capital (social, cultural, economic, symbolic)<sup>36</sup> in the culinary field which may be inheritable: restaurants, restaurant management skills, social connections in the world of cuisine, or family cooking traditions. Nonetheless, these sorts of capital are not necessarily convertible into

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<sup>36</sup> I am following Bourdieu's (1977; [1984] 1993) understanding of capital here.

chefdom. Indeed, we seldom see chefs whose parents were chefs, and none I have talked to (both in interviews and while doing ethnographic observation) had a chef parent. A few chefs had relatives in the restaurant business, as owners or service staff, but these were generally not involved in cooking. Further, only about a quarter of the chefs I have interviewed said they grew up in a family who regularly had homemade meals and for whom food was an important part of family life.

Cooking, it appears, is not an inherited occupation. Nor is it normative, or geographically bound. At any rate, elite cuisine is not. A cook in the corner family restaurant in her town may have found the job and stayed for lack of better options in the area, but this is not the case of elite chefs in New York or San Francisco. Getting to the higher positions in these culinary fields requires, at a minimum, good measures of hard work, determination and ambition. What is more, though a professional career in cooking has acquired prestige in the past years, it had little status when many chefs I have talked to chose their career.

Given how onerous a career in high cuisine is, we may expect individuals who have pursued it to great success to have an agentic account of the decision-making processes whereby they turned to this occupation. Yet, chefs experience their occupational choice as an accidental event. *How* they became chefs might be fortuitous, or geographically rooted, typically young kids who get their first job at the local pizza parlor in their hometown. But this does not account for *why* they turned that job into a life-long career.

Accomplished and successful chefs' perception of their careers is that "it happened," "I stumbled into it," "I fell into it," "a chef decided to become me," or "I

didn't really decide." In these remarks we at least see an acknowledgment that there *is* a career choice, whatever the agent of the decision. Some chefs were particularly explicit about how a convenient job, common to the American youth, *became* a career, as illustrated in the following excerpts from a chef at a high-status restaurant in San Francisco, and another at a mid-status restaurant in New York City.

Well, I didn't really decide. I don't know. I went to art school. And then, at a point during my art school, I had to get a job, and the easiest place to be employed is a restaurant. They accept all varieties of people. It's true. (Chef at a high-status restaurant in San Francisco, fieldnotes).

A chef decided to become me...I was a dishwasher. I was a young boy.... My cousin was a dishwasher... But I liked sports and I liked people and then I got a job as a dishwasher and that was very, dishwashing was just mind-blowing because, and then we'd go out to dinner, we'd go for pizza or something. (Chef at a mid-status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

Unlike these chefs, others simply overlook the cognitive instance whereby the job turned into a career, instead only referring to the seamless succession of jobs --their upward path in kitchens-- which, in the aggregate, have made their careers. The sense of lack of agency in their career choice is pervasive in chefs' discourses. Understandably, the outset of their careers is experienced as happenstance. Getting their first job in a restaurant had nothing to do with an occupational choice. After all, it is not only chefs who get jobs in a rather contingent way. We happen to run into a friend who tells us about an opening, or we come across a posting for a job we would have otherwise never considered. We find actors who experience their occupational fate as if by chance in occupations ranging from book editors (Coser, Kadushin and Powell, 1982),<sup>37</sup> to doormen (Bearman, 2005). They never made a career choice, they happened to run into

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<sup>37</sup> Coser, Kadushin and Powell (1982) distinguish between college acquisitions editors, most of whom experience their career choice as if by chance, and editors in trade and scholarly presses, who rarely have this perception.

someone who told them about a job opening, they accepted it and never left the trade. Unlike chefs, editors or doormen begin their careers later in life as a temporary job, perhaps as they plan to pursue their dreamed career (a dream they may not surrender). However, the job of doormen does not unfold into an upwardly mobile career, and that of editors does so only to a certain extent, for editors tend not to move above senior editor (I will further develop this below).

The peculiar characteristics of the cooking occupation help understand chefs' paradoxical responses. Unlike physicians, musicians, or astronauts, most individuals work in cooking before knowing anything about this career. Future physicians do not get summer jobs in a hospital in their youth, nor do musicians in an orchestra, or astronauts in a rocket. If they did, it would be because they had a prior interest in the occupation that made them wish to acquire experience before beginning their formal training. In contrast, because restaurant jobs are regarded as available and convenient in this country, future chefs are likely to learn about the occupation, and realize they like it, *on* the job. Thus, they begin their professional trajectory in cuisine with no intention or awareness that they are doing so. Medical school students, as Becker et al (1961) show in their classic study, had some knowledge of the occupation through personal contact with professionals, and their decision to become physicians was already made before high school, so that they were fully committed to the career upon entering school. Of course, this is sensible given that medical school demands a high investment of time and money. But book editors, who go through no formal training, also claim an early intention to enter publishing, and their decision is also influenced by personal connections with individuals in the field (see

Coser, Kadushin and Powell, 1982).<sup>38</sup> Unlike medical students, and like music students (see Kadushin, 1969), actors are committed to the occupation when they enroll in culinary school, but this is because most of them already have years of work experience. We should also bear in mind here that culinary school is not a requisite for a professional career.

Rarely have chefs chosen their careers without prior experience. Only three I have interviewed said this was their case, two of whom are French. Unlike Americans, French chefs had to make a career choice earlier because they began their formal training, in lieu of high school, at age fourteen. Few other chefs decided to pursue cooking upon obtaining their first jobs. And if they did, it was not out of an affirmative decision but instead either by a cognitive process of elimination, because they were not interested in anything else, or by a process of correspondence, because it was similar to another occupation they liked.<sup>39</sup>

It is sensible to think that actors require experience before choosing this career. Cooking is not taught as part of the standard elementary or secondary school curriculum.<sup>40</sup> And actors are not likely to have any information of the occupation through personal contact with professionals. Contact with chefs is unlikely to occur through their regular everyday life, in the way prospective medical students get some sense of the profession through contact with doctors (see Becker et al., 1961).<sup>41</sup> Contact with editors through regular everyday life is statistically unlikely, but book editors remark they

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<sup>38</sup> College acquisitions editors are excluded from this group (see Coser, Kadushin and Powell, 1982).

<sup>39</sup> These few cases are all in San Francisco --a phenomenon explored below.

<sup>40</sup> We find parallels in a career in design, which is also not taught in school (see Molotch, [2003] 2005).

<sup>41</sup> The lack of knowledge of chefs has changed somehow in the last decade with the increase of media attention to chefs. This change, and the glamorization of the occupation which it brought about, probably accounts, to a large extent, for the increase of students in culinary schools.

choose their career because of personal connections with individuals in the industry (see Coser, Kadushin and Powell, 1982). But individuals I have talked to generally did not have connections with chefs before choosing their occupation; their families were not culinary professionals, and they did not know any chef personally.<sup>42</sup> Not only did they not know anyone in the occupation, most chefs had not even dined at elite restaurants, and many of them pointed out they did not even know such restaurants existed.

As necessary as early work experience is for choosing the career, it is in fact a poor source of information of a chef's job, and poor training as well. The hierarchical occupational structure of kitchens, clearly distinguishing the highest positions from the routine and menial work of the lower occupational positions, only offers a partial training, even if extended over many years. Cooking on the line entails following orders, and learning to do the same few things consistently. It is not like creating new dishes, writing menus, organizing the kitchen, ordering supplies, or managing the staff.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, the first restaurants where accomplished chefs have worked are usually not particularly good --they are small town establishments. The ingredients and techniques they use, the types of dishes they make, their concern with presentation and overall quality are generally unlike those at elite restaurants in New York and San Francisco. Offering cooks in their first years of experience a limited knowledge of the chef's job, the career structure in cuisine underscores the seemingly contingent nature of the professional trajectory. Even highly accomplished chefs in elite restaurants only learned

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<sup>42</sup> Only three chefs said a personal connection had something to do with their career, but it was related to formal education. It was friends or acquaintances who had gone to culinary school and told them about it, so they did it too. These chefs had already worked in restaurants for many years.

<sup>43</sup> Whether cooks learn some of the required skills for a chef's job is contingent on the chefs they work for, namely (first) their quality of skills, and (second) their willingness to train the staff.

about creating high cuisine food at their job. Hence we find the experiential feeling of becoming a chef as something that “just happened.” This is illustrated in the following excerpt from a renowned chef at a mid-status restaurant in New York City. Not knowing of the existence of elite restaurants, he remarks he never even dreamt to be a chef.

But when I began, I had no idea that there were restaurants like this [pointing to a mid-status restaurant, with which the chef has no association]. I lived in the suburbs... This level only existed for the very wealthy French, French chefs, for the most part. So there wasn't a dream to be a chef in a restaurant. My dream was to be a *good cook*. (Chef at a mid-status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

This chef described himself as a very ambitious kid growing up, working hard in kitchens to learn everything and be the best --but the best of *cooks*. As many others, he perceives the transition from dishwashing or prepping to the position of chef as seemingly automatic --if long--, without much reference to a process whereby he made a career choice. Such perception can be as bare an account of professional fate as the following, from a chef at an upper-middle status restaurant in New York City.

I was really poor, I was a dishwasher. Chopped carrots. And stayed with the trade. (Chef at an upper-middle status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

This chef was unable to elaborate on his career choice, even if asked repeatedly for a description of his decision to stay with the trade. Some actors have only slightly more developed narratives of a transition from what started as a convenient job into a career, still without reference to an agentic process whereby such transition took place. This case is illustrated in the following quotation from a chef at a high-status restaurant in New York City.

I fell into it, really. When I was 15, 16, 17.... I thought it'd be good to get a job where I was working at night and going to school during the day. And then an opportunity came up in a local hotel, and I got that, and after years it sort of grew into more of a career. That's where I am now. It's become a career. And that's what I do. (Chef at a high-status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

Even if a little more descriptive, this narrative also depicts an automatic process whereby a convenient job turned into a career. Finally, some versions of the narrative of the contingent nature of the career path put the social actor back in the picture, as we can see in the following excerpt from a chef at an upper-middle status restaurant in New York City.

I needed a job, for the most part. And I started working in a restaurant when I was 14, like I said, dishwashing and stuff. But really the thing, after high school, I liked it. I liked cooking. I got a good job at [Restaurant's name] and I learned a lot. And I really excelled there, fast, in the kitchen from prep to like doing, like grill within a year. So, I liked it. So I fell into it, you know. The rest is history, that's all I've ever done. (Chef at an upper-middle status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

The automatic career transition is one of the two ideal typical storylines chefs have recourse to for accounting for their career choice. The other is the early socialization into food. Growing up in a family household with good homemade meals imparts them with such an appreciation and love for food that, in their view, leads them to the occupation. Almost all chefs saw either the automatic career transition or the early socialization into food as key in their career choice. Further, their narratives are evenly distributed between the two stories. As different as the two narratives are, they have the same structural discord: what are socially widespread practices are identified as singular events. Both homemade family meals (particularly in earlier times, when many current established chefs were growing up), and restaurant jobs during high school or college are not extra-ordinary experiences.

The two narratives also have a common social component associated with food. Chefs often highlight the social rewards of cooking, the perception of meals as social events, the recognition awarded to the cook, and the camaraderie in kitchens. They find these to be significant draws to the occupation. Chefs who grew up with homemade meals incorporate the social dimension of food early, for homemade meals did not only instill them with a keen appreciation of food, but also with affectionate memories of the emotional aspect of family meals, an emotional aspect which is carried over to their professional occupation. The following quotation from a chef at a high-status restaurant in New York gives a vivid image, one shared by many, of the impact of their early socialization into their occupation.

I think, I think, that I became a chef because I was very early exposed to good food. And what food is bringing along with good food is dinner, lunches on Sundays.... It used to be good food, but also what I remember is the scent. The house used to smell of the cooking. And that was to me an awakening of the sense. Awakening of both the taste buds but also the nose. And it was all good together. But you know what? It was very important also, it was a matter of feelings also. The family was there... we used to celebrate some holidays and things like this. So good food is always connected to other things as well, sense of smell, joy, tenderness. So that's why in a way, little by little, I became interested to become a chef, to become a cook. So, that's it. (Chef at a high-status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

We repeatedly hear chefs remark on the importance of early socialization into food for their careers. We also hear them remark on the significance of the social aspect of their first restaurant jobs. The long hours and intensity of the occupation, and the camaraderie they experience in their first jobs have a big impact on them. Early restaurant work opens access to a new world to youngsters. It is a world of adulthood, which brings with it economic and symbolic capital, as well as the possibility of social interaction with older co-workers. This point is salient in the phenomenology of chefs'

career choice. They often highlight the social rewards: working in a team, the pace, and (when they start working in their youth) “hanging out” with their colleagues after work. They appreciate the social capital their job provides. The following excerpts from a chef at an upper-middle status restaurant in San Francisco and another at a mid-status restaurant in New York nicely illustrate the feeling.

I just fell in love with not only the food and the creative process, but working with my hands, and I loved the smells, and everything about it. But I also loved the camaraderie in the kitchen and the adrenaline and the feeling part of a team. And I remember when I was in high school I loved working and being independent and feeling, you know, like I was an adult. I hated people thinking of me as a kid and I hated being treated like a kid. And it was so cool, I got to be treated like an adult, I would work really hard and I'd get a beer after work and I'd get to go out with these people and, and it was great. It was so great, it was so much better than school. I loved it. Anyway, I was really into it and I went to culinary school. (Chef at an upper-middle status restaurant in San Francisco, fieldnotes).

[Working in a restaurant] I enjoyed virtually every aspect of it. I enjoyed coming into work. I enjoyed the camaraderie. I enjoyed the fact that everybody was working towards a common goal, that we would come in and the whole day would be about prepping for the dinner that night, and then, you know, the day is split into two parts.... And I just enjoyed every element of it.... But the idea, but the cooking in a brigade, in a team, was the closest I'd ever come to experiencing, you know, having grown up my whole life playing sports, that was the closest I had ever come to getting that same emotion, that same feeling, that same rush, excitement, being part of a process and everything. (Chef at a mid-status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

We hear these warm descriptions of the camaraderie and intensity of the job often. Partly due to the camaraderie and intensity they experience, and partly due to the long and odd hours of their job (chefs work when most everybody else rest, and vice versa), which leave little time or occasion for other pursuits, chefs develop a strong occupational identification. They are likely to socialize with co-workers, as well as with colleagues in the field, thus tightening the social network of culinary professionals. We also find a strong occupational identification in other fields with long and odd working hours and

patterns of intra-field socializing, such as the publishing industry or symphony orchestra musicians (see Powell, 1985; Westby, 1960).<sup>44</sup>

Similarly to other fields, such as music, the strong occupational identity begins to be fostered early on and continues to be cultivated over years of training. Most chefs start working in restaurants at a young age, which leaves them little opportunity for social or intellectual pursuits outside their field. Culinary education only accentuates this process because, in contrast to the general education curriculum of college, culinary school concentrates on specific technical skills, thus (first) encouraging occupational identity and (second) closing doors to the development of other interests.

The strong professional identity probably contributes to the low out-mobility of the culinary field. Some individuals start a career in cuisine after having had a successful career in other areas, which may be finance, law, or the arts. But actors do not seem to ever leave the field once they have arrived to the higher occupational positions.<sup>45</sup> Were they to stop cooking, they remain in the field, either as restaurateurs, or culinary entrepreneurs of some sort (importing foods or wines, producing tableware or kitchenware, opening a catering business). Such low out-mobility is common in labor markets where there are options for upward mobility, because such options tend to discourage outward movement to other fields.<sup>46</sup> We may also gather that the specific skills, knowledge and social networks that actors accumulate over years of work in cuisine are not likely to be of use in other fields, and this may be a deterrent to start anew.

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<sup>44</sup> Of course, acceptance of established norms and values is also important for a professional identity (see Larson, 2005).

<sup>45</sup> With one exception, I have never heard or read about a story of an actor who became a chef at an elite restaurant and eventually left the field. The exception is a chef I interviewed in San Francisco, who left cooking for a few years to pursue studies that were, in effect, related to food (it was not culinary school but a more theoretically oriented program).

<sup>46</sup> For research on the effect of labor markets on mobility patterns in a variety of areas, see Carroll and Mayer (1984; 1986); Hachen (1990); Rosenfeld (1992), and Tuma (1985).

The professional identity and closed social network, which reinforce and strengthen each other over years, may also be limiting chefs' options --whether organizational or cognitive-- for considering other opportunities. At the very least, information is necessary for contemplating other options,<sup>47</sup> and the intense involvement with colleagues may reduce the chances that chefs would even think of another career. We find the same phenomenon in other areas with high professional identity, such as symphony musicians. This is consistent with the more contemporary findings from the neo-institutional literature that show that the chances that individuals think of alternative options are increased if they have social connections with actors in other fields (see Burt, 2004; Clemens, 1997; Clemens and Cook, 1999; Giuffre, 1999; McLaughlin, 2001; Morrill, Forthcoming; Owen-Smith and Powell, 2004).<sup>48</sup>

### **Kitchen Ladders**

Not leaving the occupation, actors have multiple options for mobility in cuisine. First, there is vertical mobility along occupational positions (i.e. rank in the kitchen) and field positions (i.e. restaurant status). There is vertical mobility across culinary fields, as some cities have a higher status than others as dining destinations. There is also horizontal mobility along culinary styles. Nonetheless, we should keep in mind that though culinary styles (such as French, American, Italian) are in theory not classified in a vertical structure, because they are qualitative categories, they are hierarchically

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<sup>47</sup> For classical references on this topic, see Blau et al (1956), Granovetter (1974), Marsden and Campbell (1990), and Sørensen (1975).

<sup>48</sup> Neo-institutional research sheds light on organizational and cognitive factors, showing that social contacts in other fields open access to different cognitive frameworks thus increasing the likelihood that actors will conceive of new ideas (see Burt, 1992; 2004; Clemens, 1997; Clemens and Cook, 1999; Giuffre, 1999; Mische, Forthcoming; Morrill, Forthcoming).

perceived. With its tradition at the top of the fine food chain, French cuisine is more likely to be perceived as refined, and consequently be afforded more stars in reviews, than Italian cuisine, long thought to be simpler, more rustic, and intrinsically incapable of achieving the high standards of French food. In effect, there are more high-end restaurants categorized as French than any other cuisine, both in New York and San Francisco. We find another type of classification, though not institutionalized, that also carries a measurable value in the assessment of restaurants: the degree of innovativeness. Insofar as innovation has an intrinsic positive value because it is understood as an indicator of creativity, chefs who create innovative food are likely to be more highly regarded than those who create traditional food.<sup>49</sup> There is stability to all these categories that structure the culinary field and there is therefore stability to field positions.<sup>50</sup>

The combination of occupational ranks, restaurant status, culinary categories, and culinary fields make up a complex set of stages for careers in cuisine. As I have mentioned, career paths are not standardized. First, there are multiple entry portals. Actors may enter the fields of New York and San Francisco through formal education, the lowest positions in kitchens, or restaurants in other cities. Occupational positions in kitchens are, as we have seen, structured in a multi-layered hierarchy, but some stages may be skipped. We know that in academia, for instance, a faculty member does not

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<sup>49</sup> Categorized by regional origin, culinary styles are used to classify restaurants in all publications, thus we can observe the correlation between restaurant status and culinary style. Though the degree of innovativeness is not institutionalized as a form of classification, it is constantly referred to in restaurant reviews.

<sup>50</sup> The stability of the field is reinforced, as field theory assumes, by the socialization of new actors. Institutionalized channels (namely, formal instruction and training) transmit codified knowledge, norms and values, socializing new actors (see Bourdieu, 1976; Larson, 2005). But the stability of the field is also maintained, as the neo-institutionalism reminds us, by actors' willing adherence to roles and norms, for fear of risking social penalties in the form of lack of recognition if they defy established categories and cause confusion (Phillips and Zuckerman, 2001; Zucker, 1977; Zucker, 1987; Zuckerman et al., 2003).

normally move from assistant to full professor simply because her work is very good, or because a full professor retires and the position becomes available. However, these are standard means for upward mobility in cuisine. This type of mobility is common to internal labor markets, where long training is required. In these markets, individuals enter the organization early, at the lowest occupational positions, and their employers invest in training them. Such investment gives employers an incentive to promote their employees, both to make the investment worthwhile and more reliably fill higher positions with properly trained individuals. It also gives employees an advantage to compete for higher positions, so they are likely to be promoted and move up the occupational ladder (see Althauser and Kalleberg, 1990; Spilerman, 1977).<sup>51</sup>

There is a core structure in the occupational ladder in restaurant kitchens which is standard across restaurants. Most individuals move through at least three steps: cook, sous-chef, executive chef. Skipping a sous-chef position (or alternatively, the structural equivalents of first cook or chef de cuisine) in the path to executive chef is rare. Likewise, mobility to chef-ownership without the executive chef experience is even rarer.<sup>52</sup> Mobility mechanisms vary slightly by rank and restaurant status. Actors in the lower ranks are likely to move up to higher positions through internal promotion whether they are at middle, upper-middle or high-status restaurants. Those in the higher ranks are likely to obtain their first executive chef position at an upper-middle status restaurant through internal promotion, but they tend to obtain such position at middle or high-status restaurants by moving to *another* restaurant. As I will show, while internal promotion is

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<sup>51</sup> Spilerman (1977) suggests employees are insulated from non-employees in competing for promotions.

<sup>52</sup> There is one such case in my sample, an unusual trajectory all in all.

regular at upper-middle status restaurants, it is almost non-existent in middle and high-status restaurants.

Since some kitchen ranks may be skipped, and openings are unpredictable, upward mobility has a stochastic form in cuisine. It is not necessarily gradual or smooth, but rather occurs in spurts as extraordinary opportunities arise. Actors may move through two notable mechanisms: internal promotion, or social ties. Friends, acquaintances, and past or present co-workers provide information on job openings. Chefs place their mentored cooks in top restaurants in their field as well as in other fields. And culinary schools have institutional ties with chefs for placing their students as externs in their restaurants. Social ties are tight in the culinary field, and they are essential for mobility opportunities.<sup>53</sup>

Why do internal promotion and social ties predominate as mechanisms for mobility in cuisine? We will come to understand that these mobility mechanisms are effective for conveying information about particular attributes, and consequently they are relied upon in labor markets where such particular attributes are salient. We will examine three binary sets of attributes common in labor markets to learn which are salient in cuisine, and why information about them is most effectively conveyed through internal promotion and social ties.

1- Status versus Skill

2- Trust versus Skill

3- Occupational Classifications versus Skill

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<sup>53</sup> For examples of other areas where social ties are essential for opportunities for mobility, see Bearman (2005), Powell (1985), and Westby (1960).

Chefs' culinary skills are, of course, critical for their job. Yet, they are unobservable before the consumption of their dishes. Therefore, it is easier to convey information about their skills through a proxy. Judging chefs by who they have worked with is a good proxy for their skills (as there is a reasonable assumption that individuals learn good skills at good restaurants), and it is easier to use this information than it is to compare chefs' dishes to those of others with similar culinary styles and status. Work ties enact social connections (see Faulkner, [1983] 1987), and they indicate status, and thus they are used as a measure of skill. In effect, we find that both colleagues and those who are not part of the field resort to past work experiences to indicate chefs' reputation.<sup>54</sup>

Podolny (1993: 835) suggests that the use of status as a proxy for skill creates a decoupling of actors' prestige (understood as the outcome of their past accomplishments) and their present production.<sup>55</sup> It follows that, insofar as perceptions of chefs are based on their past, their present production is less significant to their present status. In considering present production irrelevant, Podolny fails to note that present production is of consequence for future status (or for future prestige).<sup>56</sup> We can take this logic further to posit that the greater the decoupling between chefs' status and their present production, the more irrelevant their production would be to their status. Arguably, higher status chefs would experience greater decoupling between their status and their present work, for if they are expected to be good (due to their reputation of being so), their products are,

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<sup>54</sup> There is plenty of evidence of the relevance of chefs' status and work history. Whenever either peers or the media talk about chefs, they always include a list of restaurants where chefs have worked (and often exclude the rank they held at the restaurants).

<sup>55</sup> Podolny (1993; 2005) uses the concept of reputation for what I mean by status, i.e. field position. Note that when I refer to his work I replace the concept of reputation with that of status. The understanding of prestige I am using here is along the lines of Podolny's. Whereas status (or reputation) is an outcome of field position, prestige is an outcome of an actor's past production.

<sup>56</sup> Podolny's conception of market producers as rational actors is all the more reason to take this fact into account. However, the future only appears in his work as constraining producers' mobility across market niches.

to some extent, met with a positive a priori judgment.<sup>57</sup> Lower status chefs do not have such a preceding reputation, so their present products would have a larger role in the perception of their skill.

The limited use of culinary creations to judge chefs is not only due to the difficulty of measuring the quality of dishes. Culinary skills are ostensibly the main asset, and in particular for positions below executive chef. But culinary skills are not the only, or perhaps even the most important quality in a kitchen. The actual tasks and skills required for the job are far beyond those which would be detailed in a job description. Just as social skills are fundamental for doormen in building lobbies (see Bearman, 2005), they are important for cooks in restaurant kitchens. Cooks spend too much time together in close quarters, under acute stress and, last but not least, with potential weapons in hand. Technical skills are much more easily taught to an adult than social and psychological behavior. Because the skills required for the job are difficult to discern (some technical skills may be quickly assessed, but others, both technical and emotional, take time and intense conditions to surface), chefs highlight the value of personality, attitude, and curiosity for learning rather than specific know-how.<sup>58, 59</sup>

Social and psychological attributes are better discerned through personal contact, thus the value of promoting employees, or relying on references through social connections. Training cooks is a big investment of time, effort, and money, therefore recruiting reliable employees is all the more valuable (see Abbott, 1988: 131). Whether

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<sup>57</sup> There may be a competing argument, however, that higher prestige necessarily comes with higher expectations, which may negatively affect perceptions of chefs' creations.

<sup>58</sup> Some chefs even prefer hiring cooks with no skills because lack of training means they have no pre-conceived ideas of how things should be done, so it is easier to have them do things in the way chefs' prefer.

<sup>59</sup> We find that psychological criteria are also given preference in other fields where specific skills are not easily detectable and relevant or specific skills are generally disdained, such as among editors in the publishing industry.

through personal contact or via connections with others, the value of trust (the second binary set outlined above) for mobility in the culinary labor market is evident. Consequently, so is the value of social connections. Knowing their cooks, chefs may promote them to higher positions because they trust them to have good technical and emotional skills, and be good workers. In recruiting new cooks, chefs rely on their peers, asking them for references of those who have worked with them, because they trust their opinions.

In organizational fields where trust is important so that social connections are a much more effective means for getting jobs than formal procedures, getting jobs seems easy to those individuals with good social connections. Narrating how they moved through the ladder, chefs tell of their chance encounters with somebody who offered them a job, and being fortunate to have been “in the right place at the right time.” These chance events are nothing but the individual experience of social ties (cf. Granovetter, 1974).<sup>60</sup>

The role of occupational classifications as opposed to skill in labor markets is the third, and most ambiguous, binary set. We find in fields such as music or film acting -- fields also structured around individuals and careers, and with careers understood to be diachronic and stochastic-- that occupational classifications are central means of selection processes. Because selection is more complicated where labor markets are organized around individuals, classifying individuals into categories facilitates the process of sorting potential candidates into those who may fit the job and those who do not. In such markets, occupational classifications are more consequential for hiring than social ties or skills (see Faulkner, [1983] 1987; Zuckerman et al., 2003).

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<sup>60</sup> In his depiction of a similar context, Bearman (2005) underscores the role of chance in doormen's accounts of how they find (otherwise difficult) jobs easily. Chefs are aware that their social ties often helped them have entry to places that are blocked for outsiders.

Nonetheless, there are two main characteristics of the culinary field which make typecasting rare in its labor market. First, typecasting is most advantageous for employers, and even more for intermediaries (whose job is made easier by classifying individuals into categories), thus we will find more salience of typecasting in markets with intermediaries --that is not this one. Secondly, in fields where careers are structured in a ladder so that one position is a stepping-stone for the next one, as in cuisine, skills that are useful for one occupational position are transferable to higher ranks, thus making occupational categories that help make distinctions among skills less relevant for selection processes (see Zuckerman et al., 2003).<sup>61</sup>

Other reasons why skill is not such a valuable sorting criterion in cuisine are that, as I have argued above, (first) skill is hard to distinguish, so status --enacted in work ties-- is an easier way of inferring quality of skill, and (second) attributes required of an employee are beyond technical skills, and such social and psychological attributes are better found out through personal or social connections. In effect, when chefs talk about hiring criteria they identify a range of attributes that are important for them but rarely skill.

This is not to say that skill is irrelevant in cuisine. Skill in a given area (what in occupational classifications is referred to as a simple identity) shows specific training, undoubtedly necessary for cooking. But specific skill also serves to differentiate field members from outsiders.<sup>62</sup> A field that has multiple entry portals provides no system of credentials to easily distinguish those who have invested time and efforts in the field from

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<sup>61</sup> Zuckerman et al (2003: 1029) actually give the example of the culinary field as a market structured as a ladder, where, as they write, a pastry chef may be hired as a chef de cuisine if the position becomes available (to be sure, a highly unlikely scenario).

<sup>62</sup> Zuckerman et al (2003) argue that a simple identity is in many cases the only way of filtering the unskilled from the multitalented, a mechanism clearly at work in the film industry.

newcomers; that is, it does not provide an easy mechanism of social closure. The long apprenticeship in kitchens, where cooks learn and hone their skills, is the only process that all individuals who seek a career in cuisine go through, and thus it is the only mechanism that distinguishes those who have already invested time and efforts in the field from outsiders who may be interested in joining in.<sup>63</sup>

But specific training has the risk of constraining individuals to membership in a category, and limiting their career options. Though this occurs in music and film acting (and we unambiguously notice it in film, as actors and actresses tend to be cast for the same roles), it is not clear it occurs in cuisine. Here, we observe lateral movement. Cooks switch to different cooking techniques, creational styles, and regional cuisines in their training, and chefs may switch as well when they change jobs or open new restaurants. Indeed, competence in various cooking techniques and styles, and fluency in multiple cuisines --what we can categorize as generalism-- has a positive value, and thus lessens the risk that chefs with multiple skills are perceived instead as lacking in skill (failure, rather than choice).

This points to some underdeveloped aspects in the structural understanding of labor market mechanisms. Some contributions in the literature do note, for instance, that the role of occupational classifications varies by status (see Faulkner, [1983] 1987; Zuckerman et al., 2003). Multiple identities might be seen as negative for newer actors in the field because they are confused with lack of skill. But, having already proven their skill, higher status actors are in a different position to embrace multiple identities. Moreover, in their case, a simple identity can be viewed as narrowness.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Becker (1982) argues that the long training in the arts protects insiders from outsiders.

<sup>64</sup> This structural difference is consistent with the finding from the sociology of culture that higher status

There is another aspect in labor market mechanisms that varies by status. Just as occupational classifications have varying implications by status, so do social ties and skills. For low-status actors, in particular in fields such as cuisine where there are no formal credentials to provide social closure, social ties and status --expressed at least partly through social ties-- are more useful mechanisms for finding a job. New chefs, who have not yet established themselves in a niche, have too little reputation to be categorized in a simple identity. They can more effectively find a job not by being typecast, but through social connections. In contrast, high-status chefs, who have carved out an area of expertise, *can* be categorized in a specialized area, and in effect they are, since they are recognized for their particular culinary styles.

We know that actors obtain jobs in restaurants through social connections, their status, and the perception of their culinary styles. We will find that another possible mechanism for obtaining jobs, at the outset of their careers, is through formal credentials.

### **Entry Portals**

Lawyers or engineers need professional degrees to enter their field, academics need a doctorate, and chief executives need relevant experience. In graphic arts, filmmaking, or cuisine there are multiple gateways. Formal education, experience, reputation, and social ties are all possible channels for gaining access to these fields. Though a single entryway to cuisine, through a formal apprenticeship, was the norm in some countries (in

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actors are more likely to be omnivorous in their cultural practices because, having multiple and heterogeneous social networks, they have 1) a more varied access to a diversity of cultural practices, and therefore 2) better chances to communicate with multiple social groups (Clemens et al., 1995; DiMaggio, 1987; DiMaggio and Mukhtar, 2004; Erickson, 1996; Forthcoming; Fischler, 1990; Peterson, 2005; Peterson and Kern, 1996; Peterson and Rossman, Forthcoming; Warde, Martens and Olsen, 1999).

Europe in particular), there are other entryways now.<sup>65</sup> In the United States, multiple gateways have always been characteristic. Culinary school not being required for a career in cuisine, it is just one possible entryway. What is more, even if individuals undertake formal education in cuisine, they almost always join a culinary program after having worked in restaurants, so formal education is not the first door to the field.

We observe that whether they attended culinary school or not, chefs uniformly dismiss it on the grounds that the education it provides does not amount to real training. Real training can only be acquired on the job. Formal education only gives a foundation, mainly knowledge of the classic techniques and preparations. The classics are, always, of French origin --the traditional techniques, stocks, sauces, dishes. Chefs base their critique of culinary education to a large extent on the high cost of tuition, which can go up to about \$50,000 for a two-year program at the top schools in the country. They maintain that if tuition was lower, as it was earlier, schools might be a more worthy investment. Given the current rates, they all find that traveling abroad to eat would be a better use of young cooks' time and money.

Whatever the degree of practical usefulness of culinary training, there is one essential function of schools chefs fail to acknowledge: social ties. Culinary schools, and more so the better ones, provide a high-status entryway to the field. Externships are likely to be at high-status restaurants, and they might lead to a job offer at such restaurants (provided there are vacancies and students are good workers). Even if students were not

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<sup>65</sup> The establishment of the European and American models of culinary professionalization is consistent with the history of professions in the two areas (see Abbott, 1988; Larson, 1977). Due to a large extent to state control, professions developed in a more rigid framework in continental Europe. Careers were thus seen as life-long (see Stovel, Savage and Bearman, 1996). Developed in a more flexible and dispersed system of control, careers in the United States were more individually managed. This conception of careers led to a high rate of mobility within as well as across occupations (Abbott, 1988).

offered a job where they did their externship, experience in a high-end restaurant *and* the social ties acquired there, set them off to a good start. High-status restaurants, and the social ties associated with them, are mostly accessible through social networks (whether networks established by culinary schools, or informal social ties).

Culinary programs range widely in terms of cost, reputation, and social networking (three co-varying attributes). The most prestigious school is the Culinary Institute of America (CIA, in Hyde Park, New York),<sup>66</sup> followed by Johnson & Wales (in Rhode Island).<sup>67</sup> Far behind are the French Culinary Institute and the Institute of Culinary Education (both in New York City). As in any hierarchically structured field, better schools mean, among other things, better social networks. These schools have connections with the best chefs, which means that they (one) attract such chefs to teach classes, and (two) offer their restaurants as possible locations for externships.

As normally happens with any status structure, chefs criticize the top school --the CIA-- for imparting an arrogant attitude, besides poor training that is common to all schools. Regardless of their own educational credentials, no chef I have interviewed said he or she had preference for hiring CIA graduates. Moreover, some claimed to prefer anybody but CIA graduates. As I have mentioned, all chefs maintain they do not take formal training as a criterion for hiring. A positive learning disposition and a general good attitude, they remark, are more important.

The disregard for the CIA and all culinary schools aside, it bears noting that elite restaurant kitchens are filled with culinary school graduates and externs, and from the

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<sup>66</sup> This ranking of culinary schools excludes international schools.

<sup>67</sup> These two schools have other campuses in the country, but these are the most prestigious. All chefs and cooks I have interviewed or talked to who attended the CIA or Johnson & Wales, studied on these campuses.

CIA in particular. It is easy to understand why they would have externs. They are free labor, and risk-free because they do the most menial work. Labor costs are a large proportion of restaurants budgets, so free labor is an asset for a profitable business. However, elite restaurant kitchens are also staffed by cooks and chefs who are culinary school graduates, and this could not possibly be because all externs get hired. Of the thirty-five American chefs I interviewed, twenty-three received formal training, fifteen of whom did it at the CIA.<sup>68</sup> Even more significantly, I found that high-end restaurants in my sample have the highest proportion of chefs with formal training (85%), as well as the highest proportion of American chefs with CIA degrees (67%) (see Table 1).<sup>69</sup> Moreover, whereas I found a relatively even distribution of formally educated chefs in restaurants across status levels (ranging from 70% to 85%), there is a strong association in the distribution of American chefs who are CIA graduates across restaurant status (29%, 33%, and 67% for middle, upper-middle and high-status restaurants respectively).<sup>70</sup> The association between chefs' educational credentials and restaurant status would be even higher if we included European-trained chefs in my sample because (first) all foreign chefs had formal education *and* (secondly) there is a positive association between foreign chefs and restaurant status. Particularly in New York City, the higher the restaurant status, the higher the likelihood that the chef is European --and the higher the likelihood that the chefs de cuisine and sous-chefs are European as well. In short, regardless of

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<sup>68</sup> I only report figures for chefs here because I do not have exact data for all kitchen staff. However, the data I collected during ethnographic observation, talking to chefs de cuisine, sous-chefs, and cooks, support the tendencies described here for chefs. Dishwashers and prep cooks are largely Latin-American immigrants (mostly from Mexico).

<sup>69</sup> Data for New York City and San Francisco are collapsed here because, in respect to culinary schools, they have the same patterns.

<sup>70</sup> When giving a percentage of CIA graduates I use the total of American chefs (instead of all chefs) because foreign chefs tend to come to the U.S. with training from their countries of origin.

actors' discourses, educational credentials do matter as an entryway to the culinary field, because they are consequential for a career trajectory.

*Table 1*

*Chefs and Culinary Schools in New York City and San Francisco*

<b>Restaurant Status</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>U.S. Chefs</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Culinary School</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>U.S. Culinary School</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>U.S. School Distrib.</b>	<b>% CIA/ U.S. Chefs</b>	<b>% CIA/ Chefs</b>
<b>Middle</b>	18	17	94	13	72	11	65	CIA: 5 Other: 6	29	28
<b>Upper-middle</b>	13	9	70	9	70	5	55	CIA: 3 Other: 2	33	23
<b>High</b>	13	9	70	11	85	7	78	CIA: 6 Other: 1	67	46

There is a high concentration of culinary schools. Of numerous culinary programs in the country, only seven are represented in the sample.<sup>71</sup> Overall, accomplished American chefs either have the most recognized credentials or none at all. Middling credentials, and their social networks, are not effective for advancing careers in elite restaurant kitchens in New York City and San Francisco.<sup>72</sup>

It is puzzling that in spite of the apparent positive effect of educational credentials on careers in the culinary field, chefs are so dismissive of them. Indisputably, the fast-paced work of a restaurant kitchen is unlike a leisurely class, and from a cost-value

<sup>71</sup> The distribution of all chefs in the sample by culinary schools is as follows: fifteen chefs studied at the CIA (Hyde Park, New York), two studied at Johnson & Wales (Rhode Island), two at the French Culinary Institute (New York City), two at the New York City Technical College (Brooklyn), one at the Institute for Culinary Education (New York City), one at the California Culinary Academy (San Francisco), and one at City College (San Francisco).

<sup>72</sup> The idea that there is a reproductive effect whereby social connections with culinary schools establish themselves as conduits for new recruits seems unlikely. Few chefs have strong connections with their alma mater (be they institutional, social, or symbolic). In this regard, culinary schools are unlike universities. Programs are shorter, they do not lead to strong bonds among classmates or faculty, and they do not lead to a strong emotional bond with the school either. In short, we do not observe that culinary schools have the symbolic position that colleges or universities have among alumni.

standpoint schools are a doubtful investment. Nonetheless, the same could be said of many other professional programs that are also not a required entryway to the field, such as masters in business administration, fine arts, or film. It may be worth considering if the disconnect between the value of educational credentials that is evident in the data and chefs' representations of culinary education has something to do with the place of cuisine between craft, art and economic market. As a craft, the technique ought to be learned on site (as tradition would have it). As an artistic field, the ideal of artistic purity highlights natural talents, so curiosity, willingness to learn, and capacity to discern good from bad flavors, are the important values, and they cannot be acquired at school.<sup>73</sup> Nonetheless, market logics in the culinary field go against these ideals. Reliability when hiring staff is crucial. A bad cook results in loss of customers. Reliability is particularly important in higher status restaurants, because these restaurants have a higher pressure to demonstrate excellence consistently. Chefs at these restaurants know they can never fail. And though culinary school does not provide sufficient training for working in a restaurant kitchen, it does ensure a minimum level of technical competence and thus increases reliability (and, to be sure, the better schools provide higher technical competence). In hiring, chefs could in principle select cooks or chefs with formal credentials, and then obtain information about other required skills, namely social and psychological attributes, through personal connections.

Regardless of chefs' claims about their hiring decisions, we have seen that credentials from culinary schools, and in particular the better ones, are in effect a good

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<sup>73</sup> This understanding of the ideal of purity is in line with Bourdieu's (1976; 1977; [1984] 1993; [1992] 1996) conceptualization that every field is organized around a pole of purity, with the most highly valued principles of appreciation that are specific to the field, and a pole of impurity. The phenomenon of purity in cuisine is developed in chapters four and five.

entryway to the field. There is unambiguous evidence that credentials from good schools help advance careers to the higher status restaurants. We may wonder if the main function culinary schools serve for careers in cuisine is to provide social ties, so that cooks can obtain an externship and either be hired and subsequently promoted in the restaurant where they trained, or obtain jobs through the social ties made in both that restaurant and culinary school. Given that chefs disregard this function of culinary schools, then we can understand why we find a contradiction between chefs' claims about culinary education and the evidence of its role in advancing careers.

### **Moving Upwards and Sideways**

As we know, chefs do not only need formal credentials or social connections to obtain jobs in elite restaurants. They also require status. Insofar as they are perceived in terms of their status, their professional trajectories are of great consequence for their present standing. Managing their careers is significant because it affects their present status, but also because it gives them membership in a culinary category (Italian, French, New American). Just as the genre of academic work makes scholarly identities (see Clemens et al., 1995), chefs' culinary styles make their professional identities as well.

Professional identities are perhaps of greatest concern for young chefs. The first chef job is the most important transition in their careers. But it is the most important transition not so much because they are categorized in a niche and thus have their future career options narrowed, but because they must demonstrate their authorship, and in order to do so they must differentiate themselves from the chefs with whom they trained. Because membership in a culinary category is based on their professional trajectory,

differentiating from a category is particularly important if they worked with renowned chefs. It is their ability to demonstrate that they are *not* specialized in a particular style that proves the extent of their skills. This is not to say that chefs at this stage do not face a higher risk of being evaluated as unskilled. But their way to reduce such risk is in effect to demonstrate competence in creating dishes in a style different from that of the renowned chefs for whom they worked.<sup>74</sup> Another way for young chefs to reduce the risk of being perceived as unskilled is by not being too innovative and going beyond food that diners recognize as relatively familiar.<sup>75</sup>

It may be countered that the first chef's job, when an individual is shaping his authorship, is an exception. However, just as academics-in-training begin shaping their professional identity in graduate school (and most sociologists do not switch from qualitative to quantitative research, or from world systems to medical sociology upon getting their first faculty position), chefs-in-training are profoundly influenced by the restaurants where they have worked. Actors do not start from scratch when they become chefs. By the same token, they do not establish themselves in a culinary category for good either. Chefs constantly create and re-create their authorship and professional sense of selves. They do this more manifestly when they change jobs or open a new restaurant, but they also do it gradually in their everyday work. And, as I have suggested, they are positively perceived if they demonstrate fluency in different culinary styles.

Chefs are cognizant that they are enacting social ties when they select jobs, and some of them are explicit about following this rationale for their career moves. They

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<sup>74</sup> This does not mean that if chefs trained at an Italian restaurant, they ought to cook French food to demonstrate their authorship. They can remain within the Italian culinary category, but making dishes that are sufficiently different from their mentors' creational styles.

<sup>75</sup> The risk of being perceived as unskilled if they are innovative is higher for lower status chefs than for those with higher status. This issue is developed in chapters four and five.

sometimes have well-defined instrumental motives for choosing jobs. They know what skills they want to learn (they may be culinary, managerial, or financial), and where to get them. Once they have acquired the skills, they are ready to move on. Working for multiple chefs in their training before their first executive chef position is important for learning professional skills as much as for their authorship and status. Accomplished young chefs with a still brief but successful career express the fear of being typecast as a chef's disciple and hence associated with his or her culinary style, what amounts to being perceived as lacking authorship. They know their products will surely be compared to their mentor's. By working with more than one prominent chef, and not staying too long with any of them, they hope to avoid this risk. Approaching work with such an instrumental mindset requires what Faulkner ([1983] 1987) calls a detached concern with their jobs, so that actors can experience a degree of flexibility to move from one job to another. Such flexibility is probably facilitated by a stronger loyalty to their careers than to employers. We find this disposition among cooks during their training as much as among chefs who are not restaurant owners.

We can examine the extent to which actors move from one restaurant to another as they establish social ties and attempt to distance themselves from a given culinary category by analyzing chefs' career trajectories. We may posit that as chefs acquire more status and establish their authorship, they have a lower imperative to differentiate themselves from a given category. If having competence in multiple categories is a positive value, we should find that as established chefs open new restaurants, they expand to other categories, whether laterally (other culinary styles) or vertically (other status categories).

Podolny (1993; 2005) argues that high-status actors are limited in their expansion to lower status categories, because the economic advantages that helped them in their high-status positions are not transferable to lower categories. Some of these advantages are lower financial costs (they obtain better credit), lower labor costs (employees are willing to work for lower salaries in exchange of status), and lower advertising costs (they have a lower need to attract customers). Losing the initial economic advantages would make their business less economically profitable, Podolny maintains, so if actors open new businesses of lower status they can only do it with different identities not to harm their reputation. If this is true in cuisine, we should expect accomplished chefs to open more restaurants in different culinary categories than in lower status categories. However, this is not what we find. First, high-end restaurants are not necessarily more profitable, for they operate with very high cost and low volume. But more importantly, even if high-end restaurants were more profitable, high-status chefs can surely transfer some of the economic advantages accrued by their status when they open lower status restaurants. They still benefit from their connections with the best purveyors, they obtain good quality and low-cost labor, have better conditions to obtain financial backing, and easily attract customers. In effect, we find that as they acquire more status, chefs open more restaurants that are more likely to be of lower status than of different culinary styles.

If we want to understand all the factors that shape mobility patterns in cuisine, we need to look beyond these issues and incorporate other structural, institutional and cultural conditions. First, the occupational structure of a field affects the rate of horizontal mobility. In organizational fields where there are few options for upward

mobility, there may be a higher rate of turnover. This is one of the reasons for the high rate of turnover in the publishing industry, for instance (see Coser, Kadushin and Powell, 1982; Powell, 1985).<sup>76</sup> In fields where there are several options for upward mobility, but mostly not through internal promotion, there is also a high turnover. This is why there is high turnover in orchestras, where promotion is institutionally discouraged for fear of causing tension by turning equal relationships into hierarchical ones; so a second violin would not be promoted to first if the position needs to be filled in the orchestra (see Westby, 1960).

Horizontal mobility may also be increased by particular values that certain organizational fields foster. In some occupations, individuals tend to establish professional ties with colleagues in other firms or areas in the field. This leads them to build loyalties with them and the career itself rather than with employers, and thus increases the rate of turnover. Editors, for instance, establish close relationships with their authors, helping them get published and in return getting valuable information on new talent. As a result of their close relations, they create stronger loyalties with their authors and craft than with the publishing house that employs them, and so are more likely to change jobs frequently (see Coser, Kadushin and Powell, 1982; Powell, 1985). On the contrary, in occupations where social ties are restricted to the work environment, tenure tends to be long, as is the case among doormen with their supers and tenants (see Bearman, 2005: 141-142).

These conditions do not explain the high rates of horizontal mobility in cuisine. This field has a career structure with multiple options for upward mobility, and internal

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<sup>76</sup> There are a few positions above that of editor, but they involve more managerial and administrative tasks than editorial, and many editors are not interested in them (see Coser, Kadushin and Powell, 1982; Powell, 1985).

promotion is one of them. Turnover is very high, and is higher at the lower occupational positions, for which options for upward mobility, and internal promotion, are plentiful. The institutional organization of cuisine, with the long and intense apprenticeship, should generate strong professional ties with mentors and thus decrease turnover. Such ties do exist, and they are sometimes maintained throughout chefs' careers, in some cases formally through work ties, in others informally. But, for the most part, these ties do not prevent individuals from moving on.

The mechanism that might facilitate mobility is the strong commitment actors have to their careers and the detachment from their employers. We would expect chefs to be committed to their careers. Otherwise, it is difficult to understand why they stay in an occupation with such long hours, relatively low pay (for many years, until they reach the higher positions), and treacherous work conditions. And we indeed find that chefs express commitment to their careers when they talk about their jobs and goals.

They remark on another aspect of their occupation that is likely to increase mobility. They repeatedly note the routine side of the job, which leads them to create new challenges for themselves. Moving to a new restaurant is one option that provides them with such challenges.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, occupations that actors are likely to see as creative, even if their daily routines are highly repetitive, may increase actors' disposition to look for

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<sup>77</sup> There is an important difference between chefs' and editors' careers which may shed some light on the conditions for mobility in the two fields. The goal of all cooks is to become executive chefs and eventually chef-owners. In contrast, the goal of all editors, as Coser, Kadushin and Powell (1982; see also Powell, 1985) note, is to remain editors. They do not want to move up to editorial director, editor in chief, or publisher because that would entail spending less time on their craft (editing) and instead most of their time on managerial and administrative tasks. Although in cuisine the higher positions in a restaurant also spend more time in an office, away from the kitchen, and the higher the position the more time individuals spend on administrative tasks (usually sous-chefs are the lowest positions that may involve administrative tasks, and the proportion of such tasks increase from there), this does not prevent all actors to pursue the position of executive chefs and eventually chef-owners.

new challenges to break free from their routines.<sup>78</sup> Lastly, another condition that contributes to the high mobility rate in cuisine is the view of jobs as stepping-stones to other positions, so there is always an incentive to learn new things in another job.

### **Set of Career Trajectories**

We can examine the extent to which these characteristics contribute to mobility in cuisine by looking closely at the set of career trajectories of chefs in my sample. By examining the trajectories we will be able to analyze how the attributes of the culinary field and mobility mechanisms (as outlined above) impinge on the mobility patterns that we observe. Certainly, we find a dispersion of chefs' careers that illustrates the singularity of individual trajectories, but it also illustrates the extent to which social phenomena reach individual careers.<sup>79</sup> Career patterns may be singular, but that does not mean they are purely contingent, nor can they be made sense of as causal chains of events (see Stovel, Savage and Bearman, 1996: 361).<sup>80</sup> Individual professional trajectories take their form from their interdependence with the trajectories of others. They are affected structurally by vacancy chains (White, 1970),<sup>81</sup> and institutionally by the mobility mechanisms which operate in particular labor markets. But trajectories are also affected culturally by the social processes whereby actors orient their strategies to those of others,

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<sup>78</sup> There is a parallel with the publishing industry here. Seeing themselves as creative, editors also look for new jobs to fight the tedium of their daily jobs. In this industry, the institutional and cultural conditions seem more salient than the lack of structural options for upward mobility, because turnover is higher in the positions below editor, above which there are a few occupational stages (see Coser, Kadushin and Powell, 1982).

<sup>79</sup> As Lahire (2003) reminds us, to the extent that the social world is composed of individuals, the singular is not necessarily the unique.

<sup>80</sup> In a similar vein, Rosenfeld (1992: 40; see also Wilensky, 1960) notes that there is an implication of coherence or progress in the notion of a career, which tends to conceal the fact that random careers may exist.

<sup>81</sup> Smith and Abbott (1983: 1163) argue that when career paths are interdependent, career patterns show the sum of individuals' inclusion in vacancy chains during their careers.

and thus in accordance with symbolic meanings that are associated with career moves in their markets, as I will show.

The available data on chefs' career patterns are idiosyncratic in a few ways. First, elite chefs, even young ones, have held multiple positions at many restaurants --this is precisely what leads them to the highest positions in New York City and San Francisco. Reliable data on each and every job they have had (restaurants, occupational positions, and tenure) have not always been available. Sometimes I have had access to their full curriculum vitae, other times chefs have told me about their careers but they, understandably, have mixed the order of jobs they had a long time ago, or provided partial information.<sup>82</sup> Some chefs have been reluctant to give much information on their professional trajectories. Whenever possible, data on chefs' careers have also been obtained from other sources; being elite chefs, these data are mostly available in media.<sup>83</sup> Having outlined the limitations, there are unambiguous patterns in chefs' professional trajectories to give us confidence about their reliability.

What are these patterns? First, career trajectories are remarkably different in New York City and San Francisco. Hence, we will first examine trajectories in New York City and then we will contrast them then to career patterns in San Francisco.

We find a few types of flows of career trajectories in New York City, which vary by chefs' current status (their field location). Overall, we note that the higher chefs' current status, the steadier their trajectory status-wise.<sup>84</sup> But we find a deviation to this

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<sup>82</sup> Chefs typically mentioned the restaurants where they worked, but not necessarily the positions they had. In some cases rank can be inferred, but in others it is not possible.

<sup>83</sup> Though data are mostly available in media sources, their reliability cannot be taken for granted. I have taken measures to look across media outlets, find the ones which are most reliable, and compare data.

<sup>84</sup> I consider a trajectory steady when positions in kitchens have been at restaurants of relatively similar status.

pattern. The most fluctuating paths are among chefs who are at the upper level of mid-status (U-MS) restaurants --restaurants which could be considered borderline between middle (MS) and upper-middle (UMS) status. It is precisely the ambivalent position of these restaurants that explains the deviation, because these are chefs whose whole career has fluctuated between different status levels.<sup>85</sup> Trajectories of chefs currently at mid-status (MS) restaurants tend to be more consistently mid-status. In contrast to “borderline” chefs, limited experience in higher status restaurants in their upward path to become executive chefs places them on the mid-status (MS) level for their executive chef jobs. On the other pole, chefs at high-status (HS) restaurants tend to begin their professional careers at relatively high-status restaurants and remain on that level. The highest status chefs (the four-star chefs) have indeed the most stable career paths, always at high-end restaurants.

We can better grasp the variation in career trajectories by looking at examples of professional paths that are typical of trajectories of actors who have arrived to the four status levels: MS, U-MS, UMS, and HS. Schematic depictions of four characteristic career paths in New York will allow us to observe the flow of trajectories from actors’ first jobs in kitchens up to their current position as executive chefs. This will give us a sense of the career progression from one rank to another, the length of tenure in each job, and the fluctuations in status.

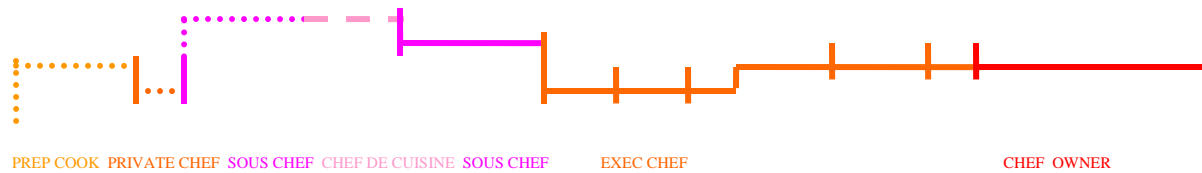
To begin, the trajectory of a chef who is now at a mid-status (MS) restaurant is depicted in Figure 2 below (see the key for coding for this and the following figures).

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<sup>85</sup> We ought to keep in mind that the restaurant categories (middle, upper-middle, and high-status) I am using are constructed with the system of stars and prices from media, which carries a high level of arbitrariness in itself. Restaurants in the upper level of the middle category (U-MS) are in a particularly ambivalent position, since only a slightly different review could have put these restaurants in the upper-middle category (UMS) --a problem we will revisit below.

Figure 2

*Professional Trajectory of a Chef at a Mid-Status (MS) Restaurant in New York City*



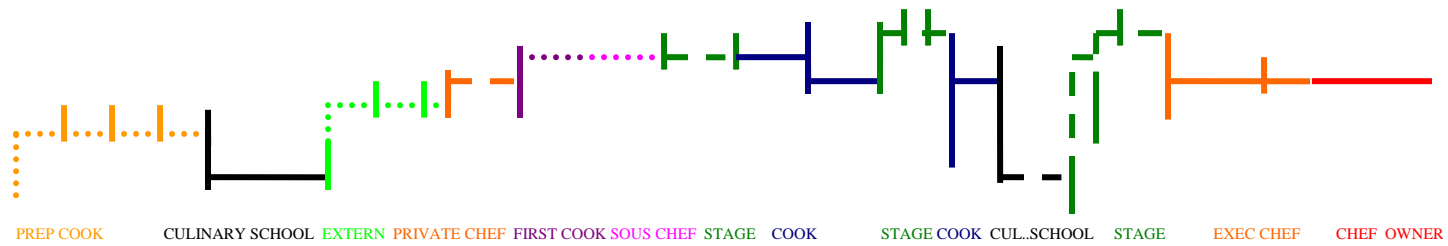
<b>KEY</b>
<b>VERTICAL DIMENSION</b> MEASURES OF STATUS: 1 STAR (APPROX.)
<b>COLORS</b> JOB RANK (INDICATED IN FIGURES)
<b>LINE SHAPES</b> NYC CULINARY FIELD ----- DOMESTIC (not NYC or SF) CULINARY FIELD ..... INTERNATIONAL CULINARY FIELD - - - -
<b>HORIZONTAL DIMENSION</b> MEASURES OF JOB TENURE: 1 YEAR (APPROX.) -----
<b>VERTICAL LINE</b> MARKER OF MOVE TO ANOTHER RESTAURANT

This chef began working in his youth as a prep cook in a mid-status (MS) restaurant in a small town in this country. After a few years, he was hired as a private chef in another town, but did not stay long (about a year). He found a job as a sous-chef in a high-status (HS) restaurant in a nearby town, where he was later promoted to chef de cuisine. Through his social ties in Europe, the restaurant's chef-owner arranged a job for him as a chef de cuisine at a restaurant abroad. International experience facilitated his return and move to New York City, where he found a sous-chef job at a high-status (HS) restaurant, though one with less status than the previous two places where he worked. This job enabled an upward move in rank to the position of executive chef, a move which he made at the expense of restaurant status. He has remained at mid-status (MS) restaurants since then. After several years as executive chef at various places, he opened his own mid-status (MS) restaurant.

Let us observe the trajectory of a chef at the upper border of a mid-status (U-MS) restaurant, represented in Figure 3, to compare it to the mid-status (MS) trajectory.

Figure 3

*Professional Trajectory of Chef at the Upper border of a Mid-Status (U-MS) Restaurant in New York City*

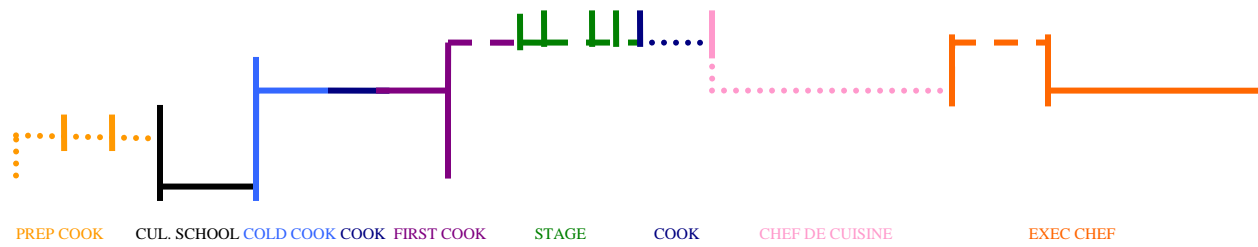


Note the contrast in the path's general flow. This trajectory is highly unsteady in terms of status, and the fluctuations are accompanied by short tenures in each job. This chef has also held a wider range of ranks in kitchens. As the former case, he started out in a small town in this country. After culinary school, he held externships at a few restaurants in other towns. This record led to a brief job as a private chef abroad, after which he returned to this country to work at a higher status restaurant in another town. He was hired as first cook, and shortly after was promoted to sous-chef. Through his social connections in Europe, the restaurant's executive chef sent him for *stages* abroad. He was then ready to return to the country and find a job of a similar status level in New York City, but a lower rank. After a few moves from one position to another and one status level to another, as well as further *stages* in Europe, he became an executive chef at an upper-border mid-status (U-MS) restaurant. Following years as an executive chef, he opened his own restaurant at the upper border of the mid-status (U-MS) level.

The trajectory of a chef at an upper-middle status restaurant (UMS), depicted in Figure 4, shows a steadier flow than the former, yet not as steady as the mid-status (MS) career path.

Figure 4

*Professional Trajectory of a Chef at an Upper-Middle Status (UMS) Restaurant in New York City*

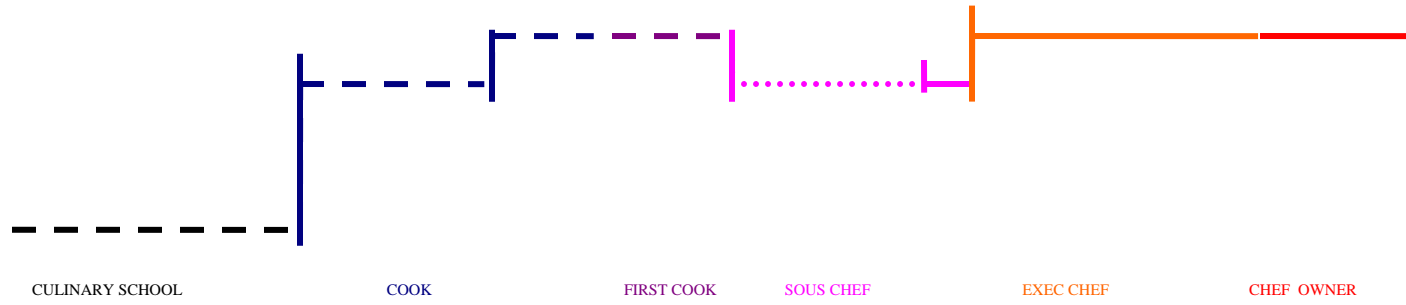


The divergence in the trajectory's flow is clear. There are fewer status fluctuations in this trajectory than in the one represented in Figure 3. After culinary school, this chef mostly worked at restaurants in the upper border of mid-status (U-MS) and upper-middle status (UMS) levels. We note that the steadiness in status is accompanied by longer tenures in each job. This actor also held a narrower range of ranks in his path to the executive chef's position. And it took him fewer jobs all in all to obtain his first executive chef's position. After graduating from school, he gradually moved up in rank at the same restaurant. The restaurant's executive chef sent him abroad to do *stages*. These enabled him to come to a city in the U.S. to find a job as a cook at a restaurant of similar status, and then move to chef de cuisine at a somewhat lower status restaurant. Through social connections, he found a job as an executive chef abroad. After that brief experience, he was able to obtain his first executive chef position in New York City at a restaurant of slightly lower status.

Finally, we will note the degree to which the trajectory of a high-status (HS) chef, as represented in Figure 5, is distinguished from the previous three career paths.

Figure 5

*Professional Trajectory of a Chef at a High-Status (HS) Restaurant in New York City*



This chef, who began his career in Europe, found a job at a high-status (HS) restaurant after culinary school and has never left that level. After a few long-tenured jobs abroad, he came to a city in the United States, where he moved up in rank, at a slight expense of status, though still remaining on the high-status (HS) level. That job provided him with the social ties and symbolic capital to move to New York City, maintaining his sous-chef rank and status level. The job was shortly interrupted by an offer to become the executive chef at a high-end restaurant. After years in the job, he became an owner of the restaurant. As we note, this chef held very few jobs, and moved through few ranks. He has maintained the longest tenures at his jobs, all of which, again, are at the high-status (HS) level.

Contrasting and analyzing the career patterns at the various status levels, the predominant negative association between status fluctuations and occupational positions (what I take to be rank in the restaurant) comes as no surprise. We note that trajectories go up in rank and in status when actors are in the lower positions --up to cook or first cook--, but as they get to the higher positions, advancement in rank comes at the expense of restaurant status. This is particularly the case when actors move to the first executive chef position. Trajectories tend to remain steady status-wise after this job. If trajectories move up in rank *and* status, it is generally because they move down in status of culinary field. Typically, this involves a higher rank job at a higher status restaurant but moving out of New York City to another city in the country.

The negative association between rank and restaurant status is marked in the oscillating career paths of “borderline” (U-MS) chefs. They have experience in high-status (HS) restaurants, but their upward occupational mobility is usually accompanied by

a decrease in restaurant status. When these chefs move from the rank of sous-chef to executive chef, they trade a job at a high-status (HS) restaurant for the position of executive chef at an upper-middle status (UMS) restaurant. On this status level, if individuals want to move up in rank they must sacrifice status.<sup>86</sup> Obviously, steady careers, whether at middle or high-status levels, do not have this association, upward occupational mobility is less likely to have a salient status cost (or, expectedly, gain).

Status fluctuation is inversely associated with tenure in that frequent status change is generally accompanied with frequent mobility, what amounts to a succession of brief tenures in each job, as we note, in particular, in the trajectory of the chef at the upper border of mid-status (U-MS) depicted in Figure 3. This is not a theoretically necessary association: a fluctuating trajectory status-wise could in principle be composed of long tenures. But this is not the case. By the same token, a steady trajectory in terms of status could in theory be composed of short tenures. But we observe that chefs at the two extremes of the status hierarchy, those with steadier trajectories status-wise, have longer tenures. Moreover, chefs at the highest status (HS) level, those whose trajectories are the steadiest in terms of status, have the longest tenures (as we see in Figure 5). Since chefs at the upper border of mid-status (U-MS) and at upper-middle status (UMS) restaurants have short tenures, in the end they have worked at more places. The fact that these are by no means necessary associations points to the significance of the patterns.

We notice that tenure varies by status. However, there is a factor of a different nature, irrespective of status, associated with tenure as well. Actors understand careers in

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<sup>86</sup> Note that this does not necessarily follow from the fact that all these chefs ended up at upper-middle status (UMS) restaurants. In principle, they could obtain their first executive chef position without sacrificing status, or be internally promoted to executive chef, just as middle and high-status (MS and HS) chefs do. By the same token, they could in theory obtain their first executive chef job at middle-status (MS) restaurants instead of at upper-middle status (UMS) places.

a social context with particular socio-cultural models of professionalization. And their understanding of careers impinges on occupational trajectories. Where careers are perceived to be lifetime projects, and where they are centrally rather than individually controlled, tenures are likely to be longer.<sup>87</sup> Occupations that socialize new members through a formal apprenticeship beginning early in their life course and lasting for several years, as is the case in European restaurant kitchens, undoubtedly underscore the cultural model of centrally controlled lifetime careers. Trajectories follow standardized paths, and thus actors experience them to be beyond their control. In effect, chefs socialized in such places have longer tenures, and fewer restaurant jobs in their resumes. Certainly, a few of the foreign-trained chefs are at high-end restaurants, but foreign chefs who are at middle and upper-middle status (MS and UMS) restaurants unmistakably show the pattern as well.

We must understand occupations as socially and culturally constructed models. As such, occupations entail a shared representation of professional projects. Actors incorporate occupational models and actively use them as strategies that are meaningfully oriented to the actions of others in their field. We observe this among European chefs who were socialized into the occupation in the U.S. They have never incorporated career strategies of their countries, where occupations are taken to be life-long commitments and thus lead to stable and long tenures. Instead, these actors have the career patterns typical to the local environment, where careers are taken to be entrepreneurial projects, and thus lead to more unsteady professional trajectories. Because actors develop their actions after what they observe around them, occupational strategies take their meaning

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<sup>87</sup> For analyses of socio-cultural models of careers, see Abbott (1988), Larson (1977), and Stovel, Savage and Bearman (1996).

from the occupational model of the social environment. Whereas traditionally in Europe (as in, typically, Japan) success was signaled through tenure (see Stovel, Savage and Bearman, 1996), in the United States individual achievement is signaled through mobility. The more flexible occupational model established in this country enables actors to perceive their careers to be individually controlled. Understanding they can control their careers through mobility, individuals are likely to move more often (see Abbott, 1988: 132).<sup>88</sup>

A trajectory composed of multiple restaurant jobs (provided they are status-affording jobs) is perceived to be a successful career. It signals skill, for there is an assumption (a relatively reasonable one) that skill is required to be hired, and that it is acquired at those status-affording jobs. Moreover, as long as having multiple skills is perceived to be a positive attribute, wider training in skills, techniques, or styles, which can only be accumulated by working at various restaurants, would be desirable. Lastly, a career comprised of multiple jobs also provides multiple social connections.

Looking into the composition of professional trajectories, we notice that the number of stages in career paths, occupational positions held, and field location of jobs vary by status. As we would expect, it takes an actor fewer steps to get to an executive chef position at a mid-status (MS) restaurant than at a higher status one. Actors who are currently at mid-status (MS) restaurants took an average of about five positions until they obtained their first executive chef job. Actors at higher status restaurants took about eight positions to become executive chefs.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Accordingly, mobility, both within and across occupations, is higher in the United States than abroad (see Abbott, 1988: 132). As Abbott points out, a more formal structure of professions (as the European) makes out-mobility more difficult.

<sup>89</sup> The figure is slightly higher for chefs at high-status (HS) than at upper-middle status (UMS) restaurants.

The variance in the number of steps to get to executive chef is partially explained by the composition of such steps. The likelihood of actors to hold *stages* is one such factor.<sup>90</sup> On one end of the spectrum, chefs with mid-status (MS) careers are unlikely to have held *stages*. On the high-status (HS) end, there is some likelihood for actors to do *stages*, so long as they are not foreign-trained (their model of professionalization makes *stages* somewhat unnecessary for their careers). The large number of foreign chefs in high-status (HS) restaurants results in a low number of *stages* in that category. Actors who are most likely to go through *stages* are those with career trajectories at the upper level of mid-status (U-MS) and upper-middle status (UMS).

Overall, we find that the lower chefs' current status, the less likely they are to have any work experience abroad, whether a *stage* or a paid job. A causal explanation may want to assert that international experience leads to high-status careers. But, by the same token, high-status careers lead to international experience. International experience certainly conveys status, necessary for high-status careers. But access to international experience is attained through social networks (mentors with connections with chefs at high-end restaurants), and such networks are more likely to travel through high-status (HS) restaurants. To be sure, chefs at lower status restaurants also have social connections with higher status actors in their field and abroad. But it seems reasonable to assume that a high-status chef's recommendation to send a cook to somebody else's restaurant would have priority over a lower status chef's recommendation.

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However, the total figure for chefs at high-status (HS) restaurants is not as high as it may otherwise be because a few of the actors at these restaurants are foreign. As we know, these chefs have lower mobility rates.

<sup>90</sup> *Stages* only partially explain the variance in number of steps in professional trajectories given that more chefs have only one than multiple *stages*.

The dual quality of international experience and high-status careers explains why some chefs obtain a *stage* or a short experience at high-end restaurants (most likely abroad, seldom locally) later in their trajectories, before an upward move in either occupational positions or restaurant status. We only find that actors do *stages* in more advanced phases in their trajectories when their careers have led them to upper-middle (UMS) or high-status (HS) restaurants. In these cases in particular, *stages* involve moving beyond basic training. Actors seek to perfect particular skills or acquire expertise in specific techniques. If actors with lower status careers have any international experience, it is earlier in their professional trajectories. Presumably, they lack the social connections to obtain such placements and move beyond the skills they have already acquired, and this is reflected in their careers.

Just as international experience is positively associated with status, national experience in culinary fields other than New York City or San Francisco (the two top domestic culinary fields) is negatively associated with it. Insofar as all other culinary fields in the country are lower in status, getting a job in those fields negatively affects careers.<sup>91</sup> Domestic experience in lower status fields (once actors have already worked in New York or San Francisco) is rare, and we only find it among chefs whose trajectories have led them to mid-status (MS) restaurants. Signaling low status, such experience is unlikely to enable upward mobility in the field.

To briefly summarize career patterns in New York City, we have seen that trajectories are generally characterized by status fluctuations and short tenures, which

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<sup>91</sup> I am not considering here the initial experience in lower status domestic fields, the first restaurant jobs actors have in their youth. Most chefs started in lower status domestic fields. What is consequential for their careers is a move to those fields after the first cook position in a restaurant in New York or San Francisco.

results in a high number of jobs before actors become executive chefs. We observed that status and length of tenure are correlated in that steadier trajectories status-wise come with longer tenures in each job, and that occupational mobility and status are negatively associated, as upward moves in rank occur at the expense of restaurant status. Finally, we saw that upward mobility goes through a fairly standardized, gradual occupational ladder, and that actors frequently move up in ranks by going to other restaurants.

We do not find these same patterns in San Francisco.<sup>92</sup> First, career paths have an overall steadier flow in terms of status, and tenures are generally much longer, even for the (in New York) typically brief cook positions. This results in actors having fewer stages before they become executive chefs. We do find the correlation between steadiness in status and length of tenure in San Francisco --but in this case it is *positive*. Actors tend to steadily move up both in status and rank, if not throughout their entire careers, at least for a good portion of them. The standardized, gradual occupational ladder we saw in the New York labor market is replaced in San Francisco by longer tenures. Actors regularly skip seemingly key occupational positions in the upward path to executive chef. Half the individuals I interviewed moved directly from cook to executive chef. Additionally, half the individuals in the sample (not the same half, there is only an overlap of two cases) were internally promoted to executive chefs.<sup>93</sup>

We can see the marked contrast of career patterns in San Francisco, relative to New York, with the trajectory of a chef at an upper-middle status (UMS) restaurant, as depicted in Figure 6 below (see the above key for coding for the figure).

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<sup>92</sup> Though the San Francisco sample is smaller than that of New York City, the findings show unmistakable career patterns that differ from those of New York.

<sup>93</sup> Given that only two actors were internally promoted from cook to executive chef, we can reject the possibility of an association between the non-standardized, non-gradual occupational ladder (i.e. skipping the position of sous-chef) and the mechanism of internal promotion.

Figure 6

*Professional Trajectory of a Chef at an Upper-Middle Status (UMS) Restaurant in San Francisco*



This trajectory shows a typical career in San Francisco. The status flow is steadier and the job tenures are much longer than in any trajectory in New York. Also, the chef has moved from the rank of cook to that of executive chef --through internal promotion--, without having ever had the position of first cook, sous-chef or chef de cuisine. Overall, we can see that the chef has held few positions in his career, and he has worked at few restaurants.

As is exemplified in this trajectory, actors in San Francisco rarely have international professional experience. When they do, they are likely to do *stages* late in their career trajectories, even right before becoming chef-owners. As in New York City, it is rare for actors to have experience in other domestic fields after entering this one.<sup>94</sup> Being the fields with the highest status in the country, New York and San Francisco are relatively closed. Actors are unlikely to temporarily leave them for any lower status field, but also few chefs with professional trajectories in other domestic fields (trajectories beyond their initial stints in restaurants) enter these two fields. Presumably, they lack the status.

San Francisco has a more localized labor market than New York. New entrants are likely to be from the area. One factor that may partly account for this is the standing of foreign cuisines in the two cities. French cuisine has a particularly high standing in New York, which puts French professionals at a clear advantage.<sup>95</sup> Making French food increases chefs' likelihood of acquiring high-status, and so does hiring French staff. French chefs (even those who have been in the country for over twenty years) are likely

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<sup>94</sup> Only one chef temporarily moved to a nearby area as an executive chef at a higher status restaurant. This is also one of the few chefs with international experience. He became a chef-owner in San Francisco subsequent to this move.

<sup>95</sup> Three out of the five restaurants awarded with four stars by the *New York Times* (the highest category) in New York City, during the year 2006, are classified as French, and they all have a French chef-owner.

to fill the higher positions in their kitchens with French professionals, thus blocking those positions to careers of locally-trained actors. The status of French cuisine is more controversial in San Francisco, a city with a local culinary tradition (the so-called California cuisine, of San Francisco origin), which has high status and roots in Italian food. We are more likely to find high-end restaurants classified as French (still plentiful) run by nationally-trained chefs than in New York.

The culinary field in San Francisco is an archetypical labor market where mobility occurs primarily through internal promotion and social networks. As we will expect in such markets, length of tenure (because it entails investment on the part of employers and competitive advantage for employees) is associated with internal promotion. In effect, there is a high proportion of actors who have had long tenures and who have moved up in rank through internal promotion. Others obtained jobs through social connections, which are particularly effective in a field that is relatively small and closed.

The strengthened internal labor market and tight social networks allow actors to skip otherwise key occupational stages, such as that of sous-chef. Either long tenures or personal recommendations from chefs at restaurants of similar status appear to be sufficiently effective trade-offs for experience in key occupational positions in the upward path to executive chef. Furthermore, the strengthened internal labor market and social networks also allow for unusual trajectories. There are more elite chefs in San Francisco without the constant professional trajectories in cooking we observe in New York City. Some of them came to the kitchen from long tenures as service staff, and without formal culinary training. A few others spent some time in different professional endeavors --mostly arts-- before moving to cuisine, and one even had an impasse in the

middle of his culinary career (something I have not heard of in New York) to pursue a college degree that was, nonetheless, related to food.

If we want to understand the career patterns we find in New York and San Francisco, we must examine the particular attributes of each field, as I have argued. But we must also look at the attributes of each field to understand how actors subjectively manage their careers, and develop their sense of selves as chefs in the process.

### **Career Structures and Professional Self-Concepts**

In this chapter, we have seen how institutionalized career paths --the entryway to the field and mobility patterns-- inform individual trajectories in New York City and San Francisco. We observed that the most common mechanisms through which actors further their careers in cuisine are internal mobility and social connections. And we came to understand that these mechanisms are the most effective because of the particular attributes that are relevant for culinary careers: status, trust, and multiplicity of skills. We have seen that where mobility signals positive values and leads to success, individuals are more likely to move often.

Beyond informing professional trajectories, institutionalized career paths also inform professional self-concepts. In cuisine, this begins with the process whereby actors turn cooking in restaurants into their careers, as we saw that early stints at restaurant shape actors' perception of a career choice as something that "just happened." Beyond the entryway to the field, we will see that the social organization of work in restaurant kitchens has a profound influence in actors' construction of their professional self-concepts.

We find that in areas where individuals do not require an institutional affiliation to do their work, such as music, actors need a strong identification with their occupation to define themselves professionally. And indeed, in these areas where they not only lack an institutional affiliation to anchor their occupational identity, but may also not even earn a living off of their occupation, actors begin developing their self-concepts early on, and their self-concepts become particularly salient (see Kadushin, 1969). The opposite is true of medical students, who have a lower need of a professional self-concept in their first years at school on account of the expectation that they will have an institutional affiliation, and a salary. But medical students do not develop their self-concepts early, as Becker et al (1961) show, also because they are constantly denied responsibility, which reminds them they are not doctors.

If we follow these arguments, we would conclude that in cuisine, having an affiliation with a restaurant and a salary from early on, actors would have a less salient need for a self-concept. The social organization of work further discourages the development of chefs' self-concepts because actors mainly follow orders until they get to the highest occupational positions. They are constantly denied responsibility --and along with it, training-- and reminded they are not chefs.

Nonetheless, the social organization of work, with the intensive socialization, and socializing, does afford them with a strong *occupational* identity, a sense of membership to the trade as opposed to an identification with a specific position --that of chef. The occupational identity sets the conditions for actors to commit to a career in cuisine. We have seen that the more narrowed education they receive in culinary school, the investment in the long and intense apprenticeship in kitchens, and the likelihood that they

will mostly socialize with peers, all increase the chances that actors will develop a strong commitment to a culinary career. We thus find a decoupling between the occupational identity incorporated early on and chefs' professional self-concepts, a decoupling which is only sustainable because actors are committed to their careers. In time, they may gradually turn their occupational identity into their professional self-concepts.

The career path to attain a chef's position looks, to outsiders, long and arduous, posing the question of how actors commit and maintain the commitment to their careers. Kitchens are rigid hierarchical organizations, and so are elite culinary fields. Nonetheless, we find that actors do not experience such career path as daunting. What happens is that there are various forces acting upon individuals and influencing their occupational identities and choices, and actors respond to them by activating different dispositions. Therefore, they feel they make their own choices and control their own careers. When they move from one job to the next, having the sense that they are building their careers (what skills to learn, what restaurant to go to, how long to stay), they are responding to the demands of acquiring a multiplicity of skills, accumulating status, and enacting work ties. And they signal these attributes precisely through their mobility patterns. They respond to these multiple demands by making particular choices, and thus they feel their careers are in their hands. As they activate different dispositions throughout their careers, they construct their professional self-concepts.<sup>96</sup>

The frequent mobility and seeming ease with which actors drop jobs and obtain new ones strengthens their sense of agency in shaping their professional self-concepts. To

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<sup>96</sup> Along these lines, Faulkner ([1983] 1987) suggests that the fact that success or status may be unpredictable, because it is to some extent random (not an outcome of productivity, success, or networks), gives individuals pleasure because it gives them a sense that there is hope in fields where the hierarchical organization may otherwise make them too hopeless.

be sure, the tight social networks make the relative ease with which actors move through the field possible. And the institutionalization of mobility as a positive signal (more salient in New York than in San Francisco) encourages frequent mobility, a positive signal that actors constantly validate (to different degrees in the two cities) through their mobility patterns. It may be worth considering if, moving more often, New York chefs have a stronger sense of agency in controlling their careers than San Francisco chefs. Though these *by no means* lack any sense of agency in what concerns their careers, they are however less likely to underscore their individual control of their professions than New York chefs.

The representation of careers as episodic further reinforces the perceived ease of mobility. Culinary careers are not understood as exhaustive diachronic progressions. Rather, they are represented by highlights in chefs' occupational histories, by particular jobs that helped them move upward.<sup>97</sup> The representation of careers as episodic lessens the burden of each career move as, if proven undesirable, it may be reversed without severe cost. So long as careers are made of highlights and not of each and every job held, actors can take chances knowing that they need not be of major consequence.

Another factor further underscores chefs' agentic sense of selves. They are constantly projecting their careers to the future, and interpret steps in their careers in light of future moves. This pattern is also stronger in New York, as chefs in this field are more likely to highlight their instrumental control of their careers. Actors can more easily single out specific instances in their trajectories as decisions they actively made for building their own careers when careers are perceived as episodic. Just as freelancers who

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<sup>97</sup> Culinary careers are in this sense akin to freelancers' such as filmmakers or musicians (see Faulkner, [1983] 1987).

compose music for the film industry, careers in cuisine are “lived forward and understood backwards” (Faulkner, [1983] 1987: 236). Chefs’ present position in the field is always at the same time a retrospective construction and a step toward future goals. Along with their occupational trajectories, chefs’ self-concepts are made of an episodic retrospective of their status (signaled through their restaurant jobs), their trust (through their social networks), and their culinary authorship (through the food they have created in the restaurants where they have worked). Just as their occupational trajectories, their self-concepts are in motion, constantly shaped by new career moves.

Chefs understand their professional selves in these terms, but also in terms of their culinary creations. To be sure, their understanding of their careers cannot be dissociated from how they subjectively manage their culinary authorship and their relations with other chefs in their field. Thus, we will turn to these aspects to examine how actors develop their careers as they navigate the field and seek to differentiate themselves from their peers.

### Chapter 3: Culinary Authorship

#### Culinary Production, Organizational Differentiation, and Professional Self-Concepts

“It is not my purpose to destroy genius  
or reduce it to something else,  
but to make its human situation  
easier to understand”

Elias

*Mozart. Portrait of a Genius.*

#### Culinary Production: Authorship

Joshua Bell, the celebrated violinist who has played in the best concert halls all over the world, gave a performance in January 2007 that he found stressful and, in his words, gave him butterflies.<sup>98</sup> It was a performance unlike all others, an experiment organized by the *Washington Post* to have him play incognito at a subway station in Washington D.C. to observe passersbys’ reactions (see Weingarten, 2007).<sup>99</sup> Why was he nervous about playing in the subway with his experience performing before hundreds of discerning and critical audiences for years? Because, he said, he knows he has been already accepted and validated when he plays for ticket-holders (see Weingarten, 2007).

If he has already been validated in concert halls it is because, as Bell well knows, his work is associated with his name. His audiences know who is playing the piece, and they care about who is playing it. It is a similar case in high cuisine, where elite diners associate the food with the name of the chef or the restaurant where they have it. We find that in cultural fields, such as cuisine or music, where products are fundamentally

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<sup>98</sup> An early version of the analysis presented in this chapter was published in *Sociological Forum* (see Leschziner, 2007). I would like to thank the journal for their permission to use previously published material.

<sup>99</sup> I wish to thank Paul McLean for drawing my attention to this experiment.

associated with their creators' names, production is *individualized*. Individualized production turns creators' names into capital, as illustrated in Bell's realization that such capital was missing when he played in the subway station. And because it turns names into capital, individualized production makes reputation more salient. Just as an anonymous music performer does not have the a priori validation, his performance -- whether good or bad--, has no major consequences for his standing either.

Musicians, chefs, and cultural creators in general, develop their careers in a field that pre-exists them. They learn from their predecessors and contemporaries, and borrow ideas from them. In some fields, the connection between a new idea and the original idea it draws inspiration from is acknowledged. Scholarly work is an exemplar, where actors use references to give credit to those persons whose ideas they borrow or upon whose work they build. In giving credit, they make those relations explicit. In other fields, such as cuisine, the connection between a new idea and its source is not made explicit. We will find that where influence is not made explicit, actors use different mechanisms to subjectively manage their authorship and their relations with their peers than in areas where influence is acknowledged.

In this chapter, we will explore how the particular characteristics of culinary production mediate actors' subjective management of their authorship, and their relations with others. Focusing on this phenomenon, we will not be concerned with how relations among social actors shape culinary production at the level of the field (we will visit this aspect in chapter 5).<sup>100</sup> In essence, we will look at the relationship between culinary

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<sup>100</sup> We have much insight on the relationship between structural positions and particular types of social action thanks to the contributions of field theory, neo-institutionalism and network theory. There has been focus on the social position of individuals in the field (Bourdieu, 1976; [1984] 1993; [1992] 1996; Burt, 2004; Collins, 1998; McLaughlin, 2001; Monin and Durand, 2003; Rao, Monin and Durand, 2003; 2005;

production and relations among social actors in the opposite direction: how the specificities of culinary production mediate relations between actors. Relatively little attention has been paid in sociology to the relationship between creators and products. Insights on this relationship mostly come from the sociology of science's interest in the material and social dimensions of scientific research (see Knorr Cetina, 1999; Latour, [1987] 1997), as well as from Latour's (2005) actor-network theory, where he proposes to conceive of objects as social actors. The importance of production in the management of authorship and social relations proposed here is more in line with Marx' ([1845] 1965; [1859] 1970) understanding that the social conditions of the field of activity, *what* individuals produce and *how* they do it (what he called the mode of production), affect relations among actors.

In this chapter, we will come to understand how chefs deal with some of the characteristics of their field of activity, namely their relations with the products they make, in order to subjectively manage their authorship and differentiate themselves from other actors. We will examine chefs' discursive patterns to analyze how they deal with these issues, and we will note that as they manage their authorship and differentiation from others, they also subjectively deal with their standing in the organizational field.

Just as the fundamental attachment of creators to their products makes reputation more salient, it increases the significance of authorship. In a field such as high cuisine, where chefs get reputation for creating food that is extra-ordinary and not simply nourishing, being able to make claims about their ideas for their dishes is fundamental.

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Sawyer, 2003), the characteristics of social connections within the organization (Clemens, 1997; Clemens and Cook, 1999; Ferguson, 1998; 2004; Hollingsworth, 2000; Morrill, Forthcoming; Owen-Smith and Powell, 2004; White and White, 1965), and the connections between actors across organizations (Clemens, 1997; Clemens and Cook, 1999; Giuffre, 1999; McLaughlin, 2001; Morrill, Forthcoming; Owen-Smith and Powell, 2004).

To be sure, along with authorship come imperatives of differentiation. Making products that are distinguishable from others offered in the field is a requisite for being able to make claims of authorship and therefore earn reputation.

Authorship and organizational differentiation are fundamental, but they are difficult to attain in cuisine. First, a new dish can only go so far in being different from what other chefs are serving in their restaurants. Dishes still have to be edible, and there is so much novelty that chefs can introduce in their food without offering dishes that customers find so awkward that they will not order, or if they ordered them, that they will not like. Chefs must make food that is, to some extent, familiar to diners. Making familiar food means making dishes that diners are eating at other restaurants. Because culinary creation thus occurs through minor changes, the boundary between one chef's recipe and another's is fuzzy. Second, while chefs draw on their predecessors' and peers' ideas to create their dishes, their knowledge-exchange is not made explicit, and more importantly, it is not legally regulated. Recipes cannot be copyrighted. Like all books, cookbooks are copyrighted, but copyrights apply to books as objects, they do not protect the recipes in them. Recipes can only rarely be patented, when they involve complex technical procedures, but even if they could be patented, chefs almost never try to do it. Chefs similarly almost never try to obtain trademarks or trade secrets, two other forms of intellectual property.<sup>101</sup> And they almost never seek legal punishment of those who transgress shared norms as to how far they can go in borrowing ideas (for instance, copying entire dishes). They do use other mechanisms to regulate these kinds of transgressions, a characteristic that leads Fauchart and von Hippel (2006) to call cuisine a

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<sup>101</sup> Trade secrets are a form of intellectual property that protects any kind of information used in an organization that may afford a potential economic advantage.

norm-based knowledge-exchange regime. The fuzzy nature of culinary production makes claims of authorship more fragile and attempts at differentiation more difficult. It consequently makes relations among chefs more difficult as well.

As in cultural fields in general, in cuisine reputation rests on authenticity. I follow Peterson (1997; see also Rao, Monin and Durand, 2005) in maintaining that authenticity requires two qualities: conformity to a style and originality. Constantly changing styles makes an actor seem inauthentic. Yet, loyalty to a style without any novelty appears as nothing but a copy of existing work. In fields where cultural production is individualized, targeted at an external audience (which is thus lay), and for-profit, conformity and originality are two imperatives co-existing in tension. Products cannot be too original because they must be recognizable for the audience, yet they ought to be distinct enough to stand out among competitors, and earn the creator reputation. This does not mean that a pursuit of reputation is assumed for all actors, but that the tension between conformity to stylistic traditions and organizational differentiation introduces real constraints on cultural creation in a field. And actors are, and need to be, aware of some of these constraints if they want to survive in a competitive market. We must understand cultural production as partially purposeful as individuals make decisions about their products and professional trajectories, partially bounded by incorporated principles of perception and creation, and partially contingent.

I begin the chapter with an analysis of the co-existing imperatives of conformity and originality, and a discussion of how chefs deal with these seemingly contradictory pressures in their culinary production. Then I examine their subjective mechanisms to manage the tendencies toward orienting their actions to what their peers are doing, and

differentiating themselves from them. I analyze their disattention to their knowledge-exchange practices as they make remarks about eating out and reading cookbooks, and explain how such patterns of disattention help chefs subjectively make claims of authorship and differentiate themselves from others. I then explore how in subjectively establishing (and severing) links with peers in the field, chefs blur their organizational distance to their competitors. I conclude the chapter with some observations on how actors subjectively manage their culinary production and self-concepts.

### **Conformity and Originality**

We can observe the tension between conformity and originality in culinary creation from two perspectives: the institutional dynamics of culinary production, and individuals' subjective management of the co-existing pressures. From an institutional perspective, we note the tension between conformity and originality in an interplay between tradition and innovation that is central in cuisine. Insofar as innovation is understood as an indicator of creativity, and thus has an intrinsic value, we are going to find that many chefs tend to innovate. They may innovate by serving ingredients that are new to the realm of high cuisine, whether because they are new imports from exotic lands, new crops from specialized local farmers, or ingredients that were regularly available but not normally used in high-end restaurants. They may innovate by combining ingredients that were not formerly paired. They may use a new technique that creates unusual textures in usual foodstuffs. Or they may serve dishes with innovative presentations. Every season a new ingredient, ingredient combination, technique or presentation is introduced in elite restaurants. The innovation rapidly spreads to other

restaurants in the field, thus driving culinary creation in a constant flow of fads and fashions (see Hirsch, 1972).

But chefs need to deliver food that is somewhat familiar to their audience to ensure their commercial well-being, and they need to be loyal to their culinary styles to maintain their authenticity. This means that not only they cannot innovate too much, but also that they cannot adopt *any* innovation because some innovations simply do not fit in some culinary styles. Their restaurants are known for a type of food and a type of atmosphere, so customers go with built-in expectations for a given dining experience. Any innovation chefs make must fit in their styles. They may want to use an ingredient that has been introduced this season and has acquired a faddish status, but often the ingredient is not consistent with their styles. This most commonly occurs with Asian foodstuffs that are still viewed as too exotic to be adapted to use in the context of western cuisines, or with ingredients that are too down-market for high-status restaurants, or alternatively ingredients that are too expensive for restaurants' price points.

Chefs are certainly aware of the constraints the tension between conformity and originality imposes on their creational potential. They mostly experience three constraints when they create dishes: (first) they must adhere to a style, be it a regional cuisine their food represents, the restaurant's style, or their own signature style; (second) they must make dishes that are familiar to their audience; and (third) they must create dishes that are distinguishable from what other chefs are serving.

Actors are most likely to perceive the constraint to make dishes that are familiar to their audiences because, being independent of the particularities of their own styles or restaurants, it is experienced as the most limiting on their creational aspirations. They

often complain about customers' demands. They may point to their limited palates, because they are not adventurous to try things they do not know. They may complain about customers' conservative preferences, because they are likely to order the same dishes over and over again, so chefs must always have staple foodstuffs on their menus such as chicken breast, steak, salmon or tuna, which they generally find to be bland and intrinsically boring ingredients. And they cannot take their "signature dishes" off the menu because is all customers want. They may be critical of customers' dietary restrictions because they generally do not wish to have such concerns limit their culinary creations, and because customers' special requests make kitchen operations during dinner service difficult, since replacing ingredients slows down the mechanization of the cooking line. They are critical of dietary restrictions which tend to change with dietary fads, most famously the earlier proscription of fats which was recently replaced with the vilification of carbohydrates. And they are critical of allergies they believe are made up, typically customers who do not wish to eat onions or garlic, or perhaps cream.

Young chefs at elite restaurants are more likely to voice complaints about limitations on their creational aspirations. This is a more acute problem for them because their reputation is yet to be established and it is more difficult to distinguish themselves from others to foster their reputation if they have to conform to familiar styles. But also, young chefs experience it as a more acute problem because, given their more limited experience, it is more difficult for them to distance themselves from the creational aspirations they see as central in their chefs' roles. Elite chefs who have been around longer have already proven their creational potential, and they can better distance

themselves from their creational aspirations and not be frustrated by what they already know to be a fact of their occupation --that it is, after all, a service industry.

We know well that in any organizational field there is going to be an imperative of differentiation, even if such an imperative is stronger in some fields than others. But the drive for differentiation is also sometimes a subjectively experienced goal. Some chefs experience a desire to *be creative*, and strive to produce unique dishes. Many of them have an inclination to regularly renew their dishes to counterbalance what is otherwise an extremely routine job. Recall that chefs generally spend evenings standing in the kitchen to ensure consistency in their dishes; they overlook the cooking and make sure that dishes taste and look exactly the same over hours, days, weeks, and months. They counterbalance this daunting routine to different degrees; in some restaurants chefs only change their menus four times a year, and in others they may partially or fully modify them daily.

Knowing they must satisfy customers' demands while also pursuing a degree of originality, whether to counterbalance the tedium of their job, fulfill their creational aspirations, or distinguish themselves from others, chefs manage the tension between conformity and originality through what they experience as a *balancing act*. The general awareness of the import of such balancing act is illustrated in the following excerpt from a young chef at a high-status restaurant in New York, who is invested in realizing his creative aspirations but is also mindful of the value of conformity.

And for me, I like to kind of incorporate these new techniques with things that taste very good. And that, for me, that's the type of food that I like to cook. I put these subtle changes, in the techniques, things that I've learned, things that I've come up with myself but the *main* thing is that the food tastes good, and that people want to return for it.... It's like walking the balance, you have to stay balanced, you know.... Like, on the menu, for instance, some of them are pretty safe choices. I try to balance safe with things that are a little bit more out there.

So I think people like to take chances with appetizers and not so much with entrées, so they'll be a little bit more dangerous in the beginning.... Most of the dishes on the menu, a good deal of, like 60%, are things that I've never seen before. (Chef at a high-end restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

How does this chef manage to create dishes he has never seen before? As all his peers, he reads culinary magazines and trade publications, searches the web, eats out, and travels. Chefs constantly learn about new ingredients and flavor combinations to create fresh and original ideas. Introducing ingredients that no one else in their field has gives them an edge on their competitors, so they may try to buy the first crop of the season's produce before anybody else, or import an unknown ingredient, or fly in the best quality fish from abroad. Creating ingredient pairings that are unusual in the field is another important means to distinguish themselves.

To be sure, the only way for chefs to know that an ingredient or an ingredient pairing is new is by being knowledgeable about what their peers in the field are doing. This knowledge allows them to maintain the fine balance between conformity and originality. They monitor culinary trends, restaurant openings, and chefs' moves in their city, and not in other cities. This focus is reasonable, because they orient their actions to their competitors, and their competitors are only in their city. But also, local chefs are more accessible, it is easier to monitor what they are serving in their restaurants, what ingredients they are using, how they are pairing them, and how they are presenting them. Furthermore, seeing what local chefs are doing is especially useful because they are cooking for the same audiences. Looking into what those in France, Italy or Spain are doing is helpful to get new ideas, but emulating what they do is riskier because diners' preferences are not the same in Europe as in the local context. Seeing what local peers are doing is also useful because they have access to the same ingredients, and even the same

purveyors. Just as ideas from chefs in other countries are sometimes not applicable to the local field, the ingredients they use can sometimes not be procured.

Though all local chefs are accessible, some are more visible than others. In particular, high-status chefs frequently appear in events, media and publications. Therefore, information about their work diffuses more rapidly through the field. Of course, it is not only their visibility that makes high-status chefs more likely to be emulated. Actors will look to emulate those with the highest prestige in the field, so if the ideas of high-status chefs spread, it is because others purposefully attend to their work. Insofar as local high-status actors are more accessible, visible, and influential, others are more likely to be familiar with their work than with anybody else's work. This is a pattern also found among French elite chefs (Rao, Monin and Durand, 2003; 2005).

Attending to high-status chefs is also sensible because they tend to be the first in the field to have access to the new meat and produce in the season, and they may use some of these ingredients in their food. Precisely because of their status, they have connections with the best purveyors both in domestic and international markets, *and* receive preferential service from purveyors. When an ingredient first arrives in the season, purveyors are likely to let high-status chefs know first, so others can learn about new foodstuffs by monitoring high-status chefs. These chefs are also more likely than others to have connections with peers in other culinary fields, so they are likely to be the first to import new ideas. They introduce new ingredients, techniques or flavor combinations that others go on to emulate. There is plenty of evidence of this pattern of emulation from information obtained from menus of restaurants included in the sample, and complemented with menus from other restaurants in New York and San Francisco.

Most menus have the same ingredients. This is in part because they have ingredients preferred by customers --such as chicken, steak, salmon or tuna--, and in part because the new and unusual ingredients diffuse rapidly in the field. In a given season an elite chef begins using pomegranate syrup --originally Mediterranean--, and numerous chefs go on to incorporate it in their food. In the next season another elite chef begins using yuzu juice --from a Japanese citrus fruit--, and soon multiple menus feature yuzu in their dishes. Dishes also consist of the same ingredient pairings. A chef breaks culinary traditions, and socio-cognitive boundaries, using savory ingredients in desserts, and soon thereafter this innovation turns up in many other menus.

Menus also display the use of the same new techniques. A chef introduces the use of chemicals and special equipment for altering food textures and serve foams, and we subsequently see most menus, even at fairly traditional restaurants, incorporate foams in their dishes. Menus also display a similar structuring of the meal. A high-status chef changes the traditional three-course meal structure by serving tasting menus composed of multiple small courses (ranging most commonly from five to ten courses) where customers have no freedom to choose the dishes, and most menus in the field of high cuisine go on to add tasting menus to their offers. Finally, menus also exhibit a similar writing style. A prestigious chef introduces the use of metaphors for naming dishes, or quotation marks for components of dishes, and other chefs follow suit.

Naturally, chefs' collective attention to what others in their field are doing results in the intensification of patterns of conformity and originality, as there is a perennial cycle whereby chefs introduce new elements to distinguish themselves from their peers and their peers emulate their ideas. The balance of conformity and originality is, as I have

suggested, particularly strong in fields where (one) creation is individualized, making reputation more salient, (two) conformity is a requisite for appearing authentic, (three) the audience is external to the field so products must be familiar to them, and (four) originality has an intrinsic positive value because it is taken as an indicator of creativity.

The best way to analyze the coexisting patterns of emulation of chefs who are in the field *and* differentiation from peers is by looking at how they separately manifest themselves in two areas: chefs' rhetorical representations of their work, and their culinary production. On the one hand, we have seen that ingredients, ingredient pairings, presentation of dishes, and menu structure are unambiguous evidence of the pattern of emulation of chefs in the field. On the other hand, chefs' drive to make products that are different from others, an inclination illustrated in the excerpt above, which I observed over and over again when chefs talked about their creational process, leaves no doubt about their perception of the imperative of differentiation. We can paraphrase Marx ([1859] 1970) to propose that just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he (or she) thinks of himself (or herself), so can we not analyze the logic of creation in a field only with chefs' discourses on their practices. Rather, we must analyze the patterning of their discourses in light of the characteristics of their field of activity --the mode of cultural production.<sup>102</sup>

Even more revealing evidence of the imperative of differentiation and the emulation of others in the field is what chefs do *not* say. There is a systematic apprehension, and at times refusal, to talk about practices that are not only customary, but

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<sup>102</sup> In the Preface to "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy" Marx ([1859] 1970: 15) writes "Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production."

also required for chefs to carry out their jobs successfully. We know that actors must have information about what their peers are doing to be competitive, so they have to monitor restaurants that have a similar culinary style to theirs. They also have to get new ideas to be able to regularly renew their menus and maintain a degree of originality, and we can gather that cookbooks are relatively good and easily available sources of ideas. We also know that they serve food emulating high-status chefs in their field.

The systematic apprehension to talk about these practices amounts to a social organization of dissattention. As Zerubavel (2002) points out in the sociology of denial, ignoring is as active and deliberate as the practice of noticing.<sup>103</sup> We are not speaking here of a psychological inclination for denial. Attending or ignoring are socio-cognitive practices that only exist insofar as actors collectively maintain them. An intersubjective understanding that attending or ignoring are better maintained because they are somehow beneficial for the life of the group has to exist for actors to uphold such socio-cognitive patterns, as I will show.<sup>104</sup> These socio-cognitive patterns are context-specific; actors may attend to a given regular practice in one context and ignore it in another. Indeed, we find that actors may both ignore and acknowledge a practice in the same conversation, depending on their perception of what is being talked about. The context-specificity of socio-cognitive patterns is consistent with the conception that cognitive schema are properties of both particular groups and settings (DiMaggio, 2002; Eliasoph and Lichterman, 2003).

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<sup>103</sup> Zerubavel (2002: 24-25) notes that there is an “optical socialization” that produces the normative organization of attending and ignoring.

<sup>104</sup> This understanding is certainly reminiscent of Goffman’s (1956) analysis of embarrassment, where he shows that an otherwise uncomfortable situation is made less socially disruptive by individuals’ cooperation in downplaying the significance of the scene, by for instance looking the other way, or making jokes about it.

Having appreciated that what is not seen, not done, not spoken, is at least as sociologically informative as overt practices, scholars have recently begun to call attention to these traditionally overlooked areas of social life (see Brekhus, 2003; Eliasoph, 1998; Eliasoph and Lichterman, 2003; Lamont, 1992; Lichterman, 2005; Mullaney, 2005; Zerubavel, 2002). For our purposes, looking at what remains unspoken illuminates two main patterns: (one) the practices that, though we know to be regular in action, actors ignore or deny, and generally deal with apprehensively in their discourses, and (two) actors' rhetorical management of the imperative of differentiation.

By examining actors' discursive practices, what they openly talk about, what they reluctantly address, and what they ignore, we can in effect analyze how chefs manage their relations with others given the social conditions of the field where they work.<sup>105</sup> We note chefs' apprehension to talk about some of their practices in their discourses, as they deny they look into what other chefs in their field are doing, or consult cookbooks, or take inspiration from peers, when there is evidence to the contrary. Other discursive forms are the justifications they always provide with regard to these practices. Whether they openly talk about going out to eat or deny it, their justifications tend to underscore they do not go to restaurants to look into their peers' work but for other purposes, as I will outline. They also have non-verbal expressive forms that show their apprehension with reference to these practices, which I have repeatedly observed in interviews. There is an uncomfortable tone in their voice, a change in their facial and bodily expressions, or their general attitude.

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<sup>105</sup> I distinguish unspoken practices and chefs' management of differentiation analytically. As the examples below make clear, they are overlapped.

## **Disattention**

### *Eating Out*

Just as scholars need to be informed about current publications in their sub-disciplines but also be familiar with the tendencies in their discipline as a whole, and entrepreneurs need to know what their close competitors are doing but also be knowledgeable with market trends more generally, chefs need to be informed about what their peers in their market niche are producing and about the trends in the field at large. Sometimes they go out to eat on their own, when they have the time and the inclination. Some restaurants have established systems to send chefs and cooks out to eat, and when they do so they pay the bills. They send chefs and cooks out when new restaurants open, or every given period of time. Sometimes restaurants send their chefs on trips to eat in a high-status culinary field, so chefs eat in multiple restaurants for a week, and restaurants pay for the whole expense as well. Other restaurants have informal mechanisms to ensure that the staff visit restaurants in the field. Sometimes chefs and cooks are simply encouraged to go out to eat, then the cost is not necessarily covered. Other times, chefs (those who own their restaurants) take the staff out to eat on occasion, and then they cover the expense.

We know that chefs go out to eat for two purposes: to look into their peers' work and ensure they are competitive, and to get new ideas. They look at the food, the service, tableware, décor, and beverage program. They often order numerous dishes, perhaps eating a little of each, to sample as much food as possible. They attend to the quality of ingredients, ingredient pairings, and presentation. They take note of the price-quality

ratio. All this information helps them both assess whether they are competitive, and get new ideas they could adapt to their restaurant.

Chefs talk about their practices of going out to restaurants in various ways. As I have suggested, the degree to which they openly talk about this common practice varies, but the apprehension about discussing the topic --with field outsiders, as is an interviewer-- is consistent. Given that they go out to eat for various reasons, and look into various aspects of the restaurant business when they eat out, they can talk about the practice and frame it in multiple ways. Of course, chefs go out to eat for work and for pleasure too, after all, how could chefs not like food?

Certainly there are too many reasons to cite and explain why they go out to eat. Yet, there is no randomness in the reasons actors select to justify the practice; they tend to focus on any reason *but* their need to see their competitors' culinary production. We see here what Cerulo (2006) calls cognitive asymmetry, whereby actors in a social group (an organization, a field of activity, a society) share a cultural pattern of giving unequal attention to different types of factors. Chefs rarely mention they go out to eat to look into their peers' culinary production, and if asked they often deny they go out to eat for work purposes. Among those who say they go out to eat, they commonly say they never check out competitors because they do not go to restaurants of the same style as theirs. They (understandably) find it boring to eat the same food they work with, and if they desired to eat similar food, they tend not to do it anyway because they are invariably disappointed due to the bad quality of such restaurants. If they do say they monitor their competitors, they mention all aspects of the restaurant business they look into but the food. In remarking they do not go to restaurants that serve similar food to theirs' because of the

boredom and disappointment that inevitably ensues, they convey an underlying assumption that going to see what their competitors are serving is not work. Otherwise, they would not simply remark they do not go to such restaurants because it is boring and disappointing, for (just as most adults) they well understand that undertaking boring and perhaps disappointing tasks is part of their occupation. In remarking they monitor their competitors to look into their service, décor or beverage program, they communicate the understanding that food is not something they ever attend to. This cognitive asymmetry is illustrated in the following excerpt from a mid-status chef in New York City, as he answers a question about whether he goes out to eat or not.

I go out to eat with different people for different reasons with different places. I mean I could go with my wife or my children or my family and we'll go where the food is, it's okay. It's good for what it is, it's good. But they know us and we've been going there for 15 years or something and we go there. And it's mostly because I am *not* going there as Chef [name] and I am *not* going there as either the owner or the chef knows I am there or .... But then you want to go out to dinner to see what other people are doing just like a movie maker would go to the movies. But I'll go with [Chef's name], or I'll go with [Chef's name] or I'll go with [Sous-chef at the restaurant] or my chefs. I take them out or my manager; I take them out. We go see what other people are doing from a décor, service, wine list, beverage program, just to, because it's your business. It's your field. You almost *have* to do it. And when a new place opens, you have to go there and take a look at it and you know, check out pricing and you check out tabletops; you check out everything. I mean, there are places that have opened that I haven't gone to that I probably should have. (Chef at a mid-status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

We observe in this excerpt that while this chef gives a quite exhaustive list of reasons why he goes to restaurants, even acknowledging he “almost” *has* to go out to eat for work, he does not list checking out the food as one of the reasons. We also find that it is common for those chefs who say they go to restaurants for work purposes to qualify such statement so that it is never *just* for work purposes. They would only go to a restaurant so long as they have a desire to eat there. Nonverbal communication conveys

the difficulty chefs experience in discussing the topic, as the tone of voice may change, speech may speed up, or their facial expressions or general attitude towards their interlocutor may change.

In expressing discomfort with the topic, chefs show that looking into their peers' culinary production involves a practice that is perceived as morally dubious. Why is it perceived as morally dubious? Given that there is no way to acknowledge peers' ideas, borrowing from them appears as plagiarism. Chefs' expressive behavior is part of the individually experienced but socially shared set of norms and values that underpin the social configuration of the field. Nonetheless, understanding that emotions are a phenomenologically and socially interactive process, as Katz (1999) notes, we should perceive that their expressive behavior is as much a subjective reaction to a moral issue as an action meant to elicit a reaction from others. By expressing discomfort with a topic, actors cue their interlocutor to stop asking questions that are morally difficult for them to deal with, thereby enabling the social interaction to proceed in a smooth fashion.

However, we find that chefs are less apprehensive to discuss drawing on ideas from others who work abroad. They explicitly state the importance of traveling for getting new ideas. Going to restaurants in fields of higher status is particularly appreciated, and in New York and San Francisco this entails going abroad, especially to Europe. Sometimes they travel on their own for the sole purpose of eating, and other times they are sent off by their restaurants to do it (in which case restaurants cover the costs). Unlike eating out in their own field, when chefs talk about going to restaurants in other countries they are less apprehensive in their general attitude, as I have just suggested. But more than that, we see here a positive cognitive asymmetry. In discussing

visiting restaurants abroad, they *only* talk about getting ideas for their food, without making any mention of other aspects they may reasonably attend to such as décor or service, or perhaps wine program.<sup>106</sup> We see how differently they discuss eating out in foreign countries in the following excerpt from a chef at a high-status restaurant in San Francisco, as he talks about how he gets inspiration for his food.

I definitely get inspiration from any place that... I spent some time in Florence, outside of Florence and in Florence, and I was in Sienna, you know.... I try to go to six different restaurants in one day, and I try to eat two courses in each one... So really it's like, you know, when I spent time in the Piedmont, definitely that influenced me a lot. In Tuscany, that influenced me a lot... I'm usually going back, inspired by that area. I have it in the memory thing to like, dip into. It's like, I always tell my cooks you should definitely go travel... (Chef at a high-status restaurant in San Francisco, fieldnotes).

As we note, he openly discusses drawing on ideas from food he has had in other restaurants. He does not mention eating out in San Francisco for getting ideas. The discrepancy in chefs' representation of their knowledge-exchange may strike us as surprising. After all, scholars, fiction writers or musicians deem borrowing ideas from others without acknowledging them as plagiarism, regardless of where those they borrowed from live. But academia, fiction writing or music (first) have laws that regulate their knowledge-exchange, and (second) are not localized fields, so competitors are not demarcated by geographic boundaries. In contrast, knowledge-exchange in cuisine is not legislated, and competitors are geographically bounded. Insofar as the exchange of ideas is regulated by norms instead of laws, and social norms are valid within, and maintained by, a group, borrowing from competitors entails breaking a norm but borrowing from

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<sup>106</sup> Though a large extent of the wine program is not adaptable because the economics of the wine business change country by country, there are plenty of ideas that could be borrowed. Chefs could get to know new wines that are perhaps already available in the U.S., or that they could import at low cost if they make connections with the winemakers. They could get innovative ideas for the organization of a wine list, or for menus with wine pairings.

actors in other cities does not, and therefore the former knowledge-exchange practice raises more severe moral boundaries than the latter.<sup>107</sup> If a blatant copy of a foreign chef's dish is found, an accusation of plagiarism may arise (and it has). But this is an extreme case, the most common practice is for chefs to borrow ideas --not entire dishes-- from others in foreign countries and adapt them to their own styles.

### *Cookbooks*

It is sensible to think that other than going out to restaurants --whether local or foreign--, actors could have recourse to cookbooks in their search for new ideas. Besides, cookbooks are more accessible than restaurants, they require less time and money in exchange of ideas. Indeed, chefs tend to develop vast cookbook collections over the years, and they may talk proudly about them. However, when they are asked about whether they use them for inspiration or ideas, in other words, when the topic of the conversation is knowledge-exchange practices, they claim to find books of little use. Of course, professional cooks are unlikely to use cookbooks in the way home cooks might use them. They have sufficient expertise to know all the basic cooking procedures, and to get a good sense of how much of each ingredient is required in a dish (even if there are always adjustments to be made). Just as experienced home cooks become less and less likely to read recipes, chefs are unlikely to read them. And being insiders, chefs may be familiar with the realities of the cookbook business that escape gullible home cooks. Recipes in cookbooks can be inaccurate. This is sometimes done on purpose, because

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<sup>107</sup> Drawing on research on social norms, Fauchart and von Hippel (2006) note that norm-based knowledge-exchange regimes, such as cuisine, create a particularly high level of communalism within the group.

chefs keep some information secret.<sup>108</sup> Recipes can also be inaccurate by accident, because chefs do not always test all the dishes in the book. Further, cookbooks may be to a large extent prepared by professionals other than the chefs who appear as authors -- professional cookbook writers or food testers.<sup>109</sup> In maintaining that they do not use cookbooks, chefs may want to clarify that books do not have the same value to professional cooks as to home cooks to their interlocutor --as a field outsider, a home cook or no cook at all--, who may not appreciate the distinction.

Nonetheless, just as chefs get inspiration from eating in restaurants when they travel, eating at friends' houses, or from looking at produce in markets, they could in principle get inspiration for cooking with certain ingredients, or pairing them with others, from cookbooks. But they are likely to deny it. Further, their expressive behavior shows that this topic raises a moral boundary that is stronger than that raised by the practice of eating out. Actors get uncomfortable, change their tone of voice and attitude, and otherwise articulate chefs lose a degree of coherence in their discourses. Insofar as knowledge-exchange is not legally regulated, so that credit is not made explicit, borrowing ideas from a book, just as borrowing ideas from restaurants, raises a moral issue. If chefs express less discomfort in discussing restaurants than in discussing books, it is because going out to eat fulfills multiple functions, and thus can be framed in multiple ways. Chefs can disattend to the food, or the work purposes, and focus on any of the other reasons why they go to restaurants. In contrast, cookbooks can serve only two purposes: they can be a source of ideas, and they can provide cultural capital. Indeed,

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<sup>108</sup> Given that chefs do not seek to protect their ideas with intellectual property laws, keeping some of the information secret works as a normative trade secret.

<sup>109</sup> In some cases, professional cookbook writers are listed as co-authors, but always second to chefs, and usually in smaller print.

chefs comfortably talk about the latter, as they proudly mention their large cookbooks collections. In what concerns the former, we find that they are very likely to remark they only appreciate pictures. Furthermore, they tend to maintain that if cookbooks were only composed of pictures, they would actually use them.

We know that authorship is consequential for a successful career, but that it is rather elusive in cuisine, as the boundary between one recipe and another is fuzzy, and knowledge-exchange cannot be credited. And indeed, we find that chefs whose authorship is more solidly established, because they have a recognizable personal style and long successful careers, are more likely than their younger peers to remark they might use cookbooks to get ideas that they can adapt to their food. They are also more likely to remark they may check specific information about how to cook a piece of meat, or about a basic sauce or stock. Given that the more experienced chefs are by no means more likely to require basic information than their young colleagues, we can only conclude that if they are more likely to remark they might use a book it is because they do not feel they have to prove their authorship.

Yet, even if they have proven their authorship, established chefs must still manage the inability to give credit for their knowledge-exchange. Therefore, an unqualified acknowledgment of reading cookbooks is rare even in their case. As Fauchart and von Hippel (2006: 4) suggest, because of the lack of legal regulation, cuisine looks to outsiders as an information commons, but it is treated as a set of compartments separated by normative fences by insiders. And chefs understand that getting ideas from cookbooks is on the wrong side of the fence. This moral boundary is represented in the following excerpt from a chef at a high-status restaurant in New York City.

I don't look much into cookbooks. I like to look at books that are beautiful, and look at the pictures, I think it's a wonderful thing to do. But I do not look at books, at a book, to make my dish. *Ever. Never do that.* I don't. I can get inspired by certain things, I look at pictures and so forth but I do not take virtually a recipe. *Never do that.* (Chef at a high-status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

We see in this excerpt that the chef, just as many others, only values pictures. We also note the extent to which he goes to make it clear that he does not borrow from books, that he understands that this practice is morally wrong. Chefs resort to an array of reasons to justify why they do not look at cookbooks. Their reasons may be moral, ethical, cognitive, or practical. Most commonly, they may remark they only look at pictures because they are the only inspiring element in books. They may note that cookbooks are nothing more than publicity for chefs, that recipes are not reliable because they are rarely tested by chefs. They may argue they could not use somebody else's recipes because such recipes would never be representative of their own culinary styles, even if they maintain they can use dishes from restaurants in foreign countries and adapt them to make them representative of their own culinary styles. They may assert that copying a recipe is not proper. And they may say they do not have time to read recipes, or they have short attention-span and recipes are too long to read, or that they do not like reading.

We have seen, on the one hand, that because cookbooks cannot be framed in any way other than as a source of ideas (or a source of cultural capital), chefs are likely to deny they use them, and we have seen, on the other hand, that when they discuss going to restaurants in their field, they disattend to the food or work purposes. Thus, they are likely to *only* identify traveling as their source of inspiration. This is illustrated in the following excerpt from a chef at a high-status restaurant in New York City as he describes how he goes about creating a new dish.

There's many ways you can do it. There's one way, you go someplace, you're traveling, you go into another restaurant, you enjoy what you're eating. That gives you an idea... then you go to the market, or in a specific region, France or South America, Japan or whatever. And you really, you get an idea because you're in a country, to get your brain working, you get your ingredient, you get *what you like to eat*, also. So you are doing it, and you go in that direction..... That's about it. (Chef at a high-status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

Note that he begins by saying there are many ways to get ideas to create a new dish, and he ends not only by identifying only one --traveling--, but also by clearly marking the end of the list with the expression "That's about it." Through this quotation, and more generally through chefs' discourses about the practices of using cookbooks or visiting restaurants, we have seen that the difficulty of demonstrating authorship and the inability to give credit for knowledge-exchange are such that chefs' easiest coping mechanism is to insulate themselves (at least in ideality) from those channels which might appear as conduits of information. Their disattention to their knowledge-exchange practices allows for a social proximity that would otherwise be uncomfortable. And allowing for social proximity is particularly important in high cuisine, given that it is a localized field, and composed of tight social networks, so chefs may find themselves in the company of colleagues often enough to benefit from ensuring comfortable interactions with them.

## **Differentiation**

### *Eating Out*

We have been analyzing the disattention to knowledge-exchange practices in light of chefs' need to demonstrate authorship and inability to give credit for borrowed ideas. But their disattention to their knowledge-exchange practices must also be understood in

view of the imperative of differentiation. The fuzzy nature of culinary production undermines claims of authorship as well as attempts of differentiation, for new dishes cannot be too different from those that inspired them. By ignoring or denying they look into their competitors' work, chefs thus also manage to obscure their organizational distance to them --who their competitors are becomes unclear. In denying that they monitor the culinary production in the field when they visit restaurants, or explore ideas in cookbooks, actors imply they do not have a pressing need for such information to be competitive. They hereby obscure their organizational distance to peers *and* subjectively increase their standing in the field (for, having established their authorship, actors with higher reputation have a relatively less pressing need to get ideas from others to be competitive).

There is a distinction, understood by most chefs (eluded by some, acknowledged by others), between going out to eat *for work* and *for pleasure*, as we have seen. It is reasonable that, in their limited time off, chefs may not like to eat food similar to theirs given the tedium of working with and tasting the same foods everyday. Nonetheless, the extent to which they go to discursively distance themselves from their market niche, as I will show, is indicative of a phenomenon that is beyond the understandable desire to eat other types of food. Chefs distance themselves through verbal and nonverbal means. Some of them remark they go out to eat to places of a similar category to their own restaurant. Few claim to do it out of pleasure, but if they do, they maintain it is due to their omnivorous behavior, given that they find pleasure in anything.<sup>110</sup> For the most part,

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<sup>110</sup> For literature on cultural omnivorousness, see DiMaggio (1987), DiMaggio and Mikhtar (2004), Erickson (1996; Forthcoming), Fischler (1990), Peterson (2005), Peterson and Kern (1996), Peterson and Rossman (Forthcoming), and Warde, Martens and Olsen (1999).

those who claim they go to restaurants of a comparative category note that they do not do it simply for pleasure.

Chefs at the most prestigious restaurants in the country claim that they do not like high-end food and would rather eat simple things. Innovative chefs note they prefer going to traditional restaurants. Chefs of French cuisine say that they would rather eat Italian foods. They point they need the change of style, and say that their palates demand what they consider simple flavors. Dishes with little culinary complexity, with only a few ingredients, and limited flourishes, garnishes, or sauces are the simple flavors they note they are after in their free time. They find simple flavors in “comfort food” and peasant traditions, so they are likely to go to Italian restaurants, French bistros or brasseries, or places that serve straightforward meats such as steaks or roast chicken. Associated with their understanding of culinary simplicity is the category of “clean” flavors. Dishes made with few components, where the ingredients can be easily distinguished because they are not muddled in a canvas of multiple flavors, are clean. Clean flavors are also usually relatively lean. Because they must ingest rich foods and complex dishes daily, they point out they require simple and clean flavors in their time off. This probably accounts for the absolute preference for sushi, as all chefs claim to love it and eat it regularly.

Simple and clean flavors are not only sought after because they give chefs a break from their regular food intake. They are also sought after because they give them a mental break. Chefs find that simple food liberates them from their internal disposition, or external demands (of those with whom they are interacting at the moment), to be analytic about food. They believe there is not much to analyze in a dish of roast chicken and mashed potatoes. Going to low-key restaurants where they find simple food also

liberates them from the pressures of celebrity chefdom. In their free time, most renowned chefs do not want to go to places where they are recognized and given special treatment because they feel they must perform their roles of celebrity chefs instead of enjoying their meal. Neither do they want to be sent several dishes from the kitchen, complimentary of the chef, which is what usually happens when they are recognized and treated as celebrities.

All these are also the reasons why they put “ethnic”<sup>111</sup> cuisines together with simple fare at the top of their list of eating preferences. (This is therefore probably why there is such an overwhelming preference for sushi, as it is categorized both as ethnic, and simple and clean.) Low-key ethnic restaurants offer a change for their palates, and a release from their celebrity status. Ethnic restaurants also liberate them from analyzing the food because they find the socio-cognitive foundation of these cuisines to be beyond their culinary competence. Finally, as I have mentioned, because chefs complain about the general bad quality of restaurants of a similar category to theirs,’ they prevent the disappointment that invariably ensues by eating simple or ethnic food.<sup>112</sup>

Recall that there is variation in chefs’ claims about eating out for work, ranging from total denial to openness and appreciation of the practice. Most of those who deny it claim they have no need to know what their competitors are doing, or other culinary trends in the field. A few chefs would rather not eat out to avoid having their culinary creations be inadvertently influenced by others.’ Actors who maintain they sometimes

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<sup>111</sup> The notion of ethnic foods is applied here phenomenologically. This category obtains its meaning and validity as it is used by chefs intersubjectively.

<sup>112</sup> Chefs’ attitudes about mentioning names of chefs or restaurants they like vary, from a refusal to name colleagues to a complete openness in talking about them. In few instances, chefs’ preferences for not citing names are evidently political. In such cases, choosing other kinds of food, ethnic or downscale in particular, saves them from having to establish preferences, connections or allegiances.

check out other restaurants make a point of going to those recently opened, for they understand they must know the new players in the field. Given the risks involved in having relations with others appear as channels of information, these actors may qualify the extent to which they look into their peers' work, as I have already explained. Only a few of them wholeheartedly argue for the importance of eating out to ensure they are competitive, or more rarely, to get inspiration.

Chefs' most effective rhetorical means of differentiation is not so much what they *do* acknowledge, the restaurants they visit, what they do for work or for pleasure, but rather what they leave out or play down, as I will show. Actors rhetorically differentiate themselves by failing to mention or denying certain restaurants or foods they enjoy, and by asserting that they do not need to see their peers' culinary production to maintain their competitiveness. Also effective is the pattern of qualifying statements, as I have noted, so that if they go to comparable restaurants, it is because they *have* to, and if they eat out to see what their peers are doing, it never is *just* work. We see here again how the characteristics of culinary production mediate relations among chefs. Attempts at differentiation are so necessary *but* difficult in cuisine that actors' most accessible means is to disattend to their knowledge-exchange practices, thereby blurring their organizational distance to their peers and making the social closeness more tolerable. We can examine this rhetorical means of differentiation at work in the following quotation from a chef at a high-status restaurant in New York City. This chef first stated that he does not go to restaurants much, and only eats sushi or goes to bistros, because he likes simple food. He then offered the following account to explain why he does not go out to eat for work.

Not really [eat out for work]. I don't even like to be influenced. I don't like to be influenced. I don't want to go to a restaurant and eat something and say "Oh, that's cool, let me try that." I have my experience. You're only as good as what you're exposed to. That's the way I look at it.... I worked for all those restaurants that... I worked for two 3-star Michelin chefs and three 4-star restaurants in New York. Very few chefs have that on their resume because it's hard to work in those places.... I don't go to be exposed to these restaurants. First, I don't like to pay money.... For me it's a sin to spend that much money on food... I don't really eat out. If I go out to eat, I'll eat pizza, or I'll eat sushi, or I'll eat good tasty, simple food. (Chef at a high-status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

It bears noting that this chef who only enjoys simple food, is morally against the cost of high-end meals, and does not want to go to restaurants because he does not want to be influenced, is a young, very innovative chef who works at an expensive high-status restaurant, and who has had a very prominent career so far. While he has acquired recognition and has built a prominent career due to his innovative and personal style, we know that he could have only managed to do so by having information about what chefs in the field are doing, because it is only by having such information that he is able to achieve the fine balance between conformity and originality that is necessary for a successful career. However reasonable it might be to be concerned about unwanted influence that could tarnish his authorship (even though he is still relatively young and likely still developing his personal culinary style), by focusing on this phenomenon he disattends to the other reasons why he may go to restaurants in his market niche and thereby blurs the organizational distance to his competitors and allows for the social proximity of high-status chefs in the city.

### *Subjective Professional Lineage*

There is a different type of rhetorical means whereby chefs blur their organizational distance to their competitors. This means does not have to do with their

regular practices of knowledge-exchange but with their subjective construction of their place in the organizational field. More specifically, we will examine how chefs discuss who they admire and who they would have liked to work for (if they were to start their career over again), two questions I have asked them in interviews. Through selecting chefs in these categories, as I will show, actors subjectively construct their professional lineage, and differentiate themselves from their peers. Just as in the cases we have already observed, we will analyze actors' negative asymmetry, as it is through omitting chefs to whom they may be potentially connected to that they sever their conduits of influence and thereby protect their authenticity. Indeed, we will find that in naming those they admire or would have liked to work with, actors generally disattend to peers they likely emulate in their culinary creations. This cognitive pattern of obscuring possible conduits of influence is, again, the most accessible means for chefs to manage their authorship in a field where such task is very important yet complex.

First, we must distinguish the categories of chefs interviewees admire and those they would have wanted to work for, since they are quite distinct. Just as the categories are distinct, so are chefs' representations about those they admire and those they would have wanted to work with, as we will see. We will find that this is more so the case in New York than in San Francisco. Therefore, we will begin by examining the New York culinary field and only then will we compare the two cities.

Arguably, admiration is a more wide-ranging category than the wish to have worked with other individuals. Actors may admire others for a variety of reasons, and they may admire them for qualities they deem fundamental or not particularly important. They would require many more qualities of a person to wish they had worked for her. For

instance, a painter may admire some of her peers for their knowledge of the art, technical skills, use of color, creativity, productivity, business skills, or personality. Therefore, this imaginary painter may think of a long list of painters she admires. Nonetheless, she surely values some of these attributes more than others, and so she would probably choose a painter with those skills as somebody she wish she had worked with. This list is likely to be shorter than the list of painters she admires.

Because actors may admire others for a variety of reasons, knowing whom they admire does not reliably tell us what qualities they value more than others. Indeed, we learn that chefs may and do admire colleagues for attributes they do not value much or even approve of. Most importantly, chefs do not have much respect for others who, in their eyes, turned into businesspeople. When chefs open several restaurants, they necessarily spend much less time in any of the restaurants' kitchens. Instead, they delegate and manage. Since chefs see their role as mainly defined by the job of cooking (however far from their job descriptions this may be), they perceive those who open several restaurants to be "only after the money." Because it is so central to their professional identity, neglecting the chef's role is a moral issue. We note this in their presentation of selves, as they distance themselves from the identity of chef-turned-into-businessperson, underscoring in contrast that they are *working* chefs, and spend much more time than their peers behind the stove.<sup>113</sup> This moral belief notwithstanding, we find that they admire those turned into businesspeople, and precisely for this quality. This finding should not surprise us if we keep in mind that social actors use different cognitive schema in different contexts (see DiMaggio, 2002: 277).

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<sup>113</sup> This point is quite important for them, so much so that most chefs tend to think that they spend more time behind the stove than their peers.

Because admiration encompasses a more wide-ranging spectrum of qualities, I take chefs' selections of who they would have wanted to work with as a stronger indicator of a conduit of influence, given that these are the professionals actors would want to learn from, that is, they are the professionals they would be likely to emulate. For the sake of simplicity of language, I will refer to the category of chefs interviewees would have wanted to work with as chefs to emulate. As we will see, this category represents chefs' subjective construction of their professional lineage, and of their position in the field.

Their selections of those they admire and those they would emulate differ in three central aspects in the New York culinary field. First, on average actors chose twice as many chefs they admire as those they would emulate (four as opposed to two).<sup>114</sup> The number of chefs each person selected varied widely, as some are hard pressed to come up with a single person they admire, and others cite countless names.

Second, besides the mean number of chefs selected, there is a sharp contrast in the distribution of names cited for admired chefs and those to emulate. There is a high concentration of admired chefs; of a total of about 30 New York actors who answered this question, twelve selected the same person, who we shall call Chef A, and seven selected another, Chef B (this is not to say they only selected Chef A or B, but that among any number of others, they chose Chef A or B). In contrast, there is a more even distribution in the selection of chefs to emulate, as nobody was selected by more than four individuals, and only three were named by four individuals.

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<sup>114</sup> The chefs I have interviewed in New York have selected a total number of 116 admired chefs (this is not to say 116 different names). The total number of chefs they would have wanted to work with is 66.

Third, a significant distinction appears in who actors select. Whereas most of the admired chefs are in New York, actors are very likely to select peers in Europe, in particular in France, as chefs they would emulate. As the birthplace of modern western cuisine (see Ferguson, 1998; 2004; Ferguson and Zukin, 1998), France is traditionally the culinary field with the highest status. Chefs' selection of their European peers is regardless of whether they have worked there or not. The four most admired actors are in New York, and they are (first and second) top chefs, with restaurants with the highest prestige in the city and the country, (third) the most high-profile innovative chef in the city, and (fourth) a vastly successful chef-entrepreneur, who owns several acclaimed restaurants in New York, a line of kitchenware, and hosts television food shows, among other related businesses. We have seen that the two most admired chefs were chosen by twelve and seven individuals respectively, the third and fourth, Chefs C and D, were selected by five individuals each. In contrast to admired peers, the three most popular ones to emulate are (first) a top chef in France, (second) a top French chef with restaurants in France and one high-status restaurant in New York, and (third) the above New York chef-entrepreneur, Chef D. Recall that these three chefs to emulate were selected by four individuals each. The next two chefs on the list, selected by three each, are French. Note that, with the exception of the chef-entrepreneur, no New York chef is among the five most frequently selected peers actors would have wanted to learn from.

The choices of chefs to emulate, to recapitulate, are an effective means for actors to subjectively position themselves in relation to others both in terms of their culinary styles and status. Consider a musician from a small third tier orchestra whose dream was to work with a conductor of another small third tier orchestra, another musician whose

wish was to work with the most prestigious conductor of a celebrated symphony orchestra in the country, and finally consider a musician who would have only wanted to work with Herbert von Karajan (one of the most distinguished conductors of the last century, no longer alive). Consider an aggregate of such choices to have an image of the patterns of social actors' self-presentations and subjective construction of their place in the field.

Just as we should look into which musicians these individuals chose, we ought to examine their omissions as well. How would we analyze a group of musicians who claimed they could have only learned from von Karajan, or perhaps from Gustav Mahler? Similarly, how do we interpret chefs' tendency to identify French peers as the most desirable colleagues they would emulate, particularly in light of our assumption that chefs who are local and who have high-status are more influential given that they are easily accessible and visible? What is more, we know that actors orient their actions to those who are in their field, and even more closely to those in their market niche. Yet, we find that individuals choose very few peers in their field, and even fewer in their market niche, as chefs they would have wanted to work with. Even young professionals, with plenty of colleagues in New York they could potentially look up to, are more likely to think of chefs they would have wanted to learn from who are far away, and preferably an ocean apart. Of the total number of chefs actors claim to admire (116), 72% are in New York, and most of the remaining 28% are in Europe. Of the total number of chefs they would emulate (66), only 44% are in New York, and most of the other 56% are in Europe.<sup>115</sup> We can only interpret the low number of chefs in their field they would want

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<sup>115</sup> The figures for New York City would be lower if we only included chefs who are currently field members. Some of the chefs selected are dead, others work at traditional Asian restaurants. Arguably chefs

to emulate as their most easily accessible means to obscure the channels that are likely to serve them as conduits of influence, be able to claim authorship, and blur their organizational position in the field. Here we see, again, how the difficulty to make claims of authorship in cuisine and differentiate from others informs actors' subjective management of these issues.

Additionally, it should not go unnoticed that one of the few local chefs actors claim they wish they had worked for --indeed, one of the three most frequently selected--, is Chef D, the chef-turned-into-businessperson they otherwise disapprove of. Thus, their subjective connection to this chef has nothing to do with their culinary creations but to business skills --they would want to have his business acumen. Even in the case of admired peers, where a higher proportion of local actors are selected, we should note that the first two are highly prestigious chefs, but the following two are the very innovative chef, and Chef D, the chef-entrepreneur. Just as the chef-entrepreneur is generally admired for his business skills, the innovative chef is sometimes admired for his audacity, for not all actors who claim to admire him appreciate his culinary style.

As I have mentioned, the patterns of chefs' rhetorical representations in New York do not apply in San Francisco. The most important difference between the two fields is that in San Francisco the patterns in actors' selections of admired chefs and those they would emulate are similar to one another. First, they selected the same number of chefs in both categories --20 and 22 respectively--, and each actor selected an average of

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of traditional ethnic foods are not competitors, and consequently not field members. If we eliminate non-field members, the proportion for admired chefs in New York goes down to 68%, and that of chefs to emulate goes to 40%. As for those selected in other fields, in both categories of admired chefs and chefs to emulate, the proportion who are in Europe is about 90%.

three chefs in each category.<sup>116</sup> Second, the selection of admired chefs and those to emulate has about the same distribution --it is even in both cases.<sup>117</sup> Third, actors equally selected field members and peers in other fields as admired chefs and those they would emulate. They chose about 35% of chefs in San Francisco in both categories. And they equally chose peers in San Francisco, Europe and New York, with about 30% from each place, and the remaining 10% from other cities in the country.

Why do patterns vary so much between New York and San Francisco when the nature of the work is similar? Chefs' jobs are more or less the same in both cities, and so are their working conditions. Nonetheless, the mode of cultural production has some differences. First, San Francisco is a much smaller field than New York City. Second, it is not as prestigious as New York (it is considered second to it in the U.S.).<sup>118</sup> The size and prestige of New York entail a much higher level of competition, intensified by the high cost of real estate. These conditions create a very volatile market, where the costs of running a restaurant put restaurants at a high risk of failing within their first year.<sup>119</sup> These conditions increase the institutional imperative of differentiation. Chefs must distinguish themselves from others to stand out and gain recognition to survive in the field. A requisite for this is maintaining their authenticity, that is, conforming to a culinary style while also being original. By (first) obscuring their connections with colleagues who may be understood as conduits of influence, and (second) subjectively blurring their

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<sup>116</sup> The figures are significantly lower in San Francisco mostly because the sample of chefs in this city is significantly lower. But also, the culinary field is much smaller. As we will see, this also affects the patterns in the selection of local chefs.

<sup>117</sup> This may also be partly explained by the small sample size in San Francisco.

<sup>118</sup> It is precisely the higher status of New York, relative to San Francisco, that explains why actors in San Francisco are likely to select New York chefs. We should expect actors to select peers in another field in the country so long as the field has a higher status than their own.

<sup>119</sup> The estimate is that one every two new restaurants in New York City fails within its first year, and about 65% fail within the first two years.

organizational distance from their competitors, chefs strive to establish their authorship and subjectively position themselves in the organizational field. Because there is a higher imperative of differentiation in New York, and differentiation is hard to achieve in such a competitive market, we should expect actors in this city to be more likely to rhetorically distance themselves from their local peers.

In contrast, we find that as San Francisco is a smaller, less volatile and competitive field, and thus imposes a lower need of differentiation, actors have a lower disposition to rhetorically differentiate themselves from their competitors. Therefore, we observe that actors in this city name field members as chefs they admire just as much as chefs they would have wanted to work with.<sup>120</sup>

The lower need of differentiation in San Francisco is also partly explained by an attribute of the field of another nature: the means of cultural production. The geographic location of San Francisco entails a greater access to local ingredients of good quality all year long. Good quality of ingredients is likely to lead to a de-emphasis of technique, as it is commonly understood that flavorful ingredients ought not to be tampered with.<sup>121</sup> Technique and the culinary artistry associated with it travel easily through social channels, and they are more readily identifiable as connections between chefs than use of ingredients. Consequently, we should expect that where there is a de-emphasis of

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<sup>120</sup> It ought to be noted that while actors in San Francisco are equally likely to select local peers as chefs they admire as those they would emulate, showing their perception of a lower need of differentiation than in New York, they are generally less likely to choose local peers relative to chefs in other fields than New Yorkers are. The proportion of local peers New Yorkers chose in both categories is higher than the proportion of local colleagues those in San Francisco chose, and significantly higher in the category of admired chefs (indeed New Yorkers chose a majority of locals in this category).

<sup>121</sup> We find the association between access to good-quality ingredients and de-emphasis of technique in cuisines around the world. Indeed, this association is the classic explanation for the difference between French and Italian cuisines. Italy's greater access to good-quality ingredients is said to account for its culinary simplicity. In contrast, the more limited access to fresh ingredients has made French cuisine highly reliant on technique, and hence the foundation of modern culinary technique.

technique, and therefore less pressure for chefs to demonstrate that their styles are unlike those of their peers, actors are less likely to sever ties with those chefs who may be viewed as conduits of influence. The de-emphasis of technique is another factor that contributes to the lower imperative of differentiation that we find in San Francisco, easing the conditions for claims of authorship. Insofar as there is a lower pressure for chefs to sever ties with peers and distinguish themselves from them to establish their authorship and subjectively manage their position in the field, we will find more concordial relations among chefs in the field.

### **Authorship: Creating Culinary Products and Professional Self-Concepts**

In this chapter we have examined how chefs make claims of authorship and subjectively manage their position vis-à-vis others in the organizational field. We have seen that their claims about their knowledge-exchange practices and relations with their peers are critically informed by an organizational context where there is a high imperative of differentiation and where authorship is particularly salient. I have shown that three factors increase the significance of differentiation and authorship: (one) the individualization of creation, which raises the stakes on reputation, (two) the absence of mechanisms to give credit for ideas, and (three) the ambiguity of culinary production, which makes demonstrating originality in a recipe difficult.

In essence, I have maintained that actors' rhetorical representations should not be conceived of as individual psychological traits, or as part of *culture*, understood as a broad set of norms, values and established expressive forms. Rather, their rhetorical representations ought to be explained by the particular patterning of relations that

constitute an organizational field, providing conditions in which actors must not only do their work but also manage their subjective sense of selves.<sup>122</sup>

Indeed, we have seen that the patterning of relations in the culinary fields in New York and San Francisco explains why actors exhibit a lower disposition for rhetorically distancing themselves from their peers in San Francisco than in New York. In chefs' patterns of emulation of their colleagues and their representation of their connections with their colleagues, we observe their subjectively experienced need of differentiation. The high level of competition in New York leads actors to be closely attentive to what their peers produce. They are very informed about what others create, restaurant openings, and the latest culinary trends. Further, I have noted actors' perceived need to be closely attentive to what is happening in the field over and over again during interviews and ethnographic observation. I often heard them talk about the new techniques that others are using, or about new "hot" produce in the market. And I very frequently heard them talk about all the recently opened restaurants, and remark they *have to* visit them. The following quotation from a chef at an upper-middle status restaurant in New York City is an unambiguous illustration of the general assumption that visiting new restaurants in their field is part of their job.

We are expected by the corporate to go around, see what's going on, see what's, you know, what are hot restaurants. If something's reviewed in the *New York Times* and it sounds really good, they want us to go down there, they want us... they encourage us, you know. They pay for it and everything. It's a good experience, to go around, and see what somebody else is doing. You know, they

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<sup>122</sup> This perspective is consistent with socio-cognitive approaches (see Geertz, 1973; 1983; Rosch, 1978; Sahlins, 1976; 1981; Zerubavel, 1997; 2002) and the neo-institutionalist tenet that organizational configurations provide rules for action as well as sets of symbolic meanings whereby individuals categorize their work and themselves as members of the organization (see Cerulo, 1998; 2006; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Eliasoph and Lichterman, 2003; Friedland and Alford, 1991; Jepperson, 1991; Mohr, 1994; Mohr and Duquenne, 1997; Rao, Monin and Durand, 2003; 2005; Vaughan, 1986; 1996; 2002; Zucker, 1977; 1987). However, in the following chapters I will propose to complement the insights of socio-cognitive approaches and the neo-institutionalism with other conceptualizations.

are not all great experiences. Like, if you read a three-star review in the *Times* and you're like, you know, they send you down there to eat, and you eat there, and you're like "The food I do is better than that," you know. So, yeah, absolutely. Actually I'm supposed to go, Thursday night I'm supposed to go to a restaurant and check out, you know, what they are doing. (Chef at an upper-middle status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

In this case, the practice of visiting restaurants is explicitly requested by the management of the corporation to which the restaurant where the chef works belongs. Such established system is indeed more common in restaurants that are part of a corporate group, but the assumption that going to restaurants is part of their job is widespread among chefs.

In contrast to New York, the lower institutional imperative of differentiation in San Francisco results in a lower demand for chefs to closely attend to what is happening in their field. I have observed that chefs in this city are much less informed and invested in knowing about what their peers are producing and the latest culinary fads. They may have only recently and vaguely heard about foams, and they almost never talk about the new culinary movement, "molecular gastronomy," whereas virtually no chef in New York would talk about food without expounding on both foams and the new culinary movement more generally. By the same token, San Francisco chefs do not talk much about new restaurants openings, and even less about *having* to visit them. They have less need to closely attend to what is going on in their field, and we find that indeed they are less likely to do so than chefs in New York.

We find that some chefs in New York are aware of the perils involved in closely orienting their actions to others, and they purposefully go to restaurants less often than they used to. We would only encounter this awareness, and following course of action, among well-established chefs, who have been around for a long time and have developed

a personal culinary style. The following excerpt from one such chef at a mid-status restaurant in New York City illustrates the case as he talks about whether he goes out to eat for work.

Absolutely, sure, sure [Go out to eat for work]. Absolutely. You *have* to. I don't as much as I should. And I'll tell you, some years ago I stopped. We used to go out a lot. Everyday. After a while it became too much information that you found your tendencies to be more somebody else's and less your own..... And you get influenced by brilliant people. And there's a lot of them here..... (Chef at a mid-status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

As a successful chef who has been in New York for a long time, and has a well-recognized authorship, he is more candid about the possibility of inadvertently emulating others than those who feel they still have to demonstrate their authorship. And we know that it is so difficult for chefs to be able to claim authorship while they struggle to survive in the market --thus simultaneously conform to established styles and distinguish themselves from their peers-- that indeed the more likely they are to emulate others, the more likely they are to rhetorically sever their professional ties with them. This is why we find that New York chefs are more likely to subjectively distance themselves from others in their field than those in San Francisco, who are more likely to recognize their channels of influence. By the same token, this is why young chefs are more likely to obscure their connections with others than more established actors, who are more likely to be candid about their conduits of influence.

When they sever links to contemporary or past colleagues which may be understood to be conduits of influence, actors distance themselves from them, make claims of authorship, and subjectively position themselves vis-à-vis their peers in terms of their culinary styles and status. We have focused in this chapter on the role of institutional conditions on chefs' subjective management of their authorship and position

in the field. Such focus has led us to leave a mechanism that is inherent to the dynamics of an organizational field underspecified. Fields are complex social configurations, with multiple and contradictory tendencies --such as those towards conformity and originality. Actors must make choices out of such contradictions, and they make choices guided by (one) their stock of information and cues about the dynamics of production, and (two) their self-concepts, as they seek consistency between their culinary production and their sense of selves. In controlling their authorship and culinary production, actors participate in the collective ongoing process whereby a given institutional imperative of differentiation is produced and maintained.

Thus we can understand that chefs in San Francisco are likely to name others in their field as peers they admire or would have wanted to work with, even if their relations with them may be taken to be conduits of influence, and they are less invested in knowing about all the trends in the field than chefs in New York because (one) there is a lower institutional demand for differentiation in their field. It is not simply due to the Californian *culture*, which allegedly leads individuals to be mellow and laid-back, in contrast to the New York cut-throat *culture*, and (two) they actively maintain their patterns of culinary production and self-conception, whereby they create the set of relations which constitutes the organizational field. In short, the difference we observe between New York and San Francisco is not to be accounted for by culture, conceived of as a set of widely shared personal dispositions, but by the particular patterning of relations that actors produce, which produces them as actors with particular dispositions in the field in turn.

Chefs learn about and experience the moral boundaries and expressive forms that are shared and maintained by the group in their daily lives at work, and they draw on them to develop their sense of selves and establish their relations with others. Through their representations of their knowledge-exchange practices and position vis-à-vis their colleagues, they subjectively establish their authorship and connections to others in ways which are consistent with shared beliefs and values about authorship, differentiation, and acceptable knowledge-exchange practices.

But chefs do not develop their sense of selves and establish their relations with others only through their shared beliefs and values about authorship, differentiation, and acceptable knowledge-exchange practices. To be sure, the culinary products they create have a fundamental role in their self-concepts, as well as in the particular relations they establish with other chefs. And it is thus to the process of creation of culinary products and self-concepts that we turn to in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4: Culinary Products

### Creational Processes, Cultural Classifications, and Professional Self-Concepts

“Each of the materials characteristic of  
a particular artistic field has its own  
inexhaustible regularities and a corresponding  
resistance to the will of the creator”

Elias

*Mozart. Portrait of a Genius*

### Balancing Acts: Juggling Occupational Roles

It is possible to imagine, at least theoretically, that when a musician composes a piece, she may primarily concern herself with the score, bracketing other matters. Of course, musicians, writers, and other artists may have the audience, producers, publishers, or their careers in mind while they create their works, but at least in principle, they could temporarily ignore these issues. Unlike them, chefs cannot ignore matters external to the food when they create a new product. Their process of creation is impinged upon by three tensions inherent to their work. First, because their products are aimed at an audience external to the field, and they *must* sell to keep the restaurant economically afloat, chefs must ensure that their dishes are appealing to non-experts, so they cannot bracket the audience when they create a new dish. Second, chefs are themselves responsible for the creation of food as well as the administration of the restaurant, hence they are of necessity mindful of economic costs and profits when they conceive dishes and design menus. These two tensions limit the products they can create, and affect their processes of creation. But this is not just a matter that is in the back of their minds when they work on new dishes. They spend a good deal of their time on the administration of the restaurant, which determines how much time they are able to devote to creation. Third,

chefs are responsible for both the creation and execution of dishes, and so they are necessarily mindful of the feasibility of turning their ideas into real dishes that can be cooked to order. Whereas composers, for instance, can get praise for a piece that cannot possibly be performed, chefs cannot design a dish that cannot be cooked. Their ideas must be feasible given the restaurant's market niche, customers' volume, and kitchen conditions --size, technical equipment, and number and quality of staff. A brilliant idea that is poorly executed simply appears as a bad dish to diners, as it is not always possible to distinguish whether a dish is bad due to the idea or the execution, and in any case, since chefs are responsible for both, their reputation suffers either way.

The coupling of creation and execution in chefs' roles inherently defines the creation of culinary products. As in all fields that are heavily technical, execution is of particular salience, and so before demonstrating competence in creating dishes that are well composed and interesting, chefs must master technique and acquire credentials to certify it. They first accomplish this with their training as cooks in elite restaurants, and then in their chefs' positions, for they must demonstrate technical competence *and* earn customers' trust before they can create novel products that have a low risk of being perceived as bad dishes. They cannot afford to risk to alienate customers and be unable to keep up with the high costs of restaurants in cities such as New York and San Francisco.

Chefs' self-identity essentially consists in the creation of cultural products. This is what distinguishes them from cooks who, much like workers on an assembly line, only follow orders to perform partial tasks in execution. And it is what distinguishes them from managers, who have no involvement in the kitchen. However, chefs' creational aspirations are constrained by their role in the management of the restaurant and by their

role in the execution of dishes. Their creations are also constrained by the culinary style that is already associated with either (one) them, if they have been chefs for long enough to have acquired a signature style, or (two) the restaurant, if they become chefs at a previously existing restaurant. Beyond the established styles they must be loyal to, their creations are constrained by institutionalized cognitive schema.

The creation of cultural products in cuisine is informed by the particular characteristics of the occupation of chefs, and of food as the object of this cultural production, as I will explain. Chefs' subjective views on the products they make, and their professional sense of selves are intrinsically linked to their creational work. I analytically distinguish three aspects for explaining the workings of the creation of culinary products in this chapter. (First) I outline the various types of processes whereby chefs create dishes. (Second) I describe and explain the classificatory schema that frame their cognitive understanding of the products they make, their subjective conception of the process of creation, and their understanding of traditional and innovative styles in culinary production. (Third), I analyze the relation between chefs' self-concepts and their subjective understanding of the products they make. The three analytical aspects, distinguished for purposes of exposition, will be brought together at the end of the chapter, where I explain their interrelation in the process of creation of cultural products.

### **Creational Processes**

While the task that defines chefs' occupational roles and professional self-concepts is creating dishes (as perceived by chefs and actors external to the culinary field), chefs spend the least of their time creating ideas, and they do it while *not* at work.

This is a curious social organization of work, one that chefs bring up when they talk about their jobs and the process of creation. They note that they are so busy at the restaurant with administrative work during the day and execution of dishes during dinner service that they can only take the time to step back and “be creative,” when they are at home alone. The work pace at the restaurant is not conducive to the contextual conditions chefs require to turn to their creative side. In the words of a chef at a high-end restaurant in New York City:

But I am inspired always at night; never during the day, almost never during the day. During the day for me is more like action, and at night is more obviously of reflection... I need an environment which is very peaceful... I need something which is the right lighting, the right silence around me, the right energy, the right, everything has to be like, something to bring me down. Here, all day long, you are ..... basically, managing a team all day. And then at night is when you can *really* focus on an onion [laughter]. (Chef at a high-end restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

This is a common story chefs tell to describe their process of creation, regardless of the food they make and their status. The spatial, temporal and cognitive separation from their workplace, and the tension between the routine and creative sides of their job which underpins such separation is omnipresent for chefs, and they generally bring it up in talking about their work. Here is a quotation from a high-status chef in New York City that illustrates this tension quite vividly.

Our job is mundane. I mean, we create stuff and we just repeat it, over and over and over and get exactly the same dish. That part of it, service is not very artistic, which is, my artistic side is when I go home and I’m creating this stuff and I’m thinking about things and stuff, and trying to be introspective. But I turn into a robot during service, where each motion’s gotta be.... It’s more like business, it’s almost like military how the kitchen... during service. So it changes, it goes from artistic to robotic, almost. (Chef at a high-status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

The process of creation the two chefs cited here depict is deliberate and separate from the workplace, occurring in the abstract, rather than in-practice (see Brown and Duguid, 1991). They plan entire dishes in a directed and holistic way, often even designing the presentation on the plate. It may take days or weeks until the dish is ready to go on the menu. Chefs whose dishes are intricately designed, with many ingredients and meticulous presentations, are more likely to use this process of creation than those who do mostly traditional food with a more rustic presentation.

Of course, this is not the only type of creational process, even for chefs with intricate styles. First, chefs do not constantly create new ideas. They generally change a few dishes at a time (every few months), and they may have some dishes they never remove from the menu. Even if they are to renew the menu, they have a repertoire of all the dishes they have made in the past to draw on. Some chefs draw on it regularly, as an established procedure in their culinary production, and others resort to their repertoire in extraordinary circumstances, when they need a new dish and are pressed for time, or when they run out of ideas. Chefs may take dishes straight from their databases, or they may do a bricolage, taking a sauce from one dish, a garnish from another, and the protein from another, combining them in a new way. This is their cultural toolkit (Swidler, 1986; Weber, 2005), a reserve of knowledge that is written down and easy to draw on. Their cultural toolkit also consists of a reserve of knowledge that is not formally and materially stored. Chefs have dishes they have cooked and eaten in the past in their cognitive frameworks, some are fresh memories present in their minds, and others are cognitively backgrounded.

A common type of creational process is embedded in and arises from practice. It occurs in the kitchen, often as an outcome of a problem-solving mechanism, when chefs have to adapt to circumstances and resort to their cultural repertoire to do so. Improvisational strategies are put in practice here, and chefs may pull out ideas from their cognitive backgrounds they are not aware they have. This mechanism takes culinary form when they see two ingredients together on the counter, suddenly thinking of combining them to make a new dish. Unlikely ingredients such as pink peppercorns and a sweet custard sitting next to each other in the kitchen may spark the idea of adding the first to the latter. This mechanism may also be the contingent realization that an old dish can be made with a new ingredient. A dish of veal with butternut squash made in the winter may be paired with celery root in the spring instead. This type of creational process may occur in the kitchen, in the market, travels, or simply chefs' daily lives, as it arises out of a random event that enables the classificatory bricolage. Indeed, a good part of the creation of dishes arises out of a "spark" from a contingent event.

When chefs deal with environmental conditions in their daily work, they rely on habitual schema, and also use ad hoc procedures to solve problems. Working towards efficiency, consistency and quality improvement, while dealing with contingency, may lead to the construction of new ideas. Contingency occurs in various guises. The flavor of foodstuffs changes regularly, as carrots are sweeter some days than others, and fish can be more or less fresh and flavorful, and so chefs regularly tweak the preparation of dishes. They may also run out of an important ingredient, so a dish with chestnuts that has been on the menu for a few weeks has to be replaced with something else when the stock of chestnuts is suddenly depleted. Everyday adaptation to contingencies in routine

tasks may lead to innovations just as a deliberate process may generate innovations. We need not conceive of routine activity and innovation (or *creativity*) as binary categories in our understanding of cultural creation (see Dalton, 2004).<sup>123</sup>

The two creational processes I have described entail two cognitive schema that vary in their degree of deliberation. The deliberate process is thoughtful, and likely to be applied for complex creations and for occasions chefs consider important, and the contingent process is automatic, rather scripted and routine, thus common in everyday action (see DiMaggio, 2002).<sup>124</sup> These cognitive schema are not assumed to be fixed for each individual, but rather circumstances may lead actors to apply different schema to different situations.

Some chefs have a higher disposition to be deliberate and others to use an automatic schema in their creational processes. Deliberate chefs tend to be more analytical, and they may consciously attend to cultural categories in their creation of products. The most common categories they are cognizant of when they create a dish are: 1) tastes: sweet, salty, acid, bitter; 2) texture: soft, smooth, crunchy, crispy; or 3) components: protein, vegetable, starch. Other chefs with deliberate cognitive schema, as well as those with automatic schema, tend to be unable to articulate the categories that undoubtedly bound their creational processes, describing such processes as an idea that suddenly hits them.

While actors have dispositions to have one cognitive schema or another, they may use different schema in different situations, as I have maintained. Chefs are likely to be

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<sup>123</sup> Along the same lines, Dalton argues for a coupling of habit and creativity in the conception of action.

<sup>124</sup> DiMaggio (2002) classifies cognitive schema along two axes of orientations toward action: the degree of deliberation, and the degree of affect, and categorizes action in four types: automatic and hot, automatic and cold, deliberate and hot, and deliberate and cold. I only follow his conception of degree of deliberation.

more cognitively automatic when working with ingredients they are familiar with, ingredient combinations they have used before, or when combining a sauce from their repertoire with a meat they know well. In these circumstances, their dishes take form out of a “spark.” They are likely to be more deliberate when experimenting with ingredients that are new to them, making a dish they consider important, or tweaking a dish to improve it. In these situations their dishes are likely to take form through a slow process of fine-tuning. As DiMaggio (2002: 278) sensibly suggests, sociologists (namely Bourdieu (1977)) mistakenly assume individuals to be consistent in the dispositions and schema they apply to a variety of situations, but the dispositions and schema individuals use are domain-dependent. Recent scholarship in sociology of culture has called attention to this phenomenon, pointing out that there may be tendencies in groups to act in given ways in given situations, an idea developed with particular force in Eliasoph and Lichterman’s (2003) concept of “group style.” In contrast to Bourdieu’s concept of practice consisting of a more rigid disposition grounded in the ingrained habitus, group styles are based on social context, thereby connecting stable cultural patterns with social interaction.<sup>125</sup>

Cultural creation occurs at the intersection of the two processes that March (1991) refers to as exploration and exploitation, the first consisting of the exploration of new ideas and the latter of the exploitation of established styles (see also Faulkner, 2006). March argues that organizations achieve their most competitive stage when they combine the two processes. Too much reliance on exploration risks putting out dishes that have not been brought to perfection. In cuisine, this often appears in the form of what chefs see

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<sup>125</sup> This argument is akin to the co-constitution of meaning and practice (see, for instance, Mohr and Duquenne, 1997).

as a dish that “has too much going on,” a dish that has too many flavors and too many ingredients, ideas that have not been sufficiently developed. This is a more common phenomenon among young chefs who are more likely to have (first) less culinary competence, (second) lower professional confidence and thus a higher inclination to “wow” others, and (third) pressure to differentiate themselves to get attention to survive in the market, and possibly increase their reputation.<sup>126</sup> An organization that relies mostly on exploitation suffers from the opposite problem, a stagnant condition yielding a competitive disadvantage. March (1991: 71) points out that these two processes are necessary, but there is a tension between the two that pushes organizations to explicitly and implicitly make choices between them. Their cultural repertoire may lead chefs toward too much exploitation, which becomes cognitively and culturally stifling. A vast record of dishes, chefs realize, lures them to exploit old ideas to the detriment of exploring new ones, making them “lose their edge” and thus a competitive position in the field.

Organizational and individual characteristics increase the likelihood of overexploitation of ideas from their cultural repertoire. Concerning the first, I follow Daft and Weick’s (1984) framework of organizational interpretation to postulate that the likelihood of creators to exploit ideas from their cultural repertoire depends on two factors: their perception of how analyzable the market is, and their disposition to take a passive or active role in relation to the market. Highly competitive markets (competing for resources and clients) introduce incentives for actors to actively develop new ideas to carve out a market niche. Markets perceived to be less competitive present weaker

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<sup>126</sup> These characteristics of young chefs are regularly mentioned by interviewees, whether in talking about contemporary young colleagues or their own early periods as chefs.

incentives for the development of new concepts (Child, 1974; Daft and Weick, 1984; Hedberg, 1981). The likelihood for actors to take an active role in creating new opportunities also depends on the age and size of the organization, according to Daft and Weick. An older restaurant has a larger cultural repertoire, thus luring the chef to draw on old ideas. Such a restaurant also imposes institutionalized styles, dishes, ideas. A large restaurant introduces obstacles for exploration of new ideas due to their high-volume production because, on the one hand, the sheer volume of food that the kitchen staff must produce everyday leaves little time to try out alternative ideas and see if they work out, and on the other hand, if a newly created dish is not ordered by customers, large quantities of foodstuffs may be wasted, which generates too high an economic loss. Additionally, large restaurants are more likely to belong to corporate groups which own several establishments. Such institutional arrangement introduces corporate control and with it further obstacles to innovation.

The likelihood of over-exploiting existing ideas is, as I have suggested, also a factor of actors' dispositions to approach creation as routine and resort to their repertoire as a habit. When they exploit established ideas they know to be successful, they actualize their disposition for exploitation and thus strengthen such disposition (see Lahire, 2003). As it follows, the cultural repertoire does not present a risk of over-exploitation for those chefs whose creational practices result from a disposition to explore new ideas.

Their dispositions notwithstanding, individuals are embedded in organizations which have established work methods and processes, and their organizations are part of an institutional field with a particular social organization of work. Individuals learn and get trained from what they see around them, and the social organization of work in

cuisine is such that cooks are more exposed to exploitation of ideas --ingredients, flavor combinations, techniques, presentation-- than to exploration of new ideas, given that cooks are rarely exposed to the process of creation of new dishes. In this way, cooks' training has short-term advantages for the restaurant because they can learn their specific tasks promptly, but it may be disadvantageous in the long-term for both the restaurant and young chefs, as the narrow training curtails broader learning (see also March, 1991: 86). Such a social organization of creational work whereby cooks receive more training in technical skills than in creation has implications for the generation and diffusion of ideas in the culinary field.<sup>127</sup> Nonetheless, even if organizations were fully devoted to exploitation, the likelihood for young chefs to create new ideas would not be completely suppressed since chefs acquire training in multiple restaurants, so they are likely to combine established ideas from various places, and through inter-organizational bricolage create new products. Weber and Glynn (2006) show a similar process of bricolage in institutional organizations where mergers take place. Just as in even larger social settings like the encounter of two cultures, as Sahlins (1981) has classically described, established ideas applied in a new setting lead to new combinations and unknown territory.

Even with their limited exposure to the process of creation, chefs learn early on that their work entails a dualism of discipline and exploration, and they separate the routine from the more spontaneous and indeterminate, just as for instance jazz musicians do (see Faulkner, 2006). Faulkner (2006: 99-100) notes exploitation and exploration entail different cultural logics, so moving from one to the other implies crossing a boundary.<sup>128</sup> The boundary between the cultural logics of deliberate and improvisational

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<sup>127</sup> See Chapter Five for a development of the institutional aspects of the diffusion of ideas in cuisine.

<sup>128</sup> Faulkner argues that the separation means that the two are independent from each other.

processes of creation is put in evidence with clarity, as I will show, by the culinary procedure of trial and error. This procedure includes tweaking a dish by means of a change of ingredients, cooking techniques, or presentation. Chefs differ in their use of trial and error, as we will see, from some who take it to be a regular procedure, to others who take it as an indicator that there is something wrong with the dish, because a creation ought to turn out well from the beginning. But the range in chefs' claims is more an indicator of their varying cultural conceptions of trial and error than of their actual use of the procedure. Whereas some conceive of it as minor tweaks, others take minor tweaks to be an intrinsic part of the cooking process, so that trial and error entails more significant changes, such as a replacement of a few ingredients in a dish. Those who believe trial and error involves minor tweaks view a change of a few ingredients as an altogether different dish.

Chefs' discourses on trial and error are tied to two cognitive schema in their conceptualization of a dish: the dish as a finished product, or as a work-in-progress. Framing a dish as a finished product implies a creation that is not to be modified, while framing it as a work-in-progress assumes a constant adjustment and improvement. Chefs are positioned on a continuum. On one end are those who deny all use of trial and error. In the middle are those who maintain that some dishes are successful creations from the beginning whereas others need adjustment. At the other extreme are those who conceive of *all* dishes as work-in-progress.

These cognitive schema also frame the conceptualization of menus. Accordingly, menus may be seen as work-in-progress, or documents of finished products (the culinary equivalent of a final draft in academic writing). Chefs who view dishes as finished

products find it unacceptable to have dishes that are work-in-progress on the menu because of the accompanying implication of treating customers as guinea pigs. This would be an irresponsible act, and so breaks a moral boundary.

Conceptualizations of dishes and menus are significant because they reveal chefs' cognitive schema. Framing a dish as a work-in-progress implies a non-intuitive process of creation, but one that is cognizant of at least some of the institutionalized classificatory schema. This type of creational process is not improvisational or spontaneous, but deliberate, amounting to "overthinking a dish" for those chefs who favor an intuitive approach.

Chefs' idea of "overthinking a dish" has cognitive, cultural, and institutional underpinnings, as I will explain. In what concerns the first, the qualities of the object of production must be brought to bear. Besides fulfilling biological functions, in the modern western world food has come to be perceived to satisfy desires, cravings, preferences.<sup>129</sup> Whereas some chefs believe this is food's role, others foster an intellectual approach whereby food should be challenging. Naturally, we should expect to find some consistency between chefs' cognitive frameworks, self-concepts, and culinary production. Chefs whose food is perceived to be traditional and who see themselves as traditionalists are more likely to link food to bodily cravings, and thus label deliberate approaches to creation involving trial and error as "overthinking." In contrast, those who pursue innovative endeavors and have a self-concept of innovative creators are more likely to foster food's role to challenge the intellect as well as to feed the body. The two frameworks are established in cuisine and are available for individuals to resort to the one

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<sup>129</sup> Of course, there are also ideological, political and health-based positions vis-à-vis food, but they are a phenomenon that is not pertinent to the present discussion.

which is more resonant with their work, styles and self-concepts (see Gross, 2002). This resonance is observed in the corporate workplace, as Weber and Glynn (2006) illustrate, as well as in the very different arena of love relations, where Swidler (2003) shows how individuals strive for consistency to make sense of their lives in a social context with contradictory cues about the meaning of love, romance and marriage.

“Overthinking” is a cognitive framework made possible by the type of production in this field. Managers could not reasonably accuse others of “overthinking,” neither could academics. Certainly, “overthinking” can only exist in an area where the object of work and the means through which it is produced has a salient sensorial component, so that there is an intuitive aspect to be either favored or criticized. We may therefore expect to find actors take a position for or against “overthinking” in cuisine, just as we may expect this to happen in poetry, or music. In these areas, actors could either claim the object of their work ought to originate in and fulfill the senses or they could claim that it ought to be an intellectual enterprise. Positions for or against “overthinking” are more likely to develop in areas where the senses used in the production and appreciation of the object of work, such as taste --and smell--, have been connected to the body rather than the mind (see Classen, 1993; Foucault, [1970] 1973; Hauser, 1982; Korsmeyer, 1999).<sup>130</sup>

But as sensorial as cuisine may be, chefs cannot possibly be unconcerned with the performance of their creations, or with their profitability. In theory, so long as they only compose and have no connection to the performance of their work, music composers could get recognition for their creations regardless of how poorly they may be performed. Similarly, not requiring high operating costs, graffiti artists could presumably not think of

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<sup>130</sup> Ostensibly a bodily sense, taste --and smell-- has been linked to the body and thus it has been cognitively underdeveloped and lowly ranked in the western world, standing in contrast to sight which, connected to the mind, it has been long ranked first among the senses.

the profit their creations might accrue.<sup>131</sup> But being associated to the creation and execution of their dishes, and being in charge of ensuring their costly operations are profitable, chefs cannot abstract themselves from these conditions. Nonetheless, the image of the romantic artist, mainly following his or her own impulses and intuitions, still holds in cuisine. The position against the analytical mindset can only be understood given the cognitive and cultural foundation of cuisine, and can only be made sense of as a mechanism actors use to contrast themselves to others.

### **Cultural Classifications**

The position against the analytical mindset is not merely an ideological statement --i.e. what chefs think the right approach ought to be. We find that chefs are generally unable to think analytically about their process of creation. Most chefs are not able to articulate how they discern they created a good dish, and explain a dish is good if it “makes sense,” “when it works,” or “you just know.” Further, they are unable to explain what it entails for a dish to “make sense,” or come to grips with why this category requires any explanation to begin with. This taken-for-grantedness shows the extent of the intersubjective understanding that “making sense” is a self-explanatory quality. Moreover, the taken-for-grantedness indicates the degree of institutionalization of the intuitive mechanism whereby chefs conceive products (for literature on the institutionalization of cognitive schema, see Cerulo, 1995; 1998; 2006; Douglas, 1986; Friedland and Alford, 1991; Mohr, 1994; Mohr and Duquenne, 1997; Vaughan, 1986; 1996; 2002; Zucker, 1977; 1987). Chefs’ intuitive approach to creation is most

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<sup>131</sup> These statements are made here for the sake of argument. I do not claim that composers are *in general* unconcerned with the performance of their works, nor that graffiti artists *never* care about profit.

graphically illustrated by a high-end chef in New York City who explains how to know a dish is good.

It's when you don't have to explain. You don't have to say it, "Try that. And you know, this is the salmon, by the way, and it's wonderful because you're going to see it's going to come like this"..... If I have to explain to you why it's good, something's wrong. (Chef at a high-end restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

The recourse to intuition is, of course, not an idiosyncrasy of the culinary field. Industrial designers, as Molotch ([2003] 2005) shows, similarly note about a "cool" product that "you know it when you see it." Intuition is a common mechanism whereby chefs create dishes, and create meaning, but this is not to say all chefs have recourse to it. Intuition is one available script among others, and chefs are likely to approach the process of creation in an intuitive way insofar as a set of conditions co-exist. From their descriptions of their creational processes and of how they learned to approach creation from chefs they trained with, we know that one such condition is that they have seen others around them (in particular those they worked for) explain their creational processes with an intuitive script. But they only adopt a script so long as it is consistent with their own culinary styles and self-concepts, and basically appears as a reasonable explanation to them. Certainly, if they have seen others approach creation in a way they disapprove of, or with a process that is not conducive to the type of food they make now, or that does not resonate with how they see themselves as chefs, they will not adopt their scripts.

Just as there are multiple scripts chefs may use, there are multiple meanings they may afford the vague category of "making sense" with. This is not a category with a given meaning, but rather a cognitive schema, an approach to cultural creation that chefs use to analyze theirs as well as others' creations. Among the most common meanings that

a dish that “makes sense” is afforded with are: (first) balance of flavors, consisting of salty, sweet, acid, and bitter;<sup>132</sup> (second) balance of textures, involving soft, smooth, crispy and crunchy; and (third) ingredients that “go well” together, itself with two meanings. Ingredients may be understood to belong together due to regional origin, with regions which may be as narrow as Tuscany, or as large as the Mediterranean, or South Asia. In this sense, the Italian Arborio rice used for risotto belongs with sage (common in Italian cuisine) but not with lemongrass (a South Asian herb). Ingredients may be understood to belong together purely in terms of taste, freed from geographic context. In this sense, lemongrass would go well with Arborio rice, just as it goes well with Thai Jasmine rice.

Note that the cognitive schema of “making sense” does not apply to the basic structuring of an entrée, classically understood to be the triad of protein-vegetable-starch, but rather to the more elusive quality of a dish. Whether it is balance of flavors, textures, or ingredient pairings, there is always a very meaningful connotation of functionality. Ingredients should be on the plate because they serve a function required for a good dish. Ingredients included for showmanship, to showcase an innovative foodstuff, technique, or presentation, are superfluous. As such, they build up to a dish that does not “make sense.”

The degree to which chefs are unable to articulate the components that endow a dish with the appropriate qualities to “make sense” varies. Regardless of their degree of cognizance, most chefs subjectively represent the cultural categories that necessarily bound and structure their creative potential as flexible, perhaps not so much rules as

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<sup>132</sup> These four tastes are understood to be the essential categories in modern western cuisines, and they are the tastes most commonly cited by chefs.

guidelines. They are more likely to recognize prescriptions guiding their work than proscriptions constraining it. They recognize cooking rules pertaining to chemical properties, but they see many others as malleable, and even when prodded they may reject the suggestion that they may be cognitively constrained by incorporated notions about ingredients or flavors which have been culturally constructed to be incompatible. To this end, they contrast cooking to pastry, which helps underscore the flexibility of the former.<sup>133</sup> Precise measurements and limited tweaking or improvisation make pastry (generally associated with baking in restaurants) appear scientific, in contrast to which cooking is represented as an art unbounded by rules.

In their attempt to underline the flexibility of culinary rules, some chefs go as far as to maintain that such flexibility even applies to baking, as the following quotation from a mid-status chef in New York City illustrates.

People say that baking is so uncreative, it's so scientific..... it's really untrue. Once you understand the rules, you can fuck with them all you want... Same as writing. Once you know your grammar, you can be E.E. Cummings. Once you understand what's going on in a dish, you can play around. (Chef at a mid-status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

Since it might be deduced that these words have been uttered by an innovative creator, it is worth noting that this chef has a restaurant serving very traditional food. Further, the chef has the explicitly articulated self-concept of a traditionalist, who does not break boundaries but instead abides by tradition.

Chefs' limited perception of the cultural categories that bound their creational potential is consistent with the neo-institutional and field theory assumption that in every sphere actors incorporate codified rules and principles which are transmitted through

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<sup>133</sup> The contrast between cooking and pastry is consistent with the longstanding opposition between the sweet and the savory that is the foundation of modern western cuisine.

institutionalized channels and which (inadvertently) constrain their work (Bourdieu, 1976; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Larson, 2005; Mohr, 1994; Mohr and Duquenne, 1997; Zucker, 1977; 1987; Zuckerman, 1999; Zuckerman et al., 2003). Naturally, there are plenty of established rules and principles which chefs internalize early on, and which remain in their cognitive backgrounds.<sup>134</sup> But rather than assuming a general template in classificatory schema, we ought to investigate individuals' active use of categories and attend to possible variations in their cognitive frameworks.

Looking at how chefs cognitively create products and how they experientially understand their work achieves two goals: it provides empirically valid explanations, and it brings analytical insight into the literature on categories. Research on improvisation in the arts shows that categories may operate as detailed schema for some, and loose guidelines for others (e.g. Sawyer, 2003). Experience gives chefs the ability to have a looser pragmatic grasp of categories. The accumulation of habitual action provides them with the cognitive skill of knowing flavors without tasting them. The more experience chefs have acquired, the less tasting of their products, and the less trial and error they may have to do (assuming a similar culinary style).<sup>135</sup> Their more developed mastery of flavors and techniques allows them to rely on what they experience as intuition, which is nothing but the accumulated knowledge in their cultural repertoire. Comfort with rules, technical procedures and cultural principles gives chefs the ability to experience their

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<sup>134</sup> At odds with the long-standing sociological assumption about socialization into the institutionalized beliefs and ideas, creators' lack of awareness of the knowledge that bounds their work is evidence for Bergesen (2005) that actors have never learned them. Bergesen therefore argues against the idea that there is socialization into classificatory schema in the arts. It seems sensible to maintain (if challenging to demonstrate) that precisely the lack of awareness of having incorporated rules is evidence of the extent of the internalization of such schema.

<sup>135</sup> Experienced chefs, and particularly those at high-end restaurants, however, are likely to taste foods because they have an especially developed attention to the subtle daily changes of ingredients. Minor changes of ingredients (a more watery onion, a sweeter parsnip) require adjusting in seasoning.

process of creation as flexible, for the categories bounding their work are internalized to such an extent that they are not experienced as rules anymore.

So long as chefs' active use of cultural classifications and, more significantly, their cognitive schema vary, the transmission of knowledge in the socialization of new actors in the field cannot be absolute. Institutions provide the foundation, substance and a degree of direction for action. Yet, composed of a multiplicity of individuals and organizations, institutions are complex configurations with competing demands, pressures and ideals, which of necessity engender internal contradictions (an argument classically developed by Marx ([1867] 1889), drawing on Hegel ([1837] 1997) and elaborated on in the context of modern institutions by Benson (1977)). In this complex social configuration, individuals (first) make sense of the information they receive with their cognitive schema, drawing on their cultural repertoire, their knowledge, ideas, and beliefs, and (second) are embedded in social networks, past and present, in their organizational field and across fields, and such networks may serve as conduits of alternative information, ideas, and cognitive approaches.

Creators' degree of awareness of the cultural categories they operate with varies along a key dimension in the culinary field: creational styles. Doing innovative work entails breaking boundaries, and thus it requires a measure of conscious knowledge of such boundaries. Indeed, innovative creators are more likely (though by no means necessarily) to be cognizant of some classificatory categories structuring their creations than traditional creators. It is interesting to ponder (though difficult to demonstrate) whether by breaking boundaries and freeing themselves of rules constraining their work (see Alter, 2003), creators have a higher likelihood of questioning other rules, and of

furthering their innovative creations.<sup>136</sup> One thing we know is that innovation is limited in cuisine by the fact that chefs must make products they can sell to a lay audience, and so have higher pressures to conform to norms than creators in fields whose audience is composed of experts (see DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Phillips and Zuckerman, 2001; Zuckerman, 1999). These pressures are very much on the foreground of chefs' thinking.

Even if creators are cognizant of cultural classifications, they are not aware of any and all categories. So long as a classificatory system is composed of various categories, some categories will be more important and more rigid than others. DiMaggio (1987) suggests that classification systems have two attributes: hierarchy and potency (see also Rao, Monin and Durand, 2005). There is a hierarchical organization of categories, and a symbolic potency of boundaries. Wide agreement on boundaries makes them stronger, and thus more difficult to break (Lamont and Molnár, 2002).

The symbolic value of categories is relative to the other categories in the classificatory system. In the U.S., French cuisine has higher status than Italian, and Italian has higher status than German. The differential value of categories is unambiguously evidenced in the stars awarded to restaurants, as in New York and San Francisco the majority of high-status restaurants are classified as French. The strength of boundaries is also affected by the total number of categories: the more categories, the weaker the boundaries. In cosmopolitan cities such as New York and San Francisco, where a wealth of cuisines thrive, chefs may borrow from other categories for their regional cuisines without accruing sanctions. For instance, borrowing Japanese ingredients does not entail

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<sup>136</sup> Alter (2003: 75) suggests innovation begins as an intuitive belief in the positive outcome of actions, given that results of innovative endeavors are more uncertain than creations based on established ideas. Once started, innovation becomes a process, whereby it is first "normed" and then normative, generating a new established way of doing things.

crossing boundaries for French chefs. Boundaries also vary in accordance with the type of relation between categories. Categories constructed in opposition have strong boundaries, and those constructed as complementary have weak boundaries (Rao, Monin and Durand, 2005). Traditional and innovative culinary styles are an exemplar of categories constructed in opposition, which thus have a strong boundary. Traditional chefs may incorporate some (not many) innovative elements in their food, but only insofar as they somehow make them seem traditional, so they can maintain their authenticity in the eyes of others, and for their own sense of selves.<sup>137</sup> In contrast, since French chefs have borrowed from Japan for some time, the boundaries between these cuisines have weakened, re-configuring the relation between the two to be somewhat complementary in the realm of high cuisine, so French chefs who introduce a few Japanese elements in their food can more easily keep their authenticity than traditional chefs who include some innovation in theirs.<sup>138</sup> We are more likely to find French chefs talk about the virtue of combining French and Japanese foodstuffs, than we are to find traditional chefs expound on the usefulness of innovation.

The symbolic value of categories is not only determined by the structural arrangement of categories but is also affected by the differential status of actors who embrace them. Because they must serve products in keeping with their standing, high-status actors tend to work with high-status categories. Yet, they may at times use more lowly ranked products, thereby increasing the products' status. If high-status chefs begin serving catfish or if they create newfangled versions of the classic Mac & Cheese, they

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<sup>137</sup> I will elaborate on how chefs frame innovative elements in their food below.

<sup>138</sup> The re-configuration of the relation between French and Japanese *only* applies to high-status restaurants, not extending to lower status, and traditional, French or Japanese establishments.

eventually modify the low standing of these foodstuffs. We see thus that there is a dual relation between actors and categories.

The hierarchy of categories and potency of boundaries are also affected by the substantive quality of categories. In cuisine, the two large culinary classifications are techniques and ingredients (Ferguson, 2004; Rao, Monin and Durand, 2005), and they differ in their internal configuration of categories and boundaries. Techniques have fewer categories, and thus stronger boundaries. What is more, because French techniques are undisputed as the foundation of western cuisines in elite culinary fields,<sup>139</sup> cooks incorporate them as *the* cooking techniques from the early stages of their training in restaurants and culinary schools. But techniques are also categorized for their degree of innovativeness. Being foundational of modern western cuisine, French techniques are perceived as traditional. They consist of all the basic rules for cooking, with their modern adaptations such as shortcuts in the cooking process or electronic equipment. This entails, for instance, replacing the lengthy procedure for making stocks as the basis for sauces with faster stocks, or even purchased ones, and using appliances such as food processors, blenders, high-end ovens. Innovative techniques are associated with the newest movement in cuisine, of Spanish origin, labeled “molecular gastronomy.”<sup>140</sup> These techniques are based on a relatively advanced understanding of chemical and physical processes, and they are commonly (though not exclusively) used for altering the texture of food with chemicals and state-of-the-art electronic equipment. Among the most widespread chemicals are Xanthan Gum, used for thickening ingredients in hot or cold

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<sup>139</sup> France being the birthplace of modern western cuisine (Ferguson, 1998; 2004; Ferguson and Zukin, 1998), it created the foundation of elite cuisines in the West.

<sup>140</sup> While this is the most common label, this movement is also referred to as “hypermodern,” “avant-garde,” or more generally “innovative.” Its chefs are commonly called “mad-scientists.”

temperatures; Methylcellulose, used for thickening ingredients and incorporate air in the process; and Agar Agar, used for making gels from hot ingredients. Among the most common equipment are the Pacojet, which makes ice cream, sauces, or purees in a matter of seconds; the Cryovac and Immersion Circulator to vacuum-seal food and cook it at low temperature for a long time in a water bath where the temperature is controlled; and Thermomix, to delicately blend and heat foodstuffs. The most popular culinary development associated with this movement are foams, and they are made from ingredients as varied as potatoes or basil.

With their strong boundaries between categories, techniques have a particularly contentious role in struggles for symbolic capital in the field. Being the new fad and embraced by high-status actors, innovative techniques have gained high status. Chefs with traditional culinary styles and self-concepts reject these techniques, embracing old-fashioned procedures and low-tech equipment to enhance their authenticity and symbolic capital as carriers of tradition. Consistent with their self-concepts, their pragmatic and discursive rejection of innovative styles legitimizes their position and reinforces their self-concepts.

The classification of techniques in the fuzzy categories of innovative or traditional is not without contention (see Bourdieu, 1976; 1977; [1984] 1993; [1992] 1996; DiMaggio, 1987). Techniques that do not fit neatly into the categories (see Rosch, 1978; Zerubavel, 1997) are particularly contentious, offering grounds for a symbolic dispute over their classification. One such case is the Cryovac and Immersion Circulator for cooking sous-vide (French for under-vacuum). Like innovative techniques, it uses expensive, high-tech equipment, but unlike most of them, it does not alter the chemical

state of foods. Cooking sous-vide makes ingredients more tender and flavorful because they are not in contact with water or air. Not altering the chemical state of foods, the use of the technique is not evident for the diner, and thus it does not create a visible boundary (see Lamont and Molnár, 2002). Because this technique can be argued to make food *taste* better, and be more tender, it may be embraced by some chefs with traditional culinary styles and self-concepts. Nonetheless, some chefs who see themselves as very traditional reject the technique on the grounds that using machines makes cooking soulless, and it is not what cooking is about. This is a mechanism for traditional chefs to struggle for symbolic capital in an organizational configuration undergoing change as an increasing number of chefs have incorporated at least some techniques of molecular gastronomy (namely, those for making foams), and have acquired high visibility and prestige as a consequence.

With a higher number of categories, ingredients have weaker boundaries than techniques. The most common classification of ingredients is in terms of regional origin, ranging from French, Italian, Japanese to broader categories such as Mediterranean or Asian. Although chefs also talk about innovative ingredients, this classification is much fuzzier. Innovative ingredients are newly discovered foodstuffs such as an exotic fruit, or a local vegetable not formerly used in high cuisine. Just as chefs at French restaurants may use some --though not many-- Asian ingredients in their food and still be perceived and self-perceived as authentic in their French style, chefs at traditional restaurants may use an ingredient that is innovative in the context of their styles without a loss of authenticity.

Yet, the geographic classification of ingredients also has porous boundaries. Chefs perceive some ingredients which are foreign to their cuisine as more adaptable than others, a perception partly grounded on the place of those ingredients in the culinary realm at large. Having long ago left the confines of Asian foods, soy sauce is perceived as adaptable. An Asian ingredient such as miso, which has not yet diffused as widely, is still more tightly associated with Asian cuisines, and so being less adaptable, its use entails crossing a boundary. Insofar as ingredients are perceived as adaptable, and used with established techniques, chefs are able to keep their authenticity. In the words of a chef at a high-status Mediterranean restaurant in New York City:

It's pretty contemporary French here. We don't do anything that's too Asian but there's no point in holding yourself back, limiting yourself to traditional cooking. People now want lighter... easier to eat dishes, less stuffy dishes. You have to move with the times as well. That's the reason why, even if it is Mediterranean, there is stuff like lemongrass and non-Mediterranean ingredients here. (Chef at a high-status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

Since the boundaries that separated French (or Mediterranean) and Asian cuisines have been blurred, Asian ingredients have become part of the repertoire of western chefs, as I have suggested above, so borrowing them does not accrue a loss of authenticity even for chefs at relatively traditional restaurants, such as the one cited above. Borrowing from a different category, Rao, Monin, and Durand (2003; 2005) suggest, enables chefs to find a balance between conformity to their style and originality.

Similarly, replacement of ingredients that are not available in the country (and cannot be flown in) with local ingredients does not only not accrue loss of authenticity, but may underscore it. A typical case of regional Italian cuisines, based on fresh and local ingredients, chefs cooking this type of food maintain they do what Italian chefs do, cook

with fresh and locally available ingredients. This enables them to maintain resonance between their culinary styles and self-concepts.

Chefs who define their culinary styles as traditional --whether Italian, French, or Mediterranean-- are likely to specify that their styles are traditional as interpreted by American chefs. The notion that an interpretation is at work implies that chefs in the United States could not possibly cook as Italians or French do, for on the one hand they lack some natural resources, and on the other they have to adjust to local customs. But also, the idea that an interpretation of necessity mediates the traditional style endows these chefs with a degree of freedom to stray from the boundedness of tradition. This common idea is evidence of the stronger boundaries and more marking role of techniques (than ingredients) in defining culinary styles.<sup>141</sup> So long as they use traditional techniques, chefs with highly traditional self-concepts can incorporate local ingredients or even flavor combinations and still claim authenticity in their culinary styles with the argument that they do traditional food as is interpreted by American chefs. The absence of a traditional cuisine associated with locally available ingredients in this country may further underscore the weakness of boundaries of ingredients.

Insofar as there are no mechanisms such as sanctions keeping categories separate, continuous borrowing, and consequently blurring of boundaries, are expected to happen (Rao, Monin and Durand, 2005). The blurring of boundaries in turn affects the status of categories, so that when ingredients from a lower status cuisine are borrowed by a high-status chef, such ingredients acquire a new classification. The high visibility of high-status chefs increases the likelihood that their borrowing of ingredients or techniques

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<sup>141</sup> Finding them more clearly defined cultural markers, Rao, Monin, and Durand (2003; 2005) took techniques (and not ingredients) as indicators of borrowing practices.

from other categories has an effect on the boundaries separating the groups, and thus that their actions are followed by others. Accordingly, the visibility of high-status actors makes boundaries all the more real when these actors back them. Boundaries separate categories, but they are maintained, challenged or blurred by actors, so they are affected by the status of categories as well as of actors (DiMaggio, 1987). As White writes (1992: 127; see also White and White, 1965), boundaries are the complex outcome of actions of individuals.

### **Professional Self-Concepts**

Besides the strength of boundaries and the status of categories, the rate of exploration chefs are able to do in a restaurant also impinges on their borrowing practices. Chefs can explore new territories but they must be loyal to their culinary styles to (first) maintain their authenticity as creators, (second) seek resonance with their self-concepts, and (third) control their symbolic position at the level of the field.

When they get a job at a previously existing restaurant, chefs must adjust to the restaurant's existing style. In some cases they can gradually modify the restaurant's style to be more in tune with their own culinary inclinations, in other cases not much tweaking is possible. When they open a restaurant (whether they are owners or not), they begin controlling their styles prior to the opening, as there is a classificatory selection that is required to create an identity and place their products in the market to get investors, publicize the restaurant, and attract customers. This is what Lounsbury and Glynn (2001) label "cultural entrepreneurship," the stories actors create to define and legitimate themselves in the market. In selecting a style to represent and legitimate themselves,

chefs define and objectify their style, and thereby reduce uncertainty and generate order (see Rao, 1994). Of course, the objectification of a style and reduction of uncertainty are only possible so long as chefs classify their styles with culinary categories that are already a currency in the field, so that investors, public relations agencies, the media, and diners are able to recognize the categories and place them in the culinary map (see DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Glynn and Abzug, 2002; Phillips and Zuckerman, 2001; Zuckerman, 1999).<sup>142</sup>

Much like impression management procedures (Goffman, 1959), there is a deliberate mechanism in classificatory work upon opening a restaurant. And much like individuals constantly manage their self-presentation as they adjust to circumstances, the classification and definition of a style is subject to contingency and fine-tuning over time.<sup>143</sup> An external event, such as an economic recession, may change original plans of opening a restaurant with high-end cuisine, to produce more casual, less refined food, or when a restaurant does not receive positive reviews and is struggling economically, a chef may gradually modify the style. Chefs constantly receive cues from media publications, websites, and customers' behavior in the dining room; they note the dishes diners order, the parts of dishes they eat and those they leave unfinished, and their comments about the food. They perceive and interpret these cues in an ongoing process that may lead to a gradual and cumulative modification of their styles. Modifying their styles gradually may be a consequence of the ongoing process of perception and

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<sup>142</sup> Glynn and Abzug (2002) use organizations' corporate naming to illustrate the principle that organizations need to select an existing identity to be afforded with legitimacy by outsiders. They note a "symbolic isomorphism" in organizations' homogenizing tendencies in choosing a name for their corporation.

<sup>143</sup> Here I depart from Lounsbury and Glynn (2001) because they conceive of entrepreneurial impression management as the construction of a new identity and not the constant re-adjusting that is a (central) component of actors' impression management.

interpretation (Weber and Glynn, 2006; Weick, 1995), but is also important for impression management for chefs to appear authentic.

The objectification of their culinary classifications defines chefs' styles because it imposes boundaries constraining their creations, leading them toward exploitation of specific characteristics of their culinary classifications in order to develop a distinctive style. When chefs define their styles they objectify them, and by objectifying their styles they define them, in such a way that action and cognitive schema constitute one another in a retrospective and constant process (cf. Weick, 1995). As styles get cognitively and performatively institutionalized, they add further constraints. A chef at a restaurant known for its original seafood dishes will on the one hand develop skills for cooking fish to the detriment of other skills, and on the other hand will carve out a market niche with the restaurant's unique style, curtailing other possible ventures (first) cognitively, because the cultural repertoire a chef accumulates over the years developing her style constrains the ideas she may conceive of, and (second) pragmatically, to maintain authenticity as well as clientele.

Because classifications constrain their creations, chefs resist the classifications with which they are labeled by outsiders. They find them inaccurate and generally meaningless. They maintain "New American" does not quite represent the food they do, or that it is a vacuous category, or that "Italian" does not do justice to their menu because they are also influenced by France, whether in technique or composition of dishes. Boundaries separating one category from another are fuzzy, as categories are attempts to compartmentalize matters which are fluid (Zerubavel, 1997). Naturally, we will find that actors in any field have a more nuanced understanding of classifications than outsiders,

so they will find distinctions within categories that are invisible or meaningless to outsiders. But also, classifications create associations among chefs by putting them in the same category, consequently turning classifications into matters of contention, subject to actors' struggles to associate or dissociate themselves from others in the field. In cuisine, three categories place chefs in the institutional space: (one) regional classifications such as French, Italian, Californian, Mediterranean; (two) status, awarded in number of stars; and (three) a degree of innovativeness, with categories such as American Creative, Eclectic, Bistro cooking; these are not hierarchically formalized as stars, but used in most media for classifying restaurants, and significantly, embedded in restaurant reviews and rankings.

The social and symbolic associations of restaurant classifications make classifications consequential for chefs. Categories entail being associated with a group, and an ascribed level of prestige. Being associated with a category means having the attributes that underpin membership in that category foregrounded (Glynn and Abzug, 2002; Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001) and consequently the distinctiveness of the creator backgrounded, thus removing some of the credit from the individuals and giving it instead to the category. Chefs are likely to resist having their individuality somewhat diminished for it tends to not resonate with their self-concepts; elite chefs are likely to want to define their styles and not be defined by them. But also they may more instrumentally resist being associated with a group for the particular social and symbolic attributes of that group. For instance, the large number of low-quality Italian restaurants in tourist areas in San Francisco has laden the category "Italian" with low prestige, so some chefs in that city would rather not have their restaurants classified as Italian for fear

of invoking a negative connotation, *as well as* for believing their style to have different attributes.<sup>144</sup>

The culinary classification of the restaurant is not the only factor imposing boundaries on chefs' creational styles. The restaurant décor, view, wine program also define their culinary styles, for the food must be consistent with them. If the dining room pre-exists the menu design, the chef has to create products in harmony with it. A rustic dining room is not the appropriate setting for refined French food. A lavishly decorated restaurant, or one with a breathtaking view, requires food to stand up to the décor. In competition with the décor or the view, the food must be visually stunning. Most chefs resent the external template that defines their styles, but a few embrace the challenge. The following quotation from a chef at a mid-status restaurant in New York City shows how chefs experience the external template that delineates what may eventually become their signature style.

And I was at [Restaurant], I was competing with the best view in the world. My food *had* to look good to get the attention it deserved. Then it was funny... I literally was competing with the best view in the world, my food had to be, had to be eye-catching, had to be whimsical, had to be... in order to break that conversation, and that view, you had to be "wowed," forget about... that was what I focused on. Then I went into the whole eye thing, and the building, and the layering. (Chef at a mid-status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

With a style defined by the setting and culinary classification also comes a particular process of creation, for culinary styles require specific work processes. A rustic Italian restaurant serves less composed food, with fewer ingredients and garnishes, and simpler presentations. Fewer and more familiar ingredient require shorter work processes,

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<sup>144</sup> Whereas the risk of this negative connotation, we may think, also exists in New York, I have not found this fear among chefs in this city. It seems reasonable to think that as there have been high-quality, high-status Italian restaurants in New York City for some time, the cultural association may have existed but faded by now.

because the creation of products is likely to involve less trial and error, and the production less time and staff since there are fewer elements to handle. Conversely, refined food at a high-status French restaurant, with complex elaborations and presentation of dishes, with new and exotic ingredients, is likely to involve longer processes of creation, fine-tuning, and production.

Culinary styles also bring along particular self-concepts. Chefs who create rustic and traditional Italian food are likely to see themselves as traditionalists, position themselves against culinary innovation, reject the analytical approach to food, and embrace food's connection to the senses. This cultural framework in turn guides their creation of products because they favor satisfying, hearty dishes over intellectually challenging ones. The cultural framework translates onto the cognitive process of creation because their rejection of the intellectual approach to food encourages an intuitive cognitive process. Of course, the type of products they make partly explain the non-analytical approach, for traditional recipes and familiar ingredients entail more exploitation of established dishes than experimentation with new ones. "Overthinking a dish" by tweaking it with too many ingredients, or with ingredients that are perceived to not belong in it, implies straying from tradition --an inconsistency with their style. In this way, chefs' culinary styles and self-concepts constantly constitute one another. Being analytical entails straying from tradition in their culinary styles, for traditional flavor combinations should not be fiddled with, and it entails straying from tradition in their self-concepts because it breaks the connection of food with the senses --the ultimate purpose.

The resonance individuals obtain between their creational styles and self-concepts is important for being able to make sense of their work and themselves (see Gross, 2002; Swidler, 2003). Yet, individuals subjectively craft an internal resonance, one which might be dissonant with external classifications. We find a traditional self-concept among chefs who make rustic, Italian food, just as among chefs at high-end French restaurants, who use the most exquisite ingredients to make food that is classified by outsiders (diners and food critics) as complex and sophisticated, and by them as simple and rustic, because they draw on country-style cooking and do not stray from tradition.

How to make sense of the decoupling between individuals' self-resonance and external classifications? First, having access to different information to assess and interpret culinary production, chefs and culinary field outsiders have a differing understanding of culinary categories. Ingredients or composition of dishes are the data available to outsiders to classify the food, so they may categorize a menu with a few pasta dishes as Italian. In contrast, chefs, as I have described, find ingredients adaptable and thus translatable to other cuisines without a categorical impact. Being key information for them, but hidden for outsiders, techniques are stronger cultural markers defining their food (see Rao, Monin and Durand, 2005).<sup>145</sup> Classifying their styles with what *they* find is most defining of their food, if they have a few pasta dishes embedded in a French culinary framework, using mostly French techniques, chefs will still deem their style French, or perhaps Mediterranean. They will similarly classify other chefs' styles with the endogenous understanding of culinary categories.

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<sup>145</sup> The exception to this statement are some of the new techniques which alter the chemical state of foods whose use is visible to outsiders. These techniques, as it follows, are applied by outsiders to classify chefs.

Chefs define their styles with regional classifications, as well as with their degree of innovativeness, with categories such as traditional, classic, innovative, different, creative. These categories, we may gather, are more ambiguous than regional foods. What is “creative” or innovative food is therefore more subject to contestation than what is French food, and thus more open to symbolic struggles in the culinary field. This puts in evidence the limitations of the hermeneutic value of the standard conceptualization of innovation in sociological and organizational research. First, in line with the tendency in modern western thought to categorize concepts in dichotomous terms (Douglas, 1986), innovation is identified as a polar binary; either there is innovation, or there is not. Joas (1997), for instance, argues that creativity only arises when habitual action fades (see Dalton, 2004). Creativity and habitual action, exploration and exploitation (March, 1991), originality and conformity (Peterson, 1997) and innovation and tradition are all similarly formulated dichotomous pairs. Further, creativity is afforded with an intrinsically positive value, and so long as innovation is taken as an indicator of creativity, it is deemed positive as well. We certainly note in cuisine that chefs whose food is perceived to be creative or innovative are likely to receive higher ratings.<sup>146</sup>

Most sociological and organizational research approaches the phenomenon with a structural or network perspective, and some of the literature embeds innovation in processes of self-conception. In the first and most common approach, innovation is understood to be a --conscious or unconscious-- strategy of individuals to achieve more prestige, implicitly conceiving actors to be instrumental-rational. Three analytical levels can be distinguished in this approach: individual, organizational, and inter-organizational.

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<sup>146</sup> There is plenty of evidence of the positive attributes afforded to the values of creativity or innovation in other fields of cultural creation as well, namely arts and sciences (see Lamont, Guetzkow and Mallard, 2004).

At the individual level, innovation is an outcome of the social position of actors in the organization (e.g. Bourdieu, 1976; [1984] 1993; [1992] 1996; Burt, 2004; Collins, 1998; McLaughlin, 2001; Monin and Durand, 2003; Mulkay, 1972; Phillips and Zuckerman, 2001; Sawyer, 2003). At the organizational level, the rise of innovation is associated with the size of the group, geographic location, hierarchical configuration, and communication channels (e.g. Clemens, 1997; Clemens and Cook, 1999; Hollingsworth, 2000; Morrill, Forthcoming; Owen-Smith and Powell, 2004; White and White, 1965). At the inter-organizational level, innovation is linked to the relations of actors across organizations, and types of connections among organizations (e.g. Clemens, 1997; Clemens and Cook, 1999; Giuffre, 1999; McLaughlin, 2001; Morrill, Forthcoming; Owen-Smith and Powell, 2004). The second, and much less widely used, framework focuses on individual processes of self-definition or identity construction (Gross, 2002; Lamont, Guetzkow and Mallard, 2004; Rao, Monin and Durand, 2003).

Mainly interested in the social and institutional causes of innovation, these frameworks do not take innovation as a phenomenon to be analyzed but rather as an a priori binary category, a tool in the investigation of other phenomena. I argue for moving beyond this approach, combining the organizational analysis and the focus on processes of self-conception with actors' phenomenological understandings, for a more complex analysis of innovation, and furthermore, for an analysis that actually resonates with actors' lived experiences.

Such analysis shows that, in contrast to the standard conceptualization, in the field of cuisine creators view innovation with multiple forms and degrees, and afford it with positive *as well as* negative values, and they may represent their culinary styles in ways

which are dissociated from external appraisals, as I have suggested. We can gain an explanatory understanding of this decoupling, and more specifically of chefs' subjective conceptions of innovation, by placing their representations of their styles in the context of meaning shared by field members. As I will show, their conceptions are associated with motivations for action. I distinguish two aspects in chefs' discourses for analytical purposes: accounts of their motivations for undertaking innovative work, and post hoc representations of their culinary products.

Culinary innovation can take four forms, recognized by chefs and field outsiders alike: innovation in technique, in ingredient pairings, in ingredients, in presentation. Given that outsiders attend to the forms of innovation that are visible indicators (to them) of chefs' creativity, they prioritize flavor combinations, followed by techniques which render visible results (i.e. foams, not cooking sous-vide). More lowly ranked are ingredients, for they associate them with sourcing rather than culinary creativity, and presentation which, not involving taste, is even more weakly associated to culinary creativity.<sup>147</sup> Using other principles to assess innovation, chefs may weigh these four forms differently, as I will show. For purposes of illustration, here are examples of the four forms of innovation with re-workings of a classic dish of pork with bacon.<sup>148</sup>

a) Traditional: a roast of pork wrapped in bacon.

b) Innovative Technique: a roast of pork with bacon powder.<sup>149</sup>

c) Innovative Ingredient Pairings: a roast of pork cooked with salt cod.

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<sup>147</sup> There is plenty of evidence of the differential weight of these categories of innovation in publications on food and chefs written by food journalists and critics in the media, as well as in websites and web logs written by diners.

<sup>148</sup> The examples I use here are imaginary, because the confidentiality of interviews prevents me from using real dishes. However, the imaginary dishes presented here are entirely plausible, i.e. they are consistent with creations served at restaurants in my sample.

<sup>149</sup> Bacon powder can be made by using chemicals to dehydrate bacon and change its chemical state to turn it into a powder.

d) Innovative Ingredients: a roast of pork cooked with mojama.<sup>150</sup>

e) Innovative Presentation: roasted pork and bacon built as a brick.

We may expect outsiders to categorize the last four dishes as innovative, even if in different degrees. We may similarly expect chefs to represent them as innovative. However, chefs *may* represent all of them as traditional, guided by the principle of function. Focusing on culinary function, specificities such as variation in ingredients, textures, or presentation become relatively irrelevant. The logic is as follows: bacon's culinary function in this dish is to add fat and saltiness to a lean cut of meat.<sup>151</sup> The innovative technique satisfies these functions, while making the dish lighter with powdered bacon. Making lighter food, viewed as a more modern style, is a concern of elite chefs so that diners are able to appreciate fresher, "cleaner" flavors, and multi-course meals, but also because a number of customers prefer, or demand, lighter foods.<sup>152</sup> The innovative ingredient pairing fulfills bacon's function of adding saltiness and fat with salt cod, an ingredient not usually paired with pork. The innovative ingredient also fulfills bacon's function but with a relatively obscure foodstuff. Whereas salt cod has acquired a traditional status, since it is widely known and available outside its regional origin (Mediterranean countries), mojama is still only sold in few specialty stores, known by a smaller group, and importantly, unlike salt cod, has a high cost. Finally, the innovative presentation turns an originally rustic dish into a composed creation by carefully stacking layers of pork and bacon (sticking the layers with chemicals introduced by the new culinary movement).

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<sup>150</sup> Mojama is salt-cured tuna, made with the loin, an expensive specialty of Spain.

<sup>151</sup> Bacon is commonly added to all sorts of lean cuts of meat.

<sup>152</sup> Customers' dietary preferences cannot be underestimated as a concern of chefs.

In the eyes of chefs whose representations are based on culinary function, these dishes are nothing but variations on a classic dish, re-workings that keep the basic structure of the original. Chefs who represent their food as traditional tend to undergird their representations with the legitimating weight of tradition. Innovation is not possible because “everything has already been done,” or “we are not inventing the wheel.” These chefs perceive they are only tweaking classics, whereby they manage to (first) serve food that pleases diners due to the comforting emotional connection with traditional dishes and (second) offer interesting products. Making a dish appear special at elite restaurants is important for customers to find their expenses justified.

Chefs who resort to the principle of creativity or novelty foreground the new elements in a dish, and thus would represent these dishes as innovative. They may maintain they are tweaking classics, incorporating an element of surprise in a dish, creating a different product, or being creative and innovative. Rather than the original foundation of the dish, they highlight the cultural principle --and institutional imperative-- of novelty and differentiation. They turn a classic recipe into a dish that looks new and interesting, and thus elaborate.

Unlike a non-descript neighborhood restaurant customers may go to for the sake of expedience, elite restaurants sell cultural products that go beyond the food, encompassing an out-of-the-ordinary experience.<sup>153</sup> Therefore, elite chefs must serve dishes that look as if they cannot be made by a home cook, an imperative they are keenly aware of. Chefs’ actions in this regard are nothing but impression management extended to the materiality of food (Goffman, 1959). This helps explain why they may perceive

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<sup>153</sup> For a history of the restaurant and its social role, see Spang (2000).

innovation in presentation on the same level as the other categories, for presentation may be even better suited for creating an interesting, thus different, product.

The variance in chefs' classifications of their products as traditional or innovative is not random, nor is it to be accounted for by individuals' psychological dispositions. There is a patterning to the variance in their classifications that is associated with their motivations for creation, so that chefs who maintain that what guides their creations is the imperative of differentiation --whether they assert this is an institutional imperative they must attend to or they experience an individual drive to *be* different-- are likely to represent a dish such as pork with bacon powder as innovative. Those who assert that what guides their creations is flavor are likely to represent this dish as traditional.

In other words, the extent to which chefs attend to differentiation or to the principle of flavor informs the degree of innovation with which they define their style. The more they highlight flavor as a principle in their creation, the more traditional they find their style to be. Chefs who identify flavor as their guiding principle, while keeping in mind the distinction of their culinary style from others, are likely to represent their style as classic with a measure of unexpectedness. The following quotation from a renowned mid-status chef with a personal culinary style in New York City illustrates this frame of reference and type of representation.

And so I tried to learn both [haute cuisine and peasant food] and then incorporate both of them ... by learning the classics or traditional dishes, regional and traditional dishes and classic dishes, and then start to create your own cuisine with those as the base, I think is what I've done for the most part. So you'll find remnants of a classic French dish somewhere in a dish, whether it is, I hate the word "deconstructed," but something might be deconstructed or something around that. But there is a familiarity there that for some reason, it makes sense.... [Example]... There is a traditional lamb stew in Morocco... So it would be the same flavors in your mouth, but it is not a stew; it's a grilled lamb chop. (Chef at a mid-status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

In contrast, chefs who highlight the imperative of differentiation, while keeping in mind the preeminence of flavor, are likely to define their styles as boundary-breaking. The framework for this representation is illustrated by a renowned high-status chef in New York City.

So when I'm actually thinking about the actual dish itself, aesthetics comes second or third. Again, it's the flavor, but then it's, ok so I say, I try to imagine, this sounds kind of weird, I'm coming to this world and there was nobody in the world and I'm trying to use what this world has to apply heat, to apply salt.... I'm thinking about how I can come at it from a different way. And I try to create my mind, like a blank slate, starting from the point where I haven't seen anything before. And it's difficult to do that, it really is. And it takes a *long* time to come up with something where I'm happy with it. (Chef at a high-status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

The two chefs cited here have distinct, personal culinary styles. They also experience and interpret their creational processes and culinary styles differently. Identifying flavor as his guiding principle, the first chef represents his style as classic with some tweaks. Pointing to originality and differentiation as central principles in his cognitive process of creation, the second chef defines his style to be very innovative. Of course, their subjective representations of their styles are not randomly dissociated from the type of products they make; the latter chef cited above is widely recognized to be innovative whereas the former is not.

The differences in styles and representations of these chefs aside, they both readily acknowledge the business nature of their cultural production, the imperative to create products that are different from others, and their drive to be creative. All chefs account for their motivations with these three possible logics (first) on the macro level, with the field's heteronomous relation to the larger social world, (second) on the meso level, with the institutional dynamic of the field, and (third) on the micro level by

recourse to the Romantic cultural construction of the artist. When chefs make an account resorting to the field's heteronomy, they highlight the business nature of their cultural production. Chefs who point to the institutional underpinnings of their cultural production stress the imperative of differentiation to acquire prestige (see Phillips and Zuckerman, 2001; Zuckerman, 1999). And chefs who frame their motivation with the cultural image of the Romantic artist focus on the internal disposition to be creative.

All chefs are aware of the economically volatile nature of the market, the environmental imperative of differentiation, and the creative potential of their occupation, but they deal with the available information focusing on particular aspects, in personal and subjective ways (see Glynn, 2000; Weick, 1995). They underpin their efforts to create different products, a goal all chefs pursue, with recourse to one of these logics. Chefs' attention to one logic or another is not to be construed as an established cognitive framework assumed to guide their actions, as is typically the case in the neo-institutionalist literature (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; 1991; Friedland and Alford, 1991; Glynn and Abzug, 2002; Jepperson, 1991; Mohr, 1994; Mohr and Duquenne, 1997; Phillips and Zuckerman, 2001; Rao, Monin and Durand, 2003; 2005; Zucker, 1977; 1987; Zuckerman, 1999; Zuckerman et al., 2003). Rather, we should understand that if they pay attention to one logic or another, it is because they are interpreting the environment where they work, and their interpretations are mediated by their motivations for creation - what drives them to create the particular products they create. To be sure, their motivations are not rigid; multiple events in their careers and lives influence what drives them to make particular choices about the food they create. And their culinary products themselves may influence their motivations. Discovering new ingredients or techniques

may motivate chefs to further explore new ideas and increase their inclination to be creative. Likewise, not getting the publicity they require to survive in the market may drive them to focus on the imperative of differentiation and create dishes that are more original and hence that will get attention.<sup>154</sup>

Concerns with economic profit, differentiation and creative expression are part of chefs' cultural repertoire as members of the organizational field. The extent to which they focus on each of these three issues, and the extent to which they act upon them, depends to a great degree on factors outside their control, namely the pressure to be sufficiently competitive to survive in the market, and ensuring a given revenue for the restaurant. But the extent to which they focus on and act upon these issues also depends on their motivations. Chefs interpret the information available to them variously, in ways which may seem inconsistent to observers (see Swidler, 1986; 2003; Weber, 2005). Yet, the inconsistency that observers may find between chefs' representations of their creational processes and their culinary styles (as they have been characterized by others) has a patterning that shows that actors look for logical consistency with the self in their choices, so that the decisions they make regarding their culinary products resonate with their self-concepts.

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<sup>154</sup> This view of actors' interpretations in organizations is along the lines of the institutional sensemaking perspective (see Barley and Tolbert, 1997; Daft and Weick, 1984; Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Seo and Creed, 2002; Weber, 2005; Weber and Glynn, 2006).

### **The Dialectics of Cultural Creation: Culinary Styles and Self-Concepts**

The focus in this chapter has been on the socio-cognitive dimension of the creation of cultural products. I have described and explained the various cognitive processes whereby chefs create dishes, the classificatory schema that frame their understanding of their products, and their subjective conceptualizations of their products. We have seen that the analytical and intuitive approaches to cultural creation, actualized in the creation and production of dishes, are associated with culinary styles, so that chefs with traditional styles are likely to favor an intuitive framework and those with innovative styles are likely to be more analytical. Cognitive and cultural processes of creation and culinary styles are in turn associated with self-concepts. Chefs' representation of their styles and motivations for creating the types of products they make have been (and ought to be) a constitutive part of the analysis of the creation of products in the culinary field. As a process that is complex, diverse, and to some extent internal to actors' worlds of lived experience, the study of cultural creation requires an investigation of individuals' phenomenological understanding of the products they create and the processes whereby they conceive and produce them.

Though partly internal to actors, the creation of cultural products is not an individual process, resulting from actors' instrumental choices or psychological inclinations (Gardner, 1993). Nor is the creation of cultural products simply an outcome of structural or organizational dynamics (Ferguson, 1998; 2004; Monin and Durand, 2003; Rao, Monin and Durand, 2003; 2005). Chefs make choices about the products they create, but they work in restaurants with economic budgets and institutionalized styles, and their restaurants are located in an organizational field with particular dynamics.

Just as any cultural endeavor, the creation of dishes is the product of a particular combination of dispositions, appetencies (Lahire, 2003), and organizational and institutional conditions, as I will show.<sup>155</sup> We normally take dispositions to be the automatic component in individual behavior. But simply conceiving them as non-reflexive does not help us distinguish dispositions from other forms of action. Of course we know that a given behavior has to be repeatedly actualized to be conceived of as a disposition, and we know that a set of conditions must co-exist for dispositions to be actualized. But the mere actualization of acts, even if repeated, does not necessarily mean they are dispositions. More analytically, we can follow Bourdieu (1998) to understand that dispositions (one) cannot be reduced to a repetition of eventualities, and (two) are a law. The empirical occurrence of an action is not reducible to a disposition because, by definition, dispositions apply to the realm of the possible, and not the real (Goodman, 1955). Certainly, empirically distinguishing dispositions from other forms of behavior, such as appetencies, is challenging. I propose, nonetheless, that the distinction between the two is suggestive and worth considering.

Indeed, in contrast to dispositions, we can understand appetencies as individuals' inclinations, preferences and desires. Evidently, appetencies are more fleeting than dispositions; they are not axiomatic, so they need not be, by definition, actualized every time a necessary set of conditions co-exist. Chefs may have periods when they are more inclined to explore new culinary territories and be more inventive in the kinds of dishes they create, and they may go through periods when they have no desire to explore new ideas. Consider the tediousness of chefs' jobs, the repetition of small tasks over the

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<sup>155</sup> This conceptualization of cultural endeavors is akin to DiMaggio's (2002: 279) definition of *culture*. Though he defines it as the product of dispositions and situations, not including appetencies, his notion of hot and cool affects are similar to this concept.

period of days, weeks, months, to ensure consistency in the same dishes. We can think of the actualization of appetencies as a way for chefs to fight such tediousness. But appetencies are not sufficient for them to be innovative, for they require dispositions that are conducive to the exploration of new ideas.

We have observed that chefs have dispositions to conceptualize dishes in a particular way, and organize the creation and production of dishes with the set of methods they have used for years that, as such, have become their established creational processes. Chefs who have cooked traditional food in various restaurants for many years, who do not make many changes to the menu at their current restaurant, and go on to make the same preparations everyday without giving much thought to it, have a firmly established process of creation that is not only effective for their culinary styles, but also consistent with their self-concepts. They think a chef should be mostly concerned with creating good flavor, and good flavor is best achieved through good old recipes that have already reached perfection. Exploration of new ideas (one) cannot be an improvement on recipes that have passed the test of time, but also (two) is driven by the pursuit of the “wow factor” and not of flavor.

We have also seen that other chefs have dispositions to be more analytical and more deliberate in their process of creation. They have worked with different culinary styles, they think about what they create and why they do it, and tend to explore alternative ideas and try them out. They may become curious about new ingredients, ingredient pairings or techniques and would experiment with them and incorporate them to the menu. If they also have inclinations to make changes to their products regularly to fight the tediousness of their job, these chefs are more likely to have innovative culinary

styles. Such dispositions and appetencies will surely resonate with their self-concepts, for they are likely to value originality, and seek to differentiate themselves from others (whether driven by a personal goal or the institutional imperative).

We understand that a strong appetency to innovate cannot be actualized if it is not accompanied by a particular disposition to create and produce new dishes. Appetencies and dispositions do not cause one another, but instead constantly develop in coalescence. Particular dispositions encourage or discourage the actualization of appetencies, and as appetencies get established through time, they may in turn become dispositions. Yet, as we well know, actors are embedded in organizations and institutional contexts, and the social conditions in which they find themselves present incentives and disincentives for exploration and exploitation. We can identify six types of organizational and institutional conditions: (one) the conditions of their appointment in the restaurant, i.e. how long they have had the position for, whether they have ownership, the financial status of the restaurant; (two) their established culinary style; (three) the cues about their products they receive from outsiders; (four) their prestige in the organizational field; (five) their social networks with other creators which serve as conduits of influence; and (six) the characteristics of the field.

We find that specific organizational and institutional conditions are associated with the actualization of appetencies. Chefs with well-known signature styles would meet much resistance if they decided to humor an appetency to create a dish at odds with their established styles because of the entrenched expectations of diners who go to their restaurants, and we find that they indeed rarely serve a dish that is inconsistent with their styles. We see this case in the following excerpt from a mid-status chef in New York City

I will call Billy, as he talks about the difficulties of actualizing his appetency to make food that differs from his recognized style.

One of the original ideas for this was sort of a chef-driven steakhouse. That didn't happen completely because customers wanted Billy's cooking a little bit more. So there was a little give and take. See, I couldn't force the steakhouse thing on them and they came in and wanted Billy's restaurant. You know "I want stuff from [Restaurant A]," "I want stuff from [Restaurant B]," "I want stuff [Restaurant C]" or places of that, that I had a reputation for. So it sort of blended together by a market demand, a customer demand and what we wanted to do and sort of the equipment, kind of, and the fact that we were making a fire in the fireplace and cooking with wood and smoke. (Mid-status chef at a restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

His desire to open a steakhouse or his inclination to create dishes in a style unlike what he has done in the past have not been much actualized. This is an obstacle for renowned chefs such as this one, of course. Chefs with low levels of prestige may hurt their careers if they pursue their appetencies to be innovative for different reasons. Not having earned enough recognition, they have a higher risk of having their innovations be perceived as bad dishes, and we find that they are thus unlikely to innovate. By the same token, chefs' appetencies to develop a particular culinary style and a creational process are undoubtedly key for acquiring a signature style and a given level of prestige. Appetencies to constantly renew what they do, to distinguish themselves from others, and dispositions to work deliberately to create their dishes increase the chances for chefs to develop signature styles, and to be afforded with visibility and, in time, potentially with recognition. In short, these illustrative cases show that an account that explains the social logic of culinary creation only with recourse to institutional factors is incomplete for there is a duality between organizational and institutional conditions on the one hand, and dispositions and appetencies on the other.

Actors draw on information available in their organizational and institutional contexts to delineate courses of action. Some types of information are explicit data such as restaurants' styles and budgets, or market trends, other types of information are more subtle cues such as predictions of future trends among their peers and in customers' consumption, or diners' perceptions of their food. Chefs not only select courses of action but also adopt classificatory schema for thinking about their work from the information they get from their environment, where they observe recurrent combinations of sets of actors, culinary styles and work processes, and contextual conditions. They may select courses of action strategically or their decisions may be thoroughly contingent, triggered by a random event. Whether deliberate or not, their decisions are triggered by something (explicit information, an actor, an event) which is associated with a corresponding type of actor, culinary style and work process, and contextual conditions. Thus, chefs are likely to select a course of action from one of these sets that are recurrent in the field. For instance, they have seen multiple chefs take a deliberate approach to make dishes with new ingredient pairings and unusual textures, constantly seeking to be original, and they have seen their reputation increased as a result. If they are inclined to try some of the new techniques, or develop a desire to change their approach to food, or are invested in increasing their own status, they are likely to follow a course of action assuming that a change in one of these areas is to co-occur with a change in all the others.

Self-concepts are not to be taken as an outcome, or a by-product of individuals' organizational and institutional conditions, and culinary styles. Rather, it is *only* through their self-concepts that actors can make sense of a complex and uncertain environment, where there are too many factors bounding their work to possibly evaluate all of them

(see Fligstein, 1996; Porac et al., 1995). Guided by their sense of selves as chefs and their motivations for creation, actors reduce all the environmental factors to a few manageable attributes. They focus on some information and cues to make decisions about their culinary creations, and in doing so they seek consistency between their styles and self-concepts, in an ongoing process in which they concurrently adjust both of these.

Chefs are unlikely to cook in a culinary style that is not in accordance with their sense of selves as chefs, and so they may not accept a job offer at a restaurant whose style is not consistent with their self-concepts, or if they accept the offer they are likely to gradually try to tweak the menu towards their preferences. By the same token, they are unlikely to maintain an image they had of themselves in the past if it does not resonate with the changes their styles have experienced through time, so those who moved from working at high-end restaurants to more downscale establishments are likely to be critical of the elaborate and intricate way of cooking of high-end cuisine they had wholeheartedly embraced. This is a fairly common professional and subjective trajectory, illustrated here by a chef who worked at high-end restaurants in New York City before moving to a mid-status informal restaurant, where he makes rustic, traditional Italian food

I don't believe in a lot of the Escoffier style, you know, everything from zero, homemade stocks and shit. I don't like it but more importantly, I don't think it's any way to live. As a choice of lifestyle, working 10 hours a day, I think it's bullshit. That cuisine requires that kind of discipline. So I decided to have an alternative cuisine for that matter.... And then, [Chef-partner] really helped me how to adapt a lot of those ideas into a more Italian aesthetic. Discipline is very different in Italian food, it's more, it's more based on shopping, product, and then also with restraint and knowing when to leave the food alone..... And there's nothing wrong with that [elaborate high-end food], in fact when I am off I love to eat that food, because I do miss it. I just don't want to cook it everyday, that's all. (Chef at a mid-status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

Given his professional trajectory, this chef could have been working at a high-end restaurant. His occupational choice was accompanied by a change in his idea of what kind of chef he wanted to be. This is not a case of an actor who makes virtue out of necessity because indeed, he eventually opened a high-status restaurant in New York City where he still makes Italian food, but of a very elaborate kind. Instead, this case shows that as they navigate the field, chefs go through changes in their culinary styles and their self-concepts, all the while maintaining a consistency between them.

We find, for instance, a chef at a successful mid-status restaurant in New York City who chooses to have a menu that is irrationally large for the very small size of the kitchen, claiming that she wants the menu to have everything she may possibly crave at any moment, an appetency her customers seem to appreciate. And in the following excerpt we observe a high-status chef in New York who reflects on how his style has changed over the years as he has matured and learned to be more accommodating in life.

But I have always been a minimalist, really, sometimes too much of a minimalist... Like, sometimes, like, wacky minimalist. [A wacky minimalist] would be like to cook a fish, and serve it in its own juice [laughter]. And say, you know what? It's so beautiful, that fish and that juice, I'm not putting *anything* with it. You know? It's actually very Japanese thinking, you know, very. But I know it was too extreme. You know, you have to find, this is, it's what my teaching in life inspired me in cooking as well, it's, you have to find a middle way in between what you would *love* to do or what you would *hate* to do; try to stay in the middle. And you can apply that in life, and then you really have a smooth ride. So I'm trying to do that in cooking, to find a middle way in some ways. (Chef at a high-status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

Rather than viewing self-concepts as an outcome of creational styles or institutional positions, or associating them only with group membership (e.g. Rao, Monin and Durand, 2003; 2005), these excerpts of chefs' discourses show that self-concepts are developed in a dual dynamic with styles. To be sure, cultural categories establish

boundaries defining creational styles, and in so doing create collective identities (DiMaggio, 1997; Douglas, 1986; Mohr and Duquenne, 1997; Zerubavel, 1997). But while individuals share attributes with others (a culinary style, a status level, a geographic location) through which they are lumped together in a collective identity, they have particular combinations of dispositions, appetencies and contextual conditions that inform their self-concepts, and these in turn translate onto their creational styles. Creational processes unfold in an ongoing co-production of cognition and action (Weick, 1979; 1995) whereby as they create products, actors prescribe and produce their styles and themselves.<sup>156</sup> In constantly re-creating their culinary styles and themselves, chefs seek both subjective resonance between the two and authenticity and legitimacy in the eyes of others.<sup>157</sup>

The neo-institutionalist literature rightly accounts for the strength of institutionalized cognitive schema in organizational fields, pointing to processes and pressures we find over and over again. But fields are complex configurations, composed of multiple cues, demands, pressures, and incentives that of necessity introduce inherent contradictions. Thus, fields are not so easily navigable. Actors navigate them with their particular self-concepts, which help them focus on a few aspects to reduce the complexity and uncertainty of the field and develop their courses of action. And as we have seen, they develop their action and cognition maintaining a consistency with their sense of selves, particular experiences, and contextual conditions.

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<sup>156</sup> This conceptualization is akin to Hennion's (2003) notion of innovation as performative action in that as actors make innovative products or services, they produce and prescribe the innovative style.

<sup>157</sup> Lounsbury and Glynn (2001: 560) propose a similar framework with their notion of "cultural entrepreneurship," positing that organizations constantly adjust their identity stories to keep their identity and status.

I have shown in this chapter that chefs have contrasting demands from their occupational roles in the creation and execution of food and the administration of the restaurant. And they face contradictory institutional pressures to conform to established styles and exploit safe ideas to ensure a profitable business, and to explore new ideas to maintain a competitive edge on the market. They are also likely to be confronted with a conflict between market demands and their own creative appetencies. Further, restaurants present chefs with given needs and degrees of freedom of action, and chefs assess and interpret the organization in view of their own observations, experiences, and sense of selves.

Of course, chefs are embedded in organizations and understand their work as lived experience largely from the perspective of their jobs in the organizations. But restaurants are not autonomous organizations, their competing pressures, demands and degrees of freedom of action are determined by the very particular place they occupy in the institutional field. Chefs' culinary styles, their understanding of their styles, and their self-concepts, as I will show in the next chapter, are indexed by their social connections and institutional positions vis-à-vis others in the culinary field.

## Chapter 5: Culinary Field

### Culinary Styles, Institutional Positions and Professional Self-Concepts

“[I]t is not particularly fruitful to conceive of men  
 in the image of the individual man.  
 It is more appropriate to envisage an image of  
 numerous interdependent people forming figurations”  
 Elias  
*The Civilizing Process*

#### The Configuration of Cuisine

Just as our perception of paintings, music performances, landscapes, or our occupation depend on our vantage point, actors’ perspective of the larger social configuration where they work depends on theirs’ --from the specificities of their job to their position in an institutional configuration. The characteristics of the restaurant where they work, the culinary styles they have learned and adopted in the past, their status, their relations with others, and their self-concepts all inform chefs’ understanding of their culinary styles, and the logic of culinary creation.

Moving away from the individual dimension of the process of culinary creation and professional self-concepts, this chapter places chefs in a social context. Chefs’ culinary styles and self-concepts are individually constructed and individually perceived, but they are certainly also social attributes. A culinary style is only recognized as such insofar as it is already in existence in the repertoire of styles in the culinary field (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Glynn and Abzug, 2002; Phillips and Zuckerman, 2001; Zuckerman, 1999). Had a chef labeled her food “molecular gastronomy” --the innovative style chiefly recognized for altering the texture of foods, associated with a culinary movement that recently originated in Spain-- twenty years ago, it would have made no sense to colleagues, customers or critics. Further, this hypothetical chef herself would

have had a more vague understanding of her style and how it relates to other styles. Not having a defined sense of the boundaries of the style, its degree of innovativeness, and the prestige with which it is afforded, she would have had a more imprecise self-perception as chef. Of course, how actors define themselves resonates with frames used by others. Just as the category of “molecular gastronomy” would have not been understood two decades ago, the category of “mad-scientist” --a label for chefs who work on molecular gastronomy-- would have had no meaning, and no social consequence, either. Nowadays, this category has a defined meaning with stylistic specifications and a given level of prestige. With technical complexity and artistry, molecular gastronomy is generally perceived to be creative, though it might also be perceived as gimmickry due to its faddish status (see Hirsch, 1972; 2000). The dual condition of a style between the values of creativity and gimmickry informs how chefs subjectively deal with their creational styles, as I will show.

We understand that actors come into a field where there are established perceptions of creational styles, but this does not mean that chefs have no control over how they perceive themselves and how others perceive them. Even if constrained by their trajectories and current job situations, they have some control over their styles and careers and the image they give to others. Chefs monitor their images interpersonally (compare Goffman, 1959), and institutionally when they create labels and stories to portray themselves and their styles to others (Glynn, 2000; Glynn and Abzug, 2002; Lounsbury, 2002; Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001). They have some control over the culinary styles they embrace, their categorization of their dishes and restaurants, and their

professional self-concepts. But what chefs create and how they understand their products is nonetheless also associated with their position in the institutional configuration.

That chefs' styles and self-concepts are associated with their institutional positions does not mean that their professional fate is determined by their status or accumulated capital (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977). Nor does it mean that their status or accumulated capital are exogenous factors over which actors have no control. As Porac et al (1995) maintain, because competition is generally assumed in the literature, it is presented as an external constraint imposed on individuals by a hierarchical structure. Instead, they propose that "[w]hile markets are arenas for economic transactions, at their core are routinized thought patterns and interlocked networks of managerial attention" (Porac et al., 1995: 224). Insofar as actors share criteria for understanding their work and position vis-à-vis their peers, they contribute to effectively build the social organization of the field (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Porac and Thomas, 1990; Porac and Thomas, 1994; Porac et al., 1995). Actors shape the social configuration as they develop their styles, reacting to the actions of others, improvising, strategizing, or adjusting to contingencies.<sup>158</sup> If the sum of individual actions appear as a social configuration that we can observe it is because, as White (1992: 6) phrases it, they have reached a dynamic equilibrium.

There is, of course, a history to the dynamic equilibrium reached by individuals' actions and social relations, a history which is an intrinsic part of the field. Individuals' actions, their products, and their social relations take form in a social configuration that

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<sup>158</sup> It is assumed here that actors develop their styles guided by different motivations, and through different cognitive mechanisms. Some may be rational actors following instrumental strategizing, but others may be more impulsive and automatic in their decisions.

pre-exists them.<sup>159</sup> Actors may strategize, and they might think of the past, present, and future social dynamics of the field, but this involves too much information, ambiguity and uncertainty. Thinking of the past and the future of field dynamics is too complex, so actors rely instead on informative cues about the main forces driving the field at present, which are concrete, immediate data they can interpret and act upon.

What are the forces organizing the field of cuisine? The culinary field takes its form from a particular patterning of relations among creators and culinary products, both of which are socially distributed by their status and creational styles (these are primarily defined by regional classifications and degree of innovativeness). In this light, the importance of products in the patterning of relations is less in line with Latour's (2005) programme for conceiving objects as social actors, as expounded in his actor-network theory, but rather more along the lines of Marx' ([1867] 1889) view of objects as imbued with social relations, a phenomenon nonetheless obscured by established social processes (which he labeled fetishism of commodities). The argument presented here is thus for understanding that *both* products and social actors are bundles of relations of *both* products and actors, and therefore the two have distinct but analytically inseparable trajectories in the organizational configuration. Products, like social actors, also have careers. The two have been independently classified in terms of culinary styles and status. Through time, products and actors associate --and dissociate-- themselves with one another, and in doing so they influence one another's standing in the social configuration. Relations among products and actors are dynamic, constantly positioning one another vis-à-vis other products and actors in the social structure.

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<sup>159</sup> This notion is akin to Bourdieu's (e.g. 1977; [1984] 1993; [1992] 1996) conception of a field as a structure composed of the history of its struggles.

Just as culinary categories and actors have independent levels of prestige influencing one another's status in their coalescence (as I have maintained in the previous chapter), products and creators similarly impinge on each others' status (cf. Breiger, 1974).<sup>160</sup> By serving culinary products associated with higher levels of status, chefs may increase their reputation (and vice versa). By the same token, by serving low-status products in their restaurants, chefs modify the status of those products. This commonly occurs when high-status chefs serve down-market ingredients, or conversely, when a dish originally created by a high-status chef is borrowed by too many (lower status) peers, in time somewhat decoupling the association between the chef and the dish, and lowering the status of the dish.

Sometimes chefs create products which are tightly associated with them because they are widely recognized as their creations, but such tie may be loosened in time and be lost altogether. At the same time, other products have reached such a status of classics that if they ever had an association to a particular creator, few if any know it. Past products and past creators are an intrinsic part of the field because they influence contemporary products and creators in a dynamic interaction, and in so doing their trajectories are embedded in relations of interdependence with current products and creators. When actors subjectively construct their professional lineage with past chefs (as I described), they associate themselves with their status and their culinary styles. They borrow past ideas, establish or shun connections with past creators, and associate themselves with past products or creators in ways which influence their styles and status.

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<sup>160</sup> In this article, Breiger (1974) developed his "membership network analysis" for the understanding of the duality of individuals and groups.

### *Heteronomy and its Consequences*

The analysis of the patterning of relations among --past and present-- creators and products is fundamental in the investigation of the logic of culinary creation, as I have been arguing, for the logic of creation is to be explained by recourse to the internal dynamics of the field and not to exogenous factors. Nonetheless, however autonomous a field of cultural production may be, the dynamics of a field are never completely independent of the larger social world. External factors influence the dynamics of creation, but some fields have a higher degree of autonomy than others. Academia is a paradigmatic example of a highly autonomous field. Contrariwise, the movie industry is an exemplar of a highly heteronomous field.

Much of the research on cultural fields has focused on a few limited areas which have characteristics different from cuisine. Following Bourdieu's (e.g. 1976; [1984] 1993; [1992] 1996) seminal work on cultural fields, research on production of cultural objects such as literature, music or the fine arts generally adheres to his conception that cultural fields are structured around the antagonism between artistic reputation and commercial success, otherwise formulated as pure and mass production. While with its focus on omnivorousness, contemporary American sociology of culture shows that the sharp boundary between high and low-brow products has been blurred as individuals diversify their cultural tastes (DiMaggio, 1987; DiMaggio and Mukhtar, 2004; Erickson, 1996; Forthcoming; Fischler, 1990; Peterson, 2005; Peterson and Kern, 1996; Peterson and Rossman, Forthcoming; Warde, Martens and Olsen, 1999), the sharp boundary is still assumed to persist in the production of cultural objects.

Research on cultural fields has also focused on knowledge production, generally investigating scientific fields (Bourdieu, 1976; Collins, 1998; Frickel and Gross, 2005; McLaughlin, 2001; Owen-Smith, 2001), where, as I have suggested, the social dynamics of cultural production and reputation are relatively autonomous. In contrast, research on knowledge-exchange mostly looks at the financial or corporate worlds or the biotechnical industry (Burt, 2004; Haveman and Rao, 1997; Owen-Smith and Powell, 2004; Zuckerman, 1999), areas that are largely heteronomous and closely tied to the economic market, and whose production is thus geared towards external audiences. Whereas the value of artistic creativity is key for reputation in the production of cultural goods, commercial success is essential for reputation in these industries.

A field of cultural production with for-profit ends in a highly competitive and volatile market, cuisine cannot possibly have two opposing poles of artistic recognition and commercial success. Whereas painters can do their work whether they are associated with a gallery or not, chefs cannot cook professionally without a restaurant. Similarly, while poets can meet in a café or a park to present their work to one another or to external audiences, chefs can hardly prepare their dishes for a group of individuals without a restaurant kitchen. Put somewhat differently, while painters or poets can in theory claim devotion to *art for art's sake*, chefs cannot possibly do it. They cannot disregard their need to appeal to external audiences (customers and critics) to survive in the market, nor can they reject commercial success in their subjective construction of their sense of selves.

The type of audience also imposes practical constraints on what they can create. The pressure to make recognizable products (normally identified in the neo-institutional

literature on organizations) is all the stronger when the audience is composed of non-experts --a pressure chefs are likely to voice. Audiences require familiar products to understand them, but at the same time novelty to enjoy them. Further, it is novelty and not recognizability what gives chefs a competitive advantage, so they must walk a fine line between conformity to recognizable products and originality to distinguish themselves from others and have an edge on the market.

That cuisine is a heteronomous field is not to say that the logic of creation is purely driven by exogenous criteria. Because every field has *some* degree of autonomy, it has a distinct set of principles that define excellence in the field. In this sense, every field has the potential for actors to gain recognition with recourse to values that are intrinsic to the logic of creation. In cuisine, recognition is gained through the exceptional qualities of culinary products, as elite chefs are not simply expected to nourish but to provide an extra-ordinary experience. Yet, individuals can only acquire recognition among peers and the external audience if they achieve artistic reputation as well as commercial success.

The heteronomy of the field manifests itself through the institutional constraint to demonstrate excellence of creation while economic profit must also be ensured. Chefs must deal with the tension between excellence of creation and economic profit in their occupational roles because they are responsible for both creation and management of the restaurant. The coupling in their roles affects the extent to which they can devote to creation, as they must juggle this task with managerial demands and the daily operation of the kitchen. The coupling of creational and administrative duties also affects their professional self-concepts. In other areas of cultural production where administrative and artistic tasks are distributed in two roles, each occupational group makes claims of

legitimacy relying on distinct criteria, as Glynn (2000) shows with symphony orchestras, where administrators resort to economic values and musicians to artistic values to legitimate themselves. On the contrary, chefs must negotiate both values in their subjective representations of their styles and themselves.

In this chapter, I explore how chefs deal with these contrasting pressures on their creational projects and attempts to legitimate themselves and get recognition. Actors must solve the tension between these pressures for their own sense of selves and their standing vis-à-vis their peers and their audience. In this light, I understand culinary styles as mechanisms for chefs to socially and symbolically locate themselves in relation to others in the field. Placing chefs' culinary styles and discursive representations in their social context, I focus the analysis in this chapter on the patterning of relations of actors and products.

First, I explain the role of culinary styles as mechanisms for actors to position themselves vis-à-vis others in the organizational configuration. I then analyze the diffusion of styles and exchange of ideas in the field. I contextualize chefs' subjective representations of their styles, in terms of their innovativeness and motivations for action (as they were described in the previous chapter), and complement the analysis with an examination of the dispersion of self-representations. I close the chapter with a comparison of the culinary fields of New York and San Francisco, and with concluding remarks.

### **Culinary Styles and Social Connections**

Actors' subjective representations of their products and themselves, as well as their relations with other chefs, are of course largely indexed by their creational styles. When they adopt a particular culinary category --French, Italian, Mediterranean, New American--, chefs position themselves in the organizational field. They also define their culinary styles in terms of their innovativeness, with categories such as traditional, classic, original, creative, innovative. Through their culinary styles, they position themselves close to some creators and far from others. Their choices of culinary styles are partly constrained by their experience, as they are likely to work with styles with which they have expertise. Sometimes they select styles deliberately. For instance, young chefs make purposeful decisions regarding their styles to differentiate themselves from renowned personalities they worked for, so they can demonstrate their authorship. But the choice of culinary style is also subject to contingency --a job offer, customer demand, market fluctuations. Through creational styles chefs associate themselves with pre-existing culinary categories and pre-existing stocks of prestige. Thus, through creational styles actors are associated with others due to their common membership in a category. It is precisely to prevent such common membership that young actors purposefully distance themselves from the renowned chefs they worked for.

Just as academic sub-disciplines, or specializations in law practice bring actors together in professional and social meetings, fostering social ties among them, so do sub-areas in the culinary field (see Gould, 1993). Chefs with similar culinary styles may meet at conferences, workshops, award ceremonies, dinner galas, industry events, and social gatherings, and they may establish social connections and exchange information. A

possible exception to the fostering of social connections among chefs with similar styles is when two chefs, not previously friends, are very close in terms of their styles *and* geographic location. Actors in this situation have too similar a place in the social configuration, and their organizational proximity may be too uncomfortable, so they may shun ties between them altogether. This exception aside, chefs form a tight social network, and when they get together they talk about food (even ad nauseam in the opinion of many), and draw on each other for ideas. They sometimes get ideas from talking generally about food and cooking with peers, and other times they call a friend for specific advice on how to best cook a squab, what to do with the seasonal morels, or how to get a hold of truffles.

But chefs are unlikely to talk *about* information-exchange for it threatens their authorship. To what extent ideas diffuse, through what channels, what kinds of ideas are more likely to diffuse, and who chefs may share information with can be (partially) inferred by combining information about chefs' discourses, their culinary production, and professional trajectories. Some actors are more likely to talk about information-exchange than others. With a long-established authorship, and a distinctive style, higher status chefs are more likely to openly talk about their knowledge-exchange than those who still have to prove their authorship. The absence of mechanisms which make influence explicit complicates the study of the diffusion of ideas because on the one hand, as I have suggested, chefs are unlikely to talk about how they get ideas insofar as it threatens their authorship and raises a moral boundary, and on the other hand, the diffusion of ideas cannot be easily traced, as it can, for instance, in academia, where it is made explicit through references.

Chefs talk vaguely about their information-exchange channels, but just as other cultural creators, they do obtain ideas from peers. They give evidence of this when they make indirect references to their information-exchange in talking about other things. They may speak of their cookbook collection, or of the restaurants they must visit to see what their peers are doing so long as they do not perceive they are talking about their exchange of ideas (as I describe in chapter three). When they perceive the context of the conversation is their exchange of ideas, they generally become uneasy and shun the topic. In showing their unease, actors do not only convey information about themselves --in this case, that this is a moral issue which threatens their authorship-- but, as Katz (1999) notes, they also give cues to others to stop talking about the issue. The following quotation from a young chef at a high-status restaurant illustrates chefs' unease with the topic of information-exchange channels, and the relatively common response to the question of whether they go out to eat to get ideas.

I mean, I go out to eat to have an experience, to experience what that restaurant has to offer, essentially. If I hear someone's cooking great food, I'll go for that. You know what I mean? I don't go for "Oh, what's he making? Is he making this, is he making that?" Because essentially if I see something, and I know most of the chefs, if I see something, I already know how it's being made. Most chefs would feel the same way. I go out to experience the whole restaurant. Service, everything.... When a new restaurant opens, within the first year I usually make it there 'cause I want to experience the restaurant and what their, their whole package. I'm not one of those people who order 10 things, and just try everything and say "OK, thanks" and leave, you know. That's, that's, those people are like "What's this guy doing? What's the buzz all about? What's he making?" Those are people that are starving for, yeah, probably for ideas. They're not confident or secure in their own, in what they do. They got to see why that guy is so popular. For me, it's more like, the restaurant got 3 stars, they got a Michelin star now, or, you know, everyone's raving about them, you know, they're raving about the restaurant, not about just one... (Chef at a high-status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

Unable to talk about their information-exchange channels, chefs emphasize they go out to eat in their field not to get ideas for their dishes, but, if anything, to assess other aspects of the restaurant business such as service, décor, and wine program. But they do acknowledge they get ideas for their culinary creations from restaurants when they travel. It seems implausible that they would not learn anything from peers in their field, and indeed their dishes and menus are evidence of the diffusion of ideas in the field. But chefs are generally unable to specify the process of diffusion.

There are two channels through which information diffuses in the field actors are likely to identify: (one) when they call friends for particular advice, because this is often a very specific request for information, and (two) when they draw on chefs at other restaurants in their corporate group for ideas, because they see themselves as part of a team and not competitors. The first case is illustrated in the following excerpt from a renowned chef at a mid-status restaurant in New York City, as he talks about whether chefs exchange ideas.

Yeah, absolutely it happens, and it's good, it's good for the whole... I pick up the phone, as I have done for many, many years. "You know, I have this piece of bass, and I don't know what the hell to do with it" "You know, I did it with lentils and...." "Oh, cool, thanks." The fact is that if I set about absolutely replicating what a friend of mine just said it's not going to have the same translation anyway.... If you look back to the relationship between Picasso and Georges Braque as an example. I mean they had side by side. And that was part of the creative spirit. They looked the same but they obviously were not the same. That's cool, it's the only, it's a way for us to learn, you know. Because once you step up and you're the big cheese, you don't always learn as much from the people working *for* you.... Because you could spend a lifetime not graduating to chef status and still not know it all. So consequently we have to lean on each other as the old daddies and get help from there. (Chef at a mid-status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

With his authorship established --and celebrated-- for a long time, this chef *can* talk more candidly about the diffusion of ideas, and even explicitly acknowledge that information-exchange is good for the collective creative spirit.<sup>161</sup> Nonetheless, as we note, after stating he draws on his friends for inspiration, he promptly proceeds to stress the *difference* between a borrowed idea and its adaptation, and what is more, with an example from another area of cultural production, distant --and distancing-- from his time and place. In this case, and even more in others where they are also relatively forthright, chefs are still vague about specificities of the process of diffusion.

In the instance of chefs who draw on their friends, or those who draw on others in their corporate group, ideas diffuse through direct social connections among actors who are likely (though not necessarily) to have relatively similar culinary styles and status.<sup>162</sup> But ideas do not only diffuse through direct social connections or actors in similar structural positions, as there is evidence in dishes and menus that lower status chefs draw on higher status actors for ideas, whether they have personal connections with them or not. Likewise, in their study of diffusion of innovation in the French culinary field, Rao, Monin and Durand (2003; 2005) show ideas are more likely to travel through geographically proximate actors who need *not* be directly connected or in equivalent institutional positions. They show that innovation is likely to diffuse when it is initially

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<sup>161</sup> For a sociological analysis of the role of friendship in collaborative circles in a variety of areas of cultural creation (not cuisine), see Farrell (2001).

<sup>162</sup> The network literature distinguishes two mechanism of diffusion of ideas: structural equivalence (Burt, 1987; 1988; 1992; White, 1992) and structural cohesion (Coleman, Katz and Menzel, 1957; Laumann, Marsden and Galaskiewicz, 1977; Laumann and Pappi, 1973). The first model posits that knowledge diffuses through actors in similar structural positions because ideas are adopted by looking at competitors. The second model posits that ideas diffuse through proximity in a network so information is likely to travel between actors who have connections devoid of many intermediaries. Along these lines, Owen-Smith and Powell (2004: 8) distinguish between two types of connections: open channels, which are diffuse, reaching centrally located as well as loosely connected actors, and closed conduits, which are legally controlled, limiting the exchange of information to membership in a group. The two cases I am describing here involve social proximity and also (likely) similar structural positions.

fostered by local actors with high-status, regardless of their relation to those who eventually adopt their innovations.

Recipes diffuse through multiple and complex mechanisms, some of which are not obvious, as I suggested above. The lack of legal regulation of knowledge-exchange and the fragility of authorship make cuisine a distinct case of diffusion of ideas from institutional organizations where knowledge-exchange is made explicit and authorship is indisputable. These conditions affect not only the diffusion of ideas in the field but also actors' agentic rhetorical mechanisms for dealing with their information-exchange.<sup>163</sup>

Even if chefs may talk vaguely about influence, they disregard it, play it down, or even deny it when it comes to the specificities of their own culinary styles and professional careers, as we have seen in the quotations above. Through information from discourses of the more candid actors, and inference from their culinary production, we know chefs obtain ideas through direct ties with peers, and through others in their restaurants, in particular from chefs with whom they have trained in the past. We also know they get ideas from (mostly) high-status chefs who are not local (because they openly talk about these channels), and we can infer they borrow ideas from high-status actors who are in their field.

There is behavioral evidence of the diffusion of ideas through direct ties, as actors may state they obtain ideas from others in their jobs and from friends in their field. And there is evidence of diffusion of ideas throughout the field, irrespective of the strength of ties or status, as dishes and menus in diverse restaurants resemble one another in their use of ingredients, composition of dishes, techniques, presentation and even menu structure

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<sup>163</sup> The literature on the diffusion of knowledge tends to overlook individuals' subjective mechanisms, focusing instead on material evidence, as is the case of Rao, Monin and Durand (2005), who analyzed chefs' signature dishes.

and writing style. This mechanism of diffusion of ideas is likely to be obscured by agentic denial practices of actors, and in this sense the diffusion of ideas through restaurants of equivalent culinary styles and status (among actors who are not friends) is the most difficult to investigate because borrowing from competitors is the most likely practice to be obscured.

Chefs have a clear sense of right and wrong in their information-exchange. When they stress that they do not go out to eat to get ideas because they already know how dishes are made, so in any case they have nothing to learn, or when they emphasize that even if they sought to replicate somebody else's idea, it would never be the same anyway, they give evidence of the information-exchange channels they consider wrong -- borrowing from competitors--, and the practices they consider wrong --plagiarizing somebody else's idea. When they openly talk about getting specific ideas from local friends, or from restaurants in their travels, they give evidence of the mechanisms they deem acceptable.

Actors deal with their intersubjective understanding that borrowing ideas from others in their field is morally wrong in varying ways through their actual practices (not just their discourses). The moral boundary is internalized to such a degree that, to some, the mere possibility of borrowing ideas from others in their field is to be prevented. Just as some fiction writers do not read others' works when they are writing a book for fear of authorship interference, some chefs do not go out to eat, or read cookbooks, when they are designing a new menu, for fear that they may unintentionally copy others, as the following excerpt from a chef at a mid-status restaurant in New York City illustrates.

But you do that [go out to eat]. You do that for creative reasons and you, not that you emulate or copy, but you see what other people are doing but actually sometimes when I am doing a menu I intentionally *don't* go out to eat because I don't want it to influence, and it can, subconsciously.... Yes, because it comes out subconsciously. It does, and so I have been conscious of that. You learn by. You know, like, I'll go out and all of a sudden, you know, I'll do the special the next day, and you realize you're looking at it the third time. Let's do it. And you go, "That's *very* like what I had two weeks ago over at whatshisname's place," or something, you know, or something like that. So I do. I try to isolate that sometimes. (Chef at mid-status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

Not all chefs take this strategy to prevent others' ideas from interfering, of course. And as even this chef realizes, they already have others' ideas stored in their memories, or their files, from eating out over the years. But ideas they obtained in the past are more blurry, and they may not even be aware they are drawing on them. They can thus borrow old ideas so long as *they* do not feel they are plagiarizing. The following excerpt from a chef at a mid-status restaurant in New York City vividly illustrates the personal fear of copying from a competitor, as well as the strained relationship between close competitors who were not formerly friends.

[Speaking of a restaurant of similar style and close location] They opened a little while before we did, but I had been working on this menu for two years. And they had a lot of things on their menu that are on our menu. And I was pissed. I couldn't concentrate on having a good time.... I was upset. And for me, not for them.... I'm three blocks away and I'm going to compete with this? OK, we are different environments, but not by that much... They came in here for brunch about a month after, right after we first opened. And me being just nervous about the similarities, we were just joking around, we were just joking and I said "I know, and I'm going to say it before you do, there's a lot of similarities between our menus... I hope you don't think that I'm taking anything from you, that we're copying you.". 'Cause I worry about that, I don't like to plagiarize, I don't like to... And they took it the wrong way. They thought I meant they stole from me. So I went, apologized, and they weren't hearing it." (Chef at a mid-status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

We note in his discourse that his biggest concern in this matter is his own feelings about plagiarizing others, not so much what the culinary community might think of him, and even less his business success, as his restaurant was very popular. We may surmise that the internalization of the moral boundary is particularly high in cuisine because knowledge-exchange is not legally regulated, so social norms take on a more significant role. Indeed, research on social norms shows that there is a higher level of communalism in groups where knowledge-exchange is not legally regulated, and that such communalism is undermined when laws are introduced (see Fauchart and von Hippel, 2006). When no legal regulation is used for keeping unacceptable borrowing practices in check, actors do not only control their own practices but also use personal mechanisms for punishing others who have broken a norm to regulate transgressions in the community. Fauchart and von Hippel (2006) propose in effect that cuisine is organized around a normative intellectual property regime, where in the absence of laws, knowledge-exchange is regulated by norms.<sup>164</sup> Chefs spread gossip through networks with friends and acquaintances to punish transgressors, tarnishing their reputation and decreasing their chances of getting any help in the future, and given the tight social network of cuisine, gossip spreads fast and widely. Gossip travels even more swiftly through virtual channels, of course. Web sites and blogs thrive on gossip, and accusations of plagiarism may even be launched there, in particular on eGullet, an influential web site for culinary insiders.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> It should be noted that chefs could in some cases resort to some intellectual property laws such as patents, trademarks or trade secrets, but they very rarely do, and they almost never seek legal action against those who violate norms.

<sup>165</sup> One of the most renowned cases of an accusation of plagiarism so far in effect began on this web site (see Wells, 2006).

Social networks in the field are required for gossip to diffuse, just as they are required for new ideas to diffuse. Given the contributions of the literature on social connections across organizational fields, a natural question might arise about chefs' social networks with cultural creators in other fields. Network and neo-institutional scholars have drawn attention to the importance of inter-organizational connections for innovation, either because they give elite actors access to elites (presumably innovators) in other fields, or because they open up doors to alternative ideas, practices, and cognitive schema.<sup>166</sup> However, inter-organizational connections do not seem to explain the diffusion of ideas in cuisine. In talking about their work and lives, chefs rarely make references to social connections outside their field, whether because they do not have such connections or because the connections do not serve as channels for ideas. It seems reasonable to assume that their non-traditional work schedules, as they work when others rest and vice versa, make socializing with individuals in other occupations unlikely.<sup>167</sup> But also, chefs generally do not seek heterogeneity of any kind in their search for ideas, whether in other fields or their own. Even when they travel, as they seek new ideas, they deliberately want to learn from chefs with similar culinary styles. Chefs who cook Italian food tend to go to Italy, those who cook French food tend to go to France, and innovators tend to go to Spain, the epicenter of molecular gastronomy.

Actors pursue homogeneity of culinary style in seeking new ideas, but they by no means look for homogeneity in status. They get ideas from higher status chefs in other

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<sup>166</sup> For network scholars who point to the transfer of ideas through actors in similar structural positions across organizational fields, increasing the likelihood that innovation diffuses through elites in different fields, see Laumann, Marsden and Galaskiewicz (1977), and Laumann and Pappi (1973). For the contention that inter-organizational connections open up access to alternative ways of thinking, increasing the likelihood of innovation, see Burt (1992; 2004), Clemens (1997), Clemens and Cook (1999), Giuffre (1999), Mische (Forthcoming), and Morrill (Forthcoming).

<sup>167</sup> Becker (1951) shows the same is the case among professional dance musicians.

(higher status) culinary fields, as well as in their own field. They also get symbolic capital from social ties with higher status chefs, as evidenced in how they talk about them. They manifest an awareness that such ties serve as proxies for their own reputation. Remarkable evidence that social ties with high-status actors afford much symbolic capital is the large number of chefs in New York who claim to be friends with a high-profile actor generally portrayed to be the most innovative chef in the city.<sup>168</sup> Such strong ties are undoubtedly true to Vonnegut's (in Scott, 2005) insight that "[a] New York friendship is a friendship with a person you have met at least once. If you have met a person only once, and you are a New Yorker, you are entitled to say, whenever that person's name comes up in conversation, "Yes - so-and-so is a friend of mine."."<sup>169, 170</sup>

Of course, we would infer that actors' claims about their strong ties with this centrally located chef do not indicate how sociable he is as much as what symbolic capital such ties supply. On the one hand, the sheer number of chefs who claim to be good friends with him cannot help but raise doubts about such friendships (and no other chef came close in popularity). On the other hand, a strong tie with an actor who is not only high-profile, but also regularly represented to be highly creative (a positive value in the field), appears to be taken as a proxy of chefs' own standing (see Podolny, 1993; 2005). Actors proudly report their relationship with this chef, and they take time to give a sense of the strength of the ties to him. Seemingly, actors with all culinary styles obtain

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<sup>168</sup> It is reasonable that the tie most frequently referenced is with a local actor (and not foreign), as local chefs are more available. Naturally, there is more variance in the foreign peers chefs claim to have ties with.

<sup>169</sup> This quotation is attributed to Vonnegut. I have been unable to find the original source.

<sup>170</sup> Interestingly San Francisco chefs did not claim a direct social tie with a centrally located actor. This indicator of the difference between New York and San Francisco is revisited below, where the two fields are compared.

symbolic capital from this tie, as they claim to be friends with him whether or not they create innovative dishes.

We may also surmise that ties with this chef also serve as conduits of information, conduits from which chefs with similar culinary styles benefit in particular. An information channel is especially valuable for these chefs given the novelty and technical complexity required for cooking in the style labeled “molecular gastronomy.” Knowledge of the new techniques and the chemical ingredients required for cooking in this style are not easily available, so chefs draw on one another to acquire both. Therefore, actors with innovative styles would accrue more advantages from strong ties with this chef, for their connections may serve as conduits for knowledge and symbolic capital. Indeed, there is behavioral evidence that this is the case, for innovative creators are more likely to talk longer and more enthusiastically about their friendship with this chef.

Of course, actors with the same culinary styles benefit more from having social ties because such ties may serve as channels of information. But also, actors with the same culinary styles are more likely to be socially connected in the first place. They are more likely to meet, and develop a social connection. As we have seen, chefs actively monitor their connections with peers, and (to some extent) control their creational styles to manage their association with them. Through their styles, they establish or shun social connections, and position themselves vis-à-vis others. We know that actors orient their actions to their peers in the field, and they manage their culinary styles in view of what others are doing. They also develop a sense of themselves and their work with regards to others.

## Culinary Styles and Field Positions

When they rhetorically establish or shun associations with others, chefs depict their culinary styles. They underscore the similarities or differences between their styles and those of others. Thus, when they deny they learn anything from their peers, they obscure associations between their styles, conceal their channels of information, and thereby manage their authorship. By foregrounding some aspects of their culinary styles and backgrounding others, chefs may subjectively represent themselves closer or further from their peers. An actor who stresses that his food is created within a French framework, when it is also strongly influenced by Italian cuisine, manages to distance himself from a famous chef of Italian food he previously worked for. We need not maintain chefs' representations as conscious strategizing, rather it seems part of a general cognitive asymmetry, whereby some aspects are underscored over others (in this case, technique over ingredients).<sup>171</sup>

Individuals make sense of their position vis-à-vis others in the organizational field in agentic ways, and they control their position in the field through their occupational choices and creational styles. To be sure, their control is limited (see White, 1992) by the actions of others, and by choices they have made in the past, namely the status and culinary styles of restaurants where they have previously worked. Critical of the view of organizational fields as composed of *objective* structures, Porac et al (1995: 224) propose that field structures are not exogenous but rather an endogenous product of actors' cognition. But it is not true that a structure has power on what actors can do *only* to the

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<sup>171</sup> Cerulo (2006) calls the cognitive asymmetry in every group's cultural knowledge "relevance structures." For his part, D'Andrade's (1989) view of this common aspect of cognition leads him to consider all actors "opportunistic information processors."

extent that actors endow it with power, as Porac et al would have it, for if actors actively attempt to control their position in the field it is because they know the structure to be consequential.

In controlling their place in the field and their connections to others through their culinary styles, chefs do not only manage their authorship, they also seek consistency between their styles and professional self-concepts. What they produce is informed by their sense of selves as creators, and their sense of selves are informed by what they produce. As they portray an image of themselves to others, in their “cultural entrepreneurship” (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001: 560), and search for resonance between their styles and self-concepts, actors constantly shape and re-shape their styles and, accordingly, create and re-create themselves as chefs in an ongoing process of action and cognition (Weick, 1979; 1995).

Chefs classify their styles largely in terms of their motivations for creation (as I have shown in the previous chapter), so that those who focus on the imperative of differentiation --whether institutionally or personally driven-- are likely to foreground the creativity of their styles and therefore represent their food as original or innovative, and those who foreground flavor as their guiding principle are likely to represent their food as traditional. I have argued that the degree of innovativeness they identify in their style is a factor of the weight they afford to the principles of differentiation and flavor in their creational projects.

To recapitulate, while the imperative of differentiation in cuisine cannot be overestimated, chefs must naturally concern themselves with making flavorful food. Being the principle of excellence in their occupation, flavor is necessary for actors to

legitimate themselves and claim purity as cultural creators. This follows the notion that every field has its own principles of perception and appreciation whereby actors understand their actions and legitimate themselves, paradigmatically formulated in Bourdieu's (1976; 1977; [1984] 1993; [1992] 1996) concept of the *enjeu*,<sup>172</sup> the specific capital that is at stake in every field.<sup>173</sup> But this notion can be further traced to Weber's ([1920] 1963: 323-324) idea that "[t]he individual spheres of value are prepared with a rational consistency which is rarely found in reality. But they *can* appear thus in reality and in historically important ways, and they have." We already find in Weber's ([1920] 1963; [1920] 1992) work the search for the set of principles around which the logic of action is organized in every sphere, and from which consistent forms of behavior follow.

In cuisine, creators must attend to flavor as well as the imperative of differentiation, though they do so to different degrees. As I have noted, chefs ought to seek novelty while simultaneously conform to established culinary styles and principles of creation to have their food be perceived to be creative or original, yet recognizable and therefore appealing (Lampel, Lant and Shamsie, 2000). In particular, they conform to (one) culinary categories such as French, Italian, or New American, (two) composition of dishes, attending to both components and proportions --for instance, chefs adjust meat and starch portions to what is established as appropriate in the field (typically lower in New York and San Francisco than in the rest of the country), (three) ingredients that are in demand or faddish, so menus consist of ingredients that are highly likely to be ordered, (four) ingredient pairings, for very unfamiliar combinations are unlikely to be positively

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<sup>172</sup> *Enjeu* translates not quite as succinctly as "that which is at stake." Note that this term has been rendered as "libido" in translations of Bourdieu's work to English.

<sup>173</sup> The view presented here is consistent with Bourdieu's idea that every field has a specific capital that is at stake, but not with the assumption that all action is of necessity either instrumentally driven to acquire more status or mechanically driven by the habitus.

perceived, and (five) presentation of dishes, as established contemporary styles are thought to look more attractive.<sup>174</sup>

While conforming to established forms, culinary products must also deliver complexity, refinement and originality in the field of high cuisine. To this end, elite chefs may make a dish with three ingredients flown in from Japan, Australia and Italy, in addition to twenty-five other ingredients, delicate cooking techniques involving a day or two of preparation for the meat, sauces and garnishes, and six cooks working to get the dish ready during dinner service (besides all the kitchen staff who worked on the preparation). Chefs generally do not cook but expedite during dinner service,<sup>175</sup> this is the task of checking dishes before they go to the dining room to make sure they *look* exactly right, and sometimes adding garnishes or sauces for decoration. That chefs' job is to expedite and not to cook is evidence of the significance of the presentation of dishes.

If one did not know better, one would expect chefs at the pinnacle of high cuisine in the country to draw attention to the creativity, originality and sophistication of their creations, the attributes that undoubtedly earn them reputation. However, I found that these chefs, and *particularly* those at the most high-end restaurants in the country, categorize their food as simple. Not only do they categorize it as simple, but they resist suggestions that they may be creative or innovative. They stress that their main concern is flavor, and that the most important element of their creations is not the creativity or the intricate composition of dishes, but the quality of ingredients. While these chefs point to simplicity and ingredients, they disattend to seemingly superfluous attributes such as the

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<sup>174</sup> Most typically, the classical presentation of dishes had the meat, starch and vegetables next to one another, with the meat placed closest to the diner, and the modern presentation places the starch in the center of the plate and the meat on top of it.

<sup>175</sup> If Executive Chefs are not in the kitchen during dinner service, then Chefs de Cuisine, or Sous-chefs (the two ranks below) expedite.

originality or complexity of their dishes achieved through the novelty of ingredients, ingredient pairings, techniques, or presentation.

How to make sense of this seeming paradox? While chefs must pursue economic profit, they also require legitimacy as cultural creators, for their own sense of selves and their reputation. As elements of the process of creation, simplicity and ingredients are instrumental for the quest for flavor, therefore they endow actors with legitimacy. To critics and diners, in contrast, products that are visually stunning or intricate in their composition are likely to be appealing. By claiming a relative disregard for presentation of dishes, complexity, or originality, and a single-minded pursuit of flavor, elite chefs present themselves as pure creators. Attempts to make dishes that are complex or original, with faddish ingredients or technical gimmickry for altering textures of foods, or attempts to make dishes that *look* good, are about the “wow factor,” as chefs call it. They view the “wow factor” as their peers’ more shameful strategies to get recognition from critics and diners and increase their status. Opposed to the purity of devotion to flavor, the pursuit of exogenous recognition is impure.

Chefs compare themselves to others through their culinary styles, their innovativeness, and their status. They must attend to market criteria to know their position vis-à-vis others and be competitive. But they also must note *what* they create and *why* they do it in order to assess themselves and others. To be sure, they compare themselves to their peers through their legitimacy as cultural creators. They therefore subjectively position themselves vis-à-vis their peers in ways which may run against their institutional positions. As I have noted in the previous chapter, chefs whose styles are classified by others as sophisticated, complex, creative and even innovative, are likely to

refute it all, highlighting their single-minded devotion to flavor. Just as creational styles are strategies actors choose to build themselves in the field, so are their self-representations. *What* creational styles actors choose and *how* they represent themselves are two strategies associated with their status positions, as I will show.

Chefs who express their single-minded devotion to flavor represent themselves as pure, and their styles as traditional. Only motivated to create good flavors, and thus drawing on well established dishes, pure creators do not deem themselves original in any way. They may draw on a variety of attributes that highlight the principle of culinary excellence: their guiding criterion is flavor, the balance of flavors, quality of ingredients, technical mastery, or simplicity to let ingredients shine.<sup>176</sup> They are likely to explain that a good dish is a dish that “makes sense.” Chefs who identify the need to differentiate themselves from others as their guiding principle appear impure in their motivations. They are likely to highlight the originality of their dishes, and represent their culinary styles as original, creative, or innovative. We can distinguish two groups of chefs who identify differentiation as a principle for creation. Some recognize differentiation *along with* other principles, and may note that contrast of textures, or colors, are important in a dish. Others focus mainly on differentiation, and point to their concern with presentation of dishes, their “elegance,” or the “wow factor.” How chefs represent their motivations and their culinary styles is not just the subjective product of their professional self-concepts --whether they see themselves as pure or impure, or tradition-bound or innovative. The pursuit of flavor or the “wow factor” are actors’ understandings of the logic of creation in the field, and of their position in the organizational configuration. In

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<sup>176</sup> Unlike technical gimmickry, I use technical mastery to refer to good execution of cooking processes, not a procedure meant to show off.

this sense, the pursuit of flavor or the “wow factor” are their strategic responses to such understandings, in other words, they are their practical theories of the field.

In order to contextualize chefs’ representations of their styles and their theories of the field, let us recall the examples of innovative variations on a classic dish of pork with bacon that we have seen in the previous chapter.<sup>177</sup>

- a) Traditional: a roast of pork wrapped in bacon.
- b) Innovative Technique: a roast of pork with bacon powder.<sup>178</sup>
- c) Innovative Ingredient Pairing: a roast of pork cooked with salt cod.
- d) Innovative Ingredients: a roast of pork cooked with mojama.<sup>179</sup>
- e) Innovative Presentation: roasted pork and bacon built as a brick.

Chefs who claim flavor to be their guiding principle for creation may represent all these dishes as traditional, and conversely those who focus on the imperative of differentiation may represent them as innovative. The weight they afford to the need to differentiate themselves from others determines the degree of innovativeness they identify in their styles. Chefs who view differentiation as an ecological factor to be kept in mind are likely to represent their styles as classic with some tweaks. Those who view differentiation as a salient concern, while at the same time expressing a motivation to make flavorful food, are likely to represent their styles as somewhat original. Finally, those whose motivation to differentiate themselves guides them in a deliberate strategy to gain more recognition tend to view their styles as innovative.

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<sup>177</sup> The examples I use here are imaginary, because the confidentiality of interviews prevents me from using real dishes. However, the imaginary dishes presented here are entirely plausible, i.e. they are consistent with creations served at restaurants in my sample.

<sup>178</sup> Bacon powder can be made by using chemicals to dehydrate bacon and change its chemical state to turn it into a powder.

<sup>179</sup> Mojama is salt-cured tuna, made with the loin, an expensive specialty of Spain.

We have seen that chefs represent their styles, and understand innovation in terms of their motivation for creation. If they serve pork with bacon powder instead of bacon slices because, they argue, it makes the dish lighter, and helps diners taste and enjoy flavors, they innovate *in the cause of* flavor. They represent an attachment to flavor to legitimate an innovation that would otherwise be seen as impure. Innovation in the cause of flavor is pure innovation, and as such it does not appear as innovation in the eyes of creators. In contrast, chefs who take differentiation to be a key motivation for creation innovate for the “wow factor.” They serve pork with bacon powder to add a different texture, because it is original, or different from what their competitors are serving. They innovate to get attention and increase their status. Innovation for the “wow factor” is not legitimating. Being impure, it is recognized as innovation by creators.

We gather that innovation is subjectively understood in ways which may be dissociated from exogenous conceptions. As part of actors’ lived experiences, innovation is not an easily definable category. Chefs interpret their styles as well as those of others in light of *what they think* their orientations of action are. In some cases they personally know their peers and their motivations, in others they infer them and represent their styles accordingly. Endogenous understandings are actors’ ways to make sense of their work and the configuration of the field in which they work, and as such endogenous understandings are contested. Because both the principles underlying cultural production in the field, the *nomos*, and the social configuration of the field are endogenously constructed, and thus contested, Bourdieu ([1992] 1996: 132) views the formation of a field as the “*institutionalization of anomie*,” since no one has the monopoly over the principles that organize the logic of creation, and the configuration of the field.

Chefs understand the logic of creation experientially, in an ongoing process whereby they make sense of all the environmental conditions that bound what they can create. There are too many factors bounding their work, and evaluating all of them is unmanageable and would only lead to confusion, so actors reduce environmental complexity and uncertainty to a few salient attributes of the logic of creation that are cognitively and pragmatically manageable (Fligstein, 1996; Porac et al., 1995). In making sense of their styles *and* those of others, chefs develop their practical theories of action. As a practical theory of action, the “wow factor” is chefs’ coherent response to some of the environmental conditions that constrain their work, namely the need to differentiate from others and get attention to succeed in a competitive environment. In light of these conditions, chefs select a strategy of action, struggle for power in the field as they compete with others, and also implicitly struggle for meaning --what is being creative, what is innovative, and what is ultimately a good dish. Insofar as a field is organized around individuals who endow the object of their work with value (see Baumann, 2007: 51; van Rees and Dorleijn, 2001: 332), there is undoubtedly going to be a struggle around that value. As another practical theory of action, working towards a dish that “makes sense” is also actors’ coherent response to the intersubjective understanding that flavor is the value that will endow them with legitimacy. The understanding that flavor is the value they ought to pursue has acquired a taken-for-grantedness that is manifested in the idea that a good dish is one that “makes sense.”

In attempting to reduce environmental complexity, the most reasonable attributes for chefs to focus on would be those that are (first) easily observable, (second) proven to be salient factors in restaurant reviews, ratings, and awards, and (third) cognitively and

pragmatically manageable. Three attributes would be, in this sense, the most sensible for chefs to compare themselves to others, and select strategies of action: culinary styles, degree of innovativeness, and status. As I have suggested, reviews classify restaurants in terms of their status and culinary styles, and though degree of innovativeness is not formally categorized, assessments of innovativeness significantly affect how restaurants are reviewed. Chefs resort to the most influential publications to compare themselves to others, as they understand that their professional future depends mostly on these publications. They classify their peers with the reviews from the *New York Times* and *San Francisco Chronicle* in each city.<sup>180</sup> There is such an understanding that they all refer to these publications (because they have no local competition in terms of their influence) that they would simply say that somebody is a three-star-chef, without a need to reference the source awarding the stars.

Even if they have mixed feelings about such ratings (because they may deem critics unknowledgeable, too driven by fads, blinded by the allure of celebrity chefs, too subjective, unfair), they still use them to identify their competitors and select strategies of action accordingly. Because they work in a field with a high level of heteronomy, their professional fate is largely determined by external assessments, therefore establishing who their competitors are with criteria used by publications yields a picture of the field that is in line with that of their audiences and judges.

They identify who they think their competitors are around the three most consequential attributes --status, culinary styles, and degree of innovativeness--, and

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<sup>180</sup> The *Michelin* Guide, originally from France and exported to several other countries, launched its first guide in New York in November 2005, and in San Francisco the following year. While this publication holds much power in France (where it is even said to have led chefs to commit suicide upon losing a star), it seems, for now, not to be as influential as the well-established local publications.

ignore cues about other attributes that are less salient. They look at what their peers in their market niche are doing, and orient their decisions to what they see. They may revise their wine program, service, or décor, and tweak their culinary products to make sure they are competitive. This strategy is illustrated in the following excerpt from a chef at an upper-middle status seafood restaurant in New York City, as he talks about whether he goes out to eat for work.

Yes, I do [go out to eat for work]. I will go to some of the finer seafood restaurants around here to see what they're doing and then kind of keep on top of what's going on. And seeing their take on it. Seeing their view on it. How does the chef look at this? How does he look at the fall? What is he pairing with crabs? (Chef at an upper-middle status restaurant in New York City, fieldnotes).

We note that he purposefully seeks restaurants which are close competitors --fine, seafood restaurants in the same neighborhood.<sup>181</sup> He goes to see what they are serving, assess himself, and orient his products to what his competitors are doing. Chefs choose ingredients, techniques, flavor combinations and presentation based on their assumptions about their customers. Insofar as they determine who their competitors are through their clientele, as the structural equivalence model contends (Burt, 1987; 1988; 1992; White, 1992), they orient their cultural production to what their clientele is exposed to in similar restaurants. By identifying their competitors through their clientele and through the attributes taken to be central, actors collectively build a cognitive order created by their shared understanding of the organizational configuration, thereby contributing to institutional stability (see White, 1981).

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<sup>181</sup> His remark that he purposefully seeks close competitors is unusual, as I have pointed out in other sections, for chefs are likely to disattend to the practice of looking into their competitors' work in their discourses. This chef had a greater degree of humility than others, which might have enabled him to make this remark.

Chefs use their practical theories of action to support and justify their professional choices. If they succeed in legitimating their work, it is because their practical theories are in line with preexisting principles organizing cultural production. They require consensus and accountability to justify their actions and legitimate themselves (see Baumann, 2007: 61; Tetlock, 1985). Their subjective discourses may be vague and inchoate, because they show the variations and improvisation in their attempts to create a story to legitimate what they do (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001). But discourses are embedded in, and represent, larger and more analytically solid cognitive schema (Baumann, 2007; Ferree and Merrill, 2000; Johnston and Baumann, Forthcoming; Oliver and Johnston, 2000).<sup>182</sup> Thus, if there is a patterning to chefs' discourses, it is because they draw on cognitive schema they have incorporated, but also because they must organize their representations and legitimate what they do in ways that are going to be understood by others and so that are consistent with others' ways of thinking (see Snow et al., 1986).

### **Social Patterning of Culinary Styles and Self-Representations**

Multiple practical theories of action, values and strategies are available in the field for actors to embrace. Chefs support different values, follow different strategies, and disagree about the meaning of innovation and of creational styles more generally. But they disagree in predictable ways. They invoke different principles to represent their styles, some of which are associated with exogenous appraisals, and others are

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<sup>182</sup> Building on Oliver and Johnston's (2000) distinction between frames and ideologies, Ferree and Merrill (2000) propose conceiving of discourses, ideologies and frames in a model that ranges from vague and incoherent to cognitively tight. Johnston and Baumann (Forthcoming) apply this model to cuisine.

dissociated, but the principles they invoke are not randomly distributed; rather they map onto culinary style choices with predictable patterns related to status.

By compiling actors' self-representations and mapping them out according to their status in the field, we understand that the logic of creation cannot be explained without attention to actors' subjective struggles for legitimacy and meaning. The map of New York chefs' self-representations of their styles in the culinary field (see Figure 1) shows where they locate themselves along two dimensions: the self-perceived innovativeness of their creational styles, and their claims of purity as cultural creators.<sup>183</sup> Chefs are identified with numbers representing their status from one to four. One represents mid-status, two represents upper-middle status, and three and four represent high-status. The high-status category is subdivided here because there is a meaningful difference between the two groups, as I will explain.

I located chefs on the map on the basis of their discourses. I took their characterizations of their creational styles and their remarks about what they consider the most important principles in their dishes and organized them on a scale. I scored their representations of their styles according to the arguments they gave to justify their characterizations, and the number and ordering of characterizations. If they said their styles are "innovative," and emphasized they break boundaries with their creations, they got the highest score for innovation, and were thus placed on that pole on the vertical axis on the map. If they said their styles are "different," or "original," and pointed to more subtle elements that add novelty to their creations, they were given a lower score and were placed just below self-represented innovators. If they said they took classic dishes

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<sup>183</sup> Figure 1 shows only New York chefs. See below (Figure 2), in the section on the comparison between New York and San Francisco, for a map with chefs' discursive representations from both cities.

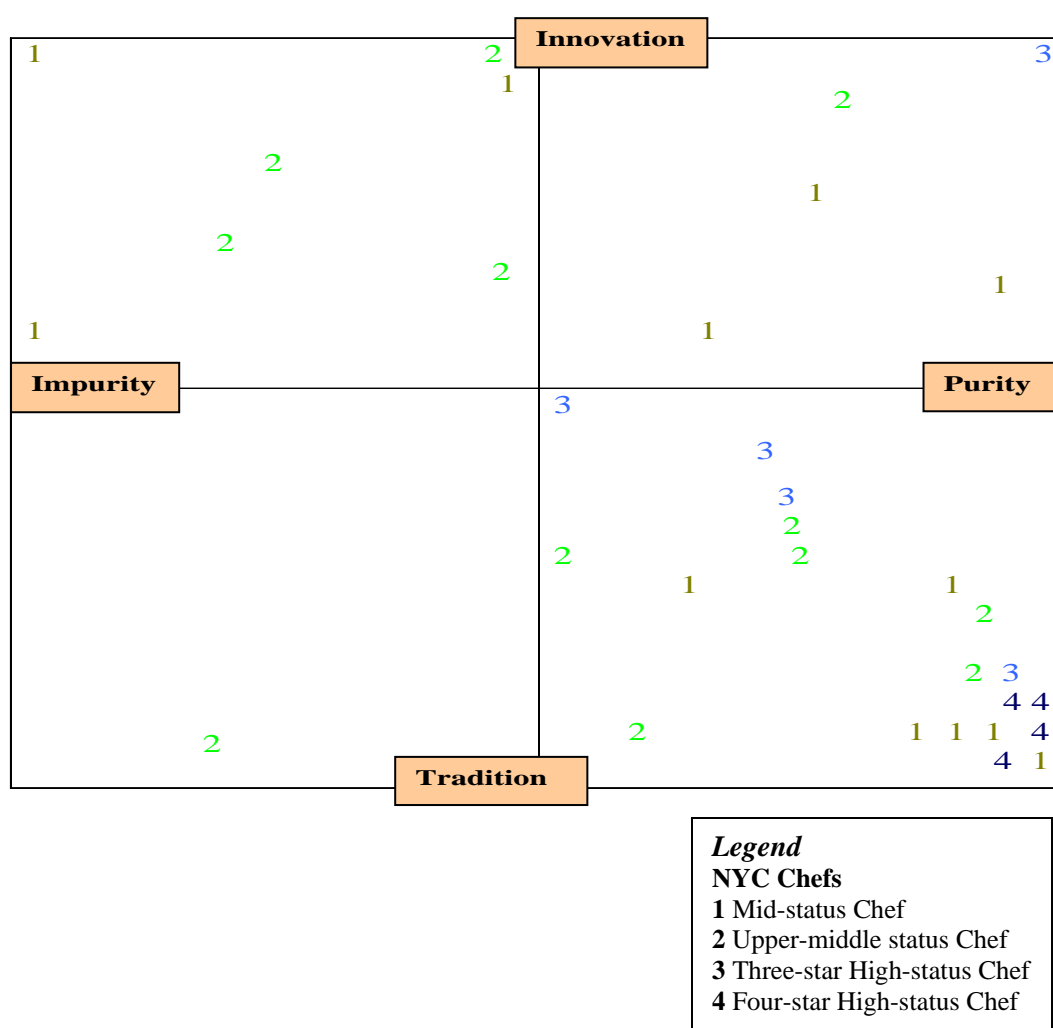
and tweaked them to recreate them and make “interesting” dishes, and remarked on the originality (as opposed to tradition) of their food, they received a mid-point score (varying on how much they stressed originality or tradition) and were placed towards the center on the vertical axis. If they said their styles are “traditional,” “classic,” or “regional” and emphasized their reliance on old recipes, they got the lowest score of innovativeness and were placed on the pole of tradition on the vertical axis. If they said their styles are traditional, but also interesting, and highlighted little touches they incorporate to do “recreation of classics,” they got a slightly higher score of innovativeness and were placed above self-represented traditionalists on the vertical axis.

I scored chefs’ remarks about what they consider the most important principles in their dishes according to how they justify the characteristics they invoked and the number and ordering of elements they cited. If they said flavor is the absolute most important principle in a dish, that their sole concern is with making food that tastes good, or that all a dish requires is good ingredients, they got the highest score in purity and were placed on the pole of purity on the horizontal axis. If they said flavor was of utmost concern, but they also needed to create dishes with contrast of textures, they received a lower score in purity and were placed next to the purest. If they instead said contrast of textures is the most important element, but balance of flavors is also important, they received a lower score, and were placed near the center on the horizontal axis. If they invoked color first, then texture or contrast of tastes, they received a yet lower score and were placed midway between the center and the pole of impurity. If they first expressed their concern with the look of the dishes, or the “wow factor” and then invoked other principles, they received a score close to zero in purity and were placed close to the pole of impurity. If

they only talked about the “wow factor” or the elegant look of dishes, they received the lowest score and were placed on the pole of impurity.

*Figure 1*

*New York Chefs' Self-Representations of their Styles*



As we see in the map, chefs who represent their styles to be traditional are very highly likely to make claims of purity, and those who represent their styles to be innovative are likely to make claims of impurity. It is logical that chefs who define their food as traditional, would reject new combinations of ingredients or new techniques for the “wow factor,” and emphasize instead a single-minded devotion to flavor, simplicity or ingredients, and those who represent their food as innovative are more likely to foreground originality, the look of the dishes, or the “wow factor.” We note in the map a weaker association between innovation and impurity than between tradition and purity because elite chefs are unlikely to claim --at least to an outsider, as is an interviewer-- that they are willing to trade creational purity for exogenous success. If they make claims of impurity, they only do it as long as they can also claim something that has a positive value, and as an indicator of creativity, innovation provides them such value. While we observe that chefs who represent their styles as innovative may make claims of purity or impurity, those who represent their styles as traditional can almost only make claims of purity --there is only one traditional chef who makes claims of impurity. Invoking tradition and impure criteria would leave actors with little of positive value.

Chefs locate themselves according to their perception of their creational styles and their claims of purity, but they are distributed in the social space by status. This is because they have different kinds of constraints on their self-conceptions as they develop stories to legitimate themselves in their own eyes and in the eyes of others. Both middle and high-status chefs (1, and 3 and 4 respectively in Figure 1) are highly constrained, but in different ways. Mid-status chefs have comparatively little freedom. First, they must be loyal to a culinary style, whether it is recognized as their signature style or the

restaurant's style. Second, having acquired relatively little reputation, trying out new ideas whose outcome is uncertain is a risk they cannot take if they want to ensure success. Third, they have more economic constraints than higher status chefs; they have tighter budgets, therefore more poorly equipped kitchens, smaller staff relative to the volume of production, and they cannot use up-market ingredients (either they cannot afford them or their clientele is not willing to pay for them). They are also constrained in terms of their self-conceptions due to their limited recognition, so they shy away from innovation, which evokes more spurious interests, and claim instead devotion to flavor and thus to tradition. Maintaining the same values fostered by high-status actors allows those with limited reputation to increase their status while at the same time possibly increase their commercial success (see Bourdieu, [1992] 1996: 149).

High-status chefs (3 and 4 in Figure 1) are even more highly constrained than mid-status chefs, but in opposite ways. In contrast to actors with lower reputation, they are constrained because they cannot admit lack of purity that is not in keeping with their status. They have the highest prestige and as such are the bastions of excellence in the field. In this sense, four-star chefs (the highest rating, afforded to very few) are more constrained than three-star chefs. They profess the most single-minded devotion to flavor and simplicity, and accordingly, they claim they are not doing anything that has not been done for decades, or even centuries.

Upper-middle status chefs (2 in Figure 1) have a few more degrees of freedom than lower or higher status actors. They have acquired enough prestige to be able to deviate from traditional styles of creation with a lower risk that their innovations be perceived as bad dishes. They have fewer constraints for admitting impure interests,

because they have enough legitimacy to be able to make claims of impurity and not so much status that they *must* claim absolute purity. At the same time, they face more pressures to differentiate themselves than lower or higher status chefs. Unlike high-status chefs, they still need to distinguish themselves from others to at least maintain their recognition and commercial success, or to increase them and move upwards. Unlike mid-status chefs, their institutional position in between mid- and high-status actors is such that they must distinguish themselves from both, and not only from their upper-middle status peers.<sup>184</sup> They have higher incentives to stand out than lower or higher status chefs, and cooking in traditional styles, or claiming an investment in conventional ideas is not likely to help them attract attention. Their institutional incentives to create original, different or innovative dishes, and deliver them with good, elegant or colorful presentations is consistent with their more impure claims, for on the one hand they are less constrained to claim purity, and on the other they have more pressures to differentiate themselves from others, thus an incentive for impurity. We note thus that their institutional constraints are resonant with their self-representations.

It might be argued that there is a higher consistency of values among high-status chefs (as they are lumped close together in the bottom right corner of the map) because elite actors tend to form tight communities so they constantly transmit and reinforce shared values. Whereas this may be true of other elite communities (see Laumann, Marsden and Galaskiewicz, 1977; Laumann and Pappi, 1973), it is not so for chefs given that high-status actors interact with lower status actors just as much as with their status-peers. With both strong and weak ties, their social networks extend to the entire field of high cuisine, including upper-middle and mid-status actors.

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<sup>184</sup> I thank Art Budros for suggesting the multiple pressures faced by upper-middle status actors.

The dispersion of chefs' self-representations of their styles of creation and legitimacy claims must be understood in view of their status, their trajectories, and the actions of other creators in the organizational configuration. Yet, the dispersion of chefs is fundamentally the result of the ways in which they cognize their position in the field and their relations with others. This is not to say that field position determines chefs' strategies of action but that there is a duality between field position and strategies of action.

In keeping with Bourdieu's paradigmatic view of the dynamics of fields of cultural production, the neo-institutionalist literature shows a wealth of evidence that status determines the risks or rewards of a creational style (Bourdieu, 1976; [1984] 1993; [1992] 1996; Frickel and Gross, 2005; Lounsbury, 2002; Monin and Durand, 2003; Owen-Smith, 2001; Phillips and Owens, 2004; Phillips and Zuckerman, 2001; Rao, 1994; Rao, Monin and Durand, 2003; 2005). Research in other areas of cultural production shows that new entrants to a field tend to be innovative because they have less capital to lose, and potentially more to gain. With a conception of social action as rational-instrumental and individuals constantly attempting to increase their status, this perspective views innovation as a strategy for transforming the rules of the game and consequently the field structure, so that innovators can move up to higher institutional positions. By the same token, high-status actors are also presumed to be likely to innovate because they have accumulated enough capital to be able to try out new ideas without a high risk of being penalized (e.g. Phillips and Zuckerman, 2001).

The distribution of risks and rewards to innovation ought not to be generalized and assumed to apply to all areas of cultural production. *What* positions bring rewards or

risks to innovation is to be explained by the particular mode of cultural production. In cuisine, as I have argued, the external --and lay-- audience and the tight connection to the economic market lead creators towards both conformity and originality in their cultural production. But conformity and originality are strategies with differentially distributed outcomes. The association of chefs' names with their creations --what I call the individualization of creation--, the fragility of authorship, and chefs' responsibility for the creation and execution of dishes, make status particularly consequential for the perception of conformity and originality. Thus, innovation becomes a rewarding career strategy for upper-middle status chefs, who have earned enough credibility to be able to - -relatively safely-- innovate, *and* who have higher pressures to differentiate themselves from their upper-middle status competitors, as well as lower and higher status peers. In contrast, innovation would be a way to destroy their career for lower and higher status chefs. Lower status actors have not acquired sufficient credibility to be able to try out novel ideas with good chances of a positive perception. High-status actors have weaker pressures to differentiate themselves, and hence incentives to innovate. Also, we know that all actors must construct a narrative to create their identities, but they do not all have the same degree of accountability in justifying their actions. High-status actors benefit from a slippage in their legitimacy claims that is not there for all actors to the same degree. Hence, we find that the highest-status chefs make narrative claims of the greatest tradition and purity even if their culinary products may not be the most traditional, and their concerns when making dishes may go well beyond good flavors or ingredients. Chefs' self-representations of their styles and legitimating claims are consistent with their place in the field.

Yet, just as status determines the risks or rewards of a creational style, a creational style can change actors' status. As chefs gradually modify their styles, sometimes while at the same restaurant, other times by moving to another one or opening an additional restaurant, they may increase (or decrease, if less likely) their status.<sup>185</sup> The duality between creational styles and status is mediated by actors' subjectivity: *how* they understand their position vis-à-vis others in the field. Their work cannot be dissociated from their needs to legitimate themselves as creators. By the same token, their differentiation from others through their culinary styles cannot be dissociated from their subjective distancing from their competitors. If chefs try so hard to distinguish themselves from others both culinarily and discursively, it is because authorship is particularly fragile in this field of cultural production.

### **The Culinary Fields of New York and San Francisco**

So far in this chapter, we have seen how the logic of creation works in high cuisine as a generic social phenomenon. I have analyzed the logic of creation with the attributes we should find in all (or at least most) culinary fields without demonstrating the importance of the specificities of fields for explaining dynamics of cultural creation. Now, we will turn to the particular mechanisms we observe in the fields of New York and San Francisco to better understand why we find the patterns I have shown to exist in cuisine.

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<sup>185</sup> Oftentimes high-end chefs open subsequent restaurants, and they are commonly of lower status than their first establishments. Yet, even if these subsequent restaurants are more informal and get fewer stars, so long as they keep their top-ranked restaurants, these chefs do not have their status decreased.

First, New York City is a much larger market than San Francisco, with about 25,000 restaurants,<sup>186</sup> compared to about 8,000 in San Francisco and the Alameda County (which includes Berkeley and Oakland).<sup>187</sup> These numbers do not give an accurate picture of the two fields because (first) they cover larger geographic areas than the fields of high cuisine as I have defined them, and (second) they comprise all restaurants, from high-end to fast food, and all cuisines, from French to strictly-defined “ethnic” fare. Needless to say, low-status and/or ethnic restaurants are not part of the field of high cuisine, and were thus excluded from the sample.

Providing a good sense of the configuration of high cuisine in the two cities is also difficult because the ratings that best represent the categories of restaurants (because such ratings are the most influential) are awarded by local publications, and these publications use different criteria and thus have low comparability. Therefore, to give a sense of the configuration of the two fields here, I do not refer to the publications I have used to create the sample (the *New York Times* and the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *San Francisco* magazine for each city)<sup>188</sup> but the *Michelin* Guide for the year 2007.<sup>189</sup> For New York City, the guide lists three restaurants with three stars, four with two stars, and thirty-two with one star, and a total of 507 restaurants (rated and unrated). For the Bay

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<sup>186</sup> This includes the five boroughs. However, Manhattan was the only borough studied in this project, but data for Manhattan were not available.

<sup>187</sup> The number for the Alameda County includes 14 of the 19 cities in the County. San Francisco, Berkeley and Oakland were the cities included in this project. Specific data for each city were not available, with the exception of San Francisco, where there are about 4,000 restaurants.

<sup>188</sup> I used two publications in San Francisco precisely because of the low comparability between the *New York Times* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. At the time I constructed the sample, the *San Francisco Chronicle* had no four-star restaurants, and instead a large number of three-star restaurants, so I combined their classification with that of the *San Francisco* magazine to create more comparable criteria to those I used for New York.

<sup>189</sup> I use the *Michelin* Guide for 2007 because it is the first year that the guide was published for both New York and San Francisco (the first guide for New York was published in 2006, and for San Francisco in 2007). The fact that *Michelin* published its first guide in the U.S. for New York, and the following year for San Francisco is further evidence of the perception of these two culinary fields in the country. After these two cities, *Michelin* released guides for Los Angeles and Las Vegas.

Area, the guide has one restaurant with three stars, four with two-stars, and twenty-three with one star, and a total of 356 restaurants.<sup>190</sup>

The sheer number of restaurants creates more competition in New York, to be sure, but the cost of real estate, particularly high in Manhattan, contributes to a highly volatile restaurant business, a testimony of which is the rate of business failure in this city, where one of every two new restaurants are said to close within their first year, and about 65% within their first two years. Competition is very high, and so is the imperative of differentiation. The differential imperative of differentiation in New York and San Francisco suggests itself in multiple areas of the logic of creation, as I will show in contrasting the dynamics of the labor market, chefs' subjective management of their authorship, knowledge-exchange and relations with others, the process of creation of culinary products and finally, the overall configuration of the two fields.

As most organizational fields, cuisine is an imperfectly competitive market, with varying restaurant types and sizes, and sub-groups of chefs who, through their creational styles and status, identify each other as competitors and thus orient their actions to each other.<sup>191</sup> As most organizational fields, cuisine is also a configuration of imperfect information, where data about market forces and competitors are partial, so actors rely on cues, proxies, rules of thumb, and habits to understand and predict their peers' actions (see Owen-Smith, 2001: 432; Rao, 1994: 30; Simon, 1959).

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<sup>190</sup> Note that this guide covers the whole Bay Area. The culinary field in San Francisco is much smaller (I have only included restaurants in San Francisco, Berkeley, and Oakland in my sample). Also, note that the only three-star restaurant is not in San Francisco (it is in Napa Valley), and only two of the four two-star restaurants are in San Francisco (the other two are in Los Gatos and Sonoma).

<sup>191</sup> Perfectly competitive markets are those where organizations are homogeneous, so that they cannot differentiate themselves from others.

Insofar as chefs in New York constantly seek information about their peers and about market trends in striving to differentiate themselves and get a competitive advantage through the incorporation of innovative elements in their culinary styles, they deepen the imperative of differentiation. This is evident in the dynamics of the labor market, as we find that where differentiation is a valuable asset, chefs move from one restaurant to another more frequently in attempts to acquire more diverse training to enrich their styles. So it is that New York chefs move through more occupational positions in their training and work at a higher number of restaurants than San Francisco chefs. The need of differentiation also leads chefs to seek ties with labor markets in other culinary fields, so whereas New York actors on the one hand seek experience in restaurants abroad (even if it is not paid), and on the other bring in cooks and chefs to their restaurants from other culinary fields, San Francisco chefs rarely do either one or the other, maintaining a relatively closed labor market. By sourcing professional experience and personnel from other culinary fields, actors can import new ideas, and differentiate themselves from their competitors. The inter-field connection is also developed in the flow of ideas. Chefs in New York do not only source professional experience and personnel abroad, they also look for ideas for new foodstuffs, ingredient pairings and techniques in foreign countries that they can apply to their products and get a competitive advantage over their local peers.

The imperative of differentiation manifests itself institutionally in the inter-field connections, and also subjectively, for New York chefs look outward for professional experience, personnel and ideas, and also to represent their position in the field and their authorship. New York chefs claim they admire and would want to emulate European

peers, whereas in San Francisco chefs are likely to select local colleagues. By establishing their social and symbolic ties with chefs in foreign fields, New York actors disattend to their local connections and conduits of influence, establish their authorship, and blur their institutional distance from their competitors. In contrast, San Francisco chefs tend to look inward in their representation of their creational styles, knowledge-exchange, and professional lineage, symbolically establishing their social ties with local peers.

The more concordial relations in San Francisco are to be accounted for by the particular mode of cultural production in that field. Because it is a smaller and less prestigious field, there is a lower need of differentiation than in New York. But the particular means of cultural production also affect the patterning of relations we find in the two fields. Given that the climate provides greater access to high-quality ingredients all year-round in San Francisco, there is a higher reliance on ingredients and a consequent de-emphasis of technique. Ingredients are not as easily identifiable as technique (and the culinary artistry associated with it) as links between creators. So whereas higher reliance on technique leads New York chefs to sever their conduits of influence, those in San Francisco are able to have more concordial relations.

Reliance on local ingredients, de-emphasis of technique, and the co-constitutive lower disposition towards differentiation are of course apparent in culinary styles. Culinary products are likely to demand shorter processes of creation and production, given that fewer and familiar ingredients and a lesser use of technique require less trial and error and fewer cooks to make each dish. They are also likely (though by no means necessarily) to lead to less deliberate and analytical processes of creation. Just as chefs

with traditional styles in New York, who are less likely to have an analytical approach to creation than those with innovative styles, chefs in San Francisco tend to have a similarly non-analytical approach, all the more given their reliance on ingredients. Cognitive schema and approaches to creation are of course consistent with their culinary styles and self-concepts. In keeping with the weaker tendency toward differentiation in San Francisco, chefs are more likely to represent their styles as traditional.

Accordingly, since more chefs represent their styles to be traditional, more make claims of purity in San Francisco. Yet, unlike New York chefs, the few who represent their styles to be innovative also claim their main principle for creation is flavor, balance of flavors, or ingredients, even if some also admit --secondary-- attention to impure criteria such as the look of dishes or texture. No chef who identifies his or her style to be innovative gives more weight to any criteria other than flavor or ingredients in San Francisco. Given the reliance on ingredients, flavor has an even higher value than in New York, so regardless of their styles, chefs are to be expected to rarely disattend to it in their representation of their food.

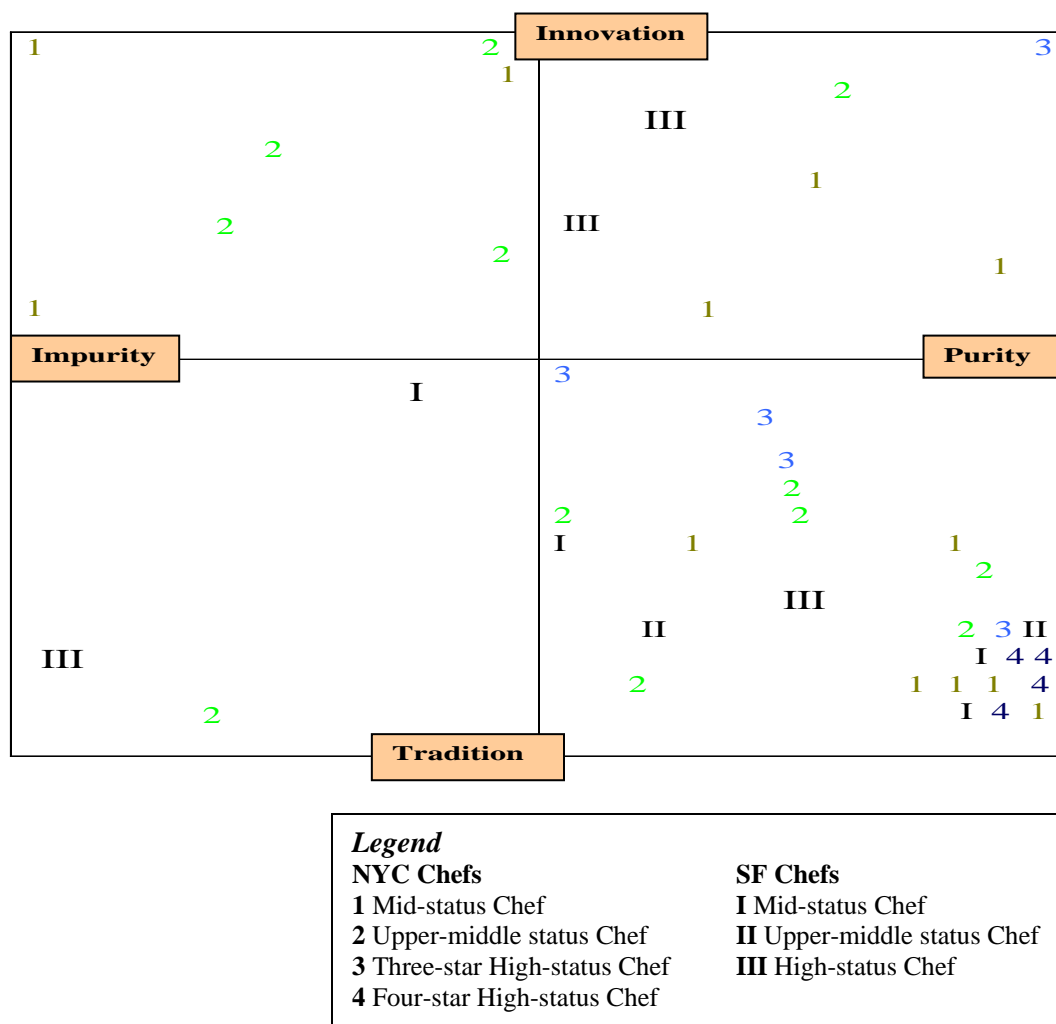
The dispersion of chefs' self-representations in San Francisco, contrasted to those of New York, can be seen in Figure 2. I incorporate data from San Francisco to the map shown in Figure 1, and represent San Francisco chefs with Roman numbers, with their status ranging from one to three. One represents mid-status, two represents upper-middle status, and three represents high-status.<sup>192</sup> The same criteria used for creating the map of the New York field are used here.

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<sup>192</sup> Unlike the case of New York, three is the highest number for high-status chefs in San Francisco, because there were no restaurants rated with four stars by the *San Francisco Chronicle* at the time I created the sample.

Figure 2

*New York and San Francisco Chefs' Self-representations of their Styles*



Veering more toward innovation in New York and toward tradition in San Francisco, the logic of creation is suitably apparent in the figure of the chef who occupies a central position in the configuration of each of the fields. We can say that a chef has a central position in the configuration of the field if: (one) he or she represents a culinary category that is pivotal in the dynamics of creation in the field; that is, a category actors

use as referent to assess their position in the field in light of their relations of similarity (Rosch, 1975; 1978) or difference to that category,<sup>193</sup> and (two) he or she best represents that culinary category, because he or she has the critical attributes that define the category (Cerulo, 2006: 7).<sup>194</sup> Thus, a chef has a central position when he or she is used as a referent by the largest number of peers to orient their actions --whether collegially or antagonistically-- toward that actor and to subjectively position themselves in the field. A central chef indicates, in this way, a fundamental dimension of the logic of creation in a field.

In New York, all interviewees made a reference to the most innovative chef, a young, high-profile actor who relies heavily on the complex technical developments of “molecular gastronomy.” Regardless of their creational styles and opinions of this innovative style, all chefs talk about this actor. Not only do they talk about him, but a good number of them, both with innovative and traditional inclinations, express their admiration for him, even if they may disapprove of “molecular gastronomy” more generally. Moreover, as I have suggested, numerous actors with both creational inclinations also claim to be friends with him. This is an interesting characteristic of the culinary field (one I will come to later), as it contrasts with many fields of cultural production which are organized around enmity. Unlike in New York, the chef all interviewees refer to in San Francisco (though none claim friendship) is somebody with a culinary style classified as traditional, and who represents herself as traditional. Further, she is recognized for introducing an emphasis on high-quality, fresh and local

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<sup>193</sup> Contrary to Rosch, I suggest that core actors are used as referents in judgments of similarity as well as difference.

<sup>194</sup> As Cerulo (2006) reminds us, cognitive scientists have proven this characteristic of concepts, but Wittgenstein ([1953] 2003) best conceptualized it with his notion of “family resemblance.” While concepts do not have to share all attributes to be taken as equivalent, they must share the critical attributes.

ingredients,<sup>195</sup> rather than technique, or even flavor combinations. Lastly, her innovation to increase reliance on high-quality ingredients took place over thirty years ago.

### **The Social Logic of Creation: Creating Cultural Products and Social Order**

In this chapter, we have seen how the logic of creation works in its social context. Contextualizing the logic of creation allowed us to understand the social patterning of creational styles and subjective representations in the culinary field. From this perspective, we have considered culinary styles as mechanisms for chefs to establish social connections with others and position themselves in relation to others in the field. We have observed, on the one hand, the social channels through which ideas diffuse in the organizational field, and on the other, chefs' strategies to locate themselves close to some actors and distant from others through their culinary styles. In what concerns the social logic of chefs' subjective representations of their styles, we learned that actors legitimate their work with recourse to the principles of flavor and differentiation, and that there is a patterning to their representations that is explained by the degrees of freedom and constraint that is inherent to their institutional positions. Yet, we found that institutional positions are in a dual relation with actors' strategies. Finally, we compared the various aspects of the logic of creation in the culinary fields of New York and San Francisco.

A key objective of this work has been to demonstrate that the logic of creation in its institutional and subjective aspects can and ought to be explained in view of the patterning of relations which constitute the organizational configuration. It follows from

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<sup>195</sup> What is more, she is credited for teaching Americans to appreciate organic ingredients and develop farmer markets.

this principle that the characteristics of the object of production are also necessary for understanding patterns of creation and self-concepts. *What* actors produce, what motivates them to do it, and how they represent and legitimate what they do, are all key aspects in this investigation for they shed light both on the principles that organize creation, and on actors' struggles for reputation and for meaning. In other words, all these aspects shed light on the organizational configuration of the field. Chefs constantly adjust their culinary styles, reacting to the actions of others in their field, while simultaneously maintaining their authorial authenticity and seeking resonance with their self-concepts. Correspondingly, they constantly adjust their self-concepts, seeking resonance with their culinary styles.

Because culinary styles are associated with levels of prestige and with particular actors, through their styles (one) chefs position themselves in the field in terms of status, (two) they position themselves vis-à-vis others with regards to creational styles, making some conduits of influence evident and shunning others, and (three) they promote or prevent social ties. In short, through their creational projects actors manage their institutional positions and legitimate themselves. I have shown in this and other chapters that status positions introduce constraints on individual action. Institutionally, status positions introduce constraints on what actors can produce without jeopardizing their restaurants and careers, and subjectively they introduce constraints on their claims of legitimation. As a consequence, creational styles --both regional cuisines and degree of innovativeness-- are distributed by status, and so are chefs' self-representations of their styles and the association or dissociation of their representations from exogenous assessments of their styles. That individual action is constrained by status is not to be

confused with determinism. Rather, we must understand that actors have choice, but one that is limited by their amount of status. Indeed, I have argued that chefs' representations are not just discourses, but their agentic actions to struggle to maintain or improve their field position, and implicitly struggle for meaning. In their cumulation, chefs' representations and actions comprise the organizational configuration (see DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Porac and Thomas, 1990; Porac and Thomas, 1994; Porac et al., 1995).

Actors' rhetorical representations inherently inform their creational projects because in defining themselves they make claims about the attributes that are central, distinctive, and enduring in their styles, and hence they develop resources and skills, and select strategies for their restaurants and careers that are consistent with their self-representations (Albert, 1985; see also Glynn, 2000). Actors require information about the institutional environment, namely the configuration of status and creational styles, and they interpret and use the information to represent themselves and make decisions for their restaurants (see March and Simon, 1958; Simon, 1959). They identify key issues of their styles and invest in resources and skills in view of their priorities, developing some to the detriment of others. But *what* skills and resources they develop is consistent with their self-image --their practical theories of action--, for they allocate resources and skills according to what they see as salient in their styles. By the same token, their self-image is shaped by the skills and resources they develop, as both their styles and self-concepts are re-adjusted in an ongoing, dual process. We can understand that what chefs consider key attributes define their styles as well as self-concepts, because their self-concepts are their practical theories of action, their subjective ways for making sense of and dealing with

their creational styles and status. Put somewhat differently, chefs' self-concepts can be conceptualized as a reflexive theory of dispositions and appetencies.

If they "see themselves" as innovative, chefs tend to invest time and resources to develop their skills in chemistry and new techniques to create innovative products. Similarly, if they "see themselves" as bastions of tradition who want to serve the highest quality of ingredients, they invest in their relations with purveyors, farmers, butchers, fishermen. Quotation marks are used here because chefs' sense of selves are not a product of their imagination, but a reflexive monitoring of their dispositions. Their being either innovative or traditional leads them to develop skills and resources in one area, which necessarily comes at the expense of other areas. Their potential future development in other areas is not only curtailed by their past and current investments in skills and resources but also by the distinctive identity they must create for their audience (customers and media) as well as for their sense of selves, given that they cannot stray much from the identity they claim to embody.

So long as actors make claims about themselves based on tasks they are competent at so that they can earn legitimacy in the field, and draw their accounts from a shared repertoire which endows them with social facticity, we will find a relative homogeneity in their discourses. Since their occupation is primarily defined by their creational tasks (even though they are also responsible for --and spend more time on-- the execution of food and management of the restaurant), traditional as well as innovative chefs ought to make claims about the principle of excellence in their occupation if they seek to legitimate themselves. Though chefs vary from maintaining a single-minded devotion to flavor, to qualified attention to this value, there is behavioral evidence that

they all share the understanding that flavor is the principle of excellence and that other criteria such as the look of the dishes, the color, or the “wow factor” they may more or less shamefully admit to attending to, are less dignifying attributes, nonetheless made necessary by the institutional imperative of differentiation.

The homogeneity of values in cuisine, I have argued, is strengthened by the tight social network, in turn facilitated by the size and locality of the field. The homogeneity of values is also upheld by the particular model of organizational competition in cuisine. Unlike other areas of for-profit cultural production, competition in cuisine is not a zero-sum game. To be sure, customers choose one restaurant over another when they dine out, but chefs do not have nor require exclusive customers; they may have regular patrons, but even these are not exclusive. Because attracting a customer does not entail curtailing competitors, chefs are not set in a system of adversarial competition against one another. Quite the contrary, elite chefs may benefit from collectively strengthening their field, for it seems reasonable to speculate that if customers are satisfied with their experiences in elite restaurants, they are more likely to be inclined to continue going to this type of establishments, and insofar as elite restaurants offer an extra-ordinary experience, it seems sensible to assume that customers (at least some of them) might want to try multiple restaurants and not stick to only one. In this sense, cuisine can be said to be a system of adversarial cooperation for chefs compete with one another, but collectively benefit from such competition.<sup>196</sup> Adversarial cooperation undoubtedly strengthens the homogeneity of values, and common values in turn strengthen the collective.

Certainly, the imperative of differentiation co-exists with the strong ties and shared values in a tight social network so long as actors make such co-existence possible

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<sup>196</sup> I am grateful to Edward Laumann for suggesting this point.

*and* actively maintain it. We have seen that chefs make choices that concern their career trajectories, their subjective management of their relations with others, their culinary creations, and their self-concepts, and that their choices are limited by the positions they occupy in the organizational configuration. Through their choices in all these areas, actors both maintain a given need for differentiation in their field (higher in New York than in San Francisco, as we have seen), and strengthen the social configuration.

We understand that the logic of creation is dual in a field, as there is a patterning to both creational styles and self-concepts that is associated to status, but such patterning is only obtained by actors' choices of creational styles and self-concepts. Through their practical theories of action, actors respond to their impressions of the environmental conditions that constrain their work, constantly adjusting their culinary styles and their self-concepts as they control their professional images for the sake of their audiences, their peers, and their own sense of selves. And, as we have seen, they control their images both through their culinary products and through their rhetorical representations of their culinary styles. Through their control of their products and representations, actors manage their work and relations with others in their field, and by doing so they contribute to the maintenance of a social order that is a requisite for being able to manage their culinary production, relations with others, and self-concepts.

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## Curriculum Vita

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### EMPLOYMENT

2007- Assistant Professor, University of Toronto.

### EDUCATION

2007 Ph.D. in Sociology. Rutgers University.

2003 M.A. Sociology. Rutgers University.

1998 Master's Program in Sociology of Culture and Cultural Analysis. IDAES, Instituto de Altos Estudios Sociales, Universidad Nacional de Gral. San Martín (Coursework Completed).

1996 *Licenciatura* Sociology (equivalent to a U.S. B.A. plus two years). Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de Buenos Aires.

### PUBLICATIONS

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

2006 "Epistemic Foundations of Cuisine: A Socio-Cognitive Study of the Configuration of Cuisine in Historical Perspective." *Theory & Society* 35: 421-443.

2003 (With Silvia Kuasñosky) "Género, Sexualidad y Afectividad. Modelos culturales dominantes e incipientes en jóvenes urbanos de clase media" (Spanish: Gender, Sexuality and Affectivity. Dominant and Incipient Cultural Models in the Middle Class Urban Youth) in Margulis, Mario (ed.). *Juventud, Cultura, Sexualidad. La dimensión cultural en la afectividad y la sexualidad de los jóvenes de Buenos Aires*. Buenos Aires: Biblos.

Also published as "Género, Sexualidad y Afectividad. Modelos culturales dominantes e incipientes" (Spanish: Gender, Sexuality and Affectivity. Dominant and Incipient Cultural Models) in Schickendantz, Carlos (ed.),

2004. *Religión, género, sexualidad. Análisis interdisciplinarios*. Córdoba, Argentina: Editorial de la Universidad Católica de Córdoba.
- 2000 (With Silvia Kuasñosky) “Cultura y Pobreza: aportes para el estudio de la práctica de los sectores populares.” (Spanish: Culture and Poverty: Toward the Study of Practice in the Working Classes) *Cuadernos de Antropología Social* 11: 327-343.
- 1999 (With Silvia Kuasñosky) “El lugar del otro. Reflexiones en torno a un estudio en el barrio de La Boca” (Spanish: The Place of the Other. Thinking on a Study in the La Boca Barrio) in Margulis, Mario; Urresti, Marcelo (eds.). *La violencia enmascarada: cultura y discriminación social en Buenos Aires*. Buenos Aires: Biblos.
- 1999 “La condición de la posmodernidad. Investigación sobre los orígenes del cambio cultural.” (Spanish: The Condition of Postmodernity. An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change) Review of *The Condition of Postmodernity* by David Harvey. *Ciencias Sociales* 38: 27.
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- 1995 (With Mariano Bargeró) “Crítica a la astucia del corporativismo y la inocencia de lo universal.” (Spanish: A Critique of the Cunning of Corporatism and the Innocence of the Universal) *El Ojo Furioso* 3: 86-87.

## TEACHING

- 2005 Sociology of Gender, Rutgers University (summer course).
- 2004 Individual and Society, Rutgers University (summer course).
- 2001-2003 Introduction to Sociology, Rutgers University (summer course).
- 2004 Contemporary Sociological Theory. Rutgers University (as a Teaching Assistant).
- 2002-2003 Development of Sociological Theory, Rutgers University (as a Teaching Assistant).
- 2005 Anthropology of Fun and Games, Rutgers University (as a Teaching Assistant).

- 2005 Social Uses of Food, Rutgers University (as a Teaching Assistant).
- 2000 Social Problems in Contemporary Argentina, Lexia International-Universidad de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- 2000 Cinema-Tango-Rock: Cultural Production and Consumption in Buenos Aires in the Year 2000, Lexia International-Universidad de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- 1999 Research Advisor, Lexia International-Universidad de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- 1998-2000 Sociology of Culture, Department of Sociology, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de Buenos Aires (as a Teaching Assistant).